

DWELLINGS IN THE VILLAGE OF *GURI I BARDHË* IN THE REGION OF MAT, ALBANIA

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ABSTRACT

The village of *Guri i Bardhë* has five neighborhoods which are located on the dominant hills. The houses are typically fenced off. There is only 3-storied dome tower of Dezhgejve. In these houses three of them are cultural monuments. The houses are decorated with symbols and different writings in Ottomans language and Albanian language, too. The symbols are carved mostly on top of the doors and corners like pines, flying snakes, etc. It is given the year when it was built and the name of the owner of the house. The master builders were mostly villagers. They were from Dibra and Macedonia. In the bedrooms they had a bathroom which proves the evidence of civilization. The ground floor was used for cattle and different objects. The Guest room had always a special care.

The Village of *Guri i Bardhë* was located in the province of 30 km far from the city of Burrel in northeast Albania. This village is known since ancient times but it has developed in the middle ages.

There are 5 neighbourhoods located in dominant hills separated from each other and almost interspersed with each other due to agricultural land restrictions... it has about 300 houses and approximately 1200 inhabitats/white stone dwellings are all two floors with the exception of a 3 story tower plus a semi conditional floor for the reason of the steep terrain and used for the housing of livestock and other objects used in every day life that is a dome tower of Dezhgijeve.

This Tower, although there are divisions according to the construction of typical towers, inside it is decorated with tastes of citizens. For example on the top floor, where the guest room is located except there is a chimney and on the contrary side where there sits the landlord there is a cupboard where there are ashtrays, coffee cups, coffee mills, coffee pots, etc. Also, inside the cottage there is an open square space where the whole space down the tower is under the full view.

During the period of time, the guest room was equipped with standing improvised couches instead of ground mattresses beautifully decorated with cushions and curtains. The ceilings are decorated with wood and in the center they have Rosetta. On top of the ceilings can be seen wheat or corn braids hanging, thus showing their agricultural products. A whole side of the wall is turned into a closet and it is the only one in the village. This covers the whole vertical space of one part of the whole wall of this room.

Inside it, there are dividers which are used to place mattresses, blankets and other pieces of clothing. In this space there is also a door that connects with another space and which is used for personal hygiene. The doors of the closet are decorated with longitudinal cuts and floral circles, such as the sixteenth century Rosettes (so-called Musandrat) with circles and semi-circles, etc. And on the sides of the chimneys, thus creating a repeating rhythm turned into the style of decoration in the whole space of the Chamber of Men. Such cuttings and trimmings are also found in the doors.

The planks that are not included in the decorative style are framed in joining areas with thin strips made of linear frames. The decorations and wood work included in this cottage show a high economic level for a rural household. But the village of *Guri i Bardhë* had this economic level because it favored its position in the way of Arbër Road, which enabled economic and cultural development due to the commercial activities and the movement in the Balkan region.

Therefore according to ethnographers the culture of this village is classified as civic as for Housing and Women Dressings are concerned. In the *Tower of Dezhgijeve* are on the same stone-carved a running horse on the surface and above it there is the snake that is a symbol of life and survival in the family and in one of them has been carved a pine as a symbol of life. In another corner near the entrance of the cottage, we see a Rosette engraved on the corner stone. We see these symbols not only in the cottages of the village of *Guri i Bardhë* but also in the other villages of Mat.

This tower is not the same as the other towers in the Mat district or even in other parts of the country because it is treated same as civic cottages where the ground floor is intended for keeping livestock and different furnishings, such as: plow and other agricultural tools, etc. The second floor is for living and the third floor as I said above is for the Guest Room. In this village and in the surrounding area, such as: Klos, Xiberr, Martanesh, there are construction of residences of civic cottages of Telize (Veranda balconies with light construction) borrowed also due to commercial exchanges. This was also conditioned because the construction of the cottages was influenced by the relief and the builders of the cottages came from other regions such as: Dibra, Macedonia, etc, where they carried with them the inherited abilities of these areas. In the construction of cottages in the village of *Guri i Bardhë* is not something

that is preceded by any good project drawn by architects but still these cottages characterize a logical solution. As a starting base has served a great experience inherited from master builders in construction of these cottages and of other peasants who built their houses. In the cottages of *Guri i Bardhë* there are squares and other fortification elements. These squares in most of the cases are constructed with light weighted stones and are connected with wood barns just like the other wall elements.

These cottages do not lack the decoration of wood work on the exterior, the stairs and the shelter of the cottage as well as the interior of the closets, musandra (Rossettas) and ceilings. Such constructions we have encountered in the cottages belonging to the families Stafalla, Domi, etc. This tower is a first category cultural monument promulgated by the Ministry of Education and Culture on 30.06.1977.

In the village of *Guri i Bardhë* in the residence of the family Domi which is also this Monument of Culture, has a jitted part similar to the squares in 5m length consisting of stones and with a wooden structure decorated with engravings. This cottage is built with the semitones along with many other cottages in this village because of the Rugged Mountain Terrain.

At the beginning of construction of half floor dwellings, the ground was first collapsed until it reached the proper level and this part was used as I quoted above for cattle and various working tools. In the exterior of these dwellings are exposed decorations made of wood and stones with floral elements. The squares and all that we described above in the areas with civil housing construction which had no fortification elements were built in the positions where the landscape can be viewed around.

The village of *Guri i Bardhë* has always been peaceful and there were no such fights or bad affections and therefore there was no need for their cottages to have outside walls to guard and fight against their foes. As such, these cottages are decorations of the artisans of this village and can be viewed from afar.

Meanwhile, floral motifs have also been found in the Domi family house, which has been declared a "cultural monument". On both walls approximately 15cm from the corner, are carved with depth two six-petal flowers with a height of 1 meter from the ground.

In symmetry with these, at a height of about 3 meters are carved two other flowers. They are linked to each-other with 3 deep lines, stylized frames that are carved in exactly the same way as the corner of the cottage. These sticks have to be carved after the end-phase of building of the cottage as it is clearly seen that their canals also cover the trees which are used to strengthen the wall structure.

Long shelters of this cottage except with the beams are also reinforced with stylized and decorated carvings or engraved ends. Cottages of *Guri i Bardhë* in general are of long shelters that are characteristic for these civic cottages, but which simultaneously retain them from moisture.

They are generally constructed to fit with the relief. On the lower floor, there is a livestock, as well as different tools and objects of work. The entrance to the cottage on the lower floor is made by the gate and at the same time from the inside there are staircases that climb to the second floor that is inhabited. Climbing to the second floor is made from the outside through the stairs built with wood. In general, there are rare cottages that have no decorations of different symbols and writings.

The inscriptions are largely informative since they are in the old ottoman language where the year of construction of the house is mentioned, the name of the master of the house, but there is an occasion that is written the name of the working master.

In those inscriptions we find the word “Marshallah”. Later, Latin scripts have been used, which generally have the same content of information, from which it is, clear also the certification of the house in the name of the owner of the house and his brother if he is a resident in the same house, if he has contributed on building it just as much as the owner himself. On the outside are used different symbols such as Rosetta with 6 petals symbolizing the sun, the tree that symbolized life, the continuum, which is the serpent coming from the time of the Ilyrians and is considered as the protector of the house but is presented in several variants different from where in some cases the snake touches a bit of a bird (at Rakip Laskus’s house) while in some other cottages the serpent has in front the moon or sunset in which this can indicate that the family members are sleeping and the snake keeps them safe. Furthermore, when the snake catches the bird, it is the significance that scares the cuckoo which is the bad feeling that triggers death. In general, these symbols are not beautifully figuratively painted, but these bricklayers could thus present their skills in artistic accomplishment. In most cases, these symbols were presented in a diagonal form with fewer twisting but there are also cases in which these drawings were presented horizontally. Such buildings were built in the spirit of the area and were as a result of people who wanted to build them, they took examples of houses which were built in recent times and which were among the most favorite. These residents trusted builders that were already in good standing and carried on them a proven professionalism. These workers had the full freedom to realize the construction of the dwelling according to their wishes, thus leading to the similarity of other dwellings in general and sometimes even out of this.

Even the bricklayers had all the necessary skills and knowledge that the cottages and additionally all the symbols outside and inside of the cottage be realized to fit the area because otherwise it wouldn't be accepted by the community. Even when these bricklayers were asked for the reasons why they treated these apartments like that, their answer was because it was the demand of these inhabitants. These symbols that persisted mainly in these dwellings you will see them to many other areas and the truth is that these are found in many other villages. For example, the Symbol of Rosetta with petals is old since back at the time of Ilyrians.

Generally, these decorations have never been common before in the apartments. They were after a large influx of these buildings. Generally, these decorations were mainly in the doorways and began to burst in the 19th century and still more in the 20th century. All of these objects that exist today are no longer than I quoted above. The reason was that these apartments are amortized and damaged. After this time they must undergo a reconstruction from the beginning. Often the damaged pieces of any of the apartments were used again to fix and reconstruct the other parts. For the construction of a flat after the project from the bricklayers it began the work on the collection of materials. The greatest importance was on the carving of the stones for the house door, the corners of the house and the window at the front door was initial which was supported on two stones and stretched throughout its length on both edges where two double-walled cobblers were placed and a vertical stone called columns or as they called the *Ballshika* from the bricklayers in their dialect during the Cermenike area.

Both vertical columns ranged up to one meter and extended over these two horizontal stones, narrowing slightly in the form of consuls and then came the arch. The arch also has other elements that are called knives that protect the arch or otherwise called a second arch. At the closing moment in the upper part these arches have a stone that is the key and comes in the shape of trapeze form which it should not be touched because when the wall was built from its heights it could be lowered and that all this harmony of actions was made to be in full equilibrium. If we look carefully and compare the way we construct the gates of these dwellings, we find similarities in the villages around and in the other provinces. This resemblance is evident in the villages bordering on the Guri i Bardhë, like Xibere Hania, Xibere Keta and up to the border with the Gurra e madhe and the Villages near Tirana and the province of Martaneshi. Strangely there are similarities in the organization and construction of the houses forming neighbourhoods that are disciplined in their placement. Mostly in the dominant hills, compressed much after each-other, thus saving so much the parcels of agriculture lands. In the construction of these flats these villages also had their own favors, since being completely mountainous area had all the possibilities to supply all the materials they needed around their area such as stone, limestone, woodcarving, river stone, etc.

So from the abundance of these materials the possibility of decorating these apartments became more possible. To these apartments there was devoted a lot of special care especially to their decorations by the bricklayers mostly used in the exterior and in the most visible parts such as the corners of the walls, in the main entrance door, in the upper part of the windows, and in the water fountains etc.

If we look at Dom's dwelling in the village of *Guri i Bardhë* it's with a big edge. The treatment of the decoration used by the master builders is not the same if we look at the flowers they are different from each-other. The squares are used almost in all the dwellings with wooden structure and which otherwise it is called *Cikma*.

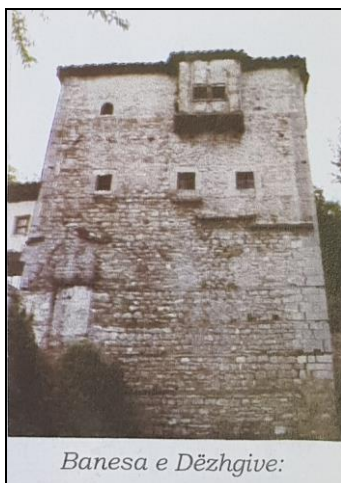
The llop calls the area of Klos, while the river flow area has called it the Square...in the village of Kurdarise we also encounter the name "Soft", while in some other villages also use the word "Sergjen"...in fact "sergjenet" are hased and used inside the chambers of houses mainly in the cooking chambers that are build with woodand serve for the maintenance of dishes, spoons, bowl ect..

The square iban architectural vellon outstretched with a wooden structure from which it has been used to soften stones the wood used in this case is decorated with different motifs...the ornaments are mainly centered on the carrying consuls. The decoration craftman could not have the same faithfullnes of all the flowers (at the Dome home).

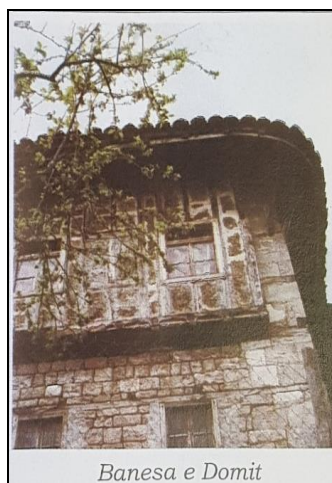
The types of decoration use geometric, floral motifs, patriotic motifs such as the eagle or emblem of the Republic, cosmologically like the sun, moon, stars, religious motifs where the Village of White stone is closely related to Muslim Religions. In the interiors inside the apartment there is a special care in the division of rooms and their administration...in every apartment is the room where all the members of the family are located, the place where the meals and dairies are kept and administered by the Lady of the house...the bedroom and the house keepers and if there is another crown (the married son)has a separated bedroom inside which there isa toilet for their personal needs and in the room no one comes in from the other members of that family...the shared toilet for the entire family is within the apartment...all the rooms are equipped with the necessary facilities for daily use as well as for the stay of the family members according to their traditions...the dwellings have a resemblance and are and are constructed with a near spirit that extends to the villages around, especially in Xibere, Martanesh, Klos and extending to the Cermenik Area.

Klosi has been a communication canter with many other villages since there every Sunday was organized "Bazar of Klos"as it was called from the whole province of Mat. Apart from others, the cultures of each area were also exchanged which resulted in similitiesin customs and rituals and especially the most officient example was that of

the resemblance of dwellings. Despite the fact that the white stone dwellings were almost even advanced in other villages around the dwellings, they had common elements... For this reason communication between them also existed, where in the bazar days the villagers stayed together with the animals and the things they had to sell in these lodge houses. There was hani i Allushit in the plow as the called the villagers and Hani i Lleshit. In white stone dwellings and other villages around it, it was necessary to expand them due to the addition of family member especially when more then two brothers lived in the same house and their families expanded. Since the dwellings are surrounded by mountains, the yard is administered and used carefully every space due to land constraints... As i have pointed out above, the apartments are typically civil...those inside have the bakery (oven for the bread)water and hives that hold the corn. Hives are two types: one is built with wood and raised a little from the soil to climate moisture...down there is a small door that opens whenever it is necessary to get grain. Above the hive is open where the corn is thrown and after it's closed from above it functions normally to take out the grain...So also in the second version of the drilled hay is almost the same way of function (operation). In the post 1990 period, due to emigration almost to a large extent little by little has begun to lose the unwritten rule for the continuation of the preservation of transition in the construction of simile dwellings with others. Simply in the last years they have started to built a one floor dwellings which they call them "Elbasani Model" which in no way they could be in harmony with the dwellings that were built before the tradition...in any case, the village of white stone is still a place which offers a lot f possibilities for studying for many to come because there is to much value where you can and way reveal it's particular occurrences.



Banesa e Dëzhgive:



Banesa e Domit