

## **THE CHARACTERISTIC TRANSITION BETWEEN THE EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR SPACES IN THE TRADITIONAL DWELLINGS OF BERAT (ALBANIA)**

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### **Резюме**

Мақалада Оңтүстік албандық Берат жеріндегі дәстүрлі баспана, тұрмыстық үй заттары, Осман империясының өмір-салтын көрсететін этнографиялық мұражай экспонаттары ретінде көрсетілген. Ішкі және сыртқы сәулеттік кеңістіктің өзара байланыстраы туралы айтылған.

### **Summary**

This article discusses traditional dwelling, which now serves as a Museum of Ethnography Berat as the representative example of Ottoman and general housing architectural patterns that characterize the relationship and transition between internal and external spaces.

### **1. The Context of Berat: Geography, History, Settlement and Architecture**

Traversed by the Osum River, the Albanian historical city of Berat (Figures 1 and 2) stretches over the Topallti Valley. To the east rises the Tomori Mountain while in the southeast Shpirag Mountain creates the background to the west.

Archeological evidence indicates that Berat has been a site of human activity since prehistory. It has been inhabited continuously since late 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The fortifications date back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. According to the ancient historian Polybius (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.), who names the city as Antipatrea, the city was built by Cassander, the son of Antipater, regent of Macedonia during the campaigns of Alexander the Great. In Antiquity, the city is considered to be one of the most important settlements in the Mallakstra and Myzeqe region having cultural and commercial links with surrounding ancient settlements like Apollonia, Dimalia and Bylis. The ancient name of the region where Berat is situated is Illyria. During the Medieval Age, many ancient Illyrian centers such as Apollonia lost their importance while Berat still remained as the capital of the region and an important ecclesiastical center. Between 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries the region

was the scene of conflict between the Bulgarian and Byzantine Empires who gained control over the territory one after another. The early 15<sup>th</sup> century is marked by the Ottoman conquest of the region. During the late 16<sup>th</sup> century the city underwent remarkable urban development (Perzhita, 2011: 26).



Figure 1- (left) The geographical location of Albania within the Mediterranean basin.

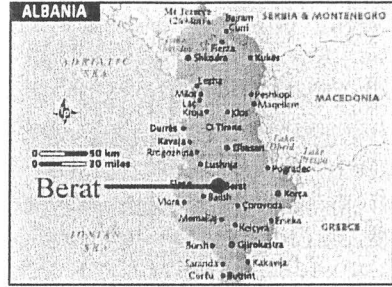


Figure 2- (right) The geographical location of the city of Berat in Albania

The long history of the city is in fact the history of encounters between different civilizations. This cultural variety coupled with the beautiful natural setting makes Berat a huge live museum. Berat is known as “the white city” or “the city of the windows one upon another” due to the expressive building clusters integrated with the slope and the large number of windows overlooking the river dividing the old city into two main quarters (Figures 3 and 4)



Figure 3- A general view of the historical Berat with the Osum River

## 2. Architectural Typology: Traditional Ottoman Dwellings

Berat is one of the most ancient urban centres in the Albanian territory. It first appeared as a small fortified centre but gradually expanded beyond the fortress walls around mid 13<sup>th</sup> century and reached its full size in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Berat was the scene of vigorous development in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Due to its favorable geographical location Berat benefited from the economic development of the whole region. The greatest number of traditional dwellings in Berat which have been preserved to this day were mainly built during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A considerable number of the dwellings were reconstructed after the earthquake on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1851, and thereafter the city acquired the appearance it has today (Rıza, 2011: 22-23) (Figures 4 and 5).

The traditional dwellings are inhabited even now, and in 1948, the monuments were set under state protection. The three old quarters of Berat are inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List since 8<sup>th</sup> July 2008 with the justification that the city is “a rare example of the architectural character typical of the Ottoman period” (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/569>).

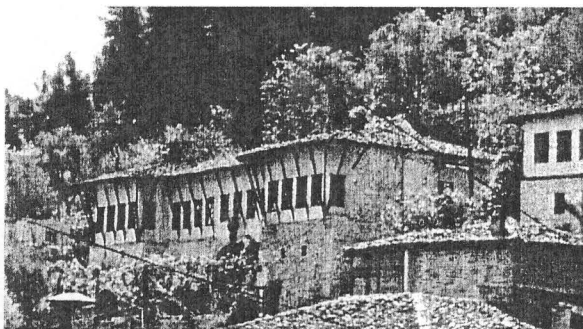
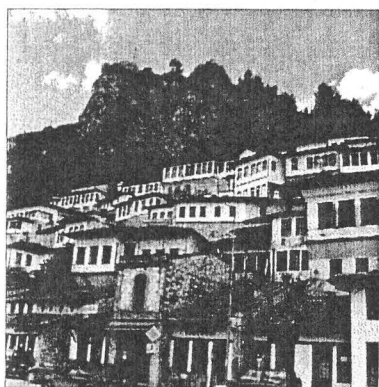


Figure 4- Berat: a general view of the traditional dwelling clusters on the sloppy terrain overlooking the river

Figure 5- Architectural characteristics of the traditional dwellings in Berat indicate common features with the traditional dwellings in the Ottoman territory: projecting eaves, transparency on the southern and eastern façades and expressive structural elements supporting the eaves.

In the context of the traditional Ottoman dwellings the functional scheme underlying the design model can be considered as the basis of continuity between different geographies and periods of Ottoman domestic architecture. The traditional Ottoman dwelling as a distinctive building type in sedentary settlements is found today in several parts of Anatolia and the Balkans which constituted the former territory of the Ottoman Empire. Available historical evidence indicates that this dwelling type consolidated after the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Kuban, 1995). However, as every cultural phenomenon, the resultant architectural type is seen as a product of a long process of development. Küçükerman (1996) argues that the most characteristic feature of the rooms inside a traditional Ottoman-Turkish dwelling is their functional autonomy as self-contained spatial units fulfilling every requirement for dwelling (Figure-6). Bammer (1996) also emphasizes this functional capacity by arguing that no other traditional dwelling encompasses such flexible spatial organizations. The typical room perfectly fulfills the requirements of living, cooking, eating, studying, sleeping and praying within the same spatial envelope.

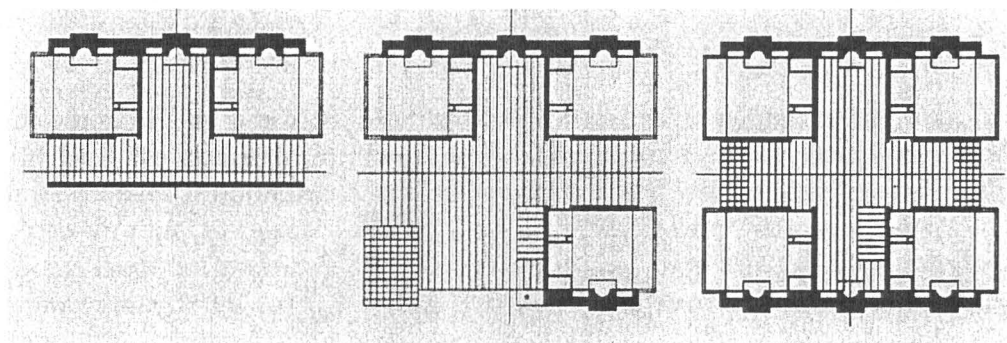


Figure 6-Plan schematizations of the traditional Turkish dwelling (Yürekli et al. 2005: 20)

### 3. The Characteristic Transition Between The Exterior And Interior Spaces in Berat

The rooms (units) of a traditional Ottoman dwelling are connected to other units through a common space (*hayat*), which structures the transitions between interior and exterior spaces of the overall architectural setting (Kuban, 1995) (Figure-6). The central space (*hayat*) around which the room units are organized is the essential component of the traditional Ottoman

dwelling. In Turkish *Hayat* stands for “life” meaning that this component is the heart of the dwelling. *Hayat* has closed, semi-closed and open variations shaped according to environmental comfort level (Figure-7).

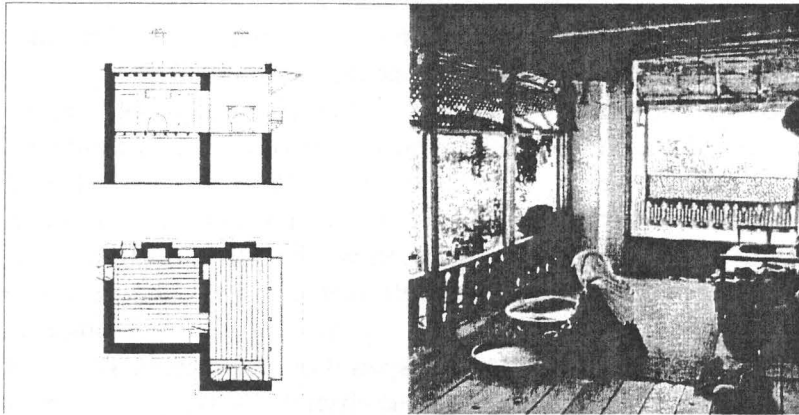


Figure 7- (left) one room and semi-closed *hayat* in a traditional dwelling in Sögütçük, Çine-Aydın (Western Anatolia) (right) life in the semi-closed *hayat* of a traditional dwelling in Kızılağaç- Muğla (Western Anatolia)

The articulation of the transitory zone between the interior and exterior spaces of the traditional Turkish dwelling is also based upon the integrity of architecture and environment. This articulation is characterized by interfaces that emerge in the architectural scale of the dwelling. Interfaces soften the boundaries and expand the limits of the dwelling by enhancing fluidity between the interior and the exterior. Interface becomes organic since it works according to natural laws. It captures, infiltrates, stores, uses or reflects solar energy and converts it into environmental comfort (Kavas, 2011). The common principle illustrated by organic interfaces of different examples is the interconnection of masonry walls, roofs, timber verandas, terraces and platforms within a three dimensional layout (Figure 8 and 9). The organic interfaces illustrate the spatial richness of the functional configuration formed by the room and the *hayat*.

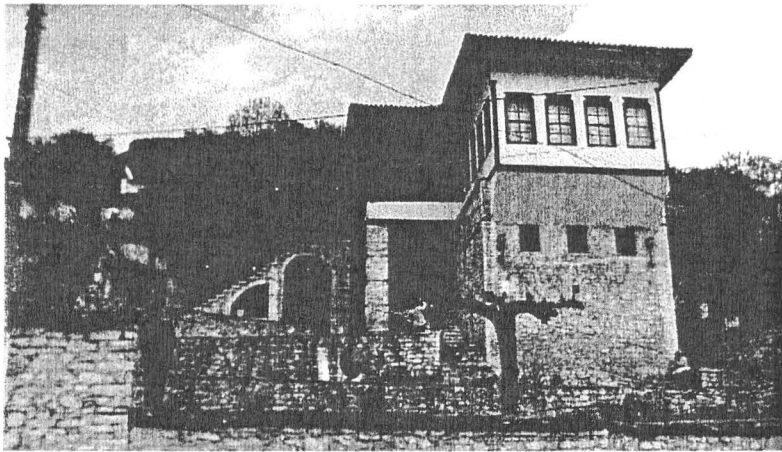


Figure 8-the southeastern façade of the traditional dwelling currently serving as the Ethnographical Museum.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century traditional Ottoman dwelling, which is currently used as the Ethnographical Museum of Berat clearly displays the typological characteristics of the traditional Ottoman dwelling and the spatial character of the semi closed *hayat* becoming an interface between the interior and exterior spaces (Figures 8 and 9).

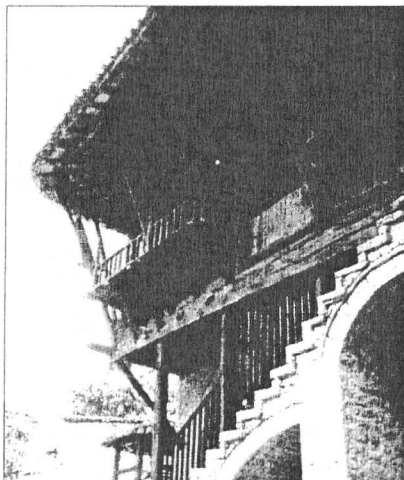


Figure 9-The semi closed common space (*hayat*) integrated with the characteristic structural system formulating the projecting open spaces and wide eaves.



In this dwelling the traditional rooms (self-sufficient living units) are interconnected through a common semi closed space (*hayat*), which is expressed by the timber structure on the upper floor of the main façade (Figure-8). The structural system and material configuration exemplifies the traditional layout where the ground floor used as storage and barn is made up of stone masonry while the upper floor, which contains the living units is constructed with lighter timber elements.

The characteristic façade of the dwelling (Figure-8) faces the southeastern directions by having the maximum benefit from sunlight. Therefore this façade exhibits the acquisition of transparency through an intricate articulation of the structural system like a lace. The diagonal bracings supporting the wide eaves of the timber roof also constitute open-air seats from which a beautiful scene of the valley can be enjoyed (Figure-9). This layout has formal commonalities with other dwellings in the quarter (Figure-5). This comparison (Figure-5 and Figure-9) indicates that a common architectural vocabulary underlies the traditional quarter and this vocabulary produces a flexible structural system enhancing transparency variations according to climatic and functional needs.

#### **4. Conclusion:**

Traditional dwellings are juxtapositions of natural materials with cultural interpretations which configure these materials in order to respond the functional requirements of habitation. The essential “attributes” of “tradition” in architectural terms are “congruence between environment and culture, diffuse knowledge and skills in architectural design and construction, efficiency in use of resources, efficiency of response to climate, high degree of culture-specificity and place-specificity and legible nature of schemata underlying the design model” (Rapoport, 1989). The architectural example of this paper reflects all the above mentioned attributes of tradition.

This paper focused on the characteristic transition between the exterior and interior spaces in Berat by revealing the role of the semi closed *hayat* as a common underlying architectural space relating the traditional dwellings stretching over the vast Ottoman territory. It may be concluded that traditional Ottoman dwellings are sophisticated cultural products of a long history. When such illustrative examples of several geographical regions are analyzed in successive scales of settlement, district, building

cluster and architectural detail, it is seen that various juxtapositions of functional and material configurations characterize the Ottoman dwellings according to common spatial patterns.

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