

GJIROKASTRA

MUSEUM CITY







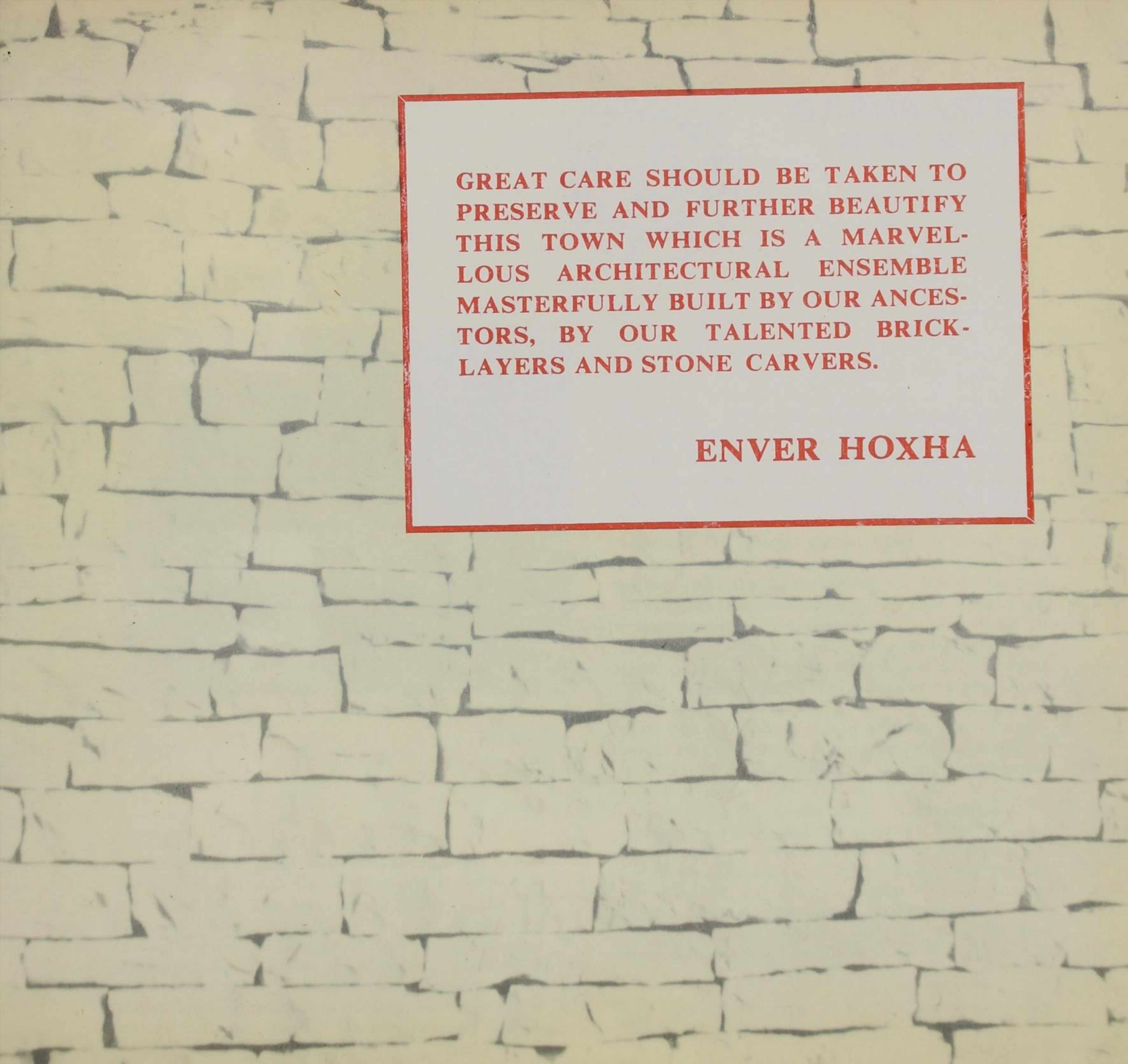
GJIROKASTRA

MUSEUM - CITY



ΔΗΜΟΣΙΑ ΒΙΒΛΙΟΘΗΚΗ
ΚΟΝΙΤΣΑΣ
ΑΡ. ΕΙΣΑΓΟΓΗΣ 55946
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**GREAT CARE SHOULD BE TAKEN TO
PRESERVE AND FURTHER BEAUTIFY
THIS TOWN WHICH IS A MARVEL-
LOUS ARCHITECTURAL ENSEMBLE
MASTERFULLY BUILT BY OUR ANCES-
TORS, BY OUR TALENTED BRICK-
LAYERS AND STONE CARVERS.**

ENVER HOXHA



GJIROKASTRA MUSEUM - CITY



Engraving of the 19th century.

Very rich in great architectural-urbanistic values the museum city of Gjirokastra is one of the important centres which throw light on the nature of the late Medieval Albanian town. Under the constant solicitude of the Party for the heritage of the material culture of our people, this city, just as all the other monuments of culture, is under the protection of the state. Studies and the restoration work carried out so far in Gjirokastra have made possible the publication of this al-

bum, which, in a concise form, reflects the architectural-urbanistic values of this museum city. Gjirokastra's important architectural-urbanistic realizations bear convincing testimony to the vitality of the ancient Albanian people, and the high level of their culture. At the 7th Congress of the PLA, Comrade Enver Hoxha stressed: «The national character and the popular spirit are expressed through the truthful reflection of reality, from the standpoint of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, the assimilation of all the experience of our culture, both its old progressive traditions and its new revolutionary elements, in a critical way, proceeding from the class standpoint, and firmly relying on the people's creativeness».¹ Broader information on the character and history of development of the museum city of Gjirokastra, along with the other achievements of our people's culture in general, helps the reflection of the national spirit and physiognomy also in architecture.

The purpose of this album is to represent the architectural development of this town, dwelling on the most typical and essential construction elements.

Hence, the album is intended not only for the broad masses, but also the students indirectly or directly interested in the Albanian architecture.

The album is divided into four part; the first deals with the development of the city, which is rea-

¹ Enver Hoxha, Report at the 7th Congress of the PLA, Tirana 1976, p. 152 (Alb. ed.).

lized through its main elements: the castle, the bazaar, the dwelling quarters and the places of worship. The main place in the album is occupied by the Gjirokastra dwelling house, one of the most outstanding realizations of Albanian architecture in this field, described in general type as well as in its internal and external construction. Then comes a review of the achievements reached so far in the restoration activity in the city, as well as of part of the modern construction. A special place is devoted to the representation of buildings of historic value, connected with important events or outstanding personalities of the struggle for freedom and independence, as well as monuments erected in memory of outstanding patriotic and revolutionary figures and events.

THE MUSEUM CITY OF GJIROKASTRA

The city of Gjirokastra occupies a central position in the Drino valley. Since ancient times several roads connected it with Vlora, the Delvina basin, and through Këlcyra gorge, with many other centres of South Albania. The mountainous regions of Upper Kurvelesh, Pogon and Zagoria, as well as Dropull and Lunxhëria, are long since linked with Gjirokastra as the chief centre of the area.

The city lies at the foot of Mali i Gjerë, on rugged terrain of narrow valleys, steep slopes and a few meadows. On this terrain full of contrasts rises a steep hillock, on which the castle, the ancient part of the city and its centre, has been built. Its position commanding the open city quarters has always played a first-rate role in the general view of the city, while it begins to lose its function as a defence construc-

tion beginning from about the second half of the 19th century.

From the data obtained so far, the earliest information about the city of Gjirokastra is given by the Byzantine chronicler I. Kantakuzenos in 1336. He mentions Gjirokastra as «Argyrokastron», once as a city and then as a castle. In the second half of the 14th century, Gjirokastra became the centre of the Zenevisi feudal lords, and in 1419 it fell in the hands of the Turkish invaders. Because of the important role Gjirokastra played during the 15th century in South Albania, it became the chief centre of the Sanjak of Albania. The most accurate data about the city are provided by the fiscal register of the years 1431-1432. According to it Gjirokastra had at that time 163 dwelling-houses. The expansion of the city outside the surrounding walls must date back to the first half of the 14th century.

During the 15th century, Gjirokastra shrank to only 143 dwelling houses in the years 1506-1507. During the 16th century and on, it again began to grow, and so in 1583 it had 434 dwelling houses. During the 17th century, its growth is quicker, mainly because of the onsetting decay of the natural economy in the countryside. It is at this time that Gjirokastra nearly reaches its present-day extent, with the principal lines of its urbanistic composition being already drawn.

Data about the development of the city in the 18th century are almost totally lacking. They begin to appear at the beginning of the 19th century in the writings of foreign Albanologists and travellers. They deal with the richest and most intensive period in the construction of the city, with the creation of new ensembles and the consolidation of the existing ones.

The peculiarities of terrain have played an important role in Gjirokastra's urbanistic development.

GJIROKASTRA

MUSEUM - CITY

This has made the city quarters stand more or less as separate units. But these units are not so separated from each other as to break the unique picture of the city. The quarters of «The Old Bazaar», «Pllaka» and «Hazmurat», built on two almost parallel ridges, constitute the most characteristic and picturesque group of Gjirokastra's constructions. Their compactness, their successful adaptation to the terrain and the diversity of their view make these quarters remarkable. The great ensembles of «Palorto» and «Manalat» quarters, built on steep hill slopes, have a different composition. In their block-like architecture, these quarters bring out well the volume of their buildings. Against the dynamic back-ground of Gjirokastra, these ensembles stand out for their monumentality and a certain uniformity. Both ensembles of «Dunavat» quarter, masterfully linked with the terrain, are of a freer composition and their buildings more individualized, making the whole more colourful, yet without impairing its unity. A freer construction is come across in «Cfaka» quarter. This ensemble stands out for its connection with the terrain and its rich greenness.

Gjirokastra belongs to the group of those urban centres set up on sloping terrain, which trace their origin to their castles. In this large and more characteristic group of Albanian towns, Gjirokastra stands out for the diversity of its terrain, which has produced the special characteristics of its quarters, as well as the great dynamism of their composition. You cannot embrace Gjirokastra at a glance, it appears differently from different angles, often it is hidden from

the sight only to appear further on in all its beauty. The urbanistic composition of this centre and its urbanistic values show clearly that the development of Gjirokastra has taken place according to some principles and norms, which have been followed by its citizens and implemented masterfully by its builders, to which both the nature and the hand of man have made their contribution.

The castle is undoubtedly one of the most magnificent constructions of the city. The construction of its surrounding walls is adapted to the terrain. It has three main entrances. According to hitherto data, the construction of the castle dates back to the second half of the 13th century. Judging by its present condition, it has gone through two construction stages. The first stage, or, to be more precise, the castle itself, was not fortified on its south-western side. This section of its fortifications, which constitutes the second stage, belongs to the construction activity of Ali Pasha Tepelena, i.e. the years 1811-1812. Within its surrounding walls, the castle preserves several buildings, many of them in ruins, which indicate that, apart from the garrison, there were also civilian settlements there. Bold feats of engineering, such as the covering of huge surfaces with a system of vaults, etc., are met with in that part of the Gjirokastra castle which was built before the Turks or that which was reconstructed by Ali Pasha Tepelena. Thanks to present — day restoration work, the National Museum of Arms has been set up in this castle, and many of its values have been recovered.

Worthy of mention is the about 10 km long aqueduct of the castle, which brought water from the Sopot Mountain. The construction of this aqueduct, about the years 1811-1812, was connected with several works of art, among which a two-arched bridge that linked Shkëmbi i Çeribashit with the castle, which was completely destroyed by the anti-popular monarchic regime, as well as another bridge over Manalat quarter.

The bazaar of the city represents an important construction complex. According to available sources initially the bazaar was situated nearer to the castle, and precisely in the place which bears the toponym of «The Old Bazaar». At the outset of the 17th century, the construction of the new bazaar began on the territory where it lies today, i.e. in the centre of the city. With regard to its relationship with the inhabited part of the city, the Gjirokastra bazaar, as all the other centres of handicrafts and trade of contemporary Albanian cities, constitutes a unit in itself, separated from the dwelling quarters. The site and the main urbanistic lines of the bazaar belong to the 17th-18th centuries, but its constructions, in their present conditions, mainly date back to the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. About the third quarter of the 19th century, after a devastating fire, the bazaar was reconstructed. Its original streets were enlarged and whole blocks of shops were reconstructed into almost the present-day view. From its urbanistic aspect, the Gjirokastra bazaar is a classic copy of this kind of complexes, with blocks of several shops in parallel rows. The sloping terrain accounts for its constructions in descending blocks. Its outer architectural structure is unique, and dates back to the same period. What strikes one's eye most is the broad use of polished stone in columns

and pillars, cornices, etc. Straight lines are mostly used but vaults are not absent, either. The bazaar of the city is remarkable not only for its architectural elements, but also for the fact that these elements are used also in the dwelling houses of the same period. This incorporates the bazaar into the architectonic complex in the city. The bazaar now restored preserves its function to this day.

A number of social buildings and places of worship are distributed in different quarters of the city. The latter, after the people did away with religion, stand only for their architectural values. Against the marked monumental character of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house, their size and structure do not bring them out clearly in the ensembles where they belong. Worthy of mention is the mosque in Mechite quarter, which may have been built in the first half of the 17th century. Its construction does not represent particular values, apart from a water pipe in the lower part of the minaret, a unique case. The mosque of the bazaar of the year 1757 is more important. The stone minaret rises high above the dome and adds to the monumental character of the mosque, which, regardless of its important values, does not play its full role in the composition of the centre, because of the flat terrain on which it is built. There are smaller mosques in other quarters of the city. In comparison with the mosques of the other Albanian cities, those of Gjirokastra do not have particular typological characteristics. That which distinguishes the Gjirokastra mosques is their small size as well as their poor decoration, especially in their exterior. The Gjirokastra mosques are typically monochronic. The ashy colour of the stone sets the tone to their outer appearance and adds to its monumental character. Just as the bazaar, these buildings merge fully with the

GJIROKASTRA

MUSEUM - CITY

architecture of the city, from which they have taken many elements, both in their general treatment and their architectural-constructive details.

The two churches of the city also possess architectural values. The first was built in the quarter of the «Old Bazaar» in 1784, and the second in «Varosh» quarter in 1776, and it was reconstructed in 1833 after a fire. The only public bath of the town is in «Mechite» quarter and belongs to the beginning of the 17th century.

The dwelling house is the sort of construction which sets the tone to the city, it is its main composing element, its most outstanding architectural achievement. In a relatively great number of variants the Gjirokastra dwelling house occupies a special position, constituting a separate type in the topology of the Albanian urban dwelling-house, with peculiar characteristics in its composition, planimetry and volume, and its special architectural-constructive elements.

Preserving its essential characteristics on the general architectural plane, the Gjirokastra dwelling-house has incessantly developed with the passing of time, from its distant origin to the beginning of the 20th century. This development of this Albanian dwelling house, which expressed the development of the way of living, also shows of many possibilities of this type, one of the most outstanding of the Albanian dwelling-house. There are many instructive examples of the variants of this type, which show that it was not an achievement which later on became something

unchangeable and stereotyped, but it was, on the contrary, a successful summing up of experience, with relatively broad limits for new contributions in compliance with the concrete conditions of every case. In the conditions of the exploiting society class differentiation is clearly evident in the rich typology of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house.

With the planimetric and volume composition as the basic criterion of its classification, the Gjirokastra dwelling-house appears in three variants: the perpendicular variant, the one-flanked variant and the two-flanked variant. There are also special solutions, though not included in any of the above variants, still possess the characteristics of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house.

The perpendicular variant is the most simple and at the same time the basis of the further typological development of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house. From the compositional aspect, it represents a prismatic block with a rectangular basis, with two or three storeys. The two first storeys are linked with outer stairs. This dwelling-house is remarkable for its closed character, appropriate especially for defence purposes, its simple and compact composition, its characteristic position in regard to terrain, as well as its height.

The one-flanked variant constitutes the most common kind of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house. It has been mastered well by the builders, who, preserving its main compositional principles, have in many cases added new creative elements to it. The two-flanked variant, one of the most characteristic of the Gjiro-

kastra dwelling-house, is the tallest. In both these variants, the Gjirokastra dwelling-house appears finer and more complete. The hitherto data show that their formation dates back to the beginning of the 18th century, or even earlier.

The morphology of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house shows the unmistakable genetic links between its variants. All these various forms are joined together by a single concept, but they are separated by its degree of development, the concrete way of its realization. This continuity and diversity of forms, as well as their great number, are strong arguments for the natural development of this architectural category. Along with the planimetric volume, the Gjirokastra dwelling-house is rich in various architectural-constructive forms and elements, which in unity with its general structure make for outstanding achievements. The period from 1800 to 1830 may be considered as the classic period of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house. During that time a great number of big buildings of outstanding architectural values were erected, which bear more clearly the essential characteristic of this type. Keeping to some fundamental principles, along its development, the Gjirokastra dwelling-house has gained some new characteristics and has lost some old ones.

The Gjirokastra dwelling-house is remarkable for its height. Usually it is three-storied, in some cases, even four-storied. Its planimetry stands out for its great compactness. It has different forms, but it preserves the grouping of different rooms round connecting halls. Rooms communicate with the latter and often with one another. The basic compositional unit is the three-storied perpendicular variant, which, repeating itself in different cases, creates different schemes. The composition of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house is very free. Thus, different solutions are possible

within the same variant, especially with regard to the ground, which is often broken. Volumes are also uneven, making the building appear even higher than it is in reality and in many cases, perceptibly enriching its side views. But that which gives the planimetry and volume of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house diversity and height is the semi-floor, passing from the ground floor to the upper floors. The sloping terrain has created the possibility of increasing the surface of every storey, thus ensuring an organic link with the terrain. Gjirokastra, just as Berat, provides us with a series of fine examples of the connection of constructions with the terrain.

Since the formation of the perpendicular three-storied variant, the Gjirokastra dwelling-house established a functional differentiation between the floors, which remained one of its important features, until the 80-ies of the last century. The loss of this characteristic is linked with the use of the ground floor for living space, and it remained no longer uninhabited.

What draws one's attention in the various variant of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house, in its rooms, as well as in its special architectural-constructive elements, is their typifying tendency. It is true, this element is a general characteristic of popular constructions, but in this case it appears very clearly. Worthy of interest is that this typification has not impaired in the least the originality of this special construction, which was bound to face the builders with some problems. The latter have been able to find new solutions to each case. Typification as never suppressed the innovative spirit of the builder, but has served as a sound basis, on which new elements could be adopted only after their rationality was tested.

The Gjirokastra dwelling-house is remarkable for the detailed functional study of each of its elements

GJIROKASTRA

MUSEUM - CITY

which are always placed where they should be. This is clearly seen in the interior of the house so rich in immovable furniture like coupboards, sofas, niches, etc. The immovable furniture, organically linked with the construction, constitute an important feature of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house, just as of the Albanian dwelling-house in general. This solution makes for spaciousness of rooms. Beside low sofas and other such furniture, nothing intrudes into the volume of rooms, which appears in all its warmth. Wooden elements, often carved, also play an important role in the decoration of rooms. Decorative wood carvings change in compliance with the function of each room: the most beautiful ones are in the reception room.

The room is the basic compositional element of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house. These rooms, as generally in all Albanian dwelling-houses, are: the reception room, the winter room on the intermediary floor and the summer room on the second floor.

Unlike its interior, which is carefully elaborated architecturally, the exterior of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house, even in its classic period, is little elaborated. Because of its composition, care is taken only of the main façade, and in some other variants, its flanks are also decorated. That which, seen from outside, is most impressive of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house, is its model, composition, and above all its monumentality and roughness, which distinguish it from the other types of the Albanian dwelling-house. But for the second storey which hardly breaks its roughness, its walled façade, creates a striking contrast with the

other part of the building. The decoration of the second storey and the broad eaves resting elegantly on picturesque corbels enrich the composition further. The functional differentiation of the storeys finds its expression in the outer architectural treatment. Outside, there are few architectural details, the special elements are usually mingled together, each making its own contribution to the monumental character of the exterior. But in some more developed variants, the backwalls and, in some cases, the side walls of rooms, are decorated with mural paintings. In general, the backwall of the reception room is decorated with panels in baroque style, and its sidewalls represent two lions in a dynamic position, one in front of the other.

One of the important features of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house is its defensive character. This feature is not the same in different times. It was on the rise until the end of the flourishing period of the Gjirokastra dwelling-house, then it begins to decline, only to disappear completely by the end of the 19th century. Yet not all Gjirokastra dwelling-houses possess this feature which also differs in different houses.

Of course, the Gjirokastra dwelling-house is not an isolated architectural phenomenon. But its connections with other Albanian dwelling-houses have been different in different times. Just as for all the dwelling-houses of Albanian towns, for the Gjirokastra house, too, the second half of the 19th century is a long period, during which it undergoes relatively important changes. It is the time expanding economic exchanges between different regions, of the growth of the national