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# An architectonic glance over the national museum "Gjergj Kastriot Skenderbeu ", Kruja

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this paper is to have a better architectonic insight over the museum of Gjergj Kastriot Skanderbeg in the city of Kruja. The history for which Albanians are proud will be the focus of this paper from its genesis until now, always seeing its architectural perspective. The castle as the last resistance of Albanians at the time of Turkish occupation will be analyzed; together with the mode of implementation of the new Museum Gjergj Kastriot Skenderbeu at the time of socialism. Who were the ideas of the ideologies of the time? What were the secrets of the building design? What were the secrets of the construction of the building? What were the motivations and inspirations of the architects and the design group?

The paper will contain historical dating, direct interviews with architects of the building, and authentic architectural analyse of the building. Museum of Kruja is a work that lifespan and later on to be forgotten completely. During the Renaissance, the Albanians rediscover Kruja belongs not only to Albanians but all of Europe and Balkan. Today it is one of the most visited works and the extraordinary figure of the king Skanderbeg (the National Albanian Hero), throughout the country. turning him in the most prominent inspiring symbol of patriotism for all Albanians and into the symbol of freedom for nations in the Balkans (Drishti, 2012).

**KEYWORDS:** historic preservation, construction techniques, architectural motivation

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the history of humankind it is rarely happened for a capital like Kruja to have only a 25 years old lifespan and later on to be forgotten completely. During the Renaissance, the Albanians rediscover Kruja and the extraordinary figure of the king Skanderbeg (the National Albanian Hero), turning him in the most prominent inspiring symbol of patriotism for all Albanians and into the symbol of freedom for nations in the Balkans (Drishti, 2012).

The castle occupies an area of 2.5 hectares and its set on a rocky hill. It is one of the most popular castles in Albania. It was set in the V-VI century. In the XIII-XIV was recognized as the centre of the state of Arber. During the period of Skanderbeg become the main fortress of Albanian resistance against the Ottoman occupation (Cami, 2011).

The monumental work written by Marlin Barleti, dedicated to Skanderbeg, Published in 1508-1510, was quickly turned into a historical monument that the Albanian nation dedicated to its hero. The greatness of the historical work of Skanderbeg has inspired a large number of Albanians and different nationalities (Drishti, 2012).As long as Albania was under the Ottoman rules, it was impossible to construct monumental sculptures and scientific museums. The possibility for their construction came after the declaration of National Independence. But due to the financial difficulties and political

the cities of Durres and Shengjin. From the north the eye is dissolved in a relief of cliffs filled with pine trees (Drishti, 2012).

In the interior part of the citadel, in addition to many ruins, there are many beautiful popular dwellings, and cults objects as: Bektashitekke of Dollmave, the ruins of an old mosque, at least two footprints of Christian churches, a complex of steam and hot water bathrooms called Amane and a very characteristic two floor dwelling dating to 17-18-th century that today is functioning as a ethnograp museum. Before nstalled a clock donated by Austrians. I s, wells for storing food water, guardhou o the National Museum of Gjergj Kastriot Skenderbeu (Kote, 2001).

Figure 1 : Kruja's Castel, Ethnographic museum Kruje (Web-1); (K.Xhexhi, 2013); (Web-2)

In the last years the castle is containing also different commercial activities from the indigenous inhabitants of the castle that are undermining the structure and the beauty of the castle.

Figure 2: Kruja's Castel, (Institute of Cultural Monument, Tirana, Albania)

## 2 THE DEBATE

After the Second World War the construction of the statue and the national museum dedicated to Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg become a very necessary issue. It is only during the second half of the 50's that the interest in the National Hero become more evident. In the year 1957, a modest building was turned into a museum dedicated to Skanderbeg (a very poor museum). It is important to say that the figure of Skanderbeg was honoured properly when its statue in Kruja was raised. The statue in br created by J outside the city canter.M undertake r works in the

Figure 3: Restorations works, architectural tracking, and cleaning works in Kruja citadel. (Institute of Cultural Monument, Tirana, Albania; K.Xhexhi 2013; Google earth 2013)

It was a conflict for the time between the two cities Tirana and Kruja, and between the two figures of Josef Stalin and Gjergj Kastriot Skenderbeg. It seemed tha t Stalin has set his foot in Skanderbeg's land.

The conflict was resolved in 1968, when Albania and the World remember the 500 years old anniversary of Skanderbeg's death, with a sense of greatness. In the 1968 the sculpture of the statue of Skanderbeg in bronze by the sculptors Odhise Paskali, Janaq Paco and Andrea Mano remove the statue of Stalin in the centre of Tirana (Drishti, 2012).

After the inauguration of the Skanderbeg monument in Tirana, discussions take place about construction of a Historic Museum for the National Hero. Many visitors ask the usually question; why don't you give us a chance to learn the history of Skanderbeg through a Museum?

The main promoter was Odhise Paskali taking advantage of the great sympathy that Enver Hoxha felt for his work and during a meeting he proposes a dignified National Museum in Kruja dedicated to Skanderbeg. There was a great enthusiasm for the time during the celebration of the 100 year old anniversary of the Albanian League of Prizren.

The construction of the museum was undermined by the two institutions: The Institute of Public Objects Design chaired by Sokrat Moska. This institute was responsible for the building architecture and the Academy of Science in Albania chaired by Aleks Buda that would deal with the muse um's content (Drishti, 2012). In the construction of the museum influence very much also the political climate created by the working party ideologies. According to such ideology Albania have to be prepared politically, ideologically, and military in order to be prepared in case of war (Frasheri, 2007).

The museum was closer observed by Enver Hoxha and he ordered the Ministry of Financ generous in Education. P commission PPSH. The debate was important de about the architectural physiognomy of the museum.

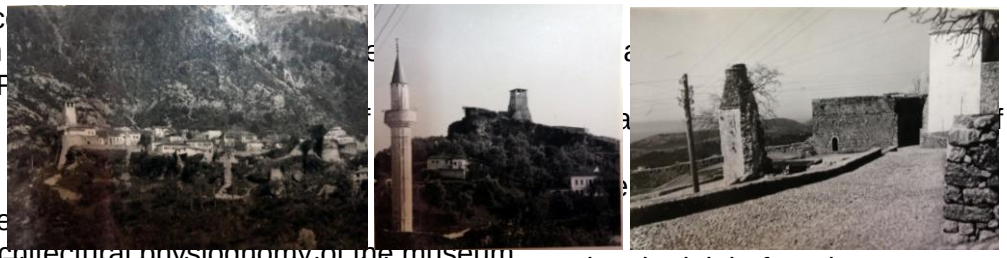

Figure 4. Kruja's citadel and the entrance to the citadel, before the intervention (Institute of Cultural Monument, Tirana, Albania)

The design institute laid down the idea that the museum should have a castle structure inside the fortress of Kruja, and then, according to them the architectonic structure of the museum must be bound to the PPSH military ideologies (Drishti, 2012). In Accordance with the figure of Skanderbeg as a statesman was laid down the idea that the structure of the museum should be appropriate with a governmental headquarter. Traces of such an establishment were discovered in the old castle of Kruja. These foundations belong to the Kastriot's family dating in XV century. Then they were collapsed and rebuilt again the mansions of Toptani. This proposal was not taken into consideration (Frasheri, 2007).

The debate ends with the approval of the draft project submitted by the Design Institute with the

## 3 INTERVIEW WITH THE ARCHIT ECTS

The design group was composed by: Klementet Kolaneci. In the role of thesis consultant and project graduation and the members of the design team were: Pranvera Hoxha, Piro Vaso, Gjon Kroqi (only for a short time), and the realization of the project of this museum was made possible by the talented architect Robert Kote (Drishti, 2012).

Klemenet Kolaneci (in the role of thesis consultant and project graduation) and Pranvera Hoxha (member of the design team).

Klement Kolaneci was born in Tirana, Albania in 26.02.1948, and Pranvera Hoxha was born in Tirana, Albania in 24.06.53,

Klement Kolaneci studied in Tirana in the Faculty of Engineering (FIN), in the first group of graduate architects together with Piro Vaso. Pranvera Hoxha studied also in Tirana in the Faculty of Engineering (FIN) and she was graduated in 1977.

Many professors have influenced in their intellectual formation. The most prominent professors of the architect Klement Kolaneci has been: Besim Daja, Petraq Kolevica, Robert Kote, Anton Lufi (who was the leader of Klement's diploma), and for Pranvera Hoxha some of the best professors has been: Ilia Papanikolla, Besim Daja, Robert Kote, Vasilika Cicko, Isuf Sukaj. All these professors have played an important role, increasing their professional potential.

The collaborators are also very important and must be taken into consideration. Klement Kolaneci at the very beginning of his career has collaborated with: Anton Lufi, Sokrat Moska (The director of the Construction Institute . They collaborate together building the Enver Hoxha's villa in Bllok area ), Koco Comi . They collaborate together making a project idea for the Tirana International Hotel, project which had not won because the major cost. Klement Kolaneci has worked as an architect assistant, together with Koco Comi who was

He at that time as wo

Museum in Durres, t

with the architect Isa

Meanwhile the colla Sokrat Moska, Pirro Vaso. Together with y realized the building . and Pranvera's Hoxha draft project Zaiu Shkodra, and a project idea of a Hotel in the city of Viora (Kolaneci 2013 ).

Figure 5 : Tower type dwelling (Web-3); (Web-4); (K.Kolaneci 2013)

The referral models play a very crucial role building the strategy of the intervention and also provide a good motivation for a proper project idea. Speaking about the National Museum of Kruja as referral models have been some of the volumes of: "Chateaux fantastique" (Fantastic Castles) and the Romanian architecture magazine, tower type dwelling mostly built in the north of Albania. The main authors who have undermined searches related to the typology were Emin Riza, Aleksander Meksi, Apollon Bace.

The references of the functionality and the circulation were taken also from the Guggenheim Museum designed by F.LL. Wright.

The architects constantly consulted different publications as: the French architecture magazine: "L'architecture d'aujourd'hui (architecture today), the Italian magazine of Bruno Zevi, of the volumes of: "Chateaux fantastique" (Fantastic

According to Klement Kolaneci, the ideological message of the Museum was very clear. The message will further emphasize the unity of the people and the Skanderbeg role as defender of Western culture. The National Museum was firstly designed as a theme diploma and after the powerful initiative and support of Aleks Buda was made possible that the diploma became reality. The Museum was designed in 1977 and it was inaugurated in 1983.

Figure 6 : (Left) Pranvera Hoxha during graduation (middle)Pranvera Hoxha with the model. (In the middle Pranvera Hoxha, in the left Piro Vaso, in the right GjonKroqi), (right) Image of the diploma

(K.Kolaneci. 2013)

According to Klement Kolaneci the approximate cost of the Museum was 2 milion Leke (at that time). Converted today the approximate amount of money may be around 1.5milion euro.

The materials play also a crucial role referring to the technical solution of the building. The primary material was the stone which is taken from the old caves from the surroundings of Zgerdhesh. From the same caves the stone was taken also for the construction of the Clock Tower in Tirana. The stone was worked by Kruja's craftsmen and the team leader was Taqo Miho. Another important material was the wood, which was taken from Gjirokastra and also the craftsmen were from the same region.

The red marble used in the interior scene was taken from Muhri (Diber) and Jorgucati (Gjirokaster). The beaten iron was worked by Korca's and Kruja's craftsmen.

The engineering team was composed by Ferit Stermasi and Kujtim Meka. They together with the architects proposed a technical solution of a structure with retaining walls combined concrete st cm) for that rea the walls s a ng were the a symmetry. e reason, the to force the

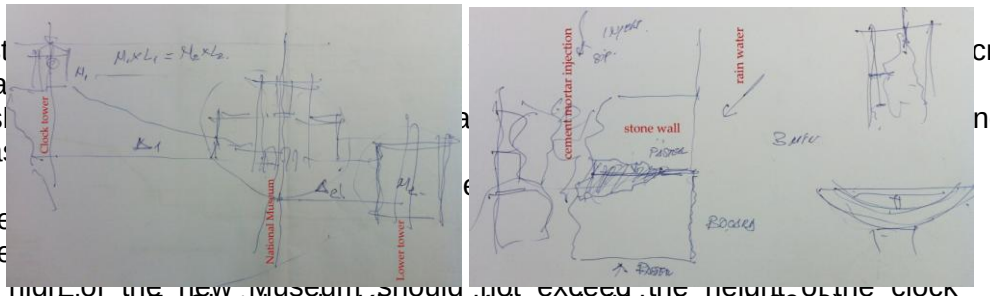


Figure 7: Sketches by Klement Kolaneci, (K.Kolaneci. 2013)

The high of the new Museum should not exceed the height of the clock tower positioned at the upper part of the citadel. The circle at the entrance tower district should have a similar effect to the one positioned in a lower part of the castle. The projection team also had some constructive problems with the masses. According to Klement Kolaneci this problem was resolved with the formula M1xL1=M2xL2.

The National Museum had its supporters and its opponents also. Two of the biggest supports of it were Aleks Buda and Kujtim Luza (the general secretary of the Albanian link of the artist and writers). Meanwhile the opponent of the building was Robert Kote which was against the construction of the facility inside the ruins of the castle, although the area where the castle was built was free and only the perimeter wall was damaged.

Before the facility was build it was undermine a genuine historical analysis and a constant and close contact with the Institute of Cultural Monuments. The model of the Museum was exposed for a couple of day in the city for the simple reason to take the citizens opinion.

It was undermine also a research about the role of the light in the interior part of the Museum. The Frescos should not be in direct contact with the zenith light, something which is avoided. The first idea was to construct a sort of atrium in the middle of the museum and the circulation should be guided by the zenith light, but this version was not concluded. In the southern part of the building where the light is a direct one are created insights in order to get diffuse light in the interior part of the building. Meanwhile in the northern part the openings are closed.

## 4 ARCHITECTONIC AND ARTISTIC POINT OF VIEW

The building of the Memorial Museum of the National Hero "Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg" started in 1982. Thereby the old castle has lost its quietness and Kruja is turned into a "City of Temple" for all Albanians (Kolaneci, 2013)

After the construction the building was faced with the moisture problematic because of the massive stone walls. This problem was solved by cement mortar injection in the upper part of the walls.

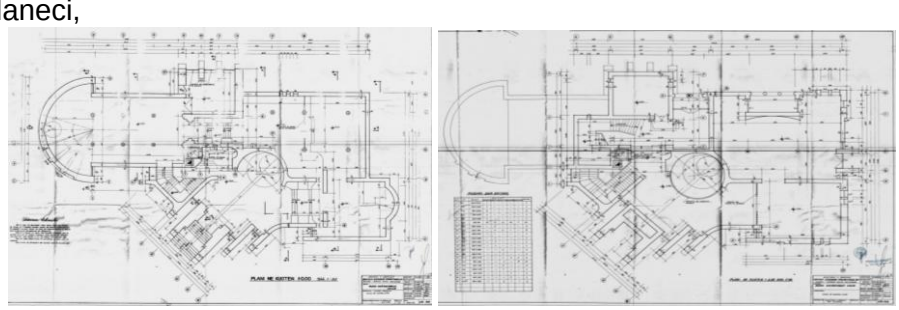

Figure 8: (Up: Ground floor plan), (Down: first floor plan) (Archive of the Construction Institute, Tirana,

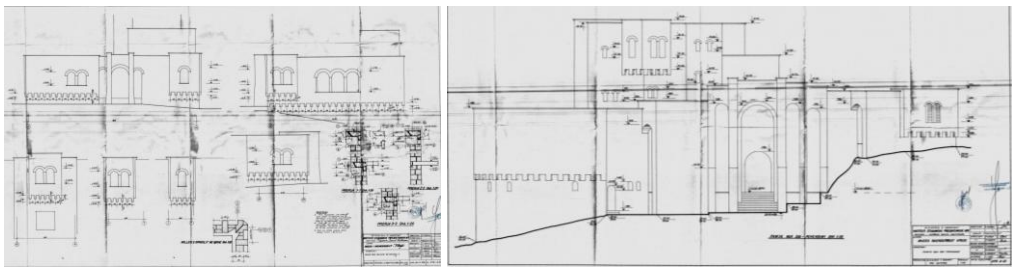

Figure 9: (Left: façade fragments and details), Right: main façade) ; (Archive of the Construction Institute, Tirana, Albania)

The central part of the museum is dominated by a triple room named "Endurance hall" showing the battle of the heroic Albanian people led by Skanderbeg. It was decided that the surface of the wall to be filled with painting and frescos, because of lack of any museum object of epic war, and of course some objects of the XV century, such as bells and icons. The project lacked any room to lighten Skanderbeg's diplomatic r[illegible] the state (Y[illegible] 2012). The [illegible] tower situat[illegible] uppermost [illegible] castle, close[illegible] wall and main entrance.

Figure 10: The entrance to the citadel, museum under construction (Institute of Cultural Monument, Tirana, Albania; R.Kote)

During the engineering work in the castle was found an original aqueduct with ceramic pipes stuck with lime. The source of this aqueduct was the mountain of Kruja (Kote, 2001).

The building respect and maintained the old tradition of coating the buildings with carved stones, which was used in old Albanian towers. The building will be entirely coated with carved stone from outside and this would play a supportive role in the northern silhouette that is close to the main entrance of the Kruja castle. The monumental character of the Museum's architecture and the concept of the pyramidal chara they reach the interior space an would contain th spaces, continu reduced space reaching the two uppermost floors which would consist of a more reduce space than the other (Drishti, 2012).

Figure 1 1: National museum, Gjergj Kastriot Skanderbeg today (K . Xhexhi 2013)

The museum was constructed with the assistance not just of the architects but also of the historians, the interior designers and of course the painters. The group of painters dealing with the interior space, during the time of its construction was faced with a very difficult choice of resolving the museums functi Prof. (Frash Ahme Drisht

Figure 13: Interior images (K. Xhexhi 2013)

It was undermined a huge work of interior design , almost 30 artists of the fresco, mosaic, stained glass, graphics, wood carving, decorations in iron work, models in alabaster or even artist mappings. Thereby the visitors will experience a unique sensation of the place, an artistic language that has never been encountered in the museum of this dimension. The materials used make the interior more elegant and original (Drishti, 2012).

In the exterior architectural appearance of the museum, one can distinguished two main volumes, the lying horizontal volume with large rooms and the main vertical emphasis volume treated as northern Albanian towers. Internal spaces are constructed in order to be combined creating a single continuous space, as is the content of the history presented. History, architecture and art are one. Historical architectural elements were used as heavy beams and stone arches. Museum opens with a sculptural group that represents - Scanderbeg among the people, made by sculptors Janaq Paco and Genc Hajdari (Web-5).

which carried the name “Chancellery”. This room was dedicated to Skanderbeg as a diplomatic leader and not to Scanderbeg as a statesman. This is a weakness that is very noticeable also today (Frasheri, 2007).

The museum function in a historical chronological sense starting from the first hall of antiquity, Illyrian culture, Illyrian kings and various objects found in the city of Kruja and the city of Zgerdhesh, immediately follows the creation of the Kingdom of Arberi with ten other exhibit halls and a historical line as: Medieval hall, Invasion Hall, Unification and Endurance Hall, Fortification Hall, Resistance, Chancellery, Library, Pinacothek, Inheritance- Skanderbeg’s Echo through centuries. The main hall is dedicated to the creation of the first Albanian state under the rule of King Skanderbeg (March 2nd 1444).

The creation of symbolic spaces was always accompanied by historical documentation (Drishti, 2012).

The building is characterized by a fluid form. This one is very good absorbed whether in historical and also in the morphological and architectural context. After relatively 30years of its construction the museum has become an integrated part of the castle, due to its architecture and its content, becoming one of the most visited places in Albania. Historical tourism is mainly active during the months from May to September. According to statistics of the Municipality of Kruja the number of visitors during summer is around 52 000, meanwhile hotel accommodation does not meet the needs. The main reasons are the lack of information, lack of modern infrastructure, tourist guides, and limited number of hotels. A good part of the visitors came from different cities of Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and all over the world (Municipality of Kruja). The visitors come out from the castle with strong historical impressions. The interior objects that have an original value and authenticity are frescos, icons, sculptures, furniture made of wood and glass, which contributed very much raising the value of the museum.

The strategic position of the castle between the main entrance and the internal court is a very balanced one. The position is right in the centre of the gravity of the citadel. The museum is integrated very carefully in the scene, without aggression, right in the intersection point of four main focal points: the entrance (in the north), the tower in the upper part (in the east), the tower in the lower part (in the west) and the ethnographic museum in the south. Thereby the new Museum respects at the maximum the historical part of the citadel enriching its context. The inspiration from the typical tower of the north of Albania combined with the inspiration by the volumes: “Chateaux fantastique” and the functionality of “Guggenheim Museum” result a great success for all Albanian context, and Albanian architecture.

## 5 CONCLUSION

National Museum “Gjergj Kastriot Skanderbeg” is one of the most important architectural works of Albania. This building possesses indisputable historical, cultural, and architectural values, becoming an active participant in social and cultural life of the province not only of Albanians but also elsewhere in Europe and the world.

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