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Memories of Seraglios Monuments of Civil Ottoman Architecture in the Albanian Provinces

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Foreword

At the south-eastern entrance to the city of Vlora, at the junction of many routes that originated at the harbour and led to the centre of the city in the middle of a grand park of 40, 000 square metres, there was until 1925 an enormous building preceded by a smaller one in front, both surrounded by an eight-metre high wall with two doors. This was the konak of the Vloras, including the harem and the selamlık. People called this complex simply 'the beys' seraglio'.¹

This passage from Ekrem Bey Vlora's memoirs, written in German² during the 1960s and translated into Albanian at the beginning of our millennium, attracted much curiosity. Indeed, the *bey* and his *seraglio* had since long vanished from the physical terrain, reduced to generic metaphors of oppression and obscurantism. Dictatorship had frozen Albanians in a mental historical frame starting *grosso modo* with the events of World War II and ending with the projection of a utopian end-of-the-history Communist bliss. At last, its collapse provided freedom to rediscover histories, characters and landscapes independent of planned historical productions customised in the scholarly amputating laboratories of autarchy. In such a context, Ekrem Bey's memoirs generated astounding attention; reprints continue to appear since their first publication. Communicative and articulate with pronounced literary style,

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¹ Ekrem Bey's list of sources mentioning or describing the Avlonyalı seraglio: Hahn, Johann Georg, *Albanesische Studien*, Jena, 1954. Godin, M. Amelie von, *Albanische Geschichten: 'In Delvino und Valona'*, 1914. Vlora, Eqrem Bej, *Kalaja e Kaninës*, Rome, 1961; Patsch, Karl, *Das Sandschak Berat in Albanien*, Vienna, 1904. Baldacci, Antonio, *Itinerari Albanesi*, Rome, 1917; Ugolino, Luigi M., *L'Antica Albania: Nelle Ricerche Archeologiche Italiane*, Rome, 1927; See: Vlora, Eqrem Bej, *Kujtime, 1885-1925*, Shtëpia e Librit & Komunikimit, Tirana, 2003, p. 19.

² Vlora, Ekrem Bey, *Lebenserinnerungen* (Memoirs), ed. R. Oldenburg, v. 5, Munich, 1968.

Ekrem Bey's memoirs enthralled both history and literary aficionados.

Ekrem Bey's voice, however, although exceptional for the grim post-Communist approach, does not merely represent cultivated intellectual thought. He epitomises a rather complex historical figure whose activities span a particularly intense historical period, heavily contested by the Albanian official historiography. An aristocrat from a long genealogy of feudal rulers of the Ottoman era, a dignitary of the Ottoman diplomatic administration, a key figure in the Albanian national movement, statesman and politician of the Albanian state and political activist of the Albanian intellectual diaspora in the West, Ekrem Bey embodies a rare historical phenomenon representing all fundamental periods of Albania's modern history. It is, however, indisputable that for collective perceptions Ekrem Bey symbolises primarily the aristocratic caste of the heavily criminalised Ottoman order. Conscious of this dynamic, he does not disappoint public expectation. A fine connoisseur in historical developments, he treats with ease and fluency all contested historical chapters from the perspective of the caste he represents. Consequently, it is primarily the merit of his fresh vision of Ottoman history that has upset the cloudy official narratives, hurriedly produced for mass consumption during extreme isolation.

*It seems to me that the more appropriate principle would be that the Albanian, in order to forget his own misfortunes, has distorted the events according to his needs, or has sought to redeem their memory. Individualist and inordinately proud, the Albanian has fabricated his own history in the hope that he would thus have a clear field to vaunt himself as he desired and deny to others any distinguishing qualities: . Through such behaviour, we have today arrived at a peculiar 'Albanian history', a history which starts with the fairy tales of Alexander the Great and Pyrrhus [of Epirus] and ends – flying past with no mention of a thousand years' worth of events – at the foggy times of the Albanian principalities and Skanderbeg. That is where the book of Albanian history closes and re-opens again according to the respective chronicler: be he a nationalist in 1912, a royalist in 1924, or a communist in 1944. Hence, Albania has been liberated and organised respectively by the 'middle class' for the democrats, by 'the people' for the communists, and all those of the 'upper class' who have been slaughtered, slain and exhausted for the national ideals from 1839 to 1914 and are none other than 'blood-suckers, traitors, or exploiters of the people'. Such a ridiculous history can be called nothing other than 'the tragic game of national identity played by a few invidious criminals'*³

³ Vlora, Eqrem Bej, "Kalaja e Kaninës (The Castle of Kanina)", *Gazeta Tema*, Tirana, 05/10/2007.

In 1998, having regained his freedom from the physical and ideological jails of the dictatorship, Jusuf Vrioni made a similar analysis of the contested chapters of history. Again, a violently silenced voice during the autarchy, temporarily tolerated by the Communist elites for having acquiesced to voicing Enver Hoxha's oeuvre in French, suddenly emerged to question the selective historical memory a few years before leaving this world. Heir to another aristocratic lineage of Ottoman provincial governors, principal actors of the Albanian national movement, statesmen and politicians of the Albanian state, Jusuf Vrioni offers a similarly fresh and fluid report of Albania's historical heritage.

Fundamentally, and this is its drama, current-day Albania has renounced its memory. It does not want to remember. Everyone, or almost everyone, distorts the earlier past; some also disfigure the recent past or summarise it in two or three sentences, the better to dismiss it. That Albania should find the desire and the will to reconnect with its pasts and that it should sift through them, this is my wish. We claim to have turned the page. But to do this, as I have often said, we first need to read it, and do it attentively and without preconceived ideas. Meanwhile, I wonder if the conclusions that we would be able to extract in all conscience and objectivity from such an analysis would find an echo among a swathe of today's important Albanian intellectuals.⁴

In these reviews of the predominant perceptions, the absence of an historical period that stretched over half a millennium is glaringly evident. Marked by Ottoman rule, this period continues to be labelled with the immutable pan-Balkan exhortation *the long dark night*, disdaining virtually all scholarly research. Furthermore, in popular historical perceptions, especially the greater aristocracy symbolises a caste of *traitors*, whose social, political, and economic legitimacy was fashioned during a period perceived as *a dark 500 year long historical accident*, in cultural and identity symbioses with the *barbaric Asiatic tribes* who prevented *Albania* from attaining *European progress*.⁵ Yet these

⁴ Vrioni, Jusuf, *Mondes Effacés: Souvenirs d'un Européen* (Erased Worlds: Memories of an European), JC Lattès, Paris, 1998, p. 21.

⁵ "[...] In the majority of cases, Albanian historiography of the socialist period has been schematic and polarising in its analyses and methodology. The manner in which these themes were treated greatly influenced the fact that the Ottoman period came to be seen as the main cause for the economic backwardness of the country and that the Orient, in our case the Ottomans, came to be equated with non-development. [...] I have chosen here a few texts, for example, the official editions of *The History of Albania* and a few articles by Albanian authors that, according to my thinking, adequately represent the general trend followed by other Albanian scholars. [...] In general, the mechanism of historical research started once the historian had already determined his conclusions. This was characteristic of a certain school of methodology and thinking, which reigned in Albania for over 50 years". See: Puto, Artan, *Disa aspekte të perceptimit të periudhës osmane në historiografinë shqiptare të periudhës së socializmit* (A few

collective perceptions can scarcely be described as an aberrant misdeed of the official historiography. Its selective narrations and limited conceptions did not cleanly remain *lettre morte* in history texts. The memory massacre was judiciously synchronised with the physical one, performed in chorus on the historical figures and on the terrain marked by them.

The course of the historical events depicted in the rare narrations by a handful of heirs to the aristocratic caste – mainly Avonyali Ismail Kemal Bey, Ekrem Bey Vlora, Jusuf Vrioni and Hana Këlcyra – was principally advantageous to a series of historical chapters formerly maltreated or left simply mysterious. Symbolically, Ekrem Bey's narrative about the thinly palpable historical periods and the evocative title of Jusuf Vrioni's memoirs, *Mondes Effacés*, corroborate the massacre performed on the architectural terrain. Initially, the annihilation of civil monuments of Ottoman architecture, the feudal *seraglios*, symbols of Ottoman rule and power and, subsequently, the carnage on monuments of the Islamic cult, among which many were *vakıfs* of prominent members of this caste, were conducted to the benefit of a new systemic order which encouraged monochrome identities and purist histories. Consequently, entire historical chapters disappeared in the black hole of memory.

The task to bring back to light the vanished prominent monuments of civil Ottoman architecture in the Albanian lands is undoubtedly immense, more so since very little of their memory is preserved. Our attempt toward accomplishing this task is hence by no means exhaustive, but rather seeks to stimulate additional scholarly attention. Our modest overview will thus primarily concentrate on a few eminent examples, contemplating not merely their main architectural features, but their atmosphere as well. Locally renowned as *seraglios* (*saraje*), these monuments of civil Ottoman architecture survived in collective perceptions as symbols of Ottoman rule, power and feudal order. As such, they dominated the entire political, social and economic life from the early stages of Ottoman rule to well beyond the Tanzimat era.

Our overview begins with the first civil architectural structures

aspects of the perceptions of the Ottoman period in the Albanian historiography of the Socialist period). This study was presented at the conference Etudes balkaniques: état des savoirs et pistes de recherche, held in Paris 2002 and organised by the Association française d'études sur les Balkans in cooperation with the French Ministry of Research and New Technologies. Courtesy of the author. See also: Kadare, Ismail, *Identiteti Evropian i Shqiptarëve* (The European Identity of the Albanians), Onufri, Tirana, 2006; Velo, Maks, *Qoseizmi, ose teoria e urrejtjes* (Qoseism or the Theory of Hate), Gazeta Shekulli, Nr. 168, 20/06/2006; and the speech of the President of Albania, Alfred Moisiu, held at the Offord Forum *Toleranca ndërfetare në traditën e popullit shqiptar* (The tradition of interfaith tolerance among the Albanian people), in November 2005.

administrators constructed for their use during the classic Ottoman period. In this context, two examples of the classic era come to the fore, the Avlonyalı (Vlora) and the Klisura (Këlcyra) seraglios. We continue with the ensuing developments that instigated the growth of urban centres in the Albanian territories, which consequently provoked the emergence of an urban style civil architecture befitting for the needs of the administrators. Particular attention in this case is given to the most distinguished examples of modern era civil monuments, the Avlonyalı and Viryonzâde⁶ (Vrioni) *seraglios*. Furthermore, our overview traces the symbolisms of these seraglios and concludes by delineating the main institutional functions they embodied until the last hour.

For a comprehensive outline of these seraglios' architectural characteristics, symbolisms and institutional functions, we have principally relied on accounts from their last inhabitants, who not only were better acquainted with these premises than most, but also endowed them with meaning. With regard to these monuments' architectural character and broader implications, particular attention has naturally been given to academic research by authoritative scholars. However, the enterprise of bringing back the historical development and the atmosphere of this architecture calls for its vivid memory, depositaries of which are a compact caste of individuals, whose rare voices contain particular historical value and whose educational and professional experiences certainly preclude any suspicion of intellectual amateurism.

There is an old saying: 'Stone by stone, make a wall'. Before all is lost in the ocean of oblivion, we must collect the stones of memory in order to assemble the sturdy structure of Albanian history.⁷

Seraglios of the Classic Ottoman Period in Sancak-i Arvanit

In 1417, when the Ottomans conquered the port town of Vlora (Avlonya), strategically located at the gate of the Strait of Otranto, the town had already suffered, since 1081, the consecutive incursions of the Normans, Sicilians,

⁶ The name Viryonzâde/Viryonzâdeler was brought to light by Professor Kiel's field study of the family's tombs in: Kiel, Machiel, *Ottoman Architecture in Albania: 1385-1912*, IRCICA, Istanbul, 1990, pp. 52, 57. Usually referred to in historiography as Vryoni(s), Vrioni(s), Bryones, Briones or something similar, the line emerged as a powerful feudal family in the Sancak of Berat (Arnavud ßelgrad) mainly thanks to the remarkable career of Omer Pasha, Mehmed Ali Pasha's commander in Egypt, commander of Tepedelenli Ali Pasha's troops, commander in the Ottoman-Russian war of 1828-1829, Vezir of Yanya, Delvina and Tırhala, Sancakbey of Salonika. See also: Vlora, *Kujtime*, pp. 586, 611-2.

⁷ Vlora, *Kalaja*.

Byzantines, Serbs, and after 1378, of the Balshas.⁸ As the Ottomans started progressively to incorporate the already conquered Albanian lands in one administrative unit, Vlorë's strategic location attracted their full attention and thus became the capital of *Sancak-i Arvanit* from 1431 to 1466.⁹ The Ottomans, like the Byzantines before them and the Venetians shortly after, located their administrative headquarters in the citadel of the Castle of Kanina, some 370 metres above sea level, a site that dominated the landscape of the Gulf of Vlorë and its hinterland. Thereafter, the Castle of Kanina, the first Ottoman stronghold in the Adriatic, became a crucial frontier of Ottoman maritime defence operations and also an important *avant post* of Ottoman military incursions in the Adriatic. In 1480, Gedik Ahmed Pasha's campaign to Southern Italy was instigated from the Castle of Kanina.¹⁰

From an urban and architectural standpoint, the conception of the offices and private chambers of the governor of *Sancak-i Arvanit* in the summit of the Castle of Kanina appears a logical solution with regard to the structure of Vlorë's strategic maritime geography. Yet the conception of the governor's headquarters in the Castle of Kanina was not an isolated example. Indeed, the rapid incorporation of the southern Balkans in the Empire created the need to crystallise an Ottoman architecture with simple and yet monumental forms, systematic in plan and easy to build. This architectural style evolved its own code of aesthetics and reached its maturity in the first half of the 15th century.¹¹ Hence, in all southern Balkan lands, including those inhabited by the Albanian speaking populations, the concept of building administrators' seraglios in castles dominating towns had been rigorously respected by the Ottoman civil and military administrators since at least the very beginning of the 15th century.¹²

Authoritative voices maintain that in the formation of this Ottoman architectural language the conquest of the Balkans played a really important role.¹³ It is thus also possible that the architectural language of the emerging

⁸ Kiel, Machiel, *Ottoman Architecture in Albania: 1385-1912*, IRCICA: Istanbul, 1990, p. 266 cites Jirecek, Konstantin, "Valona im Mittelalter", in: L. von Thalloczy, *Illyrisch-Albanische Forschungen*, I, Munich-Leipzig, 1916, pp. 168-187.

⁹ Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, p. 20 cites Inalcik, Halil, "Arnawutluk-Albania", in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, v. I, 1960.

¹⁰ Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, p. 267.

¹¹ Kiel, Machiel, *Studies on the Ottoman Architecture of the Balkans: A Legacy in Stone*, Variorum, 1990, p. x.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. ix & xi.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. x.

Ottoman Empire that was to develop in the rapidly conquered Balkans may have influenced Mehmed the Conqueror's decision to abandon his first Imperial Seraglio in Istanbul (*saray-ı atik*), built on the former site of the Theodosian Forum, and opt, in 1459, to erect his new Topkapı Sarayı on the acropolis of the former Byzantine capital.¹⁴ It remains, however, undeniable that the erection of the Imperial Seraglio on the acropolis of Istanbul and the establishment of provincial governors' seraglios on the acropolises of Ottoman provincial towns are of striking similitude. As Topkapı Sarayı rose above the crown of the imperial city, its architectural lexicon became the classic imperial model of Ottoman culture in civil and military architecture and its expression continued to adorn the Albanian landscape.

In a separate publication dedicated to the history of the Castle of Kanina, Ekrem Bey maintains that during his sojourn in the Castle, Kapudan-i Derya Gedik Ahmed Pasha, who purportedly served as the *sancakbey* of Vlorë during the preparations for the military campaign to Southern Italy, commenced, in 1479, the construction of the new administrator's seraglio in the Castle.¹⁵ According to Ekrem Bey, Gedik Ahmed Pasha was unable to complete the work he had begun and thus it was Gazi Sinan Pasha, Ekrem Bey's alleged ancestor who, upon his appointment as *sancakbey* of Vlorë in 1502, carried out most of the construction of the new seraglio on the acropolis of Vlorë.¹⁶ Concerned that the Castle of Kanina had received little scholarly attention compared to the splendid Castle of Vlorë, built in 1537 by Süleyman the Magnificent,¹⁷ Ekrem Bey dedicates a monograph to the history of the Castle of Kanina, offering an urban and architectural description of the castle and its old seraglio complex.¹⁸

Ekrem Bey describes the Castle of Kanina as an irregular rectangular building containing three squares on successive levels. The surrounding walls are described as containing three gates: the *Gate of the Village* to the south, the *Gate of the King* to the north and the *Gate of the Bey* to the east. From the *Gate of the Bey* were allegedly visible the enormous interior surrounding walls containing the south-eastern angle of the castle, enclosing the first

¹⁴ Yerasimos, Stephanos, *La Fondation d'Istanbul Ottomane*, N. Akin, A. Batur, S. Batur ed., *7 Centuries of Ottoman Architecture: A Supra National Heritage*, Istanbul: Chamber of Architects of Turkey - Yapı Yayın, Istanbul, 1999, pp. 206, 212-3.

¹⁵ Vlorë, Ekrem Bey, *Kalaja e Kaninës*, Rome, 1961.

¹⁶ Vlorë, *Kalaja*.

¹⁷ Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, p. 267.

¹⁸ All the details of Ekrem Bey's description of the Castle of Kanina are from the Albanian publication of Ekrem Bey's text, which appeared in the Albanian newspaper *TemA* in October 2007. See: Vlorë, *Kalaja*.

square called *Garden of the Does*. Upon entering the *Gate of the Bey*, guard rooms could be seen on either side of the Gate. Beyond these there allegedly stood the seraglio of Gazi Sinan Pasha, an enormous building with four towers built on a square. Ekrem Bey describes the seraglio as lacking any distinctive embellishments.¹⁹ The *harem* is described as a plain building with stone walls with small windows closed by shutters. The stone staircase leading to the *sofahk* was covered by a roof made of tiles and wooden beams. The *divans*, from which doors opened into other rooms, are described as extraordinarily large but dark as they had no windows. The rooms, numbering about 25 or 30, are described as majestic with fireplaces *as large as cottages*, embellished with vast *mahfils* and *musandras*.

Between the main *Gate of the King* and the *Gate of the Village*, Ekrem Bey describes a rather large throughway that divided the castle into two parts. In the middle of this stood the fourth gate, the *Gate of the Pasha*, which opened into the citadel (*iç kale*), divided into two squares. The squares of the citadel lay ten to fifteen metres higher than the first square and were separated from it by high walls incorporating a few small rectangular towers. On the third square, the highest, allegedly stood the *Tower of the Ağa*, the administrative premises or the *selamlık* of the *sancakbey*. The *Tower of the Ağa* is described as a rectangular building consisting of walls twenty metres long, three metres thick and three to four storeys high. The site is reportedly high enough to have dominated the surrounding landscape, including the Gulf of Vlora, even from the courtyard. Twenty metres below the *Gate of the King*, Ekrem Bey describes the *Fountain of the Harems*, a water source that could have been used even during times of siege because its site was purportedly protected by the *Gate of the King* and the *Tower of the Ağa*. Outside the external walls of the seraglio, Ekrem Bey describes the stables and storage buildings, personnel and soldiers' quarters and, according to popular belief, a mosque built during the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, of which no evidence has been discovered.²⁰

Ekrem Bey explains that the seraglio described was rebuilt in 1701 by Avlonyalı Zeynel Pasha following the burning of the Castle of Kanina in skirmishes during the Austrian and Venetian invasion of 1690, but insists that the *sancakbey* of Vlora, Gazi Sinan Pasha, whom Ekrem Bey claims to

¹⁹ For more on Gazi Sinan Pasha's magnificent palace in the Castle of Kanina see: Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, p. 150.

²⁰ According to Professor Kiel, it is possible that both the Mosque of Sultan Mehmed and the inscription of Sultan Süleyman over the North Gate stating that the latter had 'mended and repaired' the Castle during his month-long sojourn in 1537 as recorded by Evliya Çelebi, might have disappeared during the heavy bombardment by the Italians in 1920. See: Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, pp. 150-151.

have been son-in-law to Sultan Bayazit II, erected his seraglio on the same site in 1502. Following the battles at the end of the 17th century, the seraglio of the Castle of Kanina is described as having lost its splendour. Consequently, Ekrem Bey affirms that this was one of the reasons that incited the sons of Avlonyalı Zeynel Pasha, Kaplan and Islam Pashas, to start constructing the new Avlonyalı seraglio in the Tophane quarter of Vlora during the first half of the 18th century.²¹

In addition to Ekrem Bey's description of the urban and architectural features of the Castle of Kanina, another testimony enriches the literature on the castles and citadels, which housed the administrative seraglios of the classical Ottoman period in the Albanian lands. This rather modest testimony is articulated by Hana Këlcyra, daughter of Ali Bey, descendant of a long line of *bey* rulers of the southern Albanian land of Këlcyra (Klisura), whose old seraglio also stood on the acropolis of the Castle of Këlcyra until the end of the 18th century. In 1466, the town of Këlcyra, situated at the entrance of the narrow Gorge of Këlcyra, was one of the *vilayets* of the *Sancaq-i Arvanit*.²² The Castle of Këlcyra thus commanded a point of great strategic importance serving as a junction of the routes leading to Berat (Arnavud Belgradı), Përmet (Premedi) and Tepelenë (Tepedelen).²³

Hana Këlcyra testifies that the administrator's seraglio was also realised in the Castle of Këlcyra, which she supposes originated in the 13th century.²⁴ The particularity of the Castle of Këlcyra, repaired and maintained by the Ottomans,²⁵ seems to have been quite considerable as compared with the physiognomy of other castles in the Albanian lands. Allegedly, the water sources of Trebeshina, situated nearby the Castle of Këlcyra, were employed to construct channels surrounding the complexes of the castle and the citadel, quite a rare novelty in Albanian lands, especially in the mountain areas.²⁶ The seraglio of the Castle of Këlcyra, for which unfortunately no detailed description is provided, fell into the hands of Tepedelenli Ali Pasha at the end

21 Professor Kiel affirms that Avlonyalı Süleyman Pasha also conducted a restoration of the Castle shortly before 1832. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

22 Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, p. 20 cites Inalcık, Halil, "Arnavutluk", *Et.*

23 *Ibid.*, p. 161.

24 All the details of Hana Këlcyra's description of the Castle of Klissura are from the Albanian publication of Hana Këlcyra's text, which appeared in the Albanian newspaper TemA in September 2007. See: Këlcyra, Hana, *Historia e Familjes Këlcyra* (History of the Këlcyra family), Gazeta TemA, Tirana, 20/09/2007.

25 Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, p. 161.

26 Vlora, *Kalaja*.

of the 18th century and, after its destruction during his armed resistance at the beginning of the 19th century, was never to be restored or re-inhabited. Subsequently, the new seraglio of the Klisuras was built on the steep mountain slope below its former site, an emplacement that still enabled its domination of the town and the landscape of the area.

Having developed as an expression of the cultural identity of the high Ottoman strata during the classical period, more particularly since the erection of the Topkapı Sarayı, the conception of governors' seraglios on acropolises dominating urban landscapes seeks perhaps to also attract attention to the socially regulating Ottoman concept of the marked differentiation between ruler and subject, similar to the dress codes that demarcated social status.²⁷ This reasoning has often been neglected in favour of the strategic importance of building the seraglios of the classical period in the upper storeys of castles dominating landscapes, a pertinent argument in the context of the often rugged and dangerous Albanian frontier lands. Yet the concept of the *institution* of the seraglios introduced by Ottoman administrators remains very similar to that of the institution of the Imperial Seraglio. Centres of political, military and economic Ottoman administrative power in the *sancaks*, *vilayets* and their local commands in the Albanian lands, the referential Ottoman concept for the *public* and *private* institution of the *seraglio*²⁸ would indelibly mark the Albanian lands well beyond the administrative reforms of Tanzimat.

The institution of the Imperial Seraglio governed the fates of the Empire while epitomising the absolute power of the sovereign, formed and prepared the expression of high Ottoman culture of the public and private spheres along with the ruling elites of the Empire and protected the site of absolute privacy of the sovereign. Following its example, seraglios in the Albanian lands served as provincial emissaries of this institutional model. Accordingly, they simultaneously performed the function of the provincial administration, represented and spread the expression of high Ottoman culture to the

²⁷ Faroqhi, Suraiya, *Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire*, London & New York: I. B. Taurus 2005, p. 13-14.

²⁸ "Saraj [Seraglio]: A king's palace in the East and of the Sultan in Turkey. 2. As in Turkey proper also: a governmental building of the ruler especially in vilayet centres". See: Dizdari, Tahir N., *Fjalor i Orientalizmeve ne Gjuhën Shqipe* (Dictionary of Oriental Terms in Albanian Language), Tirana: Instituti Shqiptar i Mendimit dhe i Qytetërimit Islam, 2005, p. 878; "The great feudal caste, besides its economic power, played an important socio-political role in the context of its time. The premises of this caste were not merely the family's abode, but places where important activities were housed since state institutions were comparatively scarce". See: Riza, Emin, *Dy Komplekse të Zhvilluara Banimi* (Two developed housing complexes), Revista Monumentet, 1986, p. 85.

respective provinces and served as the private domain of the administrator.²⁹ This institutional analogy revealed in the architectural language of the classical Ottoman period was certainly not accidental. The example of the seraglios in the Albanian lands, far from being individual projections of provincial administrators, represented a programmed urban and architectural norm whose language was refined at the height of the centralised power by the imperial architects, an institution which from the 15th to 17th century and part of the 18th did not tolerate arbitrary individual interpretations,³⁰ neither in the concepts of urbanism nor in the project of civil, military and religious monuments in the provinces.

Contextualising Modern Ottoman Period Seraglios

In the Ottoman lands, the 16th century marked the beginning of the disruption of the *timar* system, offering Ottoman provincial administrators and officials of the Albanian lands the opportunity of establishing large *çiflik*s on the *miri* lands.³¹ Naturally, this phenomenon enabled the foundation of a strong bond between Ottoman provincial administrators and the Albanian terrain. The birth of the Ottoman Albanian landed aristocracy could not be defined in the absence of this strong connection with the land³² and its subsequent stabilisation could only with difficulty be elucidated without the phenomenon of inheritance, which permitted provincial administrators and powerful officials to perpetuate the political, military and economic administrative power and privileges through their heirs.³³ Often criticised as having inflicted

²⁹ Ihsanoglu, Ekmeleddin ed., *History of the Ottoman State, Society & Civilisation*, IRCICA, Istanbul, 2001, Vol. I, pp. 228-9; Faroqhi, Suraiya, *Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 128.

³⁰ Kiel, *Ottoman Balkans*, pp. xi-xiv; see also: Ergül, Emre, *Organisational Deterministic Explanation of Ottoman House in the Classical Age: The Mechanism and the Actors in Homogenisation Process*, N. Akın, A. Batur, S. Batur ed., *7 Centuries of Ottoman Architecture: A Supra National Heritage*, pp. 285-291; Barkan, Ö. L., *Süleymaniye Camii ve İmaret İnsaatı, 1550-1557*, Türk Tarihi Kurumu, Ankara, 1972.

³¹ Inalcık, Halil, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*, Phoenix, 1973, p. 110; Ihsanoglu ed., *Ottoman State, Society & Civilisation*, p. 407; Bruce McGowan, "The Age of the Ayans, 1699-1812", in Halil Inalcık et al., *Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 660.

³² Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, p. 24.

³³ See: Faroqhi, Suraiya, *Crisis and Change 1590-1699*, in Inalcık, *Economic and Social History*, pp. 550-2; Ekrem Bey offers the following remarks on the creation of the aristocratic caste in the Albanian lands: "It is true that in the East, more precisely in the Persian, Byzantine, Arabic and Ottoman Empires, no official recognition of aristocratic designation or of feudal rights according to the Western European perspective has occurred. In the absence of a tribal aristocracy recognised by the state, the role of the civil and military officials in the Eastern world developed to an unprecedented level of importance. From them in time, and primarily in the provinces where official positions civil or military were retained within the same families,

great damage on Ottoman administrative power, the phenomenon of the inheritance of power and privileges unto families' future generations was not unknown to the Ottoman methods of governance and administration.³⁴ The early inheritance practices observed in the caste of *sipahis* or *akıncıs*,³⁵ as well as in the strata of *esnafs* or the *reaya*,³⁶ suffice to prove that Ottoman methods of governance were conservative with regard to class mobility.

Consequently, an important part of *ocaks* or *grand doors*³⁷ in the Albanian

there developed by virtue of custom and tradition a certain distinction, which the state was forced not only to endure but also to recognise in practice. Hence, in the East there emerged 'a high aristocratic caste', which in many lands (for instance, in Albania, Bosnia, Kurdistan and Arabia) formed an 'aristokratorn', a particular, privileged establishment, which did not exist *de jure* but *de facto*. [...] An Albanian Bey from a 'grand house' resembles, from the juridical and heraldic perspective, a German Reichsgraf as little as a Chinese Mandarin resembles an English Lord. However, all four categories once embodied the high caste, the dominant and leading strata of their peoples and had one thing in common: the consciousness that they were different from and superior to all others and the recognition of this this privilege by both the people and the state *nolens volens*". See: Vlora, *Kujtime*, 554, 560.

34 "Certainly, both the *askerî* and the *sadat* were internally much differentiated in economic terms, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but this alone does not disqualify them as a nobility. Wealth most often accompanied status in pre-modern societies as well, but they were not identical, and were even less so during this period. Ottoman nobilities were not immune to the post-Black Death upswing, political and economic, that swept across Eurasia. What we observe in Ottoman lands during this period can be characterised as a contention between economic stratification and status stratification, the former rising to challenge the primacy of the latter. While the classic system of stratification was designed in a way to allow upward mobility through military might and command of (sacred) knowledge alone, economic and fiscal transformations of the post-classical era opened the way for mobility on the basis of wealth, thus bringing economic status and politically defined status closer to one another. It appears that once the *askerî-reaya* grid was stretched, the principle of birth (*neseb*), as opposed to merit, too, assumed a new and more celebrated function in the Ottoman socio-political constitution. The way the *askerî* was originally defined did not mean birth ceased to function as a customary principle of status allocation. Amidst the transformations of the post-classical period, it surfaced back into the heart of the Ottoman official hierarchy, and combined with economic power, it helped burst open the *askerî-reaya* divide, or redefine it". See Canbakal, Hülya, 'On the 'Nobility' of Urban Notables' in, *Halcyon Days in Crete 5*, Rethymno, 2005, f. 50.

35 Ihsanoglu ed., *Ottoman State, Society & Civilisation*, pp. 405-406 & 408.

36 Inalcık, *Classical Age*, pp. 111-113 & 150-162.

37 "Oxhak [Ocak]: *fig. his.* an old and distinguished family, principal and distinguished house; affluent family: *feudal ocaks*". See: *Fjalor i Gjuhës Shqipe* (Dictionary of the Albanian Language), Tirana: Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Instituti i Gjuhësisë dhe i Letërsisë, 2006, p. 726; "Oxhak [Ocak]: an old family according to the traditional view, a grand door whose fire never goes out, an affluent house, noble, munificent, gentle". See: Dizdari, *Fjalor i Orientalizmeve ne Gjuhën Shqipe* (Dictionary of Oriental Terms in the Albanian Language), p. 736; "Chaque région ou ville se trouvait sous la domination d'un pacha local, d'un bey, d'un ağa, d'un noble de haute naissance (oxhak), d'un chef de clan ou bayraktar". Shkodra, Zija, *La ville albanaise au cours de la renaissance nationale: 1831-1912*, Académie des sciences de la RPS d'Albanie, Institut d'Histoire, Tirana, 1988, p. 41; "The title 'bey of ...' (name of the provincial capital of the sancak) was held solely by the governor. The other members of the family held no titles. However, if the same family held the post of *sancakbey* a few consecutive times then the house was called *ocak* and its family members were identified as [...] 'from beyler house of ...'. Yet in order to keep this entitlement it was necessary to have a party of followers (*taraf*) and a certain level of wealth to maintain friends and clients. The *Bey* was the head of the civil and military administration in his province". See: Vlora, *Kujtime*, p. 561.

lands founded and consolidated their inherited official and administrative power between the 16th and 18th centuries. Thereafter, most particularly the main provincial administrators were established as the distinguished caste of the greater aristocracy locally known as the *grand beys*,³⁸ whose prominent political, economic, military and social power³⁹ derived from and was perpetually fused with the Ottoman administrative civil and military power. It was mainly this caste of the *grand beys* that enjoyed the traditional title of *ocakzade*,⁴⁰ an aristocratic distinction deriving from the noble *ocaklık*⁴¹ status perpetuated in generations of *ocaklis*,⁴² whose official administrative power was rarely disrupted. This insistence on emphasising the variety of the terminology deriving from the concept *ocak* is intentional. In itself the term *ocak* discloses a military symbol corresponding to the diverse Ottoman military corps, an important part of which were also the provincial armed forces under the administration and the command of *sancakbeys*.⁴³

However, in the Albanian lands the term *ocak* (*oxhak*) was to enter into use as a clear symbol of the caste of the greater aristocracy, the *grand beys*. The reasons behind the survival of this term more than any other as a predominant symbol for this caste seem to be at least *partially* explicable by the presence of *ocak* (chimney) as an object of utility. In the Albanian lands, at least until the second half of the 19th century, *ocaks* seem to have constituted objects of supreme privilege dedicated solely for the use of the aristocratic caste.⁴⁴ According to

38 "Bej [Bey]: Title once to be attributed to principal houses, heads of fiefs especially with land property, and who served the Ottoman Empire. *Tur. bey, bay*, in original 'head' Sami Frashëri KT I 297. According to Kamus: grand, affluent, head, ruler, prince, count". *Ibid.*, pp. 86-7.

39 Ihsanoglu ed., *Ottoman State, Society & Civilisation*, p. 549.

40 "Oxhakzade [Ocakzade]: noble and son of nobleman, *it. di nobile lignaggio*". See: Dizdari, *Fjalor i Orientalizmave ne Gjuhën Shqipe* (Dictionary of Oriental Terms in Albanian Language), p. 737.

"The Ottoman government appointed [in the Albanian districts] leading members of notable families or clans and tribes ('ocakzades') as governors or other high provincial officials because their status and knowledge of how to manage such a society increased the chances of collecting the taxes and recruiting the soldiers". Anscombe, Frederick, F., 'The Ottoman Empire in recent international politics – II: the case of Kosovo', *The International History Review*, 28/4, 2006, p. 785.

41 "Oxhakllëk-u [Ocaklık]: nobility, munificent, *it. stato e ceto della nobilita, supremazia in nobilita*". *Ibid.*, p. 737

42 "Oxhakli-je [Ocakli]: noble, munificent, principal door". *Ibid.*, p. 737.

43 Ihsanoglu, ed., *Ottoman State, Society & Civilisation*, vol. I, pp. 349-413.

44 "The *ocak* (chimney) understood as the complex of fireplace and chimney for smoke ventilation, hence with its internal structure situated inside the house volume and the external structure situated above the roof, is considered to be a phenomenon that entered the Albanian lands at a rather late date, around the 17th century. Only the great feudal families had the right to possess an *ocak* (chimney) with an integrated system for smoke ventilation. The society at large used the 'house of fire' (*shtëpia e zjarrit*), where the fire was lit in the middle of the house. Otherwise, most fireplaces had only a decorative

specialists, their presence in the Albanian lands is firmly documented since at least the 17th century in the seraglios of the aristocracy. As far as other strata of society are concerned, the privilege of possessing an *ocak* starts gradually to appear only in the 19th century. Following this period, this feature, which for centuries had constituted the very emblem of the caste of *ocaks*, gradually became less exclusive.⁴⁵ Before this liberalisation, other strata of society were only entitled to use simple or relatively elaborate fireplaces primarily in their reception *odas* essentially for aesthetic reasons or, more commonly, the *house of fire* (*shtëpia e zjarrit*), an area where the fire habitually burnt in the middle of the dwelling with no particular system for ventilation.⁴⁶

A synonym for the term *ocak*, the *grand door* (*derë e madhe*) also entered the mores to symbolise the caste of the *grand beys*. The *grand door* was used as a reference to the main entry gate of a *beys'* seraglio, which led to the official and public institution, the *selamlık*. The main gate was perceptibly of large dimensions, such that could at least permit passage to mounted horsemen and coaches. Beyond its ostensible dimensions, the principal and largely exclusive characteristics of a *grand door* were to be found in its complex style, typically in cylindrical vaulting (*kemer*) with an integrated tower (*kale*).⁴⁷ Such characteristics constituted a privilege prescribed solely for the use of the aristocracy and were not customarily found in general use. Yet the use of the term *grand door* does not seem to refer exclusively to the dimensions or the specific characteristics corresponding to the main gates of the seraglios. More than anything, the term seems to have been used to symbolise the institution of the *divan* of the *selamlık* in *beys'* seraglios, the governing milieu of the provincial administrator, which also housed the provincial councils. Hence, the correlation with the term *Bab-i 'Ali* of the Topkapı Sarayı,⁴⁸ symbol of the

function". Summary of telephone interview with Professor Emin Riza for the purpose of this article, held on 19.04.2010, CET 18:55.

45 "The great families of Albania, since the beginning of the Turkish rule until Tanzimat have been usually called *ocak*. By analogy with the Turkish 'Porte' they are also called 'grand door' (*derë e madhe*) = grand house. In the beginning these designations were used simultaneously. The expression 'grand door' and 'high *ocak*' derive from ancient times and point to a lord's house to differentiate it from shacks or towers (*kule*), which had a small door and no *ocak*". See: Vlora, *Kujtime*, p. 30 cites Thalloczy, Ludwig von, *Illyrisch-albanische Forschungen*. See also: Frashëri, Kristo, *Historia e Tiranës* (The History of Tirana), Tirana, 2004.

46 Riza, Emin, *Qyteti dhe Banesa Qytetare shekujt XV-XIX* (The city and Albanian city housing: 15th -19th centuries), Tirana, 2009, pp. 333-5 & 374-6.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 352.

48 Faroqhi, Suraiya, *Crisis and Change 1590-1699*, in Inalcik, *Economic and Social History*, p. 616; Bayerle, Gustav, *Pashas, Begs and Effendis: A Historical Dictionary of Titles and Terms in the Ottoman Empire*, Istanbul: Isis Press, 1997, p. 13

governing body of the *Divan-i Hümayun*, appears to have primarily motivated the usage of *grand door* to indicate the administrator's *divan*.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, subsequent to the conquest of the northern Albanian lands, the end of the 15th and the 16th centuries marked a period of stabilisation and integration of the Albanian territories in the Ottoman realm, which brought about steady development and general growth. The foundation of Korça (Görice/Koritsa) by Mirahor İlyas Bey at the end of the 15th century was followed by the urban development of Tepelena (Tepedelen) after the construction of its castle, while during the 16th century it was Kavaja (Kavalya), which under the patronage of the powerful Altun *ocakzades* was to become the most important urban centre of the Durrës (Dıraç) area, overshadowing the latter ancient city. The 17th century also proved fruitful to the urban development of the Albanian territories, first marked by the foundation of Tirana (Tiran) by Süleyman Pasha (Bargjini) and soon after by the development of Peqin (Biklenet/Peklin) as a vibrant urban centre under the auspices of Abdurrahman Pasha (Bonoti).⁵⁰ Henceforth, the foundation of new urban centres and the development of existing ones were administered by the patronage of the powerful provincial and local *ocaks*, who indelibly marked their respective territories with monuments of religious and civil architecture, such as *camis*, *medreses*, *mekteps*, *hans*, *hamams*, *kütüphanes* and *muvaakkithanes*.⁵¹

The rapid integration of the Albanian lands in the Ottoman realm was reflected in the remarkable careers of Albanian speaking elements in the high strata of the Ottoman elite, a factor mirrored in the evolution of Albanian urban centres. The renowned *sadrzams* of Albanian origins, at least thirty since Gedik Ahmed Pasha, Dukaginzâde Ahmed Pasha, the much celebrated Köprülüs and ultimately Avlonyalı Ferid Pasha, as well as the famous Janissary Ağas of whom at least one hundred were of Albanian origin,⁵² in addition to hundreds more who served as officials and administrators in all corners of the Empire,⁵³ left behind an abundant architectural legacy. Thus, the prime Ottoman predilection for the art of architecture, instigated by the imperial

49 See notes 36 & 44.

50 Ağa of the Janissaries, Governor of Egypt, Bagdad and Buda. See: Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, p. 21; Vlora, *Kujtime*, p. 579.

51 Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, p. 21; see also: Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan*, p. 233.

52 Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, p. 23 cites Ekrem Bey, *Aus Berat*, p. 40.

53 For a comprehensive panorama of the impressive careers of the Albanian element in the Ottoman Empire see: Şemsettin Sami, *Kamusu'l A'lam*, I-VI, Ankara: Kaşgar Neşriyat, 1996 [1889-1898]; *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, "Arnavutluk-Albania", vol. 1, 1960.

example, was accordingly reflected in the Ottoman Albanian lands.⁵⁴ Albanians were furthermore distinguished within the dominion of Ottoman high culture thanks to poets such as Dukaginzâde Yahya Bey; Koçi Bey, commonly known as the Ottoman Montesquieu; Hoca Tahsin, first rector of Istanbul University; and, last but not least, Fraşerli Şemseddin Sami Bey and Ekrem Bey Vlora, the last generation of intellectuals to have been part of the Ottoman cosmopolitan sphere.⁵⁵

The successful integration in the Ottoman pool, the massive islamisation of the population that started during the 17th century⁵⁶ and the institutionalisation of provincial administrative power inherited within the aristocracy were interpreted at the summit of Ottoman power as phenomena pertaining to recovery. Hence, the 17th and 18th centuries, which brought to the provinces of the Empire visible economic growth and development⁵⁷ thanks to the integration of the local and provincial economies in international markets, marked in the strategically situated Albanian frontier lands an epoch of quasi-autonomous administration and military defence, the latter owing to the leading Albanian military successes.⁵⁸ The continual empowerment of the provincial aristocracy and the creation of the large *pashaliks* of Shkodra (Iskenderiyye/Işkodra) and Janina (Yanya) cannot be fully comprehended without recognising these phenomena. The emergence of new and powerful *ocaks* during this era reinvigorated the needs and desires to further enrich urban and architectural development. Among the most significant constructions of these times were those of Tepedelenli Ali Pasha in the Vilayet of Yanya and elsewhere, as well as those of the Buşatlı *ocak* in the Vilayet of Işkodra, whose capital became a vibrant metropolis. The Kurşunlu Camii (Xhamia e Plumbit), the largest architectural construction in the north-western territories, was an oeuvre accomplished by the Buşatlı *ocak*.⁵⁹

The buildings erected by the Avlonyalı *ocak* in Berat and Vlora,⁶⁰ Kurt Ahmed

⁵⁴ Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan*, pp. 125, 134-136; Yerasimos, *La Fondation d'Istanbul Ottomane*, p. 213, 214, 216-220.

⁵⁵ Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, p. 23; Andrews, Walter G., Kalpaki, Mehmet, *The Age of the Beloved*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005, pp. 324-8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 26; Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan*, p. 225.

⁵⁸ Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, p. 15.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 26.

⁶⁰ Ekrem Bey records that his grandfather, Mustafa Pasha, former *vali* of Crete and Northern Bulgaria, during a nine month sojourn, endowed his native town of Vlora with the town's school building, a new street leading from the port to the town centre and two hydro monuments. See: Vlora, *Kujtime*, p. 43.

Pasha in Berat and Elbasan (Ilbasan), the Toptan *ocak* in Kruja (Akçe Hisar) and Tirana, the powerful Rotulla *ocak* in Prizren, the distinguished Bıçakçılı *ocak* of architects in Elbasan and by the Viyronzâde *ocak* in Berat and Fier, a city founded by the vigorous Viyronzâde in mid 19th century,⁶¹ were of course signs of the ambitions of the powerful provincial aristocracy who invested in the urban and architectural development and refinement of their territories.⁶² Similarly, the thriving centres of Christian cultures in Voskopoja (Iskopol/Oskopol/Moschopolis) and Vithkuq⁶³ confirm the global tendency of a full spectrum escalation and extension of the urban Albanian territories, in which culture in its broadest sense played an important role. The most significant feature of this cultural renaissance remains the incorporation and engagement of local constituents. The earlier sporadic signs of local interpretations and variations of the Ottoman architectural language intensified in the urban landscape during the 18th and 19th centuries, thereafter enriching the Ottoman architectural physiognomy and typology with elements of the local style.⁶⁴

In this era of modernity, while urban centres were enriched with diverse and abundant architectural elements, urban culture found fertile ground in which to flourish. Of most prominent cultural occurrence was the expansion of the *aljamiado* literature, written in the Albanian language with Arabic script and practised mainly by Muslim urban dwellers. An impressive literary collection of mystical and epic genres, novels and poetry, school texts and dictionaries and, naturally, a long series of *ilahis* and *mevluds* began to appear in the territories inhabited by Albanian Muslims, from Montenegro to Kosova, Shkup (Üsküp) to Berat and Elbasan and in all the southern lands,⁶⁵ a most remarkable achievement for a language never documented in script prior to the Ottoman era, much less employed in literary creation. The profusion of influences on the Albanian language with terms originating from the modal

61 The following passage is from a letter sent by Omer Pasha II Vrioni to the Ministry of Finance in 1924: "We were fortunate to give to this city the celebrity it enjoys today. After sixty or more years, incessantly yet unfatigued we have suffered materially and morally, but confronted all risks. We have invested a mighty amount of capital and brought it thereafter to the form it possesses today. It is true that our endeavour and sacrifice serve our interests, but it is undeniable that to the social life of this region this is a valuable service". See A. Q. SH. Fon. 152, Dos. 167, 1924, p. 41; "Fieri is a big village belonging to a very enterprising Beg who wants to make it a trade centre, and has rebuilt all the market-place with large solid-looking houses of stone, which have a surprisingly up-to-date appearance". See: Durham, Edith, *The Burden of the Balkans*, Edward Arnold, London, 1905, chapter xi; see also: Vlora, *Kujtime*, p. 587.

62 Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, p. 26; see also: Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan*, p. 234.

63 Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, p. 25.

64 Ibid p. 3. see also: Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan*, p. 128.

65 Kiel, *Ottoman Albania*, pp. 23-4.

system of *mekams*, such as *mekam-i hicaz* or *mekam-i huzam*,⁶⁶ and the rich entries for musical instruments in the dictionary of oriental terms (precisely ninety-eight, among which the *çifteli* has since risen to the rank of national instrument) display signs of vibrant musical activity, which must certainly have prospered during this period of revival of culture and art.

The abandonment of seraglios built during the classical period in castles dominating the towns was a natural result of urban evolution. Hence, urban seraglios emerged during a period of distinguished urban development which, having been enriched under the auspices of their administrators and the growing involvement of the local inhabitants, had culminated in cultural and economic maturity. Typically, the style of the new urban seraglios complied with the characteristics of urban *konak* architecture, which proliferated during the 18th century in the main urban centres of the Empire among the affluent strata of Ottoman society.⁶⁷ It is, however, noteworthy that despite the modern architectural style employed, the new urban seraglios retained certain features of the typology of classical medieval seraglios.⁶⁸ The insistence of the powerful aristocracy to erect large building blocks for the *selamlıks* and the *harems* separated by dividing walls and to encircle the complex with citadel-style high, thick walls in the heart of urban landscapes cannot be solely explained by this caste's religious identity; although the display of visible features and symbols of their elitist position in lands where plural identities were the norm remains a pertinent argument.⁶⁹

The Albanian provincial aristocracy was a caste of administrators of frontier lands. As such, they were manifestly conscious of the dangers to which they exposed themselves by living within urban settings, sufficient reason to erect high and thick protective walls. Nevertheless, their perseverance in upholding certain features of the citadel typology in their *konak*-style seraglios most certainly reveals the self-image this aristocratic caste desired to preserve, intrinsic to the strong representation of power embodied by the institution of the classic era *seraglio*. The mere fact that the term *seraglio* (*saraje*) survived as the most popular term to denote the rather elaborate and complex urban *konak* architecture suggests the image of might exercised by the administrative *seraglio* in the collective perception. It must, however, be highlighted that this

⁶⁶ Dizdari, *Fjalor i Orientalizmeve*, pp. 637, 392 & 400.

⁶⁷ Goodwin, Godfrey, *A History of Ottoman Architecture*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1971, pp. 428-453; see also: Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan*, p. 131, 150, 159.

⁶⁸ Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan*, pp. 235-6.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

particularity observed in the Albanian lands was not exclusively restricted to the *seraglios* of provincial governors, such as *valis*, *vezirs* or *sancakbeys*, as was visibly the case for the *konak* complexes of Avlonyalı or Viryonzâde. It extended to the more modest premises of middle and lower aristocracy in smaller localities,⁷⁰ to whom governors and administrators delegated local power, and most importantly also to areas under the administration of tribal chiefs, which enjoyed substantial administrative and religious autonomy, such as that of Catholic Mirdita (Merdita).⁷¹

Hence, regardless of the level of the administrator within the hierarchy of the administrative apparatus, the dimensions or confessional identity of the territory under administration, or the architectural character and typology of the complex, the *seraglio* survived in collective perception as the symbol and epitome of the Ottoman era of administration, power and order in the Albanian lands. Representing an analogy with the institution of the Imperial Seraglio, the popularity this term enjoyed in the Albanian territories indubitably mirrors the level of common perception as to the integration and identification of the Albanian lands and peoples with all structures of Ottoman life and order during five centuries of coexistence. The very fact that this term proved persistent throughout all historical periods and survived until the present day remains an indelible testimony to this historical reality, independent of the ideological interpretations and insignia that influenced the institution of the *seraglio* following Albania's independence.

Modern Seraglio Styles in Ottoman Toskalik

Scholarly research conducted on various lands of the Empire has demonstrated that the most interesting buildings erected by the potentates in the provinces were their official residences.⁷² In the urban Albanian context, the Avlonyalı and Viryonzâde seraglios clearly exemplify this general tendency. Indeed, judging from the evidence presented in the 20th century, specialists maintain that both examples erected in the cities of Vlora and Berat respectively

70 The traditional family residence of Ahmed Bey Zogolli (later King Zog of Albania), situated in the village of Burgajet in the region of Mat, was commonly referred to as *seraglio* (*saraje*). See: Andoni, Ben, *Burgajeti, atje ku flitet për Shqipëri etnike*, (Burgajet, where people speak of ethnic Albania) Revista Mapo, Tirana, August, 2010.

71 See: Përgega, Zef, *Sarajat: Vështrim Historiko-Letërar Kushtuar Derës Princorë Mirditore të Gjonmarkut* (The Seraglio: Historical and Literary Observations Dedicated to the Gjonmarkaj Princely door of Mirdita), Albin, Tirana, 2008.

72 Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan*, pp. 233-5.

reveal highly developed building complexes with *unique* forms and monumental dimensions in the global context of the urban Albanian architectural landscape.⁷³ After their demolition in the first half of the 20th century, the most significant descriptions of the urban-style Avlonyalı and Viryonzâde seraglios are chiefly provided in two different publications by Ekrem Bey.⁷⁴ Hence, the portrayal of their main architectural characteristics relies primarily on Ekrem Bey's accounts, although attention is also given to certain details supplied by Jusuf Vrioni's narrative as well as to a scholarly article dedicated to these architectural complexes that appeared in Albania in the 1980s.⁷⁵

Ekrem Bey's evidence does not clearly indicate the date when construction of the two seraglios began or their architectural evolution, but refers to historical events that provoked the beginnings of their construction and implies that both seraglios seem to have developed from the first half of the 18th century.⁷⁶ The Avlonyalı seraglio is believed to have covered a large territory of at least 4000 square metres in the Tophane quarter of the city of Vlora, at the very site where today a green space marks the centre of the city.⁷⁷ The Viryonzâde seraglio was located in the old quarter of Atik, at the foot of the hill crowned by the castle of Berat.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, the surface area of the architectural complex of the Viryonzâde seraglio is not clearly documented. Nevertheless, based on the limited evidence available, the surface area of the Avlonyalı seraglio clearly appears larger, dictated perhaps by the flat topography of the city of Vlora. The Viryonzâde seraglio in the old, hilly city of Berat seems to have been large⁷⁹ but comparatively more contained in terms of surface area.

Both Avlonyalı and Viryonzâde seraglios consisted of two main building blocks, the *selamlık* and the *harem*, separated from one another by a transversal

73 Riza, Emin, *Dy Komplekse të Zhvilluara Banimi*, Revista Monumentet, 1986. Professor Emin Riza published his article on these two seraglios based on the sketches of the Avlonyalı seraglio drawn by L. A. Rumbolt in 1861 and on an incomplete plan of the Viryonzâde seraglio drawn by Ekrem Bey and originally published in *Aus Berat und vom Tomor: Tagebuchblätter*, Sarajevo, 1911. See: Riza, *Komplekse*, p. 88.

74 Ekrem Bey's descriptions for both the Avlonyalı and Viryonzâde seraglios are from the Albanian publication of Ekrem Bey's texts, Vlora, Eqrem Bej, *Kujtime, 1885-1925*, Shtëpia e Librit & Komunikimit, Tirana, 2003, and Vlora, Eqrem Bej, *Ditar: Nga Berati në Tomorr dhe Kthim* (Journal: from Berat to Tomorr and back), Botimet Koçi, Tirana, 2003.

75 Riza, Emin, *Dy Komplekse të Zhvilluara Banimi*, Revista Monumentet, 1986.

76 Vlora, *Kalaja*; Vlora, *Ditar*, p. 61.

77 Professor Riza's evaluation of this territory is 4, 53 hectares. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

78 Vrioni, *Mondes Effacés*, p. 35; Vlora, *Ditar*, p. 61.

79 Vlora, *Ditar*, p. 63.

wall (*çatma*).⁸⁰ The communication between the building block of the *selamlık* and that of the *harem* was conducted through a gate slightly displaced from the symmetrical centre of the dividing (*çatma*) wall.⁸¹ The building complexes were protected by high, thick surrounding walls, which appear to have been eight metres high in the Alvonyalı⁸² example and two and a half metres thick in the Viryonzâde.⁸³ These walls contained two large gates of cylindrical vaulting (*kemer*), which opened onto the front courtyard and the back courtyard of the seraglio respectively. The first gate, perhaps the larger of the two, was located in the front wall almost equally equidistant from both edges and opened onto the courtyard of the first building block of the complex, the *selamlık*.⁸⁴ The second gate, perhaps more modest in scale than its counterpart in the front wall, was located in the rear wall of the seraglio and opened to the back courtyard of the second building block, the *harem*.⁸⁵

Located over the main gate of the Avlonyalı seraglio stood a tower with enclosed spaces for guards and equipped with gun turrets.⁸⁶ In the example of the main gate of the Viryonzâde seraglio, the modest evidence that has survived does not reveal if the same type of complex was built around its front gate. While it is quite possible that the same feature also existed around the main gate of the Viryonzâde seraglio, it is clear that the guards' quarters would have been positioned in the two towers, one of which is indicated to have been located in the courtyard of the *selamlık*. Both Viryonzâde towers seem to have been six storeys high,⁸⁷ albeit there is no clear evidence for the exact emplacement of the second tower. Meanwhile, the presence of a tower is indicated in the rear courtyard of the *harem* of the Viryonzâdes, apparently part of the building block of the *harem*.⁸⁸ A tower is also described in the rear courtyard of the Avlonyalı *harem*. Three to four storeys high, this tower stood as a separate architectural structure.⁸⁹

80 *Ibid.*

81 Vrioni, *Mondes Effacés*, p. 37; *Ibid.*

82 Vlorë, *Kujtime*, p. 19.

83 Vrioni, *Mondes Effacés*, p. 37.

84 Vlorë, *Ditar*, p. 63.

85 Riza, *Komplekse*, p. 86.

86 Vlorë, *Ditar*, p. 63.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

88 Riza, *Komplekse*, p. 90.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 89.

Alongside the monumental gates of both seraglios stood a large building two to three storeys high equipped with verandas (*çardak*). Its upper floors are believed to have served as a *selamlık* for short daytime visits. In the Viryonzâde example, it appears that the lower floor of this building served as stables (*ahur*) for horses and coaches.⁹⁰ The stables of the Avlonyalı are indicated as having been housed in a separate, single storey building located in a large courtyard outside the surrounding walls of the seraglio.⁹¹ The rooms on the upper floor of these buildings are indicated to have been used as private spaces for serving personnel while other personnel were housed in a separate building, which seems to have been situated along or next to the *çatma* wall separating the back courtyard of the *selamlık* from the front courtyard of the *harem*.⁹² The principle function of these buildings, which could easily communicate with the two courtyards of the independent building blocks, was to house the kitchen complexes and storage spaces for foodstuffs and furnishings. It is from these buildings that food and drinks for the needs of the *selamlık* and the *harem* were served.

For both seraglios there are indications of hydro monuments corresponding to certain functional and decorative criteria. Situated in front of the courtyards of the *selamlık* and the *harem*, their structure corresponds to *çeşmes* or *şadırvans*. In both examples they were surrounded by gardens of flowers and decorative plants,⁹³ a sign indicating an exclusive status.⁹⁴ In the Avlonyalı seraglio, the surface area of which was quite extensive, the presence of a basin is also described while its garden seems to have been of particularly large dimensions. In the complex of the Avlonyalı, the description also contains references to an orchard of fruit and decorative trees of quite large dimensions for an urban seraglio complex.⁹⁵ The flat coastal topography, the relatively late development of the urban complexity of the city of Vlora as well as the relatively early appearance of the seraglio in the urban landscape could offer certain clues regarding the large surface area occupied by this seraglio.

In the construction materials of both seraglios, stone appears to have been predominant while wood is described as having been used mainly in the upper floors of the buildings for the creation of the desired open, half-open or closed

⁹⁰ Vlora, *Ditar*, p. 63.

⁹¹ Vlora, *Kujtime*, p. 35.

⁹² Vlora, *Ditar*, pp. 63-4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁹⁴ Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan*, p. 151.

⁹⁵ Vlora, *Kujtime*, p. 25; Riza, *Komplekse*, p. 87.

verandas (*çardak*), the use of which was sought and preferred predominantly during the warm season.⁹⁶ The *selamlık* of the Avlonyalı consisted of a two-storey building block, which appears to have been seventy metres long and equipped with two identical wings, offering a harmonious and symmetrical architectural form. Access to the upper floor was provided by a double staircase not integrated in the main building block. In between the wings, a veranda served as the entrance to the upper floor, thus forming a connection between the spaces of the building while entry to the veranda was afforded by a front arcade. The lower floor is also described as having had an arcaded central entrance situated in the building block of the staircase.⁹⁷

The Avlonyalı *harem* was composed of a building block larger than that of the *selamlık*. The building was eighty-three metres in length and three storeys high. Its composition was as symmetrical as that of the *selamlık*, but by contrast appears to have had elevated side wings in the front façade and to have contained two integrated, four-storey high decorative towers, thus providing a very dynamic appearance and distinguished gravity. The wings seem to have been also present at the rear façade, assuring a dynamic and harmonious architectural continuity throughout the structure. The building block of the staircase was integrated in the main volume and the monumental staircase appears to have been double. The first parallel ramps along the wings culminated in the patio of the first floor. From there, two more parallel ramps began, developing on the cylindrical vaulting system leading to the veranda of the second floor. In front the main arcade was flanked by three other pairs of arcades, symmetrical on both sides.⁹⁸

The building block of the Viryonzâde *selamlık* is described as having been a spacious four-storey structure of particularly distinguished gravity,⁹⁹ equipped with a double stone staircase leading to the veranda of the second floor.¹⁰⁰ The building appears to have contained two *selamlıks*, one for each branch of the family, an element which would perhaps partly explain the unusual number of storeys.¹⁰¹ The upper floors are described as having had an abundance of masterly woodwork, which clearly point to the presence

96 Vlora, *Ditar*, pp. 62, 61-63; Riza, *Komplekse*, p. 88.

97 Riza, *Komplekse*, p. 87.

98 *Ibid.*, pp. 87-8.

99 Vlora, *Ditar*, p. 61.

100 Vrioni, *Mondes Effacés*, p. 38.

101 On the provisions of the *Hassa* architects regarding the choice of district and number of floors of the Muslim and non-Muslim houses see: Ergül, *Mechanism and Actors in Homogenisation Process*, p. 289.

of the verandas on the upper floors of the structure, testified to have given the front façade a particularly impressive appearance.¹⁰² Quite unusual, however, is the indication of four floors, a detail to which certain credibility is lent by the six-storey height of the towers situated in the courtyards of the seraglio. Meanwhile, the urban planning of the old city of Berat, believed to have influenced the comparatively restricted surface area occupied by the Viryonzâde seraglio, and perhaps also the specific status of the *ocak*, could provide certain clues regarding this unusual number of floors.

The *harem* of the Viryonzâde seems to have been a building block of very large dimensions, quite possibly greater than the building block of the *selamluk*.¹⁰³ Composed in the shape of a horseshoe,¹⁰⁴ the building consisted of a succession of pavilions (*kiosks*).¹⁰⁵ The structure thus seems to have been of a composite and asymmetrical monumental volume, an indication which points to the continual expansion of the architectural block of the *harem*. The structure, reported to have been at least two storeys high, seems to have had a large proportion of woodwork in the upper floors,¹⁰⁶ an unambiguous indication of the different structures of the verandas of the successive pavilions which also fulfilled a decorative purpose aiming to increase the effects of dynamism and harmony in the architectural spaces, while at the same time performing the habitual function of a liaison throughout the floor.

There is meagre evidence regarding the external or internal decorative styles of the inhabited spaces. The internal decorations appear to have varied according to the epoch: mainly oriental until the second half of the 19th century and mixed with elements of Western styles after that date, thus combining with a trend typical of this caste.¹⁰⁷ The elements of Western style seem to have been mainly present in the furnishings of the interior spaces.¹⁰⁸ As for the Avlonyalı and Viryonzâde complexes, accounts describe the prominent decorations of the stately fireplaces usually belonging to the reception halls of the *selamluk* and *harem*, or the particular finesse and diversity of the ceiling woodwork as well as that of the *musandras* and *mahfils*, doors or latticed windows

102 Vlorë, *Ditar*, p. 61.

103 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

104 *Ibid.*

105 Vrioni, *Mondes Effacés*, p. 37.

106 Vlorë, *Ditar*, p. 64.

107 Faroqi, *Subjects of the Sultan*, p. 268.

108 Vlorë, *Kujtime*, pp. 20, 22; Vrioni, *Mondes Effacés*, p. 39.

(*kafes*).¹⁰⁹ The elegance described in the external and interior woodworks point to the prominent decorative tradition of woodcarving in Toskalik.¹¹⁰ In such a context, one might imagine the diversity of the interior decoration of these seigniorial complexes. Descriptions of *hamams* exist for both seraglios, an indication typical of the social status that enabled the realisation of such amenities for private use.¹¹¹

The most distinguishing feature of the external and internal architectural style remains the frescos. The example of the Avlonyalı *selamlık* indicates an abundance of wall paintings in the reception halls of the *selamlık* and the *harem* and also on the facades of the building blocks below the roof. Evidence points to the presence of themes such as landscapes, floral and zoomorphic figures and perhaps arabesques.¹¹² Frescoes of floral motifs and *vedutes* reproducing images of Istanbul, a typical element of Ottoman architectural style encountered in all parts of the Empire in the 18th century,¹¹³ remain a familiar element in the Albanian lands. Here it is perhaps worth drawing attention to one of the sole surviving examples of such civil architecture in the Albanian lands. Indeed, the main reception hall of the *harem* of the Toptan *ocak* in Kruja (Akçe Hisar) – the *selamlık* has not survived – also built during the 18th century, retains its original floral motifs and Istanbul *vedutes* as an example of the decorative fashion of the time,¹¹⁴ thus confirming the much celebrated example of the Ethem Bey mosque in Tirana – a religious monument quite typical of the 18th century, where such decorative styles reached a very high level of execution.

Life in the Seraglio

The accounts of the last *ocakzâdes* who inhabited the seraglios outnumber the descriptions of functions and organisation of life in these large architectural complexes. Ekrem Bey's descriptions remain the most precious source of information in this context. However, the narratives from other sources, although more reserved and limited, are valuable additions to the descriptions provided by Ekrem Bey. As we shall see, all sources mirror but also complete

109 Vlorë, *Ditar*, p. 64.

110 *Ibid.*, pp. 60-1.

111 Vrioni, *Mondes Effacés*, pp. 40 & 42; Vlorë, *Kujtime*, p. 24.

112 Maximilian I, *Aus meinem Leben: Reiseskizzen, Aphorismen, Gedichte* (My life: Travel sketches, aphorisms, poems), Duncker und Humblot, Leipzig, 1867, vol. IV, p. 166.

113 Faroqi, *Subjects of the Sultan*, pp. 150, 237-9.

114 Last viewed in April 2010.

one another with significant details, a crucial procedure in our attempt to create a comprehensive description of the functions, activities and organisation of life in these buildings, which, in the Albanian lands, certainly embodied the expression of Ottoman power as well as of Ottoman urban culture.

It is therefore important to keep in mind that all voices belong to the same caste. As such, they were very frequently, if not always, related to one another through blood and marriage alliances. Furthermore, not only do they share the same caste consciousness and formation but almost all testify from a defensive perspective, albeit their specific intent may have been to record the memory of a lost world.¹¹⁵ However, we should also hasten to indicate that certain *ocak* rivalries, often dating back several generations, are clearly to be perceived in some of these narrations, particularly in those pertaining to their status and power. In the memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey and Ekrem Bey, for example, it is very difficult to ignore the ancestral disputes between the Avlonyali and Viryonzâde,¹¹⁶ although both *ocaks* were repeatedly related through marriage alliances.¹¹⁷

The sources providing testimonies in this context belong to different generations. Ismail Kemal Bey, born in 1844,¹¹⁸ was the uncle of Ekrem Bey, who was born in 1885.¹¹⁹ Although a contemporary of Jusuf Vrioni and Hana Këlcyra, born in 1916¹²⁰ and the early 1930s respectively,¹²¹ Ekrem Bey was of the same generation as their respective fathers, Ilyas Bey and Ali Bey, with both of whom he was also connected by blood and marriage.¹²² These generational differences, as well as the different milieus and languages in which the testimonies were articulated, are perceptibly important to substantiating the veracity of the accounts. The only instance of direct influence we have been able to determine is that of Hana Këlcyra, who explicitly states that Ekrem Bey was of great importance in her intellectual formation. However, our selection of Hana Këlcyra's testimony is limited only to the specific experiences of the Klisura *ocak*, thus circumventing to a large extent Hana Këlcyra's own intellectual perspective.

115 Vlorë, *Kujtime*, pp. 14-17.

116 ed. Sommerville, *Ismail Kemal Bey*, p. 8; Vlorë, *Ditar*, pp. 584-585.

117 For example, Ekrem Bey's wife, Hadiye Hanım, and his maternal grandmother, Saide Hanım, were both *beylereshas* from the Viryonzâde *ocak* and his paternal aunt, Nasip Hanım, was married to Viryonzâde Galib Pasha. See: Vlorë, *Kujtime*, pp. 73, 551, 604, 609.

118 ed. Sommerville, *Ismail Kemal Bey*, p. 1.

119 Vlorë, *Kujtime*, p. 19.

120 Vrioni, *Mondes Effacés*, p. 33.

121 Këlcyra, *Historia*.

122 Vlorë, *Kujtime*, pp. 551 & 587.

Furthermore, the generational differences are essential in confirming the institutional functions of the seraglios. While Ismail Kemal Bey and Ekrem Bey spent their formative years, from childhood to maturity, in the seraglio and thus had first hand experience of the seraglio's primary institutional functions, Jusuf Vrioni and Hana Këlcyra retained memories predominantly relating to their childhood or early youth, having been unable to develop a mature connection with the primary functions. Nevertheless, their testimonies still support the continuation of the institutional functions of the seraglios until the end. As we can see in the testimonies furnished by all the various sources, the functions and activities of both the *selamlık* and the *harem*, the two most important institutions contained in these seraglios, were continually secured, until the last hour of the seraglios' existence, by the very power of tradition, quite independently of the major changes and developments brought about by historical events, .

Selamlık or Zaphane?

Confronted since the early 20th century with dubious interpretations of Ottoman history and legacy, Ekrem Bey often refers fortuitously to the governing function of the seraglio and the *selamlık*, and provides important insights as to the modification of the functions of this institution over time. The following passage refers to the function of the *selamlık* during the classical feudal period, which Ekrem Bey was not able to experience personally, but could nevertheless give an account of, thanks to the survival of its structure and also to his thorough knowledge of Ottoman history in the Albanian lands.¹²³

Since the time of our fathers and forefathers, [...] the premises of the Sancakbey served ipso facto as the government building. For this reason, the building of the selamlık was also called zapanà in Albanian (a term deriving from the Turkish-Arabic zapt-hane, the place from which rule and discipline were administered). [...] Sancakbeys exercised simultaneously civil, military, and feudal authority: they appointed and dismissed employees. They certified property deeds and all other administrative acts that were of value only when they held their seal. They had a court, a guard (seymen), a chargé d'affaires (kapıçuhadarı) in Istanbul, and a governmental council. They were paid through aydat, arpalık, and inherited a has. Their descendants held the title

¹²³ Ekrem Bey is also author of a monumental 1150 page typescript entitled *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Türkenherrschaft in Albanien: eine historische Skizze* (Contributions to the History of Turkish Rule in Albania: An Historical Sketch), which still remains unpublished. See: Vlora, *Kujtime*, p. 16.

*'from the Beys of ...', while the ruling Bey was called 'the Bey of ...'. When blood was shed, they did not submit to the norms of the canon (the ocak does not shed blood, people say, because it represents state authority). They had the right to mint their own coins – ziyinet altını.*¹²⁴

The nostalgic tones that often emerge in Ekrem Bey's account of the original institutional function of the *selamlık* or *zaphane* during the classical feudal period, seem to stem chiefly from the logic upon which the functionality of this institution was initially built. The essential institutional modifications brought about in the first half of the 19th century by the centralising Tanzimat reform devaluated the original function of the *selamlık* that had represented for centuries the provincial centres of Ottoman power and administration. Ekrem Bey also accounts for the well-known resistance of the *grand beys* against these centralising reforms, which aimed to safeguard the privileges of the feudal period.

*The Tanzimat (1839-1876) took away from them this position and privileges. They protected themselves as far as they could, for as long as they could, and in this defence of the old order, they were not alone. Beside them stood the minor nobility and the local zaims, sipahis, dergirs and even the malisors, who regarded mercenarism as their only source of income. After ten years or so of long battles with the central government (1826-1840), they lost for two reasons: first, they were fighting for a state feudal organisation which had become old and outdated; second, they were never united and never acted simultaneously. Their descendants were greatly damaged by this overthrown order, but in many cases they conformed to the new situation, holding official positions or high military ranks and, through economic activities, were able to achieve something. In their survival, they were helped by the grand prestige that they continued to hold in the eyes of the people and the government. This gave them confidence and strength. Hence they survived thanks to the present and the past.*¹²⁵

The Tanzimat concentrated administrative power in accordance with modern state concepts in the hands of officials corresponding to a different typology, mainly bureaucrats who were often unfamiliar with the specificities of the terrain under their administration. The shock and confusion these new administrative practices caused in the traditionalist Albanian territories were also reflected in the function of the *selamlık*. Hence, it seems that although *selamlıks* ceased to be centres of provincial governance, they were unable to

¹²⁴ Vlora, *Kujtime*, pp. 38, 309.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

completely discard their functionality and thus become provincial advisory councils toward which the local population could turn for counselling, help and protection from the new administrative practices enforced by the centralised system.

It is important to note that the selamlık, in addition to being the men's quarters, was also a government performing all the functions of a public and private office as well as a school for the young. In the most recent years of its existence, the selamlık became primarily an advocacy office. Anyone in serious trouble with the complex state bureaucracy would address the Bey, who assumed responsibility for solving the various difficulties that people might encounter with the authorities. These services were rendered without any payment. If the Bey's intervention was not successful, the 'friend' could easily become an 'enemy'.¹²⁶

Hana Këlcyra also offers a short summary regarding the institutional function of the *selamlık*, covering both the classical and modern periods. The resemblance of her account to those given by Ekrem Bey could perhaps be partially explained through family connection and the intellectual influence Ekrem Bey exerted on Hana Këlcyra's education while in exile. Yet Hana Këlcyra's account relates a specific experience primarily connected to her father, Ali Bey, who exerted an important intellectual influence on her. Her testimony clearly evidences the persistence of the tradition of the *selamlık* as *zaphthane* in the *ocak* of the Klisuras, even when family members were not holding administrative positions, thus revealing that the institution of the *selamlık* continued to exercise its authority until the 1940s.

One must not forget that the Klisuras had the right to judge, to provide justice. Few aristocratic families exercised this right. There were also councils of elders, but the Bey of Këlcyra had the last word. I believe that the harsh verdicts pronounced for murder or theft may often have been represented as examples of family feuds and used to incite hatred against the Klisuras. The last Bey of the family to have exercised this right was Muhamed Bey. After the Tanzimat, it was no longer necessary, but the family continued to exercise this right, and maybe sometimes abuse it, because of the local mentality. Then, after 1939, when my father came back and Albania had become a normal state, people would still come to my father for judgments. My father was the only one in the family to have graduated in law, but he has never chosen to exercise this family custom. He used to tell the people to go to the courts. But the people wanted their affairs to be taken care of privately because they had

126 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

*neither trust nor money to confront the system. They were afraid that their opponent would pay and they would lose.*¹²⁷

The confirmation of the *grand beys'* right to judge and provide justice, a phenomenon typical of feudal and tribal societies, is also referenced to by Ekrem Bey, who often recounts picturesque examples and experiences of other *ocaks* in addition to his own.¹²⁸ The re-establishment of the councils of elders in many regions after the fall of the Communist dictatorship is quite telling as to the power exercised by the traditional tribal customs even in 21st century Albania. Meanwhile, in order to create an unambiguous idea of the confusion of the Albanian society, not merely after the Tanzimat period but also after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the testimony of the Ambassador of the Turkish Republic to the Kingdom of Albania in the 1930s proves quite enlightening. According to the Turkish Ambassador, the tendency to make a desperate appeal to the *grand beys* in the period following the Tanzimat, was extended after Albania's independence to appeals to the ambassadors of the Turkish Republic.

*To our embassy came different flocks of people - men, women and even children. All had a detained relative. For some it would be their husbands, others their uncles, still others their sons or fathers. All came with the hope that I would be able to help. This meant that Turkey still enjoyed prestige in the eyes of the citizens and, according to them, it was still possible for Turkey to intervene in Albanian affairs. [. . .] I can say that since the first day of my work in Tirana I did not feel like an ambassador, but rather a governor. How could I not feel I was in the role of governor, when people who had never been to Turkey sent me 'statements' and 'requests', written with the old letters of the Turkish alphabet? Some of them would ask me to return to the lands illegally taken away from them, others seeking my help for the appointment of an employee in a state office. These letters, made me laugh on the one hand but, on the other, caused me much pain and tears.*¹²⁹

The Selamlık School

Another significant function of the *selamlık* was what Ekrem Bey refers to as the *school for the young*. Although Ekrem Bey frequently mentions the school,¹³⁰ a more thorough description of this function is provided by Ismail Kemal Bey.

¹²⁷ Këlcyra, *Historia*.

¹²⁸ Vlora, *Kujtime*, pp. 183-3 & 181-4.

¹²⁹ Cf. Karaosmanoğlu, Yakup Kadri, *Zoraki Diplomat*, 1955, partially translated in Albanian as: *Burgjet e Zogut dhe Dënimit me 'Njëqind e Një'*, Revista Mapo, N° 75, 2008. For the purposes of this article we have relied on the Albanian translation.

¹³⁰ Vlora, *Kujtime*, p. 76.

Young men from the families of the notables were attached to the service of the chief family in the country in an entirely honorary capacity as part of their education or apprenticeship. This practice enabled them to take part in the events of the day, to learn manners and good breeding, and to get an acquaintance with public affairs. (Only grooms, coachmen and cooks were paid and treated as servants.) All these young men were dressed in the national costume of rich embroidered cloth or velvet, and armed with pistols and yataghans in silver-gilt, which they carried in embroidered leather belts. Most of them possessed their own saddle horses, and the Beys at fêtes and on other occasions made gifts to them of arms and similar objects.¹³¹

As perceived from the accounts of both Ismail Kemal Bey and Ekrem Bey, young men of notable families were attached to the young heirs of the feudal *ocaks*, thus forming their immediate retinue. The strong bonds created between the young notables and the young *ocakzades* during these years were in maturity institutionalised in specific posts in the service of the *ocak* once the young *bey* would inherit power, a phenomenon plainly revealed in Ekrem Bey's accounts of his loyal retinue or of that of his father, Avlonyalı Süreyya Bey. Research has established ethnic solidarity among Albanians played a significant role in securing young men important careers in the echelons of the local or central Ottoman administration. It is to be believed that in this context also it was natural for the *ocaks* to look after their own clans in order to procure for a selection of young notables a footing in the establishment and help them obtain important positions. Although no specific account of such practices is revealed in the narratives, it is to be expected that the often-mentioned relations of clientelism the *ocaks* maintained included also such patterns believed to have been necessary for the preservation of their power.¹³²

Selamlık Reception and Ceremony

Another important function of the *selamlıks* lay in its ability and capacity to serve as a place of public reception. The *selamlıks* of the *grand beys*' seraglios appear to have been places of ceremonial type receptions for high profile personalities, but their main function was to serve as a daily open reception

¹³¹ ed. Sommerville, *Ismail Kemal Bey*, p. 14.

¹³² Kunt, Metin Ibrahim, 'Ethnic-Regional (Cins) Solidarity in the Seventeenth Century Ottoman Establishment', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 5/3, (1974), f. 235-236; Faroqhi, Suraiya, *Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire*, London & New York: I. B. Taurus, 2005, f. 62

venue for local visitors. Hence, besides the political, juridical and administrative needs of the society, the *selamlıks* seem to have fulfilled the role of the agora, providing the necessary setting for the principal debates and activities of provincial social life. Under these circumstances, it appears that the extent of the generosity and hospitality provided by the *ocaks* was expected by tradition to be proportional to the status of the *ocak*.

As was generally the case throughout the East, the Albanian grand door, in order not to lose this title, was expected to be hospitable. But where this hospitality started and where it ended is hard to tell. It is easier to say when it began and when it ended. It began when 'a great lord' could offer the things with which he kept himself alive, or even more than that, and it ended when he sacrificed to it the very last crumb of his glory. Between these limits it was deeply rooted in people's consciousness. [...] My uncle, Ismail Kemal Bey, once told me while staying in Vlora (1912-1914), not without a tone of warning, that in his youth (1850-1860), 200 people used to eat in our konak on market day (Thursdays). [...] Nevertheless, this was still child's play compared to the festive turmoil in the castle of Kanina. As the elders have told me, 200-300 people must have stepped on each other's feet in the times when our forefathers and fore-uncles and -aunts with grandchildren lived there. In the Castle of Kanina, life was like paradise: no money, no European concepts and demands, but only what God provided.¹³³

This description by Ekrem Bey finds confirmation in the short accounts given by Jusuf Vrioni, who describes the munificence and hospitality provided in the two *selamlıks* of the Viryonzâde seraglio in the beginning of the 1920s: *The complex also included two selamlıks, one for each branch. The selamlıks were spacious pavilions reserved for guests – men, naturally [...] It was there in the selamlıks that tens of people came every day to take their coffee, play cards, sing, or debate late into the evening, because our family, the most notable of the city, exercised its ascendancy in a patriarchal manner over the region.¹³⁴*

Naturally, accounts reference the ceremonial receptions provided for distinguished visitors, who seem to have ranged from Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent¹³⁵ in the 16th century to the future Emperor of Mexico, Archduke Maximilian,¹³⁶ Serbian King Alexander Obrenović or Ferdinand de Montpensier, heir to Louis-Philippe II of France and pretender to the

133 Vlora, *Kujtime*, pp. 32-34.

134 Vrioni, *Mondes Effacés*, p. 38.

135 Vlora, *Kujtime*, p. 37.

136 ed. Sommerville, *Ismail Kemal Bey*, p. 16.

Albanian throne in the early 1910s, followed by a long list of personalities of the Ottoman, English, Austrian, French, Hungarian or Italian aristocracy.¹³⁷ Although the frequency of visits by such personalities is not reported as rare, visits by the Ottoman aristocracy and dignitaries, local or otherwise, seem to have occurred continuously.¹³⁸ Ekrem Bey refers to these incessant activities as an arduous process, but suggests that the eventual consequences of failing to fulfil the social duties and etiquette of caste seem to have rendered impossible even the thought of reducing such largesse and hospitality.

This way of thinking makes it clear to the reader the importance given to hospitality in Albania (but also in all the Eastern countries). There were no hotels for 'gentlemen' in the cities. Some miserable inns (hane) existed for ordinary people. If one carried a certain name or certain position, or at least thought of himself as someone, and came to the city, he would avail himself of an 'important konak'. If there was no such konak, then of another of smaller scale, but still important and open, one that had a grand door and a high ocak. When someone came to stay, and this happened every day, his horses would be taken to the stables and fed, his servants would be shown in and he himself would be taken care of and served as long as he saw fit to stay. [...] I do not remember the large gate of the park or door of the house ever being closed. Both these big doors remained open day and night so that everyone could come and go freely. One of the harshest curses one hears in Albania is: 'May your door be closed!' This, naturally, only for the 'important konaks', or for those who considered themselves as such.¹³⁹

In conditions where the administrative, political, juridical and social life are confined to a specific territory, independent of how large its dimensions may be, rule and discipline enforcement becomes a natural necessity in the organisation and coordination of the daily programmes of the *selamlık*. The following description provided by Ekrem Bey for the hierarchy of the Avlonyalı *selamlık* seems to refer to these needs: *In our house, the personnel hierarchy began with the German tutor, Mr. Feigenwinter, from Basel, and continued, after Mehmet Efendi Lusi was fired, with our Turkish tutor, Professor Yusuf Rıza Efendi, a man with a broad culture and an excellent knowledge of Eastern languages, and then with our dear Italian tutor, Don Luigi Beccali. The hierarchy continued with: the imam, two secretaries, one butler, eight male servants, four armed guards, two gatekeepers, three gardeners, five coachmen and stable boys,*

137 Vlora, *Kujtime*, pp. 44, 45 & 322.

138 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

139 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

three cooks, and one wood cutter, which means that more than sixty people lived under the less-than solid roof of the Vloras. If we included the servants of the cousins' house next door, we could easily have mustered a company of soldiers.¹⁴⁰

Jusuf Vrioni is less specific as to the personnel hierarchy of the Viryonzâde *selamlık* and merely mentions that the numbers counted in tens.¹⁴¹ Hana Këlcyra, in contrast, specifies that the service personnel for the Klisuras consisted of 40 servants and 118 guards all dressed in Toska *foustanellas*.¹⁴² Yet in Ekrem Bey's description as to the functions of the institution of the *selamlık* it is impossible to overlook the rather disagreeable judgment he reserves for the continuation of such practices after the Tanzimat era: *For as long as the selamlık and the hospitality of a grand door fulfilled a social and political function, this institution was rather valuable. However, when it ceased to accomplish such missions it became detrimental.*¹⁴³

The Harem

In all the accounts, seraglio *harems*, in their institutional or private spheres, emerge as the family dominion. In the context of the traditional seraglio way of life, which provided within a limited perimeter a public space for the governing and administrative institution, the *harem* represented first and foremost a well-defined space where family life was housed and developed in all its complexity. In such contexts, the need to create the necessary distances between the *public* and the *private* spheres of the seraglio was established by clear and irreducible boundaries. In other words, the private sphere constituted a forbidden, *haram*, space to the public, hence the term *harem*, denoting respect and honour. Intended as a well-defined space that housed the intimacy of the institution of the family, clearly distanced from the troubles of administrative life, the *harem* was undoubtedly also the women's domain.¹⁴⁴

Yet seraglio *harems* have never been isolated from public life, a fact clearly evidenced by the descriptions of the last inhabitants of these seraglios. Genuine centres dedicated to the development and conservation of social connections, the *harems* of the *grand beys*' seraglios were active participants in the social

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-2.

¹⁴¹ Vrioni, *Mondes Effacés*, p. 37.

¹⁴² Këlcyra, *Historia*.

¹⁴³ Vlorë, *Kujtime*, p. 35.

¹⁴⁴ For more on this subject see: Peirce, Leslie P., *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, Oxford University Press, New York & Oxford, 1993, pp. 3-6.

life of the provinces. The politics of family alliances between *ocaks* were often modelled and sealed within the *harem*, a phenomenon mainly accounted for by Ekrem Bey. However, *harems* created and maintained the greater part of their social connections through a particular institution, which could be characterised as the *harem school*.

It seems that for the private and public needs of the seraglios, the *harems* recruited young girls of local origin, who were formed and educated in accordance with their abilities and talents for the upkeep of the large seraglio complexes. Naturally, a certain part of this local feminine element was assigned to ordinary tasks, but many among them, if not all, were given access to learning and progress. Hence, large collections of Ottoman cuisine recipes, varieties of methods and motifs of embroidery, knitting, sewing and needlework, women's secrets for beauty and intimacy, culture and expressions of feminine ethics and aesthetics, language learning, the art of music, child education, domestic economy and maintenance regularly passed through generations of women indisputably affecting the creation of local societies with high urban *savoir faire* and *savoir vivre*.

Jusuf Vrioni recounts the urban legends, which commonly circulated until the late 1990s well beyond the city of Berat, referring to *beys' wives of the city, the beylereshas, who bathed in jenny milk baths, reputed beneficial for the skin*.¹⁴⁵ Whether absolutely true or only moderately so, the popular urban legends relating to the beauty, refinement, taste and life style of the *beylereshas* (*bejleresha*) exercised an indisputable power over the fantasies of urban societies, in particular because *beylereshas* provided the model for beauty, refinement, taste, style, aesthetic and feminine ethic in urban societies.

Jusuf Vrioni mentions that his grandfather, Mehmed Ali Pasha, was married to a *Circassian, a strange character from a grand Muslim family in Georgia. My grandfather had married Mihri Hanım – her name – for her beauty, a gift that she shared with her two sisters, whose renown had reached Constantinople*.¹⁴⁶ The marriages of *grand beys* with women from foreign lands, usually Circassians, who were reputed for their beauty throughout the Empire and favoured since early by the court,¹⁴⁷ is also testified by Ekrem Bey. *From 1870 to 1900 marriage with these girls became fashionable in certain Albanian*

145 Vrioni, *Mondes Effacés*, p. 40.

146 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

147 Gibb & Bowen note that 'from the end of the sixteenth century [...] the majority of the Harem women were recruited from the Caucasus' see, H. A. R. Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*, Oxford, 1950, vol. I/1, p. 75.

bey families. Ekrem Bey describes them as *coquette Istanbul felines, excessively made up, displaying self-assurance and pretensions in the firmament of the Turkish-European civilisation, more civilised than the provincial beylereshas, who prevailed with their energy and strong character*. Ekrem Bey affirms that *beys' marriages with these sophisticated girls, typically slaves brought up in the refined harems of Istanbul, corresponded to the attempt of the distinguished bey to be recognised as modern and progressive, although he admits that these marriages proved successful even in the austere Albanian terrain.*¹⁴⁸

However, even when the *beylereshas*, a designation applied to both wives and daughters of the *grand beys*, were of local Ottoman Albanian nobility, they often brought with them the fashions and styles from the capital of the Empire or its principal urban centres, thus aligning themselves with the latest developments in the expression of Ottoman refinement and high culture. Jusuf Vrioni's description of his mother, a typical product of the contemporary Ottoman feminine culture of the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, serves as a significant example in this context.

*The young lady who was to become my mother was only sixteen years old when she learnt that her family had engaged her to a young man from the Albanian aristocracy, who had just finished his studies in political science in the capital of the Empire. They announced this news to her on a day in 1910 in the parlour of Notre Dame de Sion in Constantinople. For some years she had followed a cycle of studies in French while also being educated in all the arts that accompanied the formation of a girl from a good family: embroidery, drawing, music; she played the lute, violin, and piano equally well. My mother was originally from Preveza in Çamouria [Çamlık] [...] where her parents, the Dinos, a grand family of Albanian origin, lived on an estate which descended all the way to the sea. Before entering Notre Dame de Sion, she already spoke Greek, Turkish and Albanian, and a very good English that she had learnt thanks to her governess, Miss Parkinson.*¹⁴⁹

Yet everyday life in the *harem* does not appear to have been particularly romantic. A vast space that housed quite significant numbers of inhabitants and daily visitors, the rhythm and atmosphere of the *harems* appear to have resembled those of the *selamlık*: *What I said for the selamlık is also valid for the harem: only for the harem, life cannot be compared to that of a bachelor's dormitory, but rather to a nuns' convent. In such conditions, one cannot speak of family life: husband and wife rarely ate together and saw one another only at*

¹⁴⁸ Vlora, *Kujtime*, pp. 86-7.

¹⁴⁹ Vrioni, *Mondes Effacés*, p. 30.

night after the most stubborn guests had left.¹⁵⁰ In such a vibrant atmosphere and daily activity, *harem* hierarchy, personnel recruitment and organisation are reported to have been as vital as that of the *selamlık* in the performance of the necessary tasks.

*To find and train such servants, it was necessary to follow a specific procedure: poor families would give their daughters for service from the age of 10 to 15 against a compensation of 10 to 17 gold coins. The girl would be taken in charge by a housekeeper, usually an older maid of the house who washed and groomed her and provided her with new clothes. The girl was then supervised for a year and would thus slowly learn the work of the house. After her apprenticeship the girl was given a role among the other servants according to her capabilities. The highest level (although not necessarily the most pleasant one) of this women's service hierarchy was 'chambermaid to the mistress'. The subsequent levels were: cleaning maids, reception maids, and serving maids in the dining halls, maids for ironing, for lighting candles, and many more for other duties. They were all under the supervision of two or three main housekeepers, each charged with the supervision of a certain sector of the household economy. The number of female personnel ran between 30 and 35 maids and girls. There were also the French governess of my sister and the Italian governess in charge of sewing and knitting.*¹⁵¹

However, the function of the *harem school* did not apparently end with the formation and education of the female personnel. Descriptions also clarify the aspect of social bonds and alliances that the *harem school* assumed, especially with regard to its female personnel. Ekrem Bey, and Hana Këcyra clearly refer to this phenomenon: *Girls who served in such a way for five to seven years were married (to men of great honour) by the mistress of the house and were given a dowry of between 50 and 100 gold coins, often also a house. If the marriage did not last, if they had any trouble or the husband died, the maid would not return to her family house but to the house of the lord, who was to help her out of the difficult situation. Thus, it often happened that a grand door would take care of between 40 and 50 small client doors and supplicants (in reality, parasites) thereby further ruining themselves.*¹⁵²

The practice of recruiting, training and providing for the future of the local feminine element is also reported in the narrative of Ismail Kemal Bey, offering thus a broader time spectrum of reference. While the principles of recruitment

150 Vlorë, *Kujtime*, p. 35.

151 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

152 *Ibid.*

and functional methods of the *harem school* seem to have remained quite similar between 1850s and 1890s, the issue of wages seems to have evolved towards the end of the 19th century: *The female servitors of the household were also young girls of the country, mostly peasants from the villages, and never from the families of the notables. They received no wages, but remained in the service of the family until they married, their marriages being arranged and organised by the Beys, who bore all the costs, and continued later to interest themselves in the future of the couple.*¹⁵³

Meanwhile, even lands with centuries long Islamic traditions, such as those of Albania, have recorded abuses of the image of *harems* similar to Western orientalist perceptions. This tendency principally appeared during Communist campaigns for women's emancipation, although it has survived in the ensuing years. During the Communist dictatorship, in the collective perceptions of Albanians, the condemnation of the crimes allegedly perpetrated by the patronising figure of the *bey* also included his abuse of the *harem* women. The widespread social realist literature was among the main contributors to the creation of a universal atmosphere of incrimination.¹⁵⁴ Social realist literature, one of the regime's strongest propaganda media, also proved particularly fruitful in extending to the Ottoman Albanian aristocracy the infamous Western legends of the practice of *ius primae noctis*.

Hence, Voltaire's literary artifice for the practices of the *droit de cuissage* among the ranks of French nobility – an invention of such gigantic dimensions that almost none dared question it¹⁵⁵ – which conveniently served to morally incriminate the French aristocracy, was applied to the Albanian image for the same reason and resulted, of course, in similar consequences for the *beys*. The long silence of local historians on this legend proved eloquent. Indeed, a timid denunciation appeared *a posteriori* only a few years ago.¹⁵⁶ Following the fall of

153 ed. Sommerville, *Ismail Kemal Bey*, p. 15.

154 See: Sulstarova, Enis, *Arratisje nga Lindja: Orientalizmi shqiptar nga Naimi te Kadareja* (Escaping the East: Albanian Orientalism from Naim to Kadare), Tirana: Botimet Dudaj 2006, pp. 93-202.

155 See: Boureau, Alain, *Le Droit de cuissage. La Fabrication d'un Mythe, XVIIIe – XXe Siècle*, Albin Michel, 1995 ; Breton, Guy, *Les Beaux Mensonges de l'Histoire*, Le Pré aux Clercs, 1999.

156 "Many years ago the late Fatmir Gjata published a short story that had no historical veracity. This story was about a bey from Kolonja who applied in the village of Luaras "the right of the first night" (*ius primae noctis*). We historians, until today, as far as I know, have not been able to find any evidence or document that shows that the Albanian beys ever exploited this so-called right to violate the bride on the first night of her wedding before she slept with her husband. Some of his comrades were outraged because they considered it to be an offence. According to them, it was not possible that Albanians had allowed such a code of practice to exist. They reproved him in person. But none of us historians intervened to criticise him because it was a literary work. As such, it was a work of imagination". See: Frashëri, Kristo, *Letërsia dhe Historia* (Literature and History), Gazeta Shqiptare Online, last consulted on

the dictatorship, the incrimination of the *beys* moved from the sphere of *class* to *cultural identity*, an occurrence that has not rendered any essential change to the immoral image of the *Muslim bey* who allegedly abused women as well as men. The following testimony provided by Hana Këlcyra offers an example of a *bey's* abuse of a *harem girl*. The style in which this occurrence is recounted expressively reveals the manner in which such conduct was perceived in the late 19th and early 20th century by the aristocratic caste. It furthermore eloquently communicates the broader social consequences of such incidents in a deeply conservative society.

They punished my father's uncle, his name was Ali Bey, brother to my great-grandfather. They imprisoned the brother for forty years and in Këlcyra they did not reveal the truth of why they had isolated him in the seraglio. The reason was very strong. He had just gotten married to a lady from Kosova. But then he had a liaison with a girl of the seraglio, one of those girls that we took in and raised because they were orphans. This was the greatest shame that had happened in the family, because these girls came in, we brought them up and arranged marriages for them. They were not harem girls. The girl was not punished; they married her to someone else. Meanwhile, the bride, Ali Bey's wife, was sent back to Kosova by Hysen Bey. The voyage to Kosova lasted six weeks. She did not want to leave. She said that she forgave her husband for what he had done. But the family did not. Hysen Bey was very harsh: 'A man who breaches the family's code of honour, may no longer be a member of the family', he said, and did not forgive. My father was aware of Ali Bey's imprisonment, but he never saw him. They gave him food twice a day. To the people, they let it be known that he had lost his mind and they had therefore secluded him away in a room. It is possible that when my father was born, about forty years later, he might really have lost his mind, but he was not crazy when they put him away. The place of his imprisonment was an oval room that my father called the library.¹⁵⁷

What remains quite significant in Hana Këlcyra's account is the fact that the Western orientalist prejudice against the *harem* is also revealed in her own account. Ekrem Bey also felt obliged to justify this institution by explaining that: *in Albania, the concept of the Eastern institution of the harem, which greatly inflames the European imagination, did not exist.*¹⁵⁸ That is to say, that even for individuals who had had personal experience of *harem* life and accounted

01/11/2006, CET 19: 11. On this subject see also: Sulstarova, *Arratisje*, pp. 104-8, 116-7.

157 Këlcyra, *Historia*.

158 Vlora, *Kujtime*, p. 31.

for its functions overcoming such a deeply engrained misconception proved nearly impossible.

Educating Ocakzâdes

For the education of the descendants of the *ocaks*, the testimonies extend across almost five generations. Ismail Kemal Bey's account of his own education, the earliest of all, corresponds to a mid 19th century approach. During this period, the education of *ocakzâdes* started *grosso modo* to correspond with modern principles and fashions, supplemented by educational principles corresponding to the classic feudal period. The example of Ekrem Bey's education provides testimony for a later generation, which does not seem essentially different from that of Ismail Kemal Bey. A few noticeable differences, primarily in the spheres of religious education and physical training, seem to occur in Jusuf Vrioni's generation, whose educational principles were similar to Hana Këlcyra's subsequent experience. However, Ismail Kemal Bey's account provides a view of almost the entire spectrum of his father Mahmud Bey's education. We are thus provided with a nearly complete panorama of the evolution of education for the *ocakzâdes*' from the beginnings of the 19th century to mid 20th century.

At Salonica I had been sent to the primary school, and I found later on that it was a great advantage to me to have learned Turkish as a child. On our return to Valona [Vlora] I continued my study of this language, and was also taught Italian by a refugee from that country. Apart from these studies, I received a purely Albanian education, under the guidance of my father and mother, especially the latter, who was very anxious that I should become a perfect Albanian. My father, who had received a European education, which for his time was an extraordinary thing, could read and write Turkish, Italian and Greek; he understood French and was very well versed in the literatures of the Western nations, with which he had frequent relations. He sought, from my earliest years, to inculcate in me a taste for European culture. [...] The chief elements in the education of a young Albanian of the period were horse-riding, shooting, and hunting. At each of the four seasons I was sent to make a horseback tour in the interior of the country, accompanied by my two tutors and by young companions of my age, and a numerous suite. My suite consisted of young men of the household service and professional hunters. [...] A little later [I] entered upon my studies [in Yanya] at the Zossimea Gymnasium. As I was the first and, at the time, the only Albanian Mussulman pupil I was the object of special consideration, not only of my school-fellows but also of the professors. I have the very kindest memories of my teachers, and owe a deep

debt of gratitude to the memory of Omer Effendi and Professor Tsimas, who both came each day to the house between their classes to give me extra lessons, the one in Arabic and the other in French. [...] So I left the Gymnasium, after having gone through my 'humanities' – ancient Greek and Latin – and possessing a knowledge of physical sciences and mathematics.¹⁵⁹

Ekrem Bey's testimony of his elementary and secondary education is more direct and detailed. The apparent heaviness in the educational programme he relates corresponds to the mounting demands for the Empire's elites to be instructed not only in French, but also in the German tongue of the other European empire allied with the Ottomans - the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Nevertheless, in Ekrem Bey's formation, physical training in horse riding, shooting and hunting remain prominent features, a quite traditional programme for a young aristocrat. Ekrem Bey speaks at length of his passion for guns and horses since an early age. Clearly, riding and hunting seem to have occupied his mind more than the heavy educational programme in his childhood; in his passion for these activities he proves to have been quite constant throughout his mature life.¹⁶⁰

My father had invited to Vlora Mr. Feigenwinter from Switzerland to teach us the German and French languages as well as the other subjects of elementary schooling in accordance with the Swiss programme. He also brought Professor Yusuf Rıza Efendi from Istanbul to teach us Eastern languages: Turkish, Arabic and Persian. They were both the best professors one can imagine. But what they wanted to put in our heads was really too much for our cognitive capabilities. In the morning from 8: 00 to 10: 00, we were to learn Turkish, Arabic, Persian and Islam. From 10: 30 to 12: 00, we were to learn French. Thus we had only half an hour to wash and rest. Then we had lunch together with our three professors. At 3: 00 in the afternoon, we started our German lesson, which lasted until 5: 00; then up to 7: 00, according to the season, we were allowed to finally – but still accompanied by one of our professors – play, stroll, or ride. From 7: 00 to 8: 00, we took our Italian lesson or painting with Don Luigi. In between all this, sometimes we also had piano lessons that my sisters' governess tried to give us. [...] In the summer of 1897, Mr. Feigenwinter left because we had finished our elementary programme and he did not feel able to continue further with the subjects of the gymnasium. Instead, the high school professor Dr. Zohovsky of Vienna, came from the Terezianum Academy. Besides his gentle demeanour, he also carried

159 ed. Sommerville, *Ismail Kemal Bey*, pp. 13-4 & 17.

160 Vlora, *Kujtime*, pp. 19-59 & 105-136.

*an excellent store of knowledge as well as valuable human qualities. Hence, in two and a half years, without much effort, he was able to prepare us for the first class of the gymnasium.*¹⁶¹

Having graduated from the Terezianum Academy in Vienna, Ekrem Bey embarked on his studies at the Law Faculty of Istanbul University. Subjugated by a passion for Islamic jurisprudence, he describes having greatly enjoyed the lectures of Kadri Efendi Hoca, a laureate of *Mekteb-i Nivab*, but attests to have profited immensely from the knowledge of his father, Avlonyalı Süreyya Bey, author of *Fitret ul-Islâm*, a subversive oeuvre that appeared in Istanbul during the reign of Sultan Abdül Hamid.¹⁶² However, the religious education clearly applied in the generations of Ismail Kemal Bey and Ekrem Bey, a characteristic element of the identity and culture of the high Ottoman caste, is not to be witnessed in the following generations. Present or not in their educational programmes, the last *ocakzâdes* who lived in the Viryonzâde and Klisura seraglios remain silent as to the religious aspect of their schooling.

Jusuf Vrioni's sporting activities were mostly confined to swimming, tennis, hockey and skiing, quite fashionable disciplines in the Western higher social circles of his day. His silence regarding the disciplines of the classic *ocakzâde* physical education demonstrates either a reluctance to mention them or a clear shift from tradition.¹⁶³ Jusuf Vrioni, son of Ilyas Bey and a graduate of the *Mekteb-i Mülkiye*,¹⁶⁴ describes an education quite similar to that of former generations and to the ensuing generation of Hana Këlcyra.

Following the bath, we would meet in the dining hall for our breakfast. Afterwards, we started the classes with our teacher H  l  ne Badel, who had brought her manuals from France for her teaching. She had to cover three levels, giving different lessons to my sister, my brother and me, which was much to my advantage. Being the youngest, I was obliged to anticipate a little in my own programme. Our teacher also gave lessons to a few of my cousins; certain servants ended up understanding French through exposure to it and two or three were able to speak it. Thus words from an array of languages tumbled around me in the big mansion of Berat. From my mother and also from my nurse from Corfu, I already babbled in Greek. In addition to French, our governess had already started giving German lessons to my sister and

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41 & 58.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90; S  reyya Bey is also author of *Hatirat ve Teracim-i Ahval*, see: Vlora, *Kujtime*, p. 15.

¹⁶³ Vrioni, *Mondes Effac  s*, pp. 49-90.

¹⁶⁴ Clayer, Nathalie, "Biographies of Albanian students of the Mekteb-i M  lkiye", in Elisabeth   zdalga ed., *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy*, London, 2005, p. 135.

*obviously Ali and I stretched our ears. All three of us breathed a predominantly Occidental atmosphere. My parents subscribed to French magazines and often addressed us in French. It was the first language that I really spoke.*¹⁶⁵

The elementary programme Jusuf Vrioni refers to seems to have been quite similar to the programme Hana Këlcyra testifies to have undergone: *Xhipe was a woman from Fieri. My parents had brought her up, my mother taught her French and she considered them as her own parents. She called my father 'father'. When we had visitors, the tone changed and also the manner of communicating: my father became Ali Bey and my mother the Mistress. Xhipe stayed with us all the way to the end, even when teachers and governesses took over my education. In the beginning, there was the Swiss governess, but then, at the age of four, a French one came.*¹⁶⁶ After these elementary programmes, these last two *ocakzâdes* confirm their having followed regular cycles of the French school system, Jusuf Vrioni in Paris at the *Lycée Janson de Sailly*,¹⁶⁷ Hana Këlcyra in Cairo at the *Lycée Notre Dame* and in Rome at the *Lycée Chateaubriand*.¹⁶⁸ Jusuf Vrioni completed his higher education in law and political science at the *Haute Ecole Commerciale* in Paris and later continued his law studies in Rome. Their lives as *ocakzâdes* were interrupted quite abruptly - for Jusuf Vrioni after his university studies; for Hana Këlcyra before she embarked on the secondary cycle.

An Orchestrated Process of Acculturation

Our attempt to shed light on some of the most prominent monuments of civil Ottoman architecture in the Albanian lands is but a modest contribution toward the accomplishment of a manifestly immense charge. In a context where very little memory of these monuments has been preserved, this overview concentrates primarily on their main architectural features and the atmosphere of some of these uniquely large monuments. Locally recognised as *seraglios*, these monuments of civil Ottoman architecture dominated the entire political, social and economic life of the Albanian lands from the early stages of the Ottoman era to well beyond the creation of the Albanian state and survived in the collective imagination as symbols of Ottoman rule, power and feudal order. Well aware that our approach is not a thorough study of such civil architecture or the institutions they embodied, we hope that additional

165 Vrioni, *Mondes Effacés*, pp. 42-3.

166 Këlcyra, *Historia*.

167 Vrioni, *Mondes Effacés*, p. 51.

168 Këlcyra, *Historia*.

scholarly attention will further elucidate their architectural and urban characteristics as well as institutional functions.

Accounts of the vanished monuments of Ottoman civil architecture in the Albanian lands are certainly not inexistent. Presented for the most part by romantic European travellers or consuls as well as by the early generation of scholars, they clearly remain valuable academic sources. However, the attempt to revive the historical developments and the atmosphere of this architecture necessitates the vivid memory deposited in a defined caste of specific historical value. Our outline of the architectural characteristics, symbolisms and institutional functions these seraglios is based on accounts from individuals of this caste, the last inhabitants of the seraglios. Whilst comparatively rare and frequently meagre in detail, their intimate perspective nevertheless provides an exclusive opportunity to illustrate the institutional functions and atmosphere of the seraglios. The decision to let these voices speak of their *topos* with their *logos* is thus aimed at an appreciation of these monuments not merely as architectural complexes but also as institutions of essential importance to the provincial life of the Ottoman era.

Guided by their testimonies, our journey through the monuments of civil Ottoman architecture began with the initial integration of the Albanian lands' in the centralised Ottoman state. We were thus able to observe that the medieval *seraglios* of the classic Ottoman era in the Albanian lands were realised in castles dominating urban centres. Available scholarly research demonstrates that medieval administrative *seraglios* crowning such castles represented the concept and culture of the Ottoman administrative machinery. Although certainly not of Ottoman origin, this concept became the typical imperial example of Ottoman administration. Furthermore, academic research on Ottoman centralisation practice specifies that Ottoman centralisation methods were extended to the urban and architectural domains, thus leaving no doubt as to the conception of the building complexes by the central institution of the imperial architects.

Consequently, the concept of integrating in one architectural complex the structure of the administrative institution, the *selamlık*, separated from the private structure of the *harem* by high dividing walls, in addition to the building blocks of *kales* intended for military personnel as well as the blocks designed for service personnel, stables, kitchens and storage, was not an arbitrary individual projection. On the contrary, this concept emerges as the expression of Ottoman culture and vision with regard to administrative power in the provinces modelled on the central Ottoman institution, the Imperial Seraglio. This similarity, as reflected in the architectural structure, also appeared in the institutional diversity these complexes embodied.

Thus, institutions such as the *Divan-i Hümayun*, the school for *ıçoglans* in the *Enderun*, the school for women in the *Harem-i Hümayun*,¹⁶⁹ or the *sehzâde* methods of education, were mirrored in Albanian provincial seraglios as the governor's *divan*, the *selamlık school for young notables*, the *harem school* for the local female element or in the intellectual and physical training methods of the *ocakzâdes*, that seemed to have generally followed the same line as the *Imperial Sehzâdes*. Similarly, the terminological homogeneity observed in the architectural and institutional lexicon designated these architectural complexes as *bey's seraglios* in correspondence with the *Imperial Seraglio*. Furthermore, the convention of employing the symbolic term *grand door* to identify the governor's *divan* in synchrony with the practice of referring to the *Divan-i Hümayun* as *Bab-i Ali*, testifies not only to the coherence of the institutional terminology but also to the level of penetration of Ottoman culture in local discourse.

We further observed that the formation of the aristocratic caste of *ocaks*, whose initial power originated in the administrative machinery, firmly associated this caste with the fate of the Albanian provinces following the changes in land administration. Consequently, we noticed that this phenomenon facilitated the inheritance of administrative power throughout generations of *ocakzâdes*, who significantly engaged in the development of urban centres in the Albanian lands. We thus remarked that the cultural renaissance experienced in the 17th and 18th centuries was largely stimulated by the extension of urban centres with abundant monuments of religious and civil architecture, which for the most part were endowments of prominent *ocakzâdes* and successful dignitaries of Albanian origin who embarked on outstanding careers in the highest echelons of the Ottoman administration.

Subsequently, we recognised that the construction of the *seraglios* of the modern era in urban landscapes followed the cultural renaissance of the Albanian lands. Urban *seraglios* of the modern era thus became part of the prosperous urban landscape enriched under the administration of the *ocaks*, a caste that in the Albanian lands created an eminent tradition in founding and developing urban centres from the 15th to the 19th century. We noticed, however, that urban *seraglios* of the modern era also conformed to the architectural style of the *konaks* developed in prominent urban centres of the Empire and perhaps under the supervision of the provincial architects appointed by the central government to represent the imperial architects.¹⁷⁰

169 Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, pp. 12, 139-143.

170 Faroqhi, *Subject of the Sultan*, p. 131.

Hence we clearly perceived that the new seraglio style did not develop outside the fashions and norms of the architectural movements of the Empire, but followed them carefully, albeit Albanian provincial seraglios also preserved certain architectural features typical of the classical era.

The resulting outline illustrates that the cultural legacy of the provincial representatives of the Ottoman order in the Albanian lands stretches beyond the sphere of the *seraglios*. While the foundation stones of the modern urban infrastructure still remain to commemorate the legacy of the *ocak* caste, much of the architectural and cultural legacy has vanished. The small Albanian state, the last significant political endowment in the lands this caste had once administered under Ottoman rule, proved to be the tomb of this same caste, while to a considerable extent it also became the graveyard for its material and immaterial cultural legacy. Similarly, the remaining Albanian lands, eventually attached to the emerging neighbouring states, experienced an equally severe distortion in the urban, architectural and cultural landscape.

Ekrem Bey did not live to narrate the events that provoked the demolition of the Avlonyalı seraglio. His memoirs were interrupted while he was editing the events of the year 1925, the very year that marked the end of the Avlonyalı seraglio. He recounts, however, no significant signs of decay in their structure, much less does he indicate having deserted the premises. On the contrary, Ekrem Bey waxes eloquent on his special attachment to the seraglio and often declares that during the tumultuous 1920s his seraglio afforded him much peace and consolation. Two decades later, after serving as a base for the partisan guerrillas during World War II, the Viryonzâde seraglio hosted the formation of the first Communist government in 1944. Having regularly pillaged and despoiled the seraglio in the ensuing years, the Communists ordered its demolition in 1947, save for one of the gates and a single pavilion, which had served as the first bureau of the most isolationist government in Europe.¹⁷¹

The orientalist entity established as Albania drifted away from the decaying Ottoman realm and adapted to the prerogatives of a new systemic order necessitated a certain transcendence to safeguard such ostensible symbols of the Ottoman era. Preoccupied by the imperatives of modernity, progress and European enlightenment, during its first decades the young Albanian state failed to demonstrate the necessary will to protect the Ottoman and Islamic legacy. At this time, the modification of Tirana's symbolic clock tower in Western style as well as the demolition of the Avlonyalı seraglio demonstrate the approach adopted in this epoch. The People's Republic era,

171 Vrioni, *Mondes Effacés*, p. 39.

however, proved resolute in the annihilation of the ostensible legacy of civil Ottoman architecture. Aided by a comprehensive ideological framework and also by the Soviet experience in eradicating the Ottoman and Islamic legacy,¹⁷² the Albanian proletarian dictatorship forged an unprecedented tradition in mutilating the fragile urban centres in an overwhelmingly rural nation.

Following the fall of the dictatorship, expectations were high regarding the fate of the Ottoman and Islamic legacy. However, as the former Communist elites reshuffled and acclimatised to the new political environment, their incrimination and contempt for the *oriental* Ottoman and Islamic legacy remained unaltered. As they consider the Ottoman period as either 'a non-historic' or 'anti-historic time',¹⁷³ it is obvious why the rich material and spiritual Ottoman and Islamic legacy to which the local *ockas* were significant contributors remained exposed to neglect and decay. The destruction of the *selamlık* building block of the Toptan *ocak* in Kruja, the shameful fate reserved for the tomb of Toptan Kaplan Pasha in Tirana, the destruction of several important *konak*-style residences in Tirana and elsewhere as well as the further alterations performed on Tirana's clock tower earlier this year are unmistakable signs of a continuing process of acculturation.

Nomenclature

Although born, educated and known in the Ottoman realm as Avlonyalı Ekrem Bey, later in life Ekrem Bey chose to identify himself as Ekrem Bey Vlora, Vlora being the Albanian term for both the city and the family name Avlonya. Consequently, Ekrem Bey is referred to here as Ekrem Bey Vlora. Modern descendants of the other feudal families, such as Avlonyalı, Viryonzâde and Klisura are referred to by their modern standard Albanian names, respectively Vlora, Vrioni and Këlcyra.

By contrast, the elder members of these feudal families who had not publicly effectuated or articulated a change in their names are referenced according to the name they were identified with during their life time, i. e. Avlonyalı, Viryonzâde, Klisura, Toptan and so on.

When discussing the seraglios of the feudal families, in order to differentiate between the complexes we have employed the more commonly used names

¹⁷² Publication of the Albanian translation of the main Soviet oeuvre devoted to the battle against Islam in 1958: L. I. Klimovitch, *L'Islam son origine et son contenu social*, cf. Popovic, Alexandre, *Les musulmans des Balkans à l'époque post-Ottomane*, Istanbul, 1994, p. 114.

¹⁷³ Sulstarova, Enis, "Provincializimi i Evropës" dhe Debatë Publike Mbi Integrimin Evropian ("Provincialising Europe" and the Public Debate on European Integration), *Revista Polis*, N°2, pp. 16-7.

these families were identified with in the respective historical context, i. e. Avlonyalı rather than Vlora, Viryonzâde rather than Vrioni, Klisura rather than Këlcyra and Toptan rather than Toptani, Buşatlı rather than Bushatlliu.

The use of titles, such as bey, pasha, efendi and hanım, is limited to those figures who inherited them during Ottoman rule and/or used them during their lifetime as part of their full names. For the descendents born after Albania's independence the use of titles has been deemed inappropriate.

Forenames of the elder members of these feudal families are provided in modern Turkish spelling. Forenames of the modern descendents are given in standard Albanian as commonly used and recognised, i. e., Jusuf rather than Yusuf and so on.

Names of cities, towns and localities are given in standard Albanian, but a modern Turkish spelling of their former names is also provided.