

ASPECTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PREFECTURE OF ELBASAN (ALBANIAN PREFECTURE) IN THE ALBANIAN MONARCHY (1928-1939)

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Abstract

We Albanian Monarchy years (1928-1939) Elbasan in accordance with the policies of the Central Government made important steps in the evolution and development in the prefecture. What is notable not only evidenced in Elbasan but also in its sub-prefectures and municipalities during 1928-1939 were efforts, dogged persistence and determination of elbasanasve to separate the east and to embrace the western way of progress, it not only as a concept but the complexity of it (policy reforms). Among the aspects of life to progress on the Albanian Monarchy period Elbasan Prefecture mention: progress in the field of education, which consisted in the opening of schools, teacher preparation staff, drafting of texts and the fight against illiteracy; the humanity expressed in the support and contribution in cash that the population of this area given to national education; development of infrastructure (roads, bridges); The first steps of progress in the industry (factories before the domestic capital); in the cultural field (creation of the Cultural Society "Kristoforidhi", opening the Library Qemal Baholli etc.); social emancipation (branch of the Society "Albanian woman" in Elbasan, reform on the woman's face detection) and in an active political life.

Keywords: Occidentalization, emancipation, progress, politics, humanism

“In the heart of Albania, in a place in the mountains, where Shkumbini drops from a ravine, there is a precious stone of old times, the city of Elbasan..It is situated in a place where the Romak city of “Skampa” is found, surrounded by olive groves and high old cypress tree. On the ruins and high Venetian castles lie the tall minaret But there is one competitor which has over passed those minaret in high and that is the Olive oil factory.

Soon enough even the electricity will be installed as in other cities. The Elbasani's street are cobbled and they are washed by the rain, the shops are like stables.

Women wear yashmak and the walk around the city like mystical black and white shadows. But those who know them and who go on their houses understand that they are good housewives. With the introduction of new customs this housewife spirit might vanish a bit...¹⁹⁷,
*Elbasani's development in the eyes of foreigners*¹⁹⁸

Elbasan¹⁹⁹ was one of the Albanian prefectures that up until the early years 30s of the XX century was well known not only for its favorable geographical position, laying in the middle of Albania, but also for its traditions in the fields of education, culture, religious tolerance and coexistence²⁰⁰ and quite active in the field of politics as well. How would this prefecture evolve during the Albanian monarchy? With modesty and the desire to contribute even a bit in our local history we have decided that the objective of our article in this prestigious conference would be the development of the prefecture of Elbasan between the timeframe of 1928-1939. While drafting this article²⁰¹ we tried to use material concerning both local and national history.

During the time of the Albanian monarchy, Elbasan in accordance to the policies of the central government undertook important steps toward its evolution and its development in the level of a prefecture. What was evident during the years 1928-1939 not only in Elbasan but in its sub-prefectures and its municipalities as well, were the efforts, the persistence and the dogged determination of the locals to draw away from oriental traditions and to embrace the path of occidental progression. This is clearly expressed in newspaper articles where with exhilaration it is quoted that "During these 10 years that have passed since the declaration of monarchy, Elbasan and its

¹⁹⁷ "Besa Newspaper", Tirana, Saturday 14th of May 1932

¹⁹⁸ Article of a foreigner, Oakley Hill for the development of Elbasani's city, Albania that changes – Passing the dark time of Balkan Kingdom from D.R Oakley Hill.

¹⁹⁹ Elbasani's prefecture included Peqini's sub-prefecture (a first class sub-prefecture) and Gramshi sub prefecture (a second class sub prefecture). The prefecture was comprised of the communes of: Center, Shpati 1, Shpati 2, Dumre, Krraba, Zaranika, Cermenika 1, Cermenika 2. Peqini's sub prefecture was comprised of the communes of : Center, Darsi, Vrap, Mlika. Gramshi sub prefecture was comprised of the communes of: Center, Kukri, Dragot, Kushova.

²⁰⁰ In Elbasan there existed 4 different religious faiths: Orthodox, Muslim, Bektashi, and Catholic.

prefecture have made enough progress in the cultural, social and industrial fields but its greatest progress that should also be highlighted is the enforcement of the law of unveiling.²⁰² Today we may boast that no Albanian woman in the prefecture of Elbasan has not been unveiled.”²⁰³

The development of the Counties

During the 10 years of the monarchic regime active participation was spotted in the municipalities of Elbasani's prefecture as well as by its sub prefectures. Important evidences regarding the development of these municipalities are revealed by the press of the time, which reflected step by step their development and progression.

In the municipality of **Cermenike II** two new schools were constructed, they've built 7 km of road, 6 wooden bridges, 4 water taps and a water line 1 ½ km long, 9200 vine seedlings were planted, 1150 apple trees, 630 pear trees, 320 quinces, 465 chestnuts etc.

In the municipality of **Shpati II** many governmental buildings were constructed, as well as schools, the road of Shtepanj-Belesh which was 6 km long, 22 wooden bridges. There were planted also 3000 olive trees. In Llixha they built the park hotel of Grigor Nosi and the Stringa's Hotel.

In the municipality of **Peqin** they constructed lots of kilometers of roads inside the city. The city hall had even bought a parlor as its personal building where they could conduct municipal activities. They began working in order to pave roads that linked the center of their municipality with those of Garunia e Madhe and Pekishti; they planted many trees and built governmental offices as well as school buildings.²⁰⁴ They also undertook some steps in the inclusion of women in the social life. For this purpose in Peqin they formed the Club of the “Albanian Woman”.

In Gramshi region they built the new building of the Gendarmerie, they reconstructed already existing school buildings like the Central School, the School of Grabova, and the School of Mollas as well as asking the government to build a school in the village of Shenepremte to fulfill the needs of the locals. Progress was also made in the road network where the

²⁰² During the years of Albanian Monarchy (1928-1939), within the politics undertaken by Zogu for the Occidentalism of the country, a special attention was given to the process of women emancipation, which was very important for the time, place and the Albanian society. One of the most important moments within this process was the undertaking and the approval of a draft law in March 1937 in Parliament about “The Prohibition of covering the face by women in Albania”.

²⁰³ “Drita” Newspaper, Tirana, on September 1st, 1938

²⁰⁴ As it was the case with a school building in Peqin (Near the old mosque) with the contribution of Peqini's people - Rudina Mita, Roland Gjini, an overview of documents: Elbasani 1925 – 1940, Tirana 2015, page 423

roads of Gostime-Berat 7 km long were built and 7 more kilometers of road linking other municipalities.²⁰⁵

The municipality of Belsh state and school buildings, opened i municipal olive groves, they built the road of the lake in Belsh as well as many municipal roads. The Elbasan-Belsh roadway was almost concluded during 1934. The importance of constructing new roads was a huge factor which leads towards economic development, tourism, and the facilitation in the connections within their municipality and the prefecture of Elbasan with other prefectures in the Country.

In the municipality of Cacabeze two schools were built and 1000 olive groves were planted. In the region of municipality Qender municipal roads were built which roads connected the villages with one another and with the roads that led one to Elbasan.

Elbasan and its villages became an example of progress in the of education

What was to be noticed in the field of education²⁰⁶ was the feeling of love that the locals of each and every village and region shaved with the greatest example of all being the construction of school buildings with voluntary material contributions of every family. Almost every village and municipality constructed or found a new school building. In the process another phenomenon was to be noticed the aim to fight illiteracy. The continuous expansion and extension of the primary education level that was regarded as a necessary factor in the battle against illiteracy.²⁰⁷ The village of Shterman gathered 80 gold francs and handed them over to the city hall of Elbasan for the construction of a school in their village. The villages of Godolesh vuntary gathered aid for the construction of a new school building in their village. They gathered a total of 750 gold francs. The village of Belsh gathered 1500 gold francs for the establishment of a modern school building.²⁰⁸ The locals of the municipality of Gramsh²⁰⁹ voluntary helped to build a shormitory in their region. The same practice was also attended by Shtermeni and other villages.

²⁰⁵ “Besa Newspaper”, Tirana, Saturday 14th of May 1932

²⁰⁶ In Elbasan the basis of the education was comprised by Elementary Education, but not only because in this city it was opened for the first time The First Pedegogical School which prepared teachers for the need of nations education. This was Elbasani’s Normal, described as the first Pedagogical Institution, where studied a lot of students from within and abroad the Albanian territories.

²⁰⁷ “Drita” Newspaper, Tirana, on January 5th, 1938 .

²⁰⁸ “Besa” newspaper, Tirane, Saturday 28th of April 1934.

²⁰⁹ AQSH. i R. Sh., F. 271-Elbasani’s Prefecture, D. 66, Page 3, year1928.

There were also regions where there existed no schools, despite the need of the community for education. A letter from the major of Librazhd towards the prefecture of Elbasan is an evidence of the lack of schools in the area. It is quoted that "...in the villages of the region of this County there is neither one single school nor one single person who knows how to write and read which means that the people of this region do not know what education is and they live primitive lives, We beg Mr. prefect to show kindness and undertake the proper steps to help open 7 schools in the biggest of the region of this county so that these areas will also have the opportunity to enjoy the splendid light of education...".²¹⁰ The answer of the prefecture was that the katundaria of Librazhd should appoint two areas where the schools were going to be built...²¹¹ as a result the splendid light of education was to enter the region of katundari as well.²¹²

The citizens of the city of Elbasan occasionally gave voluntary aid and contributed to the national educations, a part of the contribution being the Normal School as well as the central institutions.

In the first half of January 1939, it was announced that with special funds given by the ministry of Education a new and modern building was going to accommodate the Normal School²¹³ of Elbasan. The people of Elbasan embraced with special joy this piece of news. The plan of constructed this new building had started in November 1932 with the establishment of the foundation stone in Kraste, but it just remained in the foundation stage.²¹⁴ As highlighted by the press of Elbasan,²¹⁵ the locals were too jealous on the welfare and progress of this worthy institution because there were hundreds of Albanian students been given shelter, future apostles who shall be confined to the burden of creating the Albanian of tomorrow. Elbasani's people considered and appreciated the Normal school as an institution of high importance not only to the Elbasan city but also to the entire Albanian Nation. Their assessment was proved by the time and by the centurial historical performance of this school symbol.

To be emphasized was the constant preoccupation to develop and modernize the school in accordance with the most advanced developments of the time... We can claim with no fear that Elbasan keeps a record on containing in its bosom a large majority of intellectuals. It is to be noticed that only in Elbasan, or better said, mostly in Elbasan compared to other counties, both men and women start their education in the primary school

²¹⁰ AQSH. i R. Sh., F. 271-Elbasani's Prefecture, D. 192, page 1, year 1929.

²¹¹ AQSH. i R. Sh., F. 271- Elbasani's Prefecture, D. 192, page 1, year 1929.

²¹² AQSH. i R. Sh., F. 271- Elbasani's Prefecture, D. 192, page 4, year 1929.

²¹³ "Drita" newspaper, Tiranë, 19th of January 1939.

²¹⁴ "Besa" newspaper, Tiranë, 23rd of November 1932.

²¹⁵ "Shtypi" newspaper, 21st of January 1939.

and end it in the Normal School in which girls attend mixed type classrooms.²¹⁶

Constructions in Elbasan

The great preoccupation of the state bodies of the municipality of Elbasan towards development was an evident not only in the improvement of the roads but also in the great constructions undertaken in the city. We can mention here the resonations of many roads “...some with shoes...some in causeways in a total of 27 km...”²¹⁷

They also established the first public library, the “Qemal Baholli” library²¹⁸. The Baholli brothers undertook to build with their own funds the library which was to be named after their brother Qemal. They also contributed in equipping the library with the books by donating 2000 gold francs.²¹⁹

The school of “Ali Agja Bej” named after one of the most prominent figures of Elbasan was built with funds donated by the family of the deceased “...the mother of the late Ali Agja Bej, who was there herself and was a precious woman, wrote in her will that all her property was going to be donated for the education of the city right after her death..”²²⁰

institute if “Rock Feller” was built, and the new building of the prefecture was concluded²²¹; a part of the city sewage was also finished and two new parks were built. The most important work was the introduction of potable water by manes man 8000 m long as well the construction of the sports fields brought to the city by the springs of knesta. Action was taken toward the reinforcement of law and order as well as the cleanness of the city. Worthy to be mentions is also the initiative of the locals to establish a military hospital with their own founds. The sum collected amounted to ku, 24000 gold francs.²²²

Economic development

Elbasan progressed in the industrial field as well by building the factory of cigarettes “SAIDE” which was the workplace of 40 women and 20

²¹⁶ “Drita” newspaper, Tiranë, on 1st of September 1938.

²¹⁷ “Besa” newspaper, Tiranë, Saturday 14th of May 1932

²¹⁸ “Besa” newspaper, Tiranë, Tuesday, 8th of August 1933

²¹⁹ “Besa” newspaper, Tiranë, Tuesday, 26th of March 1935

²²⁰ “Drita” newspaper, Tiranë, 18th of June 1937

²²¹ Within Elbasani’s area it was built a magnificent Prefecture building, which would incorporate all the governmental offices in Elbasan and would fulfill all the necessary needs of the city for the concentration of all governmental offices.

²²² R. Mita, R. Gjini, mention above , page 332.

men and 4 specialists. This factory had also its own printing press, where once they used to print the “Normalist” newspaper.

A great importance in the economic development of the city played the opening the factory of that’s whose quality was good enough and they used a local wool “...as good and chick as that of Europe ...”²²³ According to the press their industry should be encouraged and should be especially supported by the intellectuals who were the leading class of the country.

For the economy of the prefecture the creation of the Council the Chamber of Economy of Elbasan was important. Based on the order Nr.1602/4 on the 1st of April 1929 of the of the ministry of the National Economy under the article Nr.10 of the before mentioned law, they select and name by common voting as a member of the Council of the Chamber of Economy that is to be established in Elbasan for the first implementation of the law.²²⁴ A small electric powerhouse which illuminated the houses, the street and the market of the city was built. The powerhouse has 3 engines, which functioned with petroleum and had 210 CW²²⁵. Where the powerhouse was built there used to be an oil factory built by a French Society with Albanian capital. Between 1928-1939 they built the Factory of Alcohol by Mr. Grigor Nosi, which functioned as a stock market society.²²⁶

The implementation of the Agronomy Reform of the prefecture of Elbasan²²⁷ consisted not only in the disposition of farmers in fields but also in the establishment of 76 immigrant families in the area of Fushes mbret. This area after 1930 turned into the neighborhood of “Fush Mbret”.²²⁸

In the village of mozge an agricultural form was established and it had an effacing in production, in the village of Shijon a tobacco seed plot was set up with a surface of 1000 m² and was led by the specialist Xhemil Koka, who dealt with the distribution of seedlings to farmers for the tobacco planting. This seed plot used the Bulgarian seed “Pirostrica” which gave very good results in the region of Elbasan.

In the economics fields special came devoted to the culture of olive.²²⁹ Studies proved that the climate and the soil of Elbasan were favorable for the growth and development of the culture of olive. In the 1937

²²³ “Arbënia” newspaper, Tiranë, 28th of september 1930

²²⁴ AQSH. i R. Sh., F. 271-Elbasani’s prefecture, D. 140, page 1, year 1929

²²⁵ “Besa” newspaper, Tiranë, Saturday 14th of May 1932

²²⁶ Ibid

²²⁷ “Besa” newspaper, Tiranë, Friday, 11th of October 1935.

²²⁸ Fusha Mbret before 1930 functioned and was managed by Elbani’s inhabitants as a grazing land, but after the agrarian reform this place was used by the Albanian state to accommodate the Kosovar’s immigrants.

²²⁹ “Drita” newspaper, Tiranë, 6th of February 1938

in Fushe Mbret the first and only seed plot of olive was established.²³⁰ In the same year 1937 olive trees were planted and agricultural office gain 7300 olive triggers.²³¹ In Elbasan the meeting of olive grove owners was held where they discussed the need for the establishment of a company that was to be dealing with the improvement of olives.²³²

The infrastructure

In the world's construction undertaken during the '30`s we can mention the opening of the new automobile roads of Elbasan-Tirana, Elbasan-Gramsh,²³³ Elbasan-Lushnje, Elbasan-Peshkopi, Elbasan-Korce, Elbasan-Llixhe etc. Along the streets, with the same determination between the locals, examples are the New Bridge of Shkumbini which was a necessity for the people of Peqin, Elbasan and the other provinces,²³⁴ the bridge Murrashi, the Bridge of Xhibraka, the bridge of Kushes etc. All these construction were important because they affected significantly the development of the prefecture of Elbasan as well as they met the needs of the locals.²³⁵

Worth mentioning is the initiative of the municipality of Elbasan in 1931 which asked the prefecture of the city to undertake a city regulatory plan and to hire an engineer.

The cultural field

In the cultural field the best known work of the municipality of Elbasan was the organization of the city's music Band.²³⁶ A group of young people from Elbasan formed a Cultural Society, which was baptized with the name "Kristoforidhi" and which intended to help and bolster the city of Elbasan towards progress in educational, cultural, economic and aesthetic view. They also published a cultural magazine the neglected to local folklore.²³⁷ They also armed to erect a bust for the great appreciator of the Albanian language, Kostandin Kristoforidhi. In the social field we can mention the establishment of extracurricular clubs, created for almost every branch, especially in music under the direction of the violinist professor Mr. Baki Kongli, who had also held violin concerts in Elbasan as well as in other Albanian cities. The press of that time also stated that "...on the other hand it

²³⁰ "Drita" newspaper, Tiranë, 20th of September 1938

²³¹ "Drita" newspaper, Tiranë, 6th of February 1938

²³² "Besa" newspaper, Friday, 15th of June 1934.

²³³ "Drita" newspaper, Tiranë, 1st of September 1938.

²³⁴ "Besa" newspaper, Tiranë, 19th of December 1932.

²³⁵ AQSH. i R. Sh., F. 271-Elbasani's Prefecture, D. 195, page 6, year 1931.

²³⁶ "Besa" newspaper, Tiranë, Friday, 11th of August 1933.

²³⁷ "Besa", newspaper, Tiranë, Monday, 13th of August 1934.

is obvious that there's a significance progress in the cultural field because a great majority of the girls in the city, some older than the others, tend to attend on a daily basis the club of the unveiled women of the city who dress according to fashion..."²³⁸

The social aspect

The social reform on unveiling made by King Ahmet Zogu²³⁹ was embraced with enthusiasm by all citizens of Elbasan, especially women. Even in documents one can notice that the Grand Mufti of Elbasan²⁴⁰ was the first in the implementation of the reform for the Albanian women.²⁴¹ The women of Elbasan through the society of "The Albanian woman" sent King Ahmet Zogu a telegram²⁴² expressing their gratitude and manifesting their enthusiasm for the important reform undertaken in the interest of the Albanian woman by drafting and enforcing the law of the unveiling. This new emancipator movement, almost modern considering the time, was rapidly spread throughout the Prefecture of Elbasan, in both the city and its villages. Courses, like the special course of women frequented by 94 women and young ladies, were opened.²⁴³ On February 1, 1937 they held the general meeting of the society of "The Albanian Woman"²⁴⁴ in Elbasan.²⁴⁵

Another feature of the social life in all Prefectures and sub prefectures was pronounced sense of humanity, which expressed the virtues and the nobility of the locals, with examples being their clean feelings, the contributions of the officers, the aid given by the intellectuals toward the poor.²⁴⁶ The Municipality's annual budget envisioned special funds for these purposes and goals expressing a social character.

²³⁸ "Drita" newspaper, Tiranë, on 1st of September 1938

²³⁹ Ahmet Zogu was one of the most known politicians in Albania, his activity started from the declaration of Independence on 28th of November 1912. His political powering would evolve in the years 1920-1924 until 1925 year in which he was proclaimed as the president of Parliamentary Republic.

Having not finished his mandate as a president he was self proclaimed King of Albania in September of the year 1928, a post he would carry until 7th of April 1939 when Albanian would be captured by Fascist Italy. During the period he stayed on power he tried to Occidentalize Albania trying to concentrate all the power in his hands.

²⁴⁰ The wife of head of Muslim leaders in Albania was the first to remove the yashmak in the public buildings..

²⁴¹ "Drita" newspaper, Tiranë, 12th of March 1937.

²⁴² "Drita" newspaper, Tiranë, 21st of March 1937.

²⁴³ "Drita" newspaper, Tiranë, 1st of September 1938

²⁴⁴ Elbasani's branche chose as leaders: Th. Parashqevi Nosi; Sekretare Liria Dodbiba; Arkëtare Persefoni Buda; Consultants Miss. Shkëndi, Muazes Biçaku, Naf Biçaku

²⁴⁵ "Drita" newspaper, Tiranë, 16th of February 1937.

²⁴⁶ "Drita" newspaper, Tiranë, 28th of March 1937.

Politics

In political terms, Elbasan will have an active life both at the local level as well as at a central. In terms of local politics we can mention the elections of 1929 for local counselors and headmen of the villages; on September 25, 1930 new elections were held for members of the Administrative Council of the Prefecture; the reappointment of the elders of the villages in 1933, the elections of the 12 members of the Administrative Council of the Prefecture in 1935. In the years 1928, 1932 and 1936 parliamentary elections were organized where Elbasan had its representatives (MPs) to be represented in the Albanian Parliament. In political terms we can conclude that despite local politics, everything was conditioned by the policies of the Central Government. Instead there was: political pluralism, war between the opposition and the position, freedom of the press or freedom of association and the creation of political parties or organizations. So there was a kind of conditional democracy, different from political life in the years 1920-1924 in the Elbasan Prefecture.

From what was outlined above it is proved that there was an ongoing performance and development in Elbasan, with local specifications, in accordance with the policies that were taken by the central government during the Albanian monarchy. Steps were made toward progress²⁴⁷ but we cannot say that these steps or state regulated and significantly improved the economic situation of the residents of Elbasan. Establishing an infrastructure was developed for purposes of the Italian invasion which had entered Albania in its grip since 1925 and that this invasion will material on April 7, 1939.

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²⁴⁷ We should keep in mind that until the years 20s of the 20th Century Albania was a very undeveloped country with feudal remaining values.