

ALBANIA – HERITAGE @ RISK!

Albania represents a land with a rich cultural collection and, at the same time, a crossroads of diverse cultures, because of its position in South East Europe, on the Adriatic sea and in the Mediterranean basin, and at the centre of east-west and north-south arterial routes. The Albanian legislation for cultural heritage, which is based on that from the 1920s, has been modified and improved, particularly in recent years. In Albania there are actually 1500 items classified as First Class cultural heritage places (archaeological sites, fortresses from antiquity and the Middle Ages, religious objects, historic centres, residential and other buildings etc). The Institute of Cultural Monuments identifies, studies, restores, protects and publishes the values of Albanian cultural heritage.

In considering our cultural heritage as an asset for all the international community (Albania is a member of UNESCO, ICOMOS and ICCROM and belongs to the Council of Europe Campaign *Europe, A Common Heritage* – <http://culture.coe.int/postsummit/pat/en/epatrimoine.htm>), we truly appreciate ICOMOS' initiative to understand the problems and the concerns of the various countries on standards for cultural heritage.

Like all countries in Eastern Europe, Albania is in a period of transition towards a market economy. Actually, the Albanian State does not have the means to protect, restore, and manage all the country's cultural heritage, whilst new phenomena such as sponsors, patrons etc are in their infancy. The situation is made even more difficult by the exploitation, theft, and other negative circumstances under the difficult Albanian Transition. Under these conditions, in order to save Albanian cultural heritage, collaboration, co-operation, and international aid are vital. And in this sense, it is necessary to begin at once at Gjirokaštër. I am sure that you would be of the same opinion if you had visited this city, which is a unique urban complex, built in the 18th-19th centuries, having as its components, its original form, construction techniques, interiors of remarkable outstanding artistic value, enclosed courtyards and medieval cobbled streets. During the past 10 years of the Transition, the State has given very little towards heritage and it is because of this reason, amongst others, that the Heritage City of Gjirokaštër appears today as a declining historic centre, threatened by the deterioration of its architectural values.

After a request to ICOMOS, we proposed a project to the World Monuments Fund, to organise an International Symposium in October 2000, to raise the world's awareness of the values and the problems of this Historic City, in which 400 buildings, classified as cultural heritage, are threatened by a slow destruction because of a lack of resources to restore them. The fortress of the city is in a very serious state because the hill on which it is built has sustained serious geomorphological damage.

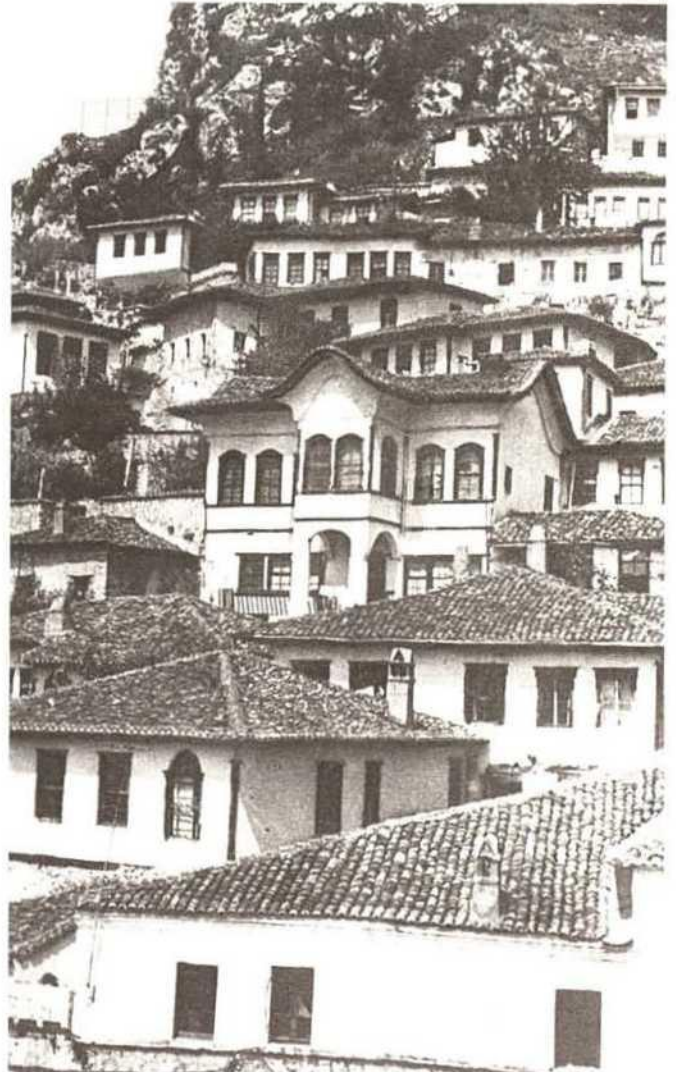
But Albanian cultural heritage does not only consist of Gjirokaštër. The Historic City of Berat, which we also attempted to nominate to the UNESCO World Heritage List, with its characteristic "quarters": Kala, Mangalem and Goricë, is another very original architectural complex built in the 18th-19th centuries. The Berat Fortress is lived in. In the city there are many Byzantine churches. The consequences of the difficulties of the Transition are however also present in Berat.

In the south east of Albania, there is the city of Korçë which has a historic centre of outstanding value, with buildings and cobbled streets built in the 19th century, which has waited for a long time for city planning and architectural treatment. Because of its ancient cultural ties with Greece and Macedonia, the city of Korçë is architecturally very interesting, especially the historic and commercial centre.

The Shkodër Boulevard, in so far that it is a local version of Dalmatian towns of the 19th century in this northern Albanian city, is also an original example of market streets, of which the building façades are in a degraded state.

We have not made a complete list of towns and historic centres with problems in Albania, but it is true that many other ancient architectural complexes in Albania are threatened by neglect, degradation and slow destruction, if one does not intervene to care for them (the churches in the south of Albania, particularly those of Voskopjë, the Lead Mosque in Shkodër, rural dwellings, etc), and such conservation operations require very significant financial resources.

ICOMOS Albania



The historic city of Berat