

PLACE AND ROLE OF MOSQUES IN RURAL URBANISM

Mosques, as buildings of the Muslim cult, are shrines of comparatively long and massive use in the territories inhabited traditionally by Albanians. In these territories such shrines' origin is related to the Ottoman invasion, which started in the 15th century and continued for almost 5 centuries.

According to official statistics published in 1928, in Albania, there existed 2361 villages distributed in ten prefectures. Besides 844 Orthodox churches, 144 Catholic churches and 70 monasteries, there were 1127 mosques, 17 *madrassas* and 260 *tekkes* at the service of the inhabitants.

The most general feature from the urban point of view is the division of the village into quarters. Also, besides these structures, each village has its own centre, which is usually related to the core or the oldest quarter. An almost permanent element has traditionally been and has remained as such the building of cult. Even, its presence in a said quarter makes its name be related with the concrete building of cult. It has relatively happened to encounter quarters called the Mosques Quarter (*Lagja Xhami*) in villages inhabited by Muslims. Even in Kosova it is chosen a central point to build the mosque that is easy to be reached by inhabitants either of a quarter or one or more villages. There, like in the all the Albanian villages, in most of the cases are built by the villagers with their own expenses, without excluding the ones built with the contribution of this or that donor.

The territory surrounding the mosques often served as meeting and forum places as well, where important decisions have been taken of both locale or national character. Also, with these buildings of cult there are traditionally related ceremonies of the main moments in the man's life such as: birth, marriage and death. At the same time, it should be taken into account that all

the objects of cult, including mosques built in the Albanian rural areas constitute authentic architectonic works. Mosques are built in a later period in the rural areas than in towns in a stage when the islamization in masses happened among the inhabitants of that time. Also, they were not built by masters of any other nationality, including the Turkish one, but by Albanian masters of building, emerged from the rural areas well-known generation after generation for their construction traditions.

These building, along with the ones of the other categories, remain saint ones, they are evidences, are the same as the historical documents in the completion of the historical backgrounds of these territories: they bring and witness a tradition, experience, and why not, a culture, the traces and presence of which has resisted and continues to resists the time, even in the form of ruins and not only by being functional.