

PROJECT OF THE BALKAN UNIVERSITY IN ALBANIA IN THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY. THE AMERICAN SCHOOL OF KAVAJA, PEDAGOGICAL AND AESTHETICAL MODEL

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Abstract

The American politics for the transformation and development of the Near East in the beginnings of the 20th century included even Albania. These politics became concrete in Albania through the opening for the first time of American schools in Albania, in early 1920s. In order to implement the project for the development of the Balkan countries, the United States through the Near East Foundation, projected the creation of the Balkan University in Albania, a project that started with the building of the architectonic ensemble of the American School of Kavaja, in the 1930s. This school focused on the importance of the pedagogical quality by bringing in Albania a very professional staff of American professors who were PhD-s in Sciences and Arts. These professors have had an enormous contribution not only in educating the students with the most advanced American theories and practices of the time, but also in the documentation of the school life. During their work, the American professors made possible the recording and archiving of a great part of Albanian Cultural Heritage of the beginning of 20th century. The Kavaja school, fulfills all the standards of the contemporary American Design International Style. The refectory building, besides its utilitarian aspect, served even as socio-cultural space for the students and the inhabitants around the area. The objective of the school was the adaptation of the American products in the European and Mediterranean aspect. In this light were the experiments that this school performed on agriculture, fruit-culture and zoo-technic. The American school of Kavaja is the only trace of the American architecture in Albania. The funds for the Balkan University in Albania that started with the building of the American school of Kavaja were provided by the Near East Foundation. The Foundation commissioned the architectonical project to the "Thomson & Churchill" studio, in New York, which chose one of the best architects of the time, Howard Raymond Meyer. The American school of Kavaja is the only existing monument in Albania of the American avant-garde architecture of the 20th century. Unfortunately, a part of the complex projected by Meyer, risks to be put down by a decision of the local authorities of the city of Kavaja, that instead of it want to build a playground for children.

Keywords: American school, Albanian, development, socio-cultural space

Introduction:

""A puzzle, wrapped in mystery inside and enigma..."".

Winston Churchill

(Made in a radio broadcast in October 1939)



The Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja (Near East Foundation), (Golem) 1934.

THE AMERICAN POLITICS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALBANIA

At the end of the First World War, Albania and the Albanian people were politically divided, militarily invaded from various countries winners of the war, and in a difficult economical state. This was a serious difficult moment for the existence of the country.

Being part of the Near East, Albania was never left outside the America's focus of politics for the development of Near East countries after the First World War. It was the President Woodrow Wilson, the man that projected Albania's salvation from disintegration of the secret London treaty, on April 26, 1915. There the European Powers wanted to divide Albania in pieces among its neighbors and vanish it from the map.

President Willson, influenced by his christian and liberal vision, had many discussions with specialists of various fields in order to consolidate his own idea of finding a new way for the administration of international relations according to the concept of self-governance. (V. Murati, 2014) He asked from the experts to gather statistics and to consult with the local citizens of each country.

Americans looked upon their values as universal ones, and they looked upon their government and society as a model for others.

On January, 1922, the Albanian state, had asked the American Episcopal Methodist Church, to enable the opening of an American college in Albania. The Archbishop Blake, answered to the call of the Albanian government by sending in Albania Prof. Elmer E. Jones, director of educational school of North-Western University, in Evanston, in order to report on the conditions and the possibilities of future education in Albania. During his three months visit in Albania, Prof. Elmer E. Jones visited the most important cities and areas of Albania, also he studied the archaic characteristics of National traditions belonging to the Albanian Cultural Heritage. He returned in Evanston and presented his detailed report to the Board of Foreign Mission of the American Episcopal Methodist Church, asking with persistency the opening of the American college in Albania (The Albanian Journal - January 02, 1922).

Among the words he wrote in his report:

"Shqiptarët janë të etur për edukim dhe çdo gjë amerikane është e pëlqyer prej tyre"
"Mikpritja e shqiptarëve, siç ata e quajnë veten, është e pakrahasueshme."

He assured the Board that the Albanian authorities in Tirana were very enthusiastic about his proposals and had promised him every support for successfully building the American College. The Albanian government had expressed its wish to offer suitable buildings for the

construction of the college, and they were ready to offer vast pieces of lands for the agricultural experiments according to the proposals of the American part.

Prof. Elmer E. Jones organized the first American expedition in Albania on July 1923. (The Albanian Journal (Xhurnalli Politik), April 10, 1923).

The aim of this expedition was to document and acknowledge the Albanian context in all of its components as well as the opening of the first American college in Albania through the help of the American Episcopal Methodist Church.

According to the documentation prepared by Prof. Elmer E. Jones, the field that represented most interest for Albania was education.

One of the American 20th century humanitarian organizations whose goal was the transformation according to the American style of the Near East countries (Albania included), was Near East Relief (NER).

The purpose of NER was “*A full circle of life for everyone*”. Initially, before and during the First World War, NER served as a humanitarian agency in war times. The focus of this organization was the orphans of war and the Christian populations of the Near East. (U. S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. Annual Report..., 1921: p. 4, 7).

NER staff was closely related with the USA government. After the First World War, NER broadened its vision and passed from a humanitarian organization in war emergencies to an agency of professional development. This transformation was not an easy and quick one.

The inside conflicts in the direction of NER at the end of the 1920s, surfaced the necessity of changes in scopes but also in the organization’s personnel.

The organization spread hundreds of American volunteers all over the region, starting with the coastal cities and then the inland ones. The work of NER, for the development of stable long term projects, was to create the “The Golden Rule Children”, through 100.000 orphans raised with the American philosophy and practice. These children would become “the leaders of the New Age in the Old World”. (Ch. Vickrey, Preliminary Report..., 1920. “Near East Relief Minutes, 1920-1922,” Box 1, NEF, RAC.). This idea were going to be put in practice during several years, through trainings of the organization’s personnel and investments in infrastructure, a competence of missionary schools until that time.

After a poll taken in 1925, which analyzed the state of the organization in the Near East, NER decide that there were needed changes in the American politics of philanthropy. The changes had to do with long term scopes of stable projects of scientific basis. This search for change, after the Conference of Constantinople in 1927, started a chain of tensions and fractions inside of the organization. In the beginning of 1930, NER started its period of transition which culminated with the creation of a new organization called the Near East Foundation, NEF. (M. Limberg, 2013: 3).

On 5 June, 1930, “Ora” Newspapaer Nr.84 (State Archive. Banka Kombëtare e Shqipërisë, 1930: folder Nr. 179) published the article “The American Commission is concluded”.

In the article, there is described the visit of NER commission in Tirana, which “*aimed to unify the various cultural American initiatives in Albania, which were particularly developed in the American schools of Kavaja and Tirana, and were subsidized by other groups*”.

The Commission was composed from Dr. Paul Monroe, director of the International Institution and founder of “Near East”, Barclay Acheson, executive secretary of NER, Mrs. Achenson, Dr. H. B. Allen, agriculture expert of NER, Thomas Jessie Jones, director of “Phelps & Stokes” Institute of “Near East”, and Miss Jeanette Monroe. Near East Foundation, NEF, started to expand even more the work done by NER in the Near East. The organization continued its work with the orphanages (a highly valued engagement), by giving importance to the training of professionals through long term projects, in order to increase the socio-economic standards of entire communities.

Just like NER, NEF declared in 1934 that its purpose was to create “a full cycle for everyone”, through its work in the Near East. In NEF’s report is explained that “the full cycle for everyone” included, “health and hygiene for the individual and the community, economic security through effective agriculture and industry, happy families with rights for children, brotherhood and collaboration between various nationalities and races, as well as a spiritual and cultural fulfillment.” (Near East Foundation Progress Report 1934).

These aims reflect NEF’s hopes for a complete transformation of the society in the Near East and the big changes that NEF had undergone from its origins as a humanitarian organization. NEF thoughts were that the American experience and expertise could be a model for the entire world. This philosophy was applied in the Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja, which was sponsored and directed by NEF. So in the beginning of the 1930s, the staff composed of missionaries who aimed to implement “The Golden Rule in the World”, was substituted gradually with technicians and specialists of Science and Art.

According to the aid, but also the informations in relation to the American politics in Albania and the region, the government and the American organizations, besides the American evangelical missionaries, had a strong support by the Albanian Diaspora in America, among which we can mention the Vatra campaign for the salvation of Albania, (Gazeta “Dielli”, March 31st, 2015)^[1] before and after the first World War.



Delegatët e Kombësive të Ndëryshme, që ishin ftuar prej Presidentit Wilson në Washington, për Kërkimin e Dites Katër Korrik, në cilin depozituan nga një kurorë për racat që përfaqësonin mbi varrin e George Washingtonit në Mount Vernon. Delegatit i Shqipërisë: At Fan Noli, mund të njihet lehtë nga jaka priftërore.

1917

Data analysis:

THE ALBANIAN-AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF KAVAJA. PEDAGOGICAL MODEL

EDUCATOR FOR ALBANIA.

Prof. Elmer G. Jones of Northwestern Will Help to Modernize Schools.

On his way to Albania, where he will act as adviser to the Minister of Education, Professor Elmer G. Jones of Northwestern University sailed yesterday on the Savoie of the French line. He said he had been asked to assist in the creation of an educational system for Albania along modern lines. He was designated for the post by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

P. Harley Mosely, U. S. Consul at Calcutta was a passenger on the Kroonland of the Red Star line. Mrs. Samuel Vauclain Jr. of Philadelphia and the Misses Amelia and Patricia Vauclain also were on board.

The New York Times

Published May 22, 1921
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In order to understand the pedagogical model of this Institute, we have to take in consideration the origins of the American pedagogical models in Albania at the beginning of the 20th century. The origins of the American education and pedagogy in Albania date since March 26th 1908, when the American couple, Violeta and Fines Kenedi came to Korça”. (I. Gogaj, 1999:7).

They are the first foreign evangelist missionaries that were settled in Korça with the help of the European Turkish Mission”. (J. Quanrud, 1998: 218).

The Kenedi couple came to Albania to be an immense help for the educational and cultural activities, also for the religious

¹In that campaign, which was organized to finance the rescue of Albania at the Peace Conference, they gathered 150 thousand dollars, converted at today's exchange rate, approximately 2 million 700 thousand dollars.

(evangelical), humanitarian ones, in a countrywide level. They were financially supported by the Board of the Foreign American Mission in Balkan. (P. S. Luarasi, korrik, 2003, "Gazeta 55", 19-20-21-22).

The Kennedys (D. Hosaflook, <http://instituti.org/>), collaborated closely with the Albanian intellectuals, some of whom belonged to the protestant belief like Gjerasim, Gjergj, Parashqevi Qiriazi, Sevasti Qiriazi-Dako, Kristo Dako, and also other Albanian patriots like Petro N.Luarasi, Skënder Luarasi, Shega Luarasi (Uçi), Aspasia Efthimi, Mila Gjokoreci, Ollga Plumbi, Mihal Grameno etc. (I. Gogaj, 1999:20).

After the Kenedi couple, on 5th September, 1908, the Erikson couple ^[2] together with their three children came to Korça. (Rev. "Drini", 2014).

The American President Wilson created a positive opinion about USA among most of Albanians, with his statements in favor of Albania at the London Peace Conference. In this light, the opening of American schools in Albania was perceived very positively from the leaders of Albanian government of the time.

After the work and report done before by Prof. Elmer Jones for the opening of the American college in Albania, on 29th December, 1921, Charls Telford Ericson, the first American resident in Albania, presented to the Albanian government an educational program, a basis on which the Albanian educational system should be based.

His platform in general lines was this:

"The educational system of the time to be immediately abandoned and to be substituted with a national educational system, based on scientific principles, in order to educate the people through a certain profile. Foreign contingents of experienced teachers to be employed in Albania. In the center should be built two gymnasiums, one for boys and one for girls. In the main cities should be built schools for boys and girls, which would be directed by foreign professors with Albanian assistants. There should be created an agricultural school in one of the government's estates, having a foreign expert as a director. The lessons should be in two languages, English and Albanian". (Gazeta "Dielli", September 2nd, 2013).

Also in that project, Ericson was suggesting to the Albanian government to separate education from politics, disestablishing in this was the Ministry of Education (Later, the functionaries of this Ministry would become the ones that would impede with their suggestions, the continuance of the school founded by Ericson).

"America – he said – spends millions of dollars for the education in other countries, and there is no reason for Albania to not profit from this, until the foundation of a great balkan university.."

In 1924, Ericson receives the order from the Albanian government of Ahmet Zogut, to found "The Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja" as well as the Girl's School in Tirana and Kavaja.^[3]

The talks between the government of Ahmet Zogut and Ericson finished in 1923, with the permission of using the land located in the village New Stan of Kavaja, and the right of opening the school in this area.

The Albanian government of Ahmet Zogu, aimed to give an occidental inclination to the educational system Albania. In an interview for the "Daily Telegraph" newspaper of London, in October 1928, Ahmet Zogu said: *"We are entire centuries behind the civilised Europe. The*

² Note: From 1908-1912 Charls Telford Ericson was director of American Board of Foreign Mission in Tirana and Elbasan. In 1919, he was an honorary delegate of Albania at the Paris Peace Conference, elected by Pan-Albanian Federation of America "Vatra". From 1920-1921, Ericson was the special commissioner of Albania in the United States; Since 1922-1923 Ericson worked as a staff assistant at the US Legation in Tirana, Albania. - David Hosaflook, <http://instituti.org/>

³ Note: Until now, the name and the work of Prof. Elmer Jones, is not mentioned in any of the publications dealing with American education in Albania.

people here are not capable neither to write nor to read...I am determined to civilise my people and to introduce them to the values and traditions of the western civilisation”.

The project for the opening of the Balkanic University in Albania started in the year 1926, with the opening of the Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja.

The Girl's School opened on 20th September, while the Boy's School on 10th October, 1926. In the publication of 12th November, 1926, “Dielli” newspaper of Vatra Federation, was announcing and saluting the opening of the Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja.

The institution that until 1928 followed the NER politics, opened the way for a modern professional education, as well as for the implementation of modern American methods in the Albanian agriculture.

The aim of this institution was to show the superiority of a qualified farmer via a developed agricultural technique. The school years were 4 and the enrolled pupils were mainly from the villages close by.

The payment was 50 gold franga per month. The first graduates were 10 students of the year 1930. (U. Asllani, 9 prill 2011: 22 – 23). The institution was administered by two Americans, the director and the deputy director, while the lessons were in English and Albanian.

The difficult years of the world financial crisis affected even the Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja. In these years started the economical aid of the Near East Foundation (NEF) for Albania. On April, 1929, Dr. Samuel Irvin started the talks with the Ministry of Education for the construction of new buildings for the Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja. On 20th June, 1929, was signed the contract between the Ministry of Education and Prof. Samuel Irvin for the construction of the college in Albania, called “The Albanian-American College”.

This contract was complemented by “New York Times” newspaper, on 1st November 1930. On 18th October 1930, was inaugurated in Golem of Kavaja, the new building in which was invested 50.000 dollars. (U. Asllani, 14 prill 2011).

According to the documentation found in the State Archive, nearly all the staff of the Albanian-American Institute of 1930s, had one or more diplomas from the best American universities, in Sciences and, as well as a rich work experience in many countries of the world.

According to the staff of the Institute which was directed and sponsored by the Near East Foundation, besides their work done in the agricultural profile, it should be mentioned their scientific, medical, artistic and sportive contribution.

In the 30s, the staff of this institute in collaboration with the students, used to perform scientific experiments in agriculture, which constituted the core concept of this school since its creation.

The professors of medicine and hygiene, where it is worth mentioning here the Bulgarian physician Tatjana Zilatkova, (R. Hoxha, 2012: 179 – 184) in collaboration with the students, have contributed immensely in the medication of the population of Kavaja and Durrësi, particularly against diseases such as ague and other infectious diseases. In the context of the fight against ague, the institution reclaimed and disinfected all the swamps in the upper mentioned areas.

A particular importance was given by this institute to the artistic and cultural education of the students, who used to perform plays for the citizens of the area close by.

According to the artistic and cultural education, in the Art and Albanian Cultural Heritage sector, it is worth mentioning the particular contribution given by the couple Burta and Elliot Taylor, who were two professors of this institute.

Elliott Taylor (1904-1986) and Burta Beers (1908-1994),^[4] were students in College of the Pacific në Stockton, California, when they first met. After the graduation in college, in 1928,

⁴ Online Archive of California <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf2n39n8dn/>

Elliot worked as an assistant of the Presidency, in Monte Mario College of Rome, while Burta Beers was graduated in 1929, and after one year started work in Bryn Mawr College. After the wedding in Rome in 1930, they went in Albania in the Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja (Golem), where Elliot worked as deputy director of the Boy's School and as a professor of zootechnics, while Burta founded the Girl's School, sponsored by the Near East Foundation of New York (1929-1935).

The aim of both schools, which were separated in accordance to the Muslim practices of the area, was "to train the young people who would become the future leaders of the rural areas", through education in medicine, agriculture and culinary etc.

During their stay in Albania, Burta and Elliot Taylor traveled also around Europe. Both taught summer courses in Vienna University.

According to the pedagogical model, it is enough to mention Burta May Taylor's (State Archive, folder Nr. 195, Ministria e Arësimit programi, viti 1932) curricula of 11th November, 1930, signed by the Director of Education of Near East Foundation, Mr. Harold B. Allen.

Trainings:

Graduated in Pacific University of California in 1929, with the Golden diploma.

Courses:

Profiled for a career in Education, through subjects like:

- 1 - General Psychology - History of education
- 2 - Child Psychology - Special methods
- 3 - Abnormal Psychology - Teaching practices
- 4 - Philosophy of Education - Scholar law
- 5 - Old History - The History of the United States of America
- 6 - Medieval History - History of Europe
- 7 - Modern History - General philosophy
- 8 - Orient History - Political sciences
- 9 - History of Latin America - Advanced studies
- 10 - History of South America - Sociology and Economy

Certification for special courses issued by the State of California.

Diploma from Bryn Mawr University in Sociology and Economy.

Part of her training was even seminars for child education of the Bryn Mawr University.

Seminars in Psychology for her work cases in Psychiatry. Seminars in economy according to social relationships, in Bryn Mawr University, 1928 - 1930. Special recognition from Bryn Mawr University, for case studies in psychiatry, in Philadelphia Family Society, etc.

During their stay in Albania (1929-1935), Burta and Elliot realized many film recordings from their life and work in the Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja as well as moments from the Albanian society life and work at the beginning of 20th century. The filming material realized by Burta and Elliot Taylor comprises today an extraordinary treasure for the Albanian archive of the Intangible Cultural and Historical Heritage. Parts of this archive are the collection of traditional Albanian clothes, bought in different areas of Albania that Burta Taylor donated to the Metropolitan Museum after the death of her husband in 1988.

Another important part of the Taylor collection is the big number of correspondence, letters and photographs, made during their stay in Albania (1929-35).

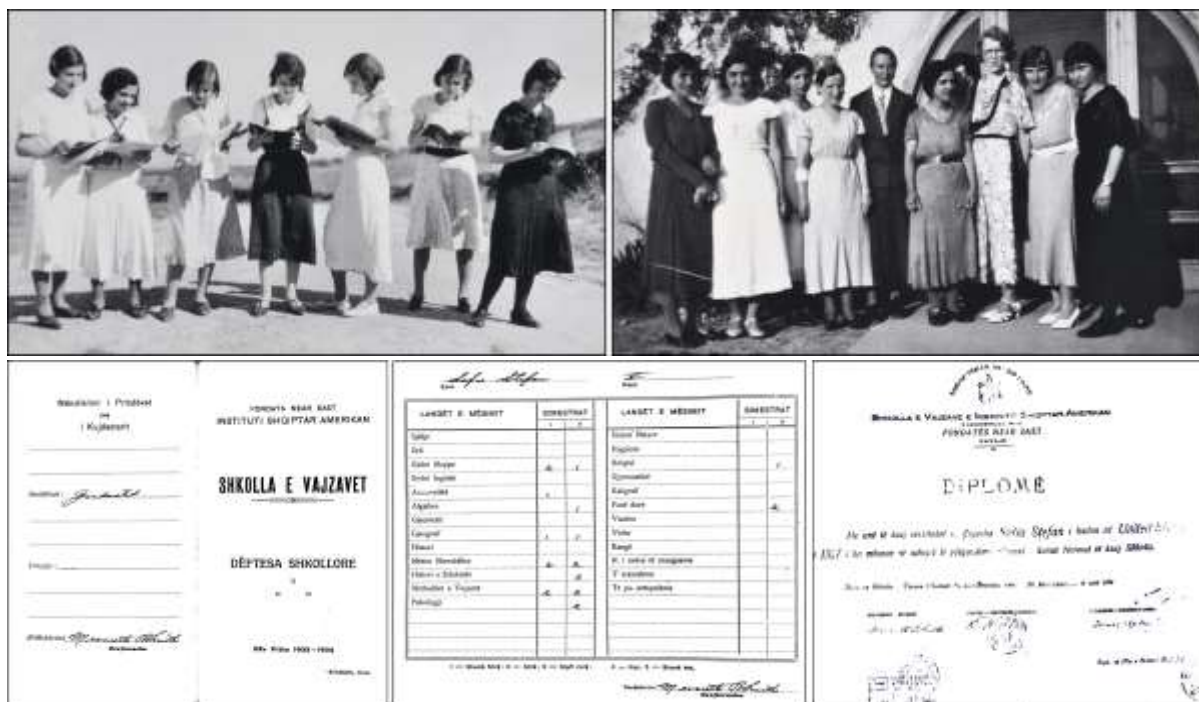
In October, 1934, Dr. Ralf H. Allee, was appointed director of the Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja and worked there for four school years.

The Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja, initially had in its possession 40 ha of land, while towards the end of its existence reached to 300 ha. In 1938, the Institute reclaimed 100 ha of land for cereals and vegetables. The institution had 10 ha of alfalfa and clover in order

to feed 33 heads of cows, bulls, veals, of Jersey and Gensey race; - 575 flocks of lumjane race and 12 sheep of the English race, 200 livorneze chickens and other animals.

The main aim of the Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja and NEF, was the training of the administrators and agricultural businessmen according to the “Golden Rule” principles.

In this institution, for 14 years in row were trained 177 agronomists, 65 of whom were appointed as agricultural agents in the local administration, 48 took care of their lands and estates, 19 became teachers and 21 continued their studies in various universities of Europe and USA.



In picture: Sophie PapaStefan-Naum, (one time student of the Albanian-American institute of Kavaja) with my friends and the talented professor Burta May Taylor.^[5]

Personal documentation of Sophie Papastefan-Naum. *Kavajë/ Golem* 1933 - 1934

On April, 1938, the Near East Foundation asked to the Albanian Ministry of Education to shorten the delivery time of the Institution to the Albanian Government.

After one year, on 7 April 1939, Italy occupies Albania and the Near East Foundation left from Albania. After NEF left, the Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja changes name to “Arnaldo Mussolini” (Duce’s little brother).

Findings:

THE ALBANIAN-AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF KAVAJA AESTHETIC MODEL

The Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja, is the only trace of the American architecture of the beginning of 20th century, in Albania.

The funding of the project of Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja, with which would mark the start of the project for the Balkanik University in Albania, was made possible from the

⁵ The materials were sent by Mr. Andi Papastefani (Genci Naumi-Boston, Collection USA).

Near East Foundation, which ordered it to the “Thompson & Churchill” design and architecture studio, in New York. In the beginning of the 30s, Thompson & Churchill, sent in Albania the young architect and designer, Howard R. Meyer (1903 –1988). (Meyer, Howard Raymond, <http://www.howardmeyer.org/index.php>; F. Hudhri, 2012:288-289).

Meyer is known as the first modern architect and designer in Dallas, from the mid 1930s until his death in 1988.

Meyer was born in 1903 in New York City and it was the son of a Hebrew family of immigrants. He was graduated from Columbia University’s School of Architecture in 1928 and worked as an architect in New York City from 1929 until 1934, when he returned back to Dallas.

While studying in Columbia, in 1926, Meyer worked for William Lescaze, a swiss architect, who was aiming to introduce the modern architecture in America. In those times, Lescaze was one of the most modern architects of the east coast. During these practices, Meyer was astonished from the European modernism. After graduation, in order to follow his interests, he undertook a journey in Europe to study design from the biggest modernists of the time. He met Le Corbusier (Charles-Edouard Jeanneret), one of the most influential architects of the 20th century and one of the most prominent figures of the modernist movement. During his stay in Europe he visited the architectonic complex of Weissenhofsiedlung, in Stuttgart, and saw the works of the famous architects and designers of the time as, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Josef Frank, Walter Gropius etc.



In the 30s, for a short period of time, before starting to work for Thompson & Churchill, he worked for Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue society, who had strong connections with Frank Lloyd Wright.

In 1930 Meyer, was sent by Thompson & Churchill studio, to direct the works for the construction of the Albanian-American Institute in Kavaja, a construction which would constitute the foundation for the construction of the Balkanik University in Albania.

Meyer won the trust of Thompson & Churchill studio, for his work under difficult circumstances and for realizing on time of the project.

In 1935, after New York, Meyer settled in Dallas, where he was the first modern architect who wanted to synthesize the organic architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright's with the International Style, in order to adapt it according to Texas climate.

The best example of this style is Emanu-Elqv Temple in Dallas (1953–59), about which Meyer collaborated with the well known West Coast architect, William W. Wurster, as well as with the sculptors Gyorgy Kepes and Octavio Medellin, and the artist, Anni Albers.

For this work, in 1959, Meyer, was rewarded with the AIA award of gratitude by the Institute of the American Architects.

He won another prize for his work as interior designer from the Greater Dallas Preservation League.

He served as a consultant for the Public Housing Administration in Fort Worth and Atlanta, from 1962 until 1968, as well as in Greater Dallas Planning Council from 1967 until 1968.

In his archive, located in Alexander Architectural Archives of Texas University in Austin, are included more than 240 projects. During his stay in Albania, Meyer realized some watercolor works, where the most important one is “*Albanian Landscape*”. There is presented the *Kavaja Gulf in Golem* in 1932.



Meyer in his archive.^{6]}



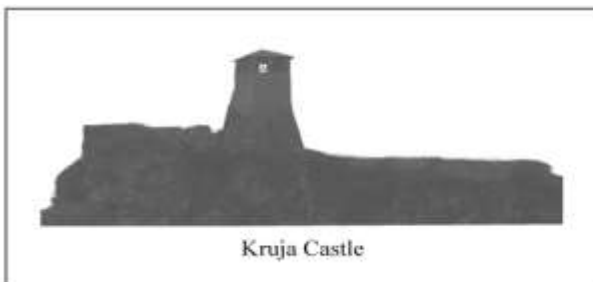
H. R. Meyer, *Albanian Landscape*
(*Gulf of Kavaja-Golem*) 1932 Watercolor, 24.5 x 38.8 cm.
(F. Hudhri, 2012: 288-289).

This landscape has a unique importance for the History of Albanian Visual Arts. According to Professor Ferid Hudhri, the time of the creation of this work with Albanian motives, coincides with the opening of the First National Exhibition of Albanian artists.

The architectonic ensemble of the Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja, as the only monument of the avant-garde American architecture of 20th century, for its artistic and historic values, belongs not only to the Albanian Cultural Heritage, but also to the World one. In order to realize the project of the Balkanic University of the Near East Foundation, during the work for the Albanian-American Institute, Howard Meyer, gave a great importance to the safeguarding of the landscape and the harmony of the architectonic ensemble.

The watercolor realized in the hills of Golem in Kavaja, shows the importance that Meyer gave to the landscape of Kavaja's Bay. His landscape contains great historical, artistically and documentation values.

In this project, besides the International Style, Meyer reached to introduce other unique elements from Albanian Architectonic Historical Heritage. In order to create the unique element in this project, in respect to the safeguarding of the historical memory of the Albanian architecture, he took as a referential point the architectonic silhouette of the Kruja castle, which is a symbol of this heritage.



⁶ Frame taken from the documentary "A Well-Made Object, a documentary on architect Howard Meyer".
<http://www.howardmeyer.org/index.php>



The ensemble of the Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja (Near East Foundation)
The Boys' Building during construction in 1930, under Meyer's supervision.
(*Cafeteria and Theatre Building*)

This building has an extraordinary value for its interior design aspect applied by Meyer. Its interior side includes important characteristics of the International Style. The entire internal space is conceived as a multifunctional space.



Cafeteria hall in the Boys' Building, in 1936. (Arkivi Shtetëror, Dosja Nr. 2434, Arësimi Profesional, viti 1926).

The internal structure of the cafeteria is conceived in harmony with the International Style and avant-garde concepts of time, of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, further elaborated by Myer. In this object, he exposes a light structure, balanced and with a considerable free space. This particular internal style conceives the internal part of the building as an open space, multifunctional, without columns or space separations; a space which in this case is a spacious plan that allows a free flux. Meyer used the application of textures such as bricks and wood elements even in other later important projects in USA, for which he was awarded by the American Society of Architects, AIA.

According to the multifunctional aspect, as noticed even from the pictures, the hall was being used not only as a cafeteria but also as a recreative hall. The wooden chairs in first plan are set towards the scene, which is part of the same space. A scene used not only for artistic shows realized by the students and professors of the Institute, but even for movie projections.



The students and professors of the Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja (Near East Foundation), wearing costumes of “Skënderbeu” drama, performed by them in the hall of shows in the Boys’ building, on 26 June 1933. (R. Hoxha, 2012:94).



The hall of cafeteria and performances, in the Boys’ Building, on 26 September 2015.
(Photo: Shpend Bengu)

Conclusions:

Unfortunately, in the trail of abusive interventions upon the architectonic ensemble of the Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja, one century from its construction, the Boys’ Building, the greatest object of this ensemble risks to get put down by a draft decision, “pretending” to turn the space into a playground for kids.

During the time i was photographing the building while my friend, the architect coming from America, Andi Papastefani, was doing the last surveys of the interior parts of this masterpiece realized one century ago, i recalled a reportage of my friend, Ben Andoni:

We are alone. Under the scorching July sun, the coffin, the imam...and us, three mortals.

I understand nothing while I stare to the hands of the three old man by me, while they hit their face with them. This thing makes me sad. It takes away the hope. It weakens. I would like to connect my words with them of the Bakar’s Sure, the only thing that I remember:

“Oh our God, we seek Your forgiveness,

Oh our Great God, do not punish us, if we forget you or if we mistake,

Oh our Great God, do not leave on us a heavy burden,

Oh our Great God, do not allow us to deal with impossible things,

Forgive us, be merciful and please give us strength...”

All in vain, everybody is gone. We were so many one hour ago, when the procession of this honorable man from Kavaja started. Led by the imam we waited for the last rites to be

sang... Then somebody murmured Amen... One of the rows from the believers of Kavaja vanished... Only the four of us and the soul of the dead ... has remained. (B. Andoni, 12 korrik 2008; S. Shameti, 2011).

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