

## Gjirokastra (Albania)

No 569 rev

### 1. BASIC DATA

*State Party:* Republic of Albania  
*Name of property:* The City-Museum of Gjirokastra  
*Location:* Region of Gjirokastra  
*Date received:* 3 October 2003  
*Category of property:*

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*. In terms of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, this is a historic town which is still inhabited.

#### *Brief description:*

The historic town of Gjirokastra in southern Albania is a rare example of a well-preserved Ottoman town, built by farmers of large estates. The town is located in the Drinos river valley. The focal point of the town is the old citadel from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The architecture is characterized by the construction of a type of tower house (Turkish 'kule'), characteristic of the Balkan region, of which Gjirokastra represents a series of outstanding examples.

### 2. THE PROPERTY

#### *Description*

The City-museum of Gjirokastra is located in the south of Albania, in the Drinos river valley, not far from the Greek border. The region is amongst the richest heritage areas of Albania, covering a time span from pre-history to the Ottoman empire. From the 14<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Gjirokastra developed from a small military post to a trading, administrative and residential centre of an agricultural region consisting of large estates. It occupies a central position on the western side of the Drinos valley, on the north-east slopes of the mountain Mali i Gjerë, which separates the valley from the Mediterranean region. The nominated area covers an irregularly formed site with a diameter of ca. 1km. The buffer zone extends some 200m further around the core zone. Today the town has some 25,000 inhabitants.

*The citadel (Kalaja)* with the castle forms the focal point of the settlement. This fortification originated from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when it was a feudal centre, later taking also residential functions, and it continued its function through the Ottoman period. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was enlarged and part of the old nucleus was rebuilt. The plan of the citadel is nearly 500m long and 50-100m wide, set along the elongated hilltop. The historic structures were built in stone with lime mortar, and are still standing though the site is ruined. It is crowned by a series of defence towers of different plan forms (rectangular, polygon and circular). There are three entrances: the oldest

of these is from the north; the other two date from the enlargement phase in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The citadel had underground reservoirs to store water provided by an *aqueduct*, which was some 10km long, one of the longest of the period.

The development outside the citadel initiated in the 14<sup>th</sup> century with its best period in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The residential quarters developed organically following the morphology of the rough and rocky terrain. In the centre, just north of the citadel, there is the market area, the *Old Bazaar (Pazari i vjetër)*. It developed here at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It extends along four main streets that link it with the different parts of the city. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was seriously damaged by fire, and was subsequently rebuilt using the architectural forms of the period, though following medieval traditions in its structural system.

The residential houses are marked by the emphasis of their verticality in the construction. The structure is entirely in stone, harmonising well with the rocky landscape. The typology has its own particular character in the late-medieval building tradition in Albania and the Balkan region. This house type is named *Kullë* ('tower'), and it is represented in a vast variety in Gjirokastra. It obtained its crystallisation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but there are more elaborate examples dating from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The house has normally a tall basement, above which the first floor was for use in cold season, and the second floor for the warm season. In the interior, there are rich decorative details and painted floral patterns, particularly in the zones reserved for the reception of visitors.

There are various structures dedicated to cult functions, which structurally follow the same pattern as the residential buildings. The Bazaar mosque in the centre of the city dates from 1757, and is formed of square plan surrounded by a portico on two sides. The church of Saint-Sotir, built in 1786, is a simple stone structure with three aisles each with an apse. The church of St. Michael, built in 1776 and rebuilt in 1833 after fire, is similar in structure.

#### *History*

The historic city of Gjirokastra is the centre of the region of the Drinos river valley that has been called Dropolis taking the name from the Roman Hadrianopolis. A few kilometres east of Gjirokastra, there are the remains of the ancient city of Anigonea, founded by king Pyrrhus in 295BC. The region is characterised by a network of traditional cobbled lanes that linked this region to Greece in the south and central Albania in the north. In the villages of the valley there are 29 post-Byzantine churches and monasteries with important mural paintings, dating from the Ottoman period.

The citadel of Gjirokastra was built in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century as a feudal centre with military, administrative and economic functions in the region. The first phase of the castle was built on the south-eastern side of the fortification.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the settlement extended outside the citadel area forming the town of Gjirokastra. In 1419 it was occupied by the Turks, who chose it as the centre of

Sandjak in Albania. In the 1430s, the town had some 163 houses. In the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it was the centre of Zenevis feuds.

In subsequent centuries, the development was relatively gradual, and even though the town expanded, its basic character was retained intact, respecting the earlier constructions. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the builders however represented wealthier social classes and land owners, building more elaborate residences. The town grew around the fortified hill, which remained the central features. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the fortification had lost its military function. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the city has not had any considerable constructions.

### ***Management regime***

#### *Legal provision:*

The fortification and the religious properties are owned by the state, while the residential buildings are in private ownership.

The city of Gjirokastra was declared “Museum City” by the decision of the Council of Ministers in 1961, and has since been protected under the decree 568 of 1948 on the “Conservation of rare cultural and natural monuments”. This law has subsequently been replaced by new decrees in 1971, 1994 and 2003. This last decree on the protection of cultural heritage is currently in force, and it defines the concept of “museum town” as: “the urban centre being protected by the state for its historical and cultural values”.

The city of Gjirokastra is divided in two sections: the historic centre and the free zone. The historic centre consists of the museum zone and of the protected zone. These zones are surrounded by a buffer zone which is subject to control.

Individual historic buildings are protected under two categories. The first category concerns 56 buildings, which are protected in their integrity. The second category has 560 buildings, which are protected externally and in their volume; in the interior, it is possible to make the necessary arrangements so as to meet present-day needs.

#### *Management structure:*

The general conservation management of Gjirokastra is the responsibility of the municipality. The Institute of Monuments of Culture in Tirana and its local office in Gjirokastra are responsible for the control of the restoration works in agreement with established criteria.

The municipality of Gjirokastra has prepared a management plan for the protected historic area of the town for the period: 2002-2010. The municipality, in collaboration with the city of Grottamare (Italy), is currently also developing an urban master plan for Gjirokastra. At the same time, Packard Foundation has already carried out a study on “The conservation and development of Gjirokastra”.

#### *Resources:*

In principle, the funds for conservation and restoration of the museum-city have been provided by the state. However, since 1990, there has been a serious lack of financial means and the impossibility to continue the

works. There are some NGOs or institutions, who have expressed interest in assisting in this regard.

Earlier, the qualification of restorers was mainly obtained through field practice. Later, training has been provided by ICCROM and other institutions. For the professionals, there is now training offered by the Faculty of Architecture at the Polytechnic University of Tirana. A course has been foreseen by the Institute of Monuments of Culture for 2004.

Until 1990s, Gjirokastra, as the rest of the country, was isolated due to political reasons. Recently, the first steps have been taken to publish guidebooks and to prepare facilities for visitors in small hotels arranged inside existing houses. At the moment, there are 7 hotels with a total of 84 beds. Considering the short distance from the port of Saranda, there is a possibility for tourism. A folkloristic festival is planned to be organised in the citadel every four years.

### ***Justification by the State Party (summary)***

*Criterion iii:* The city-museum of Gjirokastra is distinguished by its origin in the military fort. It is an exceptional testimony of a residential centre of Albanian farming class related to large estates (*latifundia*). The settlement is characterised by the dynamic territory and the clear natural limits of the residential areas. It is a city built in stone, which developed from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

*Criterion iv:* The residential house of Gjirokastra is characterised by its vertical composition and a clear distribution of the functions in the different floors. It has marked defence character. The houses are closely related with the rocky terrain. The monumentality of the exterior is contrasted by the elaborate interior. The fortified residence of Gjirokastra is a remarkable illustration of the way of life in Albania in a particular period of time (14<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century).

## **3. ICOMOS EVALUATION**

### ***Actions by ICOMOS***

This property was first nominated in 1990, but it was deferred by the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee at its 15<sup>th</sup> session (Paris, June 1991) in order to help the Albanian authorities to redefine the nominated area and put in place a management system. An ICOMOS mission took place in November 1991, providing some guidelines for the redefinition of the property. In January 2003, a UNESCO mission visited Gjirokastra. The nomination was received by UNESCO in October 2003. A new ICOMOS expert mission visited Gjirokastra in October-November 2004.

ICOMOS has also consulted its International Scientific Committee on Historic Towns and Villages.

### ***Conservation***

#### *Conservation history:*

Gjirokastra was declared “Museum City” in 1961. It is noted that this concept could best be translated as “urban

conservation area". It does not refer to an open air museum. In 1965, the Institute of Cultural Monuments established an office in Gjirokastra, which started a systematic restoration of the historic buildings. By 1990, 38 buildings of the first category and 253 of the second category were restored. At the same time, the castle has been subject to maintenance, consolidation and restoration. The mosque and the public baths of Meçite have also been restored in this period. After 1990, the works have been interrupted due to the lack of funding, and are only being started again in the past couple of years.

#### *State of conservation:*

The general condition of the urban fabric is variable. Unfortunately, many buildings are not in good condition. In the first category, it is reported that 41 historic buildings out of 56 (73% of the total) are in need of repair and/or restoration. In the second category, some 32% of the protected buildings need restoration. There is general lack of maintenance, and many buildings have lost their function.

#### *Management:*

Several reports, guidelines and plans, which partly overlap, have been prepared in the past few years, including reports on the conservation and development of Gjirokastra by foreign consultants (Prince Research Consultants, 2002; F. Torresi, 2003). There is a municipal management plan for the period 2002-10 (2002), and a Plan for Renewal of Historic Zones of Gjirokastra, prepared in collaboration with the Italian municipality of Grottamare (2004). The management plan is adopted, though it will need further refinement. In any case, the present document is considered a good basis for the development and improvement of the management system.

The main actor in the management structure is the Regional Directory of the Monuments of Culture, who have close professional collaboration with the State Institute of Cultural Monuments in Tirana.

#### *Risk analysis:*

The historic town of Gjirokastra and its surroundings are subject to various pressures, which require careful monitoring and management. Partly this is seen in the lack of economic resources, leaving some historic buildings unused and short of maintenance. On the other hand, development outside the protected area may challenge the traditional and still fairly well preserved setting. While the authenticity and integrity of the place are still kept to a high level, it is necessary to monitor the situation and implement appropriate measures to counteract any illegal and unsympathetic changes in the urban and landscape context.

#### ***Authenticity and integrity***

The historical authenticity of the nominated property is generally very high. This concerns the historic buildings listed for legal protection, but also various urban elements such as spaces and traditional street paving. The repair and restoration of listed historic buildings have generally been carried out using traditional materials and techniques. There are few exceptions particularly related to the period when the control was less due to political situation.

Problems are visible especially in buildings that are not protected, such as the use of cement and introduction of unsuitable industrial materials (plastic). However, the present administration has improved the site control.

The citadel is partly in use, partly in ruins. It has been preserved with the developments of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which are well in line with the traditional character of the place. The authenticity of the setting is considered to be intact though it can be threatened by pressures for change (e.g. development of parking areas). There are also some new constructions, especially outside the nominated area, which are not harmonious with the setting. Legal action has been taken to correct such issues.

The general integrity of the protected historic areas has been well kept. The old citadel dominates the cityscape, and the traditional tower houses and the old bazaar area are intact. The relationship with the setting of the river valley and the mountains is impressive. On the other hand, problems are emerging particularly in the new urban developments towards the east and north-east, where there is most pressure for change, and which are outside the protected zones.

#### ***Comparative evaluation***

There exist studies of the evolution of the Ottoman residential houses, which took different forms from region to region, while keeping some basic features in common. Structurally, the buildings could be in timber frame, stone or brick masonry, adobe, or massive timber, depending on the availability of materials or other reasons. Turkey has generally used timber-frame structure. Cut stone is used in Capadocia, parts of Anatolia, Syria and northern Egypt. Rubble or broad stone structures with mortar were common on the Mediterranean and Aegean coasts, including Albania. The Balkan region thus has its own specificity, distinct in the Ottoman Empire.

The nomination document compares Gjirokastra to the medieval city of Berat, another Ottoman historic city protected by the state. This town, however, differs in its character, being a town of crafts persons and merchants. Gjirokastra is also compared to Safranbolu in Turkey, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1994 (criteria ii, iv and v): from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the advent of the railway in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Safranbolu was an important caravan station on the main East-West trade route, and much larger than Gjirokastra. Here, the buildings have timber-frame structures with stone basements and tiled roofs. Though having common features typical of Ottoman houses and having developed in an organic manner, the two towns differ in their building types as well as in the historic functions, one being built by merchants, the other by farmers.

Sites representing Ottoman vernacular architecture include: Ohrid in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, an important religious and cultural centre (World Heritage Site); the small Ottoman bazaar area of Novi Pazar in the serial site of Stari Ras and Sopocani, in Serbia (World Heritage site); the Ancient City of Nessebar, in Bulgaria as well as the towns of Mostar and Sarajevo in Herzegovina. Compared with these sites, Gjirokastra stands out for its character as an urban settlement built by

farmers, and especially for the integrity and special character of its fortified architecture.

### ***Outstanding universal value***

#### *General statement:*

The Ottoman empire emerged from the 15<sup>th</sup> century lasting until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It extended to most of the eastern Mediterranean region, involving particularly Turkey and the Balkan states. The earlier Christian Byzantine state was changed into Muslim culture. The Ottomans set new standards for quality of construction, and the ideas were diffused with master builders, artists and craftsmen from Islamic and Christian background.

Many Ottoman settlements developed outside the fortified citadels, not as a planned expansion but as an organic evolution. Settlements were generally located in a valley, leaning against the slope of the hills so that the houses did not block each other's view. An Ottoman house has generally two or more floors, and it was built so as to guard the privacy of the family, as well as to provide a comfortable space for receiving visitors. While presenting certain common characteristics, the architecture of the Ottoman house (or Turkish house) nevertheless varied from region to region. Thus, the Balkan region differs from the Turkish area and North Africa in the morphology of its houses and in the construction technique.

Within the Balkan context, moreover, Gjirokastra represents an exceptionally well preserved and outstanding ensemble of fortified tower houses as these developed in the Balkan region. Most of the houses date from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, though they have preserved the medieval tradition of construction. The town is particularly characterized by having been built by farmers of large estates, who had different requirements from the more frequent merchants' settlements.

#### *Evaluation of criteria:*

Criterion iii: The old city of Gjirokastra developed as a result of a dynamic balance between the citadel and the fortified residential tower houses. It is an exceptional testimony to a long-lasting, and almost disappeared society and life-style, influenced by the culture and tradition of Islam in the Ottoman period.

Criterion iv: The historic urban quarters of Gjirokastra with the dominating citadel and the characteristic tower houses (*kule*) represent an outstanding example of a traditional urban settlement and building type. This typology developed in the Balkan region from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as a result of the specific multi-faceted political and cultural situation, and adapted to the physical conditions that still characterise the setting of the town.

## **4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Recommendation with respect to inscription***

ICOMOS recommends that the World Heritage Committee adopt the following draft decision:

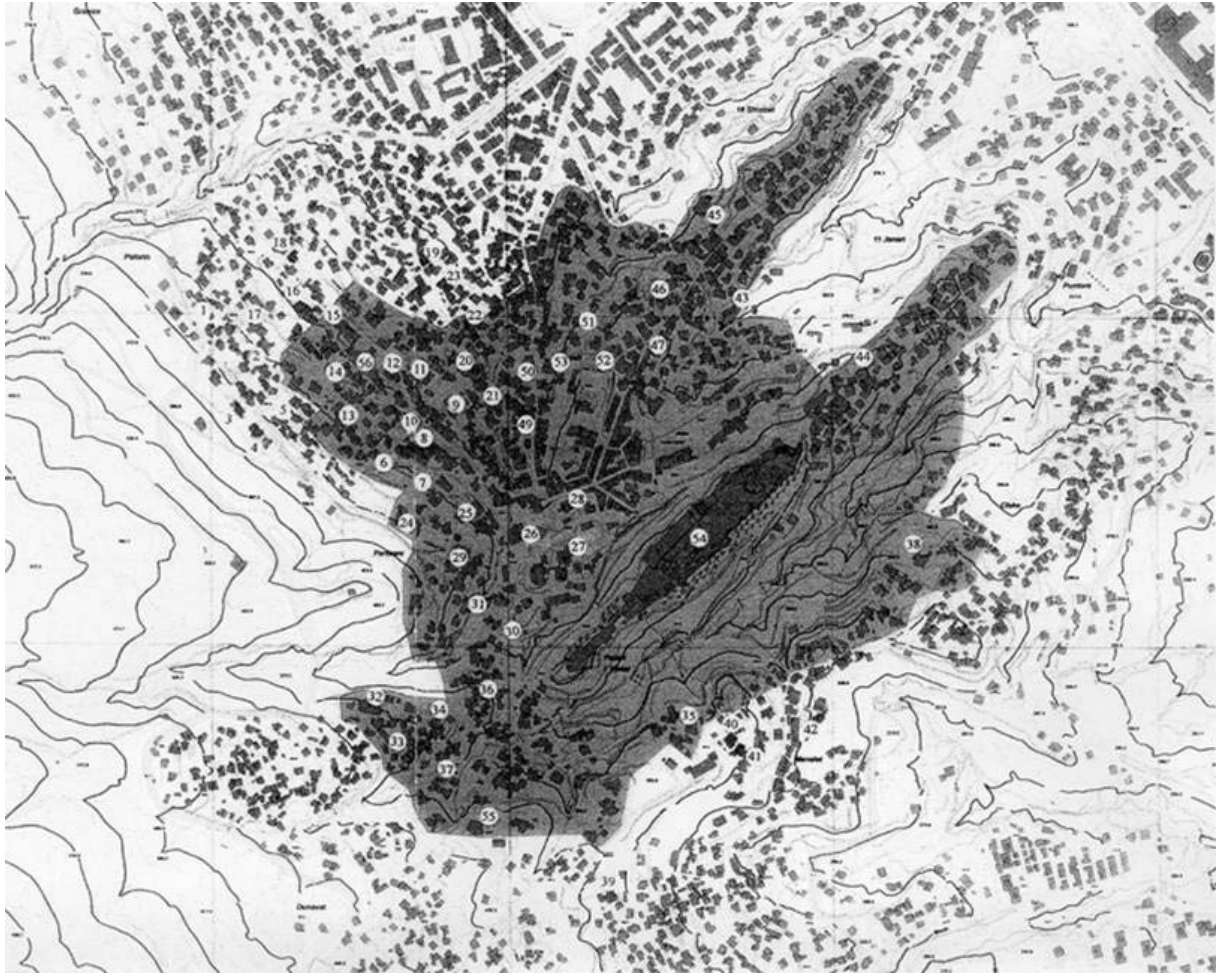
The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC-05/29.COM/8B,
2. Recalling the decision adopted by the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee at its 15<sup>th</sup> session (UNESCO, 1991) and the report of the rapporteur SC-91/CONF.001/2,
3. Inscribes the property on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii and iv*:

***Criterion iii:*** The old city of Gjirokastra is an exceptional testimony to a long-lasting, and almost disappeared society and life-style, influenced by the culture and tradition of Islam in the Ottoman period.

***Criterion iv:*** The historic town of Gjirokastra is a rare example of a well-preserved Ottoman town, built by farmers of large estates, around the 13<sup>th</sup>-century citadel. The architecture is characterized by the construction of a type of tower house (Turkish 'kule'), of which Gjirokastra represents a series of outstanding examples.

ICOMOS, April 2005



**Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property**



**View from Parolo quarter to the castle**



**Tekke Quarter**