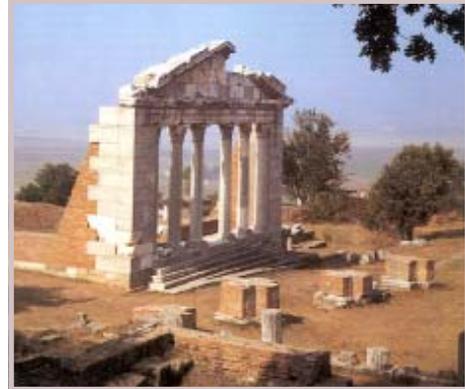


2.12. ARCHITECTURE and Urban Development

The architectural heritage of Albania, so ancient in origin and so varying in forms over the centuries, represents an important patrimony of the Albanian people.

The early stage of architecture is noted by the prehistoric dwellings (coastal dwelling, pre 5th century B.C.) discovered in Dunavec belonging to the medium neolithic period and in Maliq belonging to the late neolithic period. These houses were constructed upon a wood floor, and rested upon stakes driven vertically into the ground. The prehistoric dwellings are classified into three groups: 1-Houses totally inserted in the ground (in Cakran); 2-Houses half-inserted in the ground (in Cakran); 3-Houses, on the ground, with one alcove.



Buleuterion (Agonothetes' temple), Apollonia, 2nd century AD

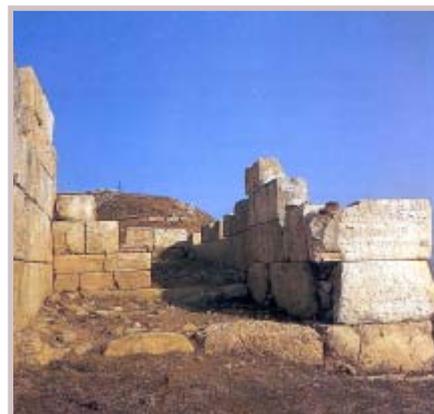
The fortified centres seemed to have an architectural unity, both in terms of land location and in the planimetry solutions. Changing roles from pre-urban shelters into real urban centres, these fortifications developed their architectural shapes and solutions as well as construction techniques. These constructions represent the beginning of antique fortifications.

5th Century B.C. Architecture and urban planning of this period was based on Hellenic achievements, although linked strongly to Illyrian reality as the cities of Dyrrachium and Apollonia passed through prosperous periods. Apart from these two colonial cities, there were also a number of towns in Southern Illyria such as Bylis, Amantia, Dimal, Albanopoli, Lisi and so on. These places were constructed on the top of the hills and were surrounded by high walls using construction techniques taking into consideration the form of the blocs (stone bricks), and the presence of ports and defensive towers with square and round shapes. These fortifications have many common elements of defence (towers, entrances), which were developed in different ways depending on location in terms of planimetry, shapes and land location. The masonry was performed by applying simple stone blocks, carved and pre-fabricated elements.

The urban planning of the cities differed from one another in terms of the position of the acropolis, the trade and social centres according to the topography.

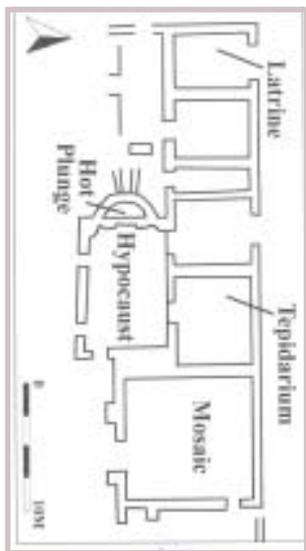


Antigonea



Ancient Walls of Bylis, 3rd century BC

Urban planning of these ancient cities shows for an ordered and modern road network within both the later centres like Antigonea and the ancient ones like Apollonia and Orikum. This indicates an advanced town-planning strategy that coincides with the beginnings of the normative and regular town-planning of the Roman empire.



Bath house system plan layout in Butrint



Column in Apollonia

Although the acropolis in Butthrot (Butrint) is placed in the middle of the city, the sloping hillside has created a different scheme. The centre of the city was built up in the area between the hill and the surrounding wall, while in the northern and eastern parts of the hillside, the houses were placed. The main monuments of the city centre are the boulevard, the theatre and the temples, among others.

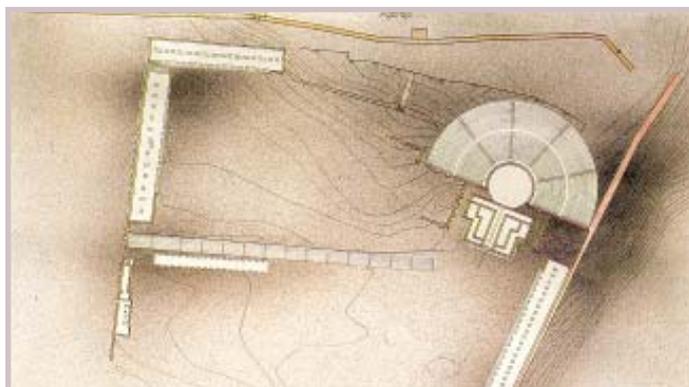
In some cities like Dyrrah (Durrës) and Aulona (Vlorë), the acropolis was built outside the city. This is the reason many historians and archeologists refer to the acropolis as “up-town” and the city, “down-town”. Apollonia and Antigonea have orthogonal systems of roads, based on Hipodam, while Bylis and Dymal have longitudinal

systems of roads. In Antigonea, three areas were discovered in which the main roads cross each other at right angles to make insulas (parcela) of 50m in length.

The most advanced dwelling from this period was found in Apollonia. The main area of the house is the open courtyard called peristil, surrounded by a covered hall. Regarding the interior design, in contrast to other dwellings of Apollonia and Dyrrah where the floor is decorated with mosaics, the floor of the *advanced* dwelling was done using marble stones or baked clay tiles. In one of the Dyrrah houses, a well preserved mosaic called “The beauty of Dyrrah” was

discovered. Belonging to the 4th-3rd century B.C, this mosaic is among the most artistic and expressive in the world and can be seen today in the National History Museum in Tirana.

Social Buildings are the considered to be the most important indicators of the level of the architecture of antiquity.



Layout plan of Bylis

The most ancient temples in Albania are the Artemis in Apollonia, and the temple of Asklep in Buthrot. Both of these temples are situated in dominant places, and play an important role in the urban planning of the city, however, there are other cases where temples were built outside the cities as well. There are two common types of temples, the first type with portico and 4-6 columns on the narrow side and the second type with columns in the front.

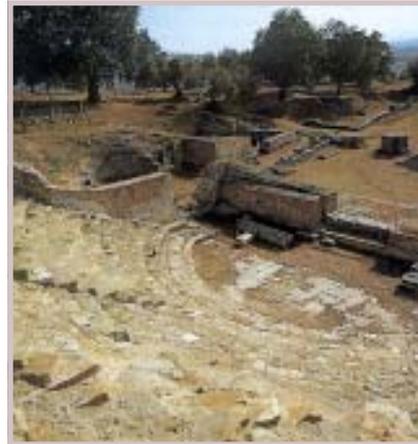
The **boulevards** were important parts of the urban planning of cities. They are distinguished for their construction and architectural style and are had covered galleries with columns alongside the open gardens to provide gathering spaces for trade and lectures on rainy or sunny days, as well as covered walking spaces. The most notable boulevards were discovered in Apollonia, Buthrot and Bylis.

Like the boulevards, the main **theatres** of this period were those in Apollonia, Buthrot and Bylis. They have a common way of building stairs in a semicircle shape, placed on the steep hillside or constructively adapted. The difference between them depended on spectator capacity (size) or the economic power of the city (elegance). The largest theatre of this time was the theatre in Apollonia. Archeologists have discovered parts of stage, fronted with doric columns with triglyphs. The theatre of Butrint is also very well preserved, with a capacity of 1,500 people and is well situated between the rock of acropolis and the surrounding wall. The smallest theatre was discovered in Nikae, and had a capacity of 1,000 people.

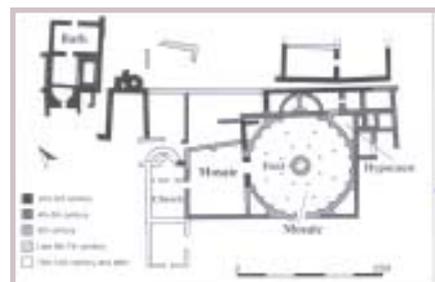
During the 3rd-2nd century B.C, sports were rapidly developed and monumental construction such as the **stadium** of Amantia was constructed. This stadium is typical of the antique period, with a runway of 184.8m in length and 12.25m in width. The stadium is well preserved and on one side of the stadium one can see 17 rows of stairs and 8 rows on the other side, constructed with limestone blocks.

1st-5th Century A.D. During this period, the architecture continued to preserve the former characteristics, and fortifications were built using the same construction techniques. After the Roman occupation, many Illyrian cities became colonized like Dyrrah, Buthrot, Bylis and Shkodra to name a few.

The Roman influence in these cities was limited, because of the presence of an existing and advanced architecture, whereas construction techniques were developed to a greater degree under their



Odeon in Apollonia



Plan layout of Baptistry in Butrint

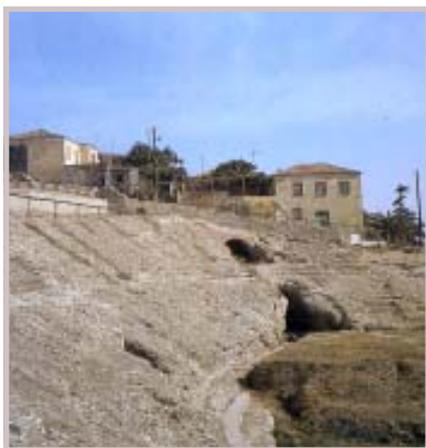
influence. The orientation of Roman architecture towards Hellenic architecture was mostly effected during the period of Augustus (who in his youth carried out his studies in Apollonia) during the time that he remained in Rome.

From the beginning of the 6th century, during the period of Anastas domination, three surrounding walls were constructed in Dyrrah, as well as a new hipodrom. Many modern engineering works such as the sewerage system were also perfected. Although two earthquakes ruined the city, it was quickly rebuilt, due to the fact that many of the Emperor's treasures were kept there, and for the high economic and trading position of the city.

Regarding **town planing** during this period, the Illyrian cities preserved their former schemes. In Apollonia, the town planing was defined by the former Hypodamic orthogonal system of roads. The changes consisted on new elements that made the centre appear different, such as new monuments like Odeons, libraries, buleuterions and so on.

In Buthrot, the road system followed the izoipses and the buildings were built in a disordered manner. The buildings (therms and nymphs) or water deposits, were distributed all over the hill, overpassing the surrounding wall and offering a coastal character like Pompeu and Herculaneum.

The Buthrot **houses** are mostly a peristyle type (columned with a courtyard), while in Apollonia a house with decorated mosaics and an atrium was discovered. There is no doubt this house belonged to the upper class.



Durres
Amphitheatre, 2nd
century A.D.

The **social buildings** were the biggest monuments of this period, and include the amphitheatre of Dyrrah, constructed in the 2nd century A.D. To the west side of the surrounding wall of the city, with an eclipse shape the amphitheatre measures 150m in length and 20m in height. It was built on a slope, with stairs to one side, and an underground covered galleries reinforced by a structure of 4m high by 2m of wide.

In the centre of Apollonia there are two very important monuments. The **Odeon** (covered theatre) and the temple of Agonoteteve or **Buleuterion** which was used as a meeting place for the Council of the City. In between the this temple and the Odeon the basements of the **Arch of Triumph** have been discovered. Libraries were found in Dyrrah and Apollonia, and a gymnasium (secondary school) was found in Buthrot.

Therms are treated with an ordered architectonic and aesthetic style, decorated with mosaics of a high artistic value. Therms were

also found in Apollonia., Buthrot and Dyrrah, the latter of which are distinguished for architectural perfection.

The early buildings of Christian cult.

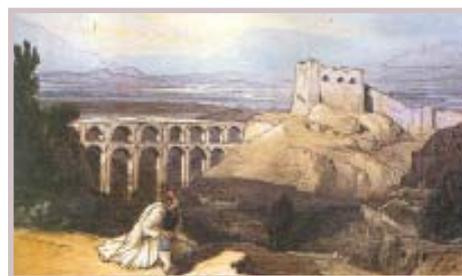
Becoming an official religion by the permission of Emperor Constantine in the 4th century A.D, churches and religious buildings started to appear, generally following the Roman architectural schemes of the previous centuries. The paleochristian architecture of the 4th-6th century A.D. has the same values as those found in the neighbouring countries of Italy and Greece. This style extended throughout the vast territory of north and south Illyria.



Baptistry of Butrint

Roofs with wood carcass, influenced by Roman architectural links, covered Illyrian basilicas. The biggest in Albania is the basilica of Butrint, situated in the southeast of the city.

The Baptistry of Butrint is a testimony to a great value of architecture in the 5th and 6th century A.D. It's importance extends beyond Illyria, and was the biggest building with a central planimetry in the whole Mediterranean world. Having a round shape with a diameter of 13.5m, the baptistry was paved with multi-coloured geometric and animal mosaic motifs, assuming a tremendous artistic value. Two rows of granite tower over the mosaic to support the baptistry roof.

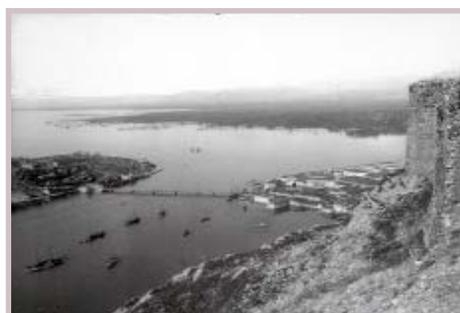


Gjirokastra Aqueduct

7th-15th Century - The Byzantine period

Byzantine architecture in Albania can be considered as an organic continuation of Illyrian architecture, effected also by various new factors of the time.

Situated in the corridor that connected east with west (Byzantine with Rome), the territory of Illyria served as a transit point of architectural values from west to east and vice-versa. During the early and middle ages, the architecture is represented in different buildings and constructions such as houses, fortifications, religious and cult buildings and engineering projects. The diversity of buildings and the high level of construction, shows an advanced medieval architecture on par with the most developed neighbouring coun-



View of Buna River bridge "Varosh" from Rozafa Castle, Shkoder. Photo by Marubi

tries, indicating a mutual influence. Original architectural solutions in specific elements are evident throughout.



Berati church, 14th century

During the period of the consolidation of Albanian feudalism, architecture flourished. An important urban phenomena appeared and developed known as the birth of "VAROSH", which is the dwelling houses situated outside the surrounding walls of the city, causing **the birth of the open city**.

From the **13th-14th centuries**, because of powerful Albanian princedoms such as Petrela, Kruja and Gjirokastra, the fortifications were repaired, extended, enlarged, and in some cases even the "VAROSH" was surrounded by imposing walls.

Important architectural achievements of Christianity also belong also to this period. They were developed according to the Byzantine way, while retaining some original features, thus distinguishing them from neighbouring countries.

Medieval fortifications were built as feudal residences, castles, military fortifications, and observation point to name a few. The cities established in medieval times were created based on the princes residences and their castles like Petrela, Kruja and Gjirokastra. Other cities like Shkodra and Kanina had three fortified sections linked to each other through gates. The sections consist of the outskirts, the downtown and the castle, which as is usually situated in the dominant part of the city.

The Turkish-Albanian war of **the 15th century** led to the destruction of many fortifications and buildings of high architectural value. The development of *the open city* "VAROSH" was quickly halted.



The castle of Tepelena built by Ali Pasha

During this period, new fortifications were built according to the advanced methods of warfare of the time. The castles of Lezha, Petrela, Devoll, Butrint and Shkodra belong to this period. Durres city became extremely fortified with walls and towers.

The architecture of fortifications in the 15th-19th centuries is seen in the reconstruction of strategic centres such as the castle of Elbasan, the castle of Preza and the castles of Tepelena and Vlora, as the most important defenses of the Albanian coastal regions.

Fortifications of the 18th-19th century attest to the domination of the pashaliks. At the beginning of the 18th century, the castle of Shkodra was repaired by Bushat pasha and the castle of Berat by Ahmet Kurt pasha. Among all the pashas, Ali pasha Tepelena, was distinguished for repairing and building of fortifications. Ali pasha used foreign architects and engineers for his castles and engineering works in the castle of Janina, Preveza, Arta and Sul. He built many other castles including the castles of Porto-Palermo, Berat, Tepelena, Gjirokastra, Saint Triadhe, Butrint and Libohova. The majority of these castles are well-preserved, and are distinguished by their construction technique using carved stones, regular geometric shapes planimetries, the solid high towers, loop-hole parapets and so on.

Regarding the external architectural treatment, the castles are built by carved stones through monumental treatment of folding doors and coggled decoration of the upper parts of towers.

Buildings of the Muslim religion were originally built using Turkish models, and over time took a somewhat original shape. The mosques are classified by either types with dome or by types with roof covered saloon. The latter were the first examples after the Turkish occupation, modifying existing churches in Shkodra, Kruja, Berat, Elbasan and Kanina. The technique of construction is very interesting, especially in domes, lintels, graded arch windows and the way of building the external walls by bricks and stones.

This did not happen in Turkish mosques, and demonstrates the local architectural influence. The sharp pointed arch was substituted at the end of 18th century by the semi-circle arch, used extensively in popular architecture and especially in Christian buildings.

The largest and most complex mosque in Albania, is the lead mosque of Shkodra, built between 1773 and 1774 by Mustafa Bushati pasha. It's similar to Istanbul mosques, with a central volume, covered by roofs in triangular shapes at the corners, the presence of portico, and the placing of windows in three rows being the main characteristics of this mosque. The minarets also play an important role in this ensemble.

The architecture of the Christian religion has inherited many principles of the former architecture, and from the second part of the



The lead mosque in Shkodra



Voskopoje engraving of 1742

16th century, simple and small churches began to appear, continuing until the second part of the 18th century, when this activity peaked. The architecture of the Christian religion is characterized by the free interpretation of types and shapes and show a special individuality of the master works, and their efforts to find new ways of architectural expressions.

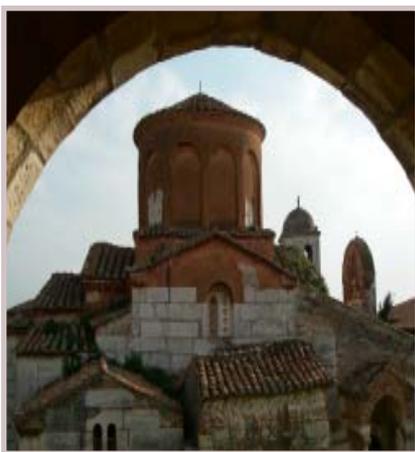
From the 16th-19th century, many Christian sanctuaries were built after the long period of the Turkish occupation. The first buildings of this period belong to the second part of 16th century, and were very small with simple shape planimetry. The

more sophisticated churches emerged in the 18th century, and are represented by the basilicas of Voskopoja.

The post-Byzantine churches are classified in three types: 1. With one neff; 2. Cross shape covered with a dome; and 3. Basilicas.

The church of Saint Koll in Voskopoja is a monument of great value. Pictures, painted by the masters David Selenica, Kostandin and Athanas Zografi brothers cover its internal walls.

This variety of church has a common horizontal axis to be of considerable length, even in the presence of the vertical axis. The decorations are presented in closed volumes with even facades and very narrow lighting spaces.



Monastery in Apollonia.
Photo by K. T., 2009

Many monasteries belong to this period as well. These buildings make an architectural ensemble, placed in very dominating, well defended and beautiful places. The main building in this ensemble is the church. These ensembles are characterized by their compactness, where every building has its function. Important to be mentioned for the architectural and iconographic values ones are the monastery of Ardenica and that of Apollonia, which was constructed within the ancient city ruins.

Urban development of the medieval city during 15th-19th centuries

Turkish occupation had negative influences on the development of the Albanian city, which in spite of the destruction of the Turkish-Albanian war, achieved a considerable level of development. In the 17th century, the Albanian city grew and prospered. The notes of a traveller of that time, Evlia Celebia, indicate significantly developed cities like Berat, Gjirokastra, and

Elbasan. To this point, the Albanian city had created its urban shape by preserving their main individual features in subsequent centuries. During the 17th century, **markets (the bazaars)** were transformed into proper and authentic exchanging and production centres. High clock & bell towers completed the markets of these medieval cities.

In the the 18th century, **the mosque with the clock tower**, became noticeable as a monumental building among other social buildings like public baths, madrassahs (schools), and so forth, to enrich the centre of the city. Every quarter of the town, had its own small center consisting of a mosque, steam baths (hamam) and a fountain.

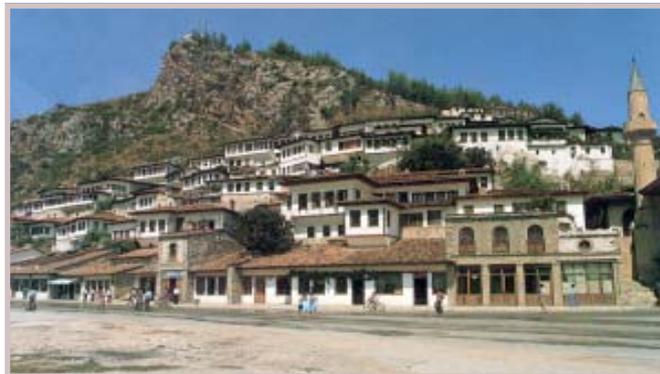
During the 19th century, Albanian cities once again began to prosper. In most cities, a bazaar was constructed to be centre of trade and production, but the rates of town planning developments differed from one city to another. Elbasan, Gjirokastra and Berat preserved in general their town planing, while the city of Shkodra was enlarged to the city boundaries of today, to be end at the castle of Rozafa, which had completely lost its importance by the middle of 19th century. If the city of Shkodra was developed without a regular town planning, Korça was extended according to a modern urban planing system (orthogonal system of wide streets and avenues) coinciding with the boom of trade development there.



Tirana centre.
Photo by Marubi

The late Albanian city formed its main urban characteristics in the second part of 17th century, resolving the main issues of its development and extensions such as the centre and the road system, which is preserved mostly to this day.

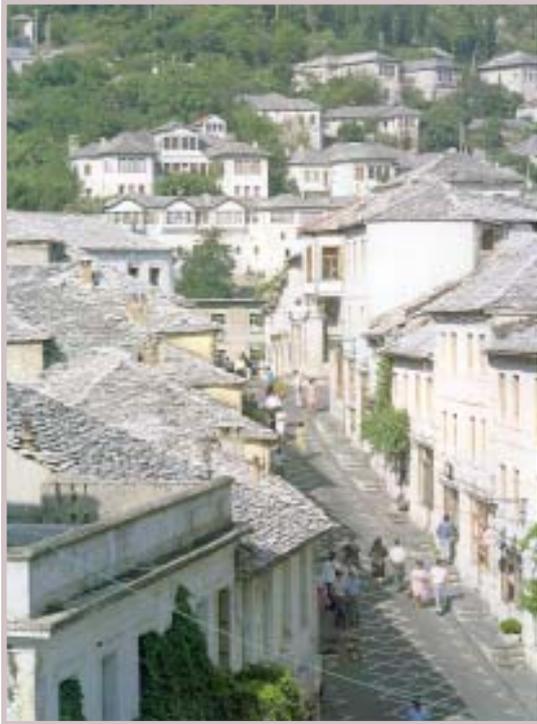
The Albanian medieval city could be classified as either cities linked with castles and fortifications, placed on steep hillsides like Berat, Gjirokastra, Kruja, or cities established on flat grounds like Tirana, Kavaja and Elbasan.



View of Berat (City of 1000 windows)

Cities built within castles are the most ancient and developed. At the beginning, the city was linked to its fortification, but later the city is extended to include the "Varosh", the area outside of the castle.

The sloping and hilly terrain served as a natural defence and had a great deal of influence in the architectural ensembles, impos-



Gjirokastra "stair like" city ensemble

ing an obliged orientation to all the houses to cover the hillside forming compact and organic buildings. The lack of land and level ground meant that the houses must be constructed in rows (as in the neighbourhood of Mangalem, Berat). In other cases, the houses are placed in a free manner like in Gjirokastra. In both cases, the connection with the land grows the monumentality. Houses come out directly in the street, taking part in its architectural composition. The steep terrain has conditioned the house to be vertically composed and placed in a stair-like manner, consisting of two or three floors. The cult buildings are totally merged and lost within this dynamic ensemble of "stair like" houses, which is the main element in this architectural composition.

The cities on the plains have completely different characteristics. Houses are rarely spread out, placed in vast land and surrounded by high walls. The compositional monotony breaks down only by

the appearance of cult buildings. They are usually built on level grounds to show dynamic architectural volume effects.

The houses of the upper class were built in suitable places, usually wide open, full of light and greenness, while the lower class houses were small, close to one another, and built in narrow places without enough light. In the most of the big Albanian cities there were also Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox parts of the city.

In the fortified cities, the main street began at the main entrances to the castles, then spread out across the city by secondary roads. The perpendicular roads were built in the forms of stairs. A key role was also played by the roads that linked the dwelling quarters with the economic and trade centre.

In flat cities, wide main streets and roads paved with stones ran continuously, with other streets linking cities between them.

The greenness is characteristic of the medieval city, especially in the steep, hilly quarters, where the greenness naturally linked the houses to the ground, emphasizing its monumental character.



Vila in Korca

Albanian museum cities of Berat and Gjirokastra (both under UNESCO Cultural Heritage Protection as the finest examples of Ottoman Architecture), as well as the historical centers of Elbasan and Korça, represent the achievements of the medieval urban developments of the 18th-19th centuries.

The Albanian House

The Albanian house plays an important role for its architectural types and value well spread all over Albanian territories in the Balkans. The Albanian house during the 18th and 19th centuries is distinguished for its architectural achievements both in village and city. The movement of the National Renaissance together with the birth of capitalism elevated the architectural values of Albanian house. City houses are distinguished from village houses, especially from the typical North Albanian village house. Generally the civil house belongs to one family, but there are examples of houses for two family members (i.e. brothers), in this case the house is built according to a symmetric axes

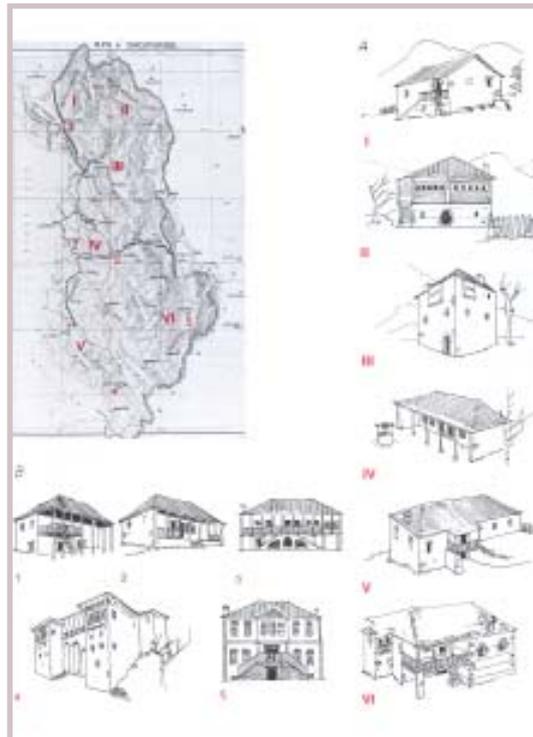
The types of Albanian house are **rural** and **urban**.

According to its volume and planimetric composition the civil house is classified in the 4 groups:

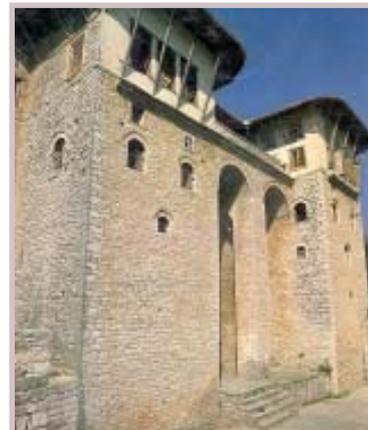
- Houses with fire place (Tirana house)
- House with porch (hajati)
- Houses with lobby (cardak)
- Civil tower (house of Gjirokastra)

Urban development and Architecture in the 20th century

This period starts with the Austrian occupation during **First World War**, followed by the Fan Noli democratic government to the kingdom of King Zog culminating with the Italian occupation. Albanian cities, with existing medieval town planning schemes, were subject to proper town-planning studies carried out by Austrian architects, aiming at European urbanisation of Albanian cities.



Albanian house types: A- rural and B- urban



Gjirokastra tower house

Saranda. Besides, rational characteristics, they had also respected the Albanian psychology and tradition in their designs regarding private property. They designed Tirana to be an extensive city with private villas and preserved the historic center of the city, including the mosque, the clock tower and the market among other aspects, which remain as important points of the city.

The town planning of Albanian cities in 1942 was carried out by Italian architects, and is considered as the basis for the urban planning projects after the liberation of the country.



Tirana first real Urban Masterplan of 1942 drafted by Italian Architects

Urban & Architecture after WWII

(Communist dictatorship period)

The end of the World War II brought a communist government in Albania. The dictatorial communist system was too centralized and inclined toward launching urbanistic operations that ignored private ownership, with architects and town planners enjoying the “freedom” to “revolutionarize and transform “easily”. Communist dictatorship held architects under tight control and condemned severely every sign of modernism, however small, and every tendency to freedom in their creative process that might cause problems to the ideology of the regime in power. This situation went on for long decades until the wind of change began to blow in Albania.

HOWEVER it is important to note that after 1944 the urban schemes of the main cities were preserved. Further more, cities like Gjirokastra and Berat were declared “museum cities”.

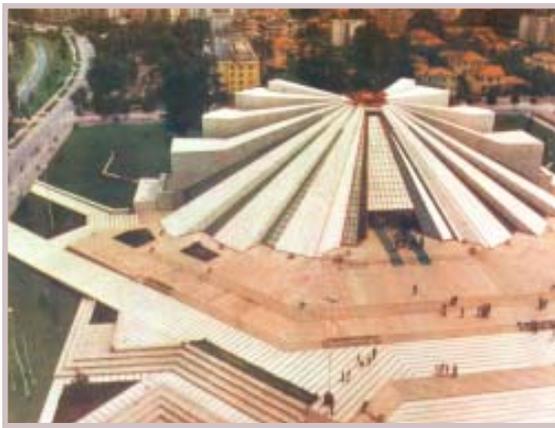
There started the new regulatory plans as that of Tirana drawn up in 1957. Its basis consisted in a renewed development of the existing zones and creating new peripheral areas in the form of **satellite towns** in order to provide the labor force for the new local industry (mechanical and textile), agricultural enterprises and coal mines chiefly along the main transport roadway and towards the outskirts of the city.



Prefabricated popular flat blocks in Albania built from 1970 to 1990.

After 1960, rehabilitation projects were geared towards the industrial and agricultural development of Albania. Major infrastructure projects were undertaken, such as hydropower plants, irrigation projects, railways, roads, plants, mines and the oil industry began to be developed.

The new Albanian house became small flats in five to six floor buildings, built through volunteering work which reflected the poor conditions of life. The new towns and the new parts of the existing towns and cities represent the same strict regular urban schemes. Even the social buildings like schools, hospitals, kindergartens were a standard design throughout Albania to reduce cost and time.

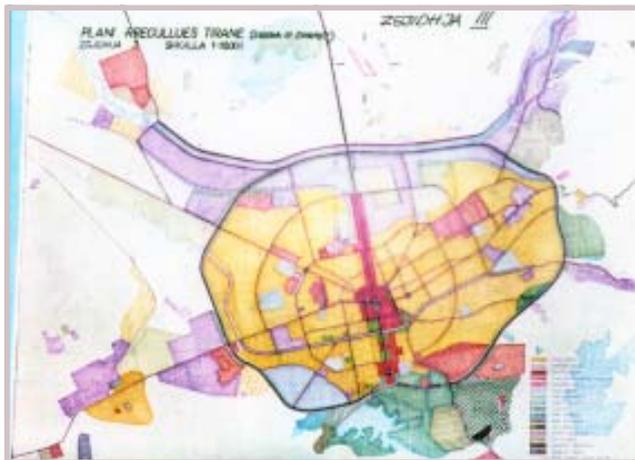


The "Pyramid" built as museum of Enver Hoxha in 1986 and converted to the International Cultural Center in 1991

"The Albanian Cultural revolution of 1967 damaged numerous architectural values all over the country either by destroying the cult buildings or by converting them to cultural houses, cinemas, or sport palaces (Shkodra's catholic Cathedral).

In spite of the totalitarian climate, talented Albanian architects managed to produce few, but monumental buildings like the "Palace of Congress" and masterpieces like the "Pyramid", both linked to the glorification of the dictator Enver Hoxha.

In 1985, the National Institute of Urbanistic Studies and Projects launched the drawing up of a new regulatory plan that was adopted by government 1989.



Tirana Regulatory Plan of 1989 still in power in 2010!

Objective I of this plan was to satisfy the housing needs by 2005; to define new spaces for industrial development by considering ways of settling the pollution problems; and to enlarge and improve the street network.

Objective II of the regulatory plan was to review and reassess a great part of the residential area that was marked as an inappropriate settlement area. From 960 ha of the inhabited area, only 460 ha were considered as properly settled, while the rest of 500 ha was to be the focus of more detailed reassessment plans, in which the necessary

space for service facilities was to be found even at the cost of obtaining such space by tearing down existing structures.

Objective III A disturbing problem to be settled by the new regulatory plan was that of immigration, which would be difficult to control following 1990.

From 60,000 inhabitants that Tirana counted in 1945, the population had increased to 300,000 in 1992. The new plan provided for the population's growth to reach 317,000 by 2005. In spite of the presence of this demographic dynamics, the plan provides for a reduction in the residential density from 224 inh./ha in 1988 to 170 inh./ha in 2005 due to the enlargement of the residential area space.

Urban & Architecture after 1990

Political and economic changes that took place at the beginning of the 1990s were rapid and dramatic and caught architects unprepared who for years in succession were producing a rigid, standardized and occasionally even primitive architecture, if some objects of public importance are excluded. Years 1991 to 1993 were the years of an identity crisis of Albanian architecture, but by the same token they mark the beginning of a new era for the architecture of Tirana toward a growing drift to creation of private workshops in Tirana where architects, but also specialists of other construction fields, organized themselves in small private project bureaus based on a very pragmatic practice. The performance of private sector marks a turning point in architecture, too. In the meantime, many architects were able to become well acquainted with international architecture because of their trips abroad.

During 1996, the architect's profession experienced a sort of reawakening as many people who invested in the bogus pyramid schemes began to make investment projects that required architectural designs and ideas. These projects were often large and exaggerated and though in most cases they were never materialized, they indirectly influenced the employment and the practice of architecture professionals who finally had a chance to let free their creative skills what gave architecture in Albania a new impulse, especially in the main cities' center, where an investment boom has taken place in recent years, mainly in multistoried buildings.

After 1990, the transition period brought in many irregularities in urban planning and in many cases outlaw construction occurred, especially in Tirana, which is the main urban area. With the return to private property, the Albanian house has diversified its forms and shapes depending on the terrain, location, occurrence of raw material and funds.

Nowhere in Albania has development been so fast and at times unregulated as in Tirana. This was largely due to the mass regional migration from the villages into the city, more than quadrupling Tirana's

population in less than 20 years. Naturally, this has led to a great deal of transportation issues, such as bottlenecks, narrow streets, lack of parking and difficulty for waste management and emergency services.

In the early 90s, the eagerness after waiting so long for private business, led to the building of many bars and cafés everywhere. As a result, many of these businesses were located in the main city parks, along the Lana River and everywhere else imaginable. From 1997-2004 the municipal government began the campaign "Return to Identity" by destroying all the illegal buildings in the centre, as well as a new project called "City of Many Colors" initiated by Mayor Edi Rama. As a result, the main buildings along the boulevard and the ring received a "facelift" by being painted with colors of various geometrical forms, slogans and images, many of which are prevalent today. This concept has been widely adopted throughout Albania.

While the current scene remains full of heavy concrete and brick constructions, quickly built to accommodate the exploding population, the future appears drastically different. The country has recently come under the spotlight of international urban development, often selecting extreme designs that may not be approved in other European cities. Many of these projects are part of a larger scheme to modernize the city and develop a distinct downtown core, taking into account transportation and other essential urban issues, including major underground parking lots.

As well, major road construction projects are taking place, including a four lane highway connecting the mountainous region between Durrës and Kosovo, which features a 5km tunnel, the longest in the Balkans.



Studio design of an approved future development in Tirana, 2008

The Competition for the Tirana Center urban planning started at May 2003 with the Call of opening of international bid on the occasion of International Conference of ENHR, (European Network for of Housing Research). At least 35 International Studios applied- only one of them was Albanian, among them there were well known studios. There were short-listed, as selected by an international jury,: Architecture Studio (France), Boles & Wilson (Germany-Australia), and Mecano (Nederland). The **Winner was French Studio Named: *Architecture Studio*** which enjoys a notable international reputation and has carried out a considerable number of important Projects, including the construction of Head Quarters of the European Parliament.

The version represented by **Architecture Studio** have given full priority to the pedestrians, green areas and water mirrors and has proposed a complete cancellation of car traffic in some of the key areas of the City like the “Skanderbeg” Square and “Mother Teresa” Square. The work for the renovation of Boulevard and Lana River is combined with the introduction of new elements of urban texture and architecture finish of construction of side walks and extension of the green areas. In order to create a new profile for main Boulevard, which will contemporary be more plastic and aggressive, it has been proposed the creation of two main parallel axes (one by each side) of the Boulevard. These axes will be constituted by high buildings, up to 25-30 floors, along both sides of Main Boulevard, with a distance of about 50-100 meters from each other. The Boulevard will be notably green at the sides and also will have a green closing area at the end, near the Train Station, creating a balance with the green zone of “Rinia” Park. In the same time this closing area defines a boundary for the vital infrastructure extension area, just at the northern part of the city, which is the growing area of the city

In the centre of Tirana, soaring over the Hero's Boulevard (Deshmoret e Kombit) rise the Twin Towers. Completed in 2004, they are two 15 story office high-rises, with a modern blue glass exterior. One block away stands the 16 story European Trade Centre, another major high-rise office tower with a shopping centre below. It is built of steel and concrete, with a semi-circle glass exterior

Other projects in Tirana include the TID Building, designed by a Belgian architecture firm. It will stand 85m tall at the symbolic centre of old Tirana. At the base of the north-east corner sits the tomb of Suleman Pasha, the founder of Tirana. The tower has been designed to feature a three dimensional, circular cut at the base, serving as an umbrella overtop of the undisturbed monument.

Major projects are taking place throughout the country, such as the Illyria Square design competition in Durres. The 2008 competition featured 36 domestic and international studios competing for the redevelopment of the main square in Durres, and construction will begin in 2009. As well, many large scale commercial and residential centers are springing up throughout the country, both in city centers and along the highways. In other cases entire ‘cities’ are being constructed, such as the Garden City between Tirana and Durres. Garden city consists of 31 blocks of uniquely painted 5 story apartments, in a self-contained environment with shops, streets, amenities and 24 hour security. Similar projects exist in Vlora and elsewhere.



“Tid” Building by 51N4E studio, under construction, Tirana, 2009

Possibly taking shape from the traditional Albanian Kulla, or defense tower, a new era of towers is rising fast. These are the 'Sky Towers', and almost every major Albanian city has one, including Durres, Tirana, Elbasan, Korca and several cities in Albanian Kosovo.



These Sky Towers consist predominantly of offices and a few small shops, however the defining feature is a rooftop cafe, which in some cases also revolve. The young construction expert Arber Hoti claims "The sky tower offers a panoramic 360' view to enjoy over coffee or a meeting and although the defensive purpose of the 'kulla' is no longer necessary, from the new towers one can still witness the 'concrete soldiers' waging war on the city and the sky."

Modern architecture in
Korca, 2008

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