

Albanian Cultural Profile

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Editors

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1. Introduction

The first part of this paper provides information on the most significant aspects of Albanian society and its geographical, historical and demographic features. The second part analyses the political and economical evolution of Albania and the Albanian communities from the point of view of their cultural, social and family life. Different aspects of the way of life of the Albanian population in their land of origin, as well as in its impact on one of the countries of migration, in this case Italy, will also be examined. The research is based on the specific bibliography and makes use of statistical data provided by different institutions and organisations, including the Centre for Geographic Studies at the Academy of Sciences in Tirana, the University of Tirana, INSTAT (Albanian National Institute of Statistics), various Ministries, and the Media and Documentation Centre of the European Union.

Thus the aim is to provide a synthesis of the situation of the country from the demographic, socio-cultural, geo-political and territorial standpoint that is as complete as possible. First a brief geographical profile of Albania will be given, providing information on the morphology, hydrography, climate and environment. Then to create a more complete picture a historical overview of the country will be provided with particular emphasis on the periods that have most affected the evolution of the Albanian nation.

2. Background

2.1. Political profile

Albania (*Republika and Shqipërisë*), also known as *Shqipëria*, which means literally 'Country of the Eagles', is a parliamentary republic. On the 28th November 1912 Albania declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire. On the 14th December 1955 it became part of the United Nations and in 1998, after a referendum, the new Constitution was established. From the administrative point of view Albania is subdivided into 12 prefectures (which in their turn are subdivided into 36 districts) and 351 communes.

The country capital is Tirana (853,400 inhabitants); other important cities are: Durazzo (114,000 inhabitants), Elbasan (100,000 inhabitants), Scutari (96,000 inhabitants), Valona (85,000 inhabitants).

The official language is Albanian and the currency is the lek.



The Albanian flag:
two-headed eagle, black on red background

2.2. Geographical position

Albania (*Republika and Shqipërisë*) lies in south-east Europe in the south-west of the Balkan peninsular. It shares a border with Montenegro to the north (for 287 km), with Kosovo and Macedonia to the north-east (151 km), with Greece (for 282 km) to the south and south-east, while to the west it looks onto the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, with a coastline extending for 472 km.

Albania covers a total area of 28,748 km², 1,350 of which are internal waters. By way of comparison, it is a little larger than Sicily (Italy) and slightly smaller than Maryland (USA).



Geografic position of Albania

To the North its territory is marked by Mount Zhihovës (*mali Zhihovës*: 2,174 m; 19° 43' long. E, 42° 39' lat. N); to the East by Mount Gorkpës (*mali Gorkpës*: 1584 m; 21° 03' long. E, 40°

40' lat. N); to the South by Mount Topçiu (mali Topçiu: 843 m; 20° 14' long. E, 39° 39' lat. N); to the West by the island of Saseno (Sazani: 19° 16' long. E, 40° 30' lat. N).

Physically Albania includes part of the extensive Balkan Dinaric system. It lies in the northern temperate zone, mid way between the Equator and the Arctic Polar Circle.

2.3. Natural features

Albania is characterised morphologically by great contrasts and fragmentation, ranging from sea level to Mount Korab, which at 2,751 m is the highest mountain peak in the country. The mean altitude is 708 m, which is twice the European mean and makes Albania markedly hilly and mountainous. 48% of its land area is situated at levels between 200 and 1,000 m, with 28.5% above 1.000 m. Its orographic system is made up of three main areas: the Albanian Alps, the mountainous central-eastern region and the southern mountainous region.

The Albanian Alps are the south-eastern continuation of the mountainous Bosnia-Montenegro system and extend 90 km in a SW-NE direction, from Lake Scutari (Shkodra) to the Metochia (Metohia) plain. The highest point is Mount Jezercës (2.694 m) and the average height is 2.000 m.

The mountainous central eastern region includes three great mountainous areas: the western, central and eastern and in between lie the valleys of the upper Mati and the upper Shkumbin, the valley of the Black Drin and the basin of Coriza (Korça); the Mirdita plateau lies in the more northerly section.

The mountainous southern region is made up of parallel NW-SE chains, characterised by rounded summits with a dense hydro-graphic network. The highest altitude is reached by Mount Tomori (2,417 m), the symbolic and sacred mountain of central-southern Albania.

Plains and low hills occupy barely a seventh of the Albanian land area and include a coastal belt extending about 175 km with a width that varies between 10 and 30 km. The cities of Alessio (Lezhë), Valona (Vlorë) and Elbasan mark the highest points. Most of these plains, which were once swampy, have been reclaimed for agricultural use.



Albania, physic map.



Starting on the top: Mountains of Korab, Jezerca, Tomor

2.3.1. Hydrography

Albania is a country with abundant waters including: 136 rivers and streams for a total length of 50 thousand km (1.7 km for every km² of land surface area); 10 main lakes with a total surface area of 1.100 km²; about 200 springs. There are also many artificial lakes, some of which are larger than the natural lakes. The annual water reserves of the country amount to 41.2 km³.

The main rivers, from north to south, are: the Boiana (Buna), the only outlet of the lake of Scutari (Shkodra); the Drin, which is divided into two branches, the White Drin that rises and flows mainly in Serbian territory, and the Black Drin, the only outlet of the lake of Ocrida (Ohri) in Macedonian territory that joins the White Drin in the basin of Kukës; the Mati; l'Ishmi; l'Erzeni; lo Shkumbini; the Semeni (Seman); the Devoll; the Osum; the Vojussa (Vjosa).

The most important lakes include: the lake of Scutari (Shkodra) shared between Albania and Montenegro, the largest Balkan lake, with a surface area of 370 km²; the lake of Ocrida (Ohri) of 367 km², shared between Albania and Macedonia; the lake of Prespa of 285 km² shared between Macedonia, Greece and Albania; lake Mala Prespa (Prespa and Vogël) the largest part of which lies in Greek territory; the lake of Butrinto, brackish and linked to the sea by the 4 km long canal of Vivari,; the 42 km² lagoon of Karavasta, which is also linked to the sea by a system of canals and is considered the most important Albanian wetland area due to its particular ecological features.



Vojussa river and Boiana delta in Adriatic Sea

2.3.2. The coastline



Sazeno Island in Ionio Sea
and Velipoja Beach in Adriatic Sea

The Albanian coastline extends along the western edge of the country. It is divided into the Adriatic coastline, from the mouth of the river Boiana (Buna) as far as cape Gjuhës, and the Ionian coastline, extending from cape Gjuhës as far as cape Stillos on the strait of Corfù on the border with Greece.

The Adriatic coastline is characterised by a low sandy coast with numerous lagoons and sandy deposits (the -100 m isobath is 50 km from the coast). Along this section, going from north to south, there are a series of gulfs and bays such as the gulf of the Drin, the bay of Lazlit, the bay of Durazzo (Durrës), the gulf of Karavasta and finally the bay of Valona (Vlora) at the mouth of which lies the island of Saseno (Sazan).

The Ionian section is high and rugged with cliffs overlooking the sea. The rocky seabed is much deeper than that of the Adriatic: the -50 m isobath is very close to the land mass and the depth increases steeply a mile away. In the stretch between Cape Gjuhës and Cape Qefalit the coast is straight, interrupted only by small gulfs; the bay of Saranda then opens out and finally the

bay of Butrinto. The Ionian coast, in particular the "Riviera of Flowers" between Valona and Saranda, provides some of the best views in the country.

2.4. Climate, environment and flora

Albania has a large number of climatic regions for its surface area. The coast plains have a typically Mediterranean climate, with hot dry summers and mild winters, while the mountainous regions have a continental Mediterranean climate characterised by cold humid winters.

Albania enjoys a high percentage of sunny days (80%) and has abundant rain (an annual average of 1.430 mm), which is irregular geographically and throughout the year, even though about 40% of the rainfall occurs in the winter months.

During the winter the region is affected by the Icelandic cyclone with heavy rainfall, while the summer is very dry due to the anticyclone of the Azores. The variety of landscape and flora of Albania is closely related to the complexity of these systems.

In Albania there are 3,221 different species of plants divided in two groups: the Mediterranean *macchia* (35% of plants), and the northern Balkan central European flora type with broadleaf trees and conifers (65%). Albania also has a wealth of endemic plant species (1.1% of the overall flora), and sub-endemic (5%).

The eagle, wolf and wild boar are the main types of fauna found in the internal areas.

Albania has six national forests, 24 nature reserves and 2000 natural monuments. However, only 2% of the Albanian territory is protected. There are nine national parks, all recently established. The Laguna of Karavasta in the Divjake National Park is particularly important as it is the most westerly nesting point for the Dalmatian pelican, a species under threat of extinction. All the parks are threatened by human activity such as hunting, while deforestation and environmental pollution are a serious problem for the country.

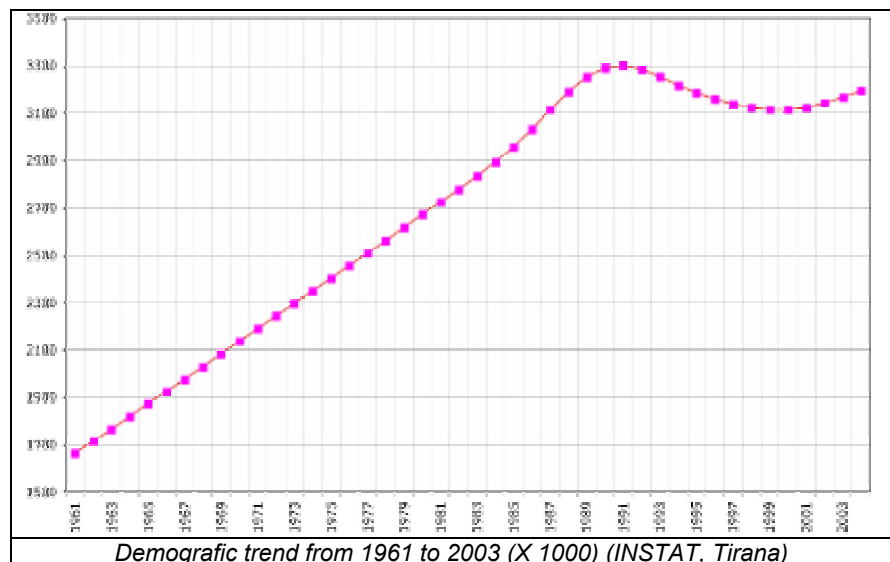
The cultivable land, mainly used for pasture, makes up 25.5% of the total surface area of the country. The intense deforestation, the uncontrolled pasturing of cattle and frequent flooding have considerably increased the process of soil erosion.

2.5. Demography and ethnic structure of the population

2.5.1. Demography

Much of the Albanian population is ethnically extremely homogeneous: in 98% of cases the population is of Albanian extraction, and descends from the Illyrians, an Indo-European population that once lived in the area. This theory has also been confirmed by the most recent studies in Albania and in Europe by anthropologists, geneticists and archaeologists on individuals with blood ties to Albanian descendents.

In 2004 the Albanian population was 3,127,263 individuals of whom 1,406,443 were concentrated in cities and 1,720.820 distributed in rural areas^[1]. After the collapse of the Communist regime, since 1992 there has been a decline in population due to migrations mainly to Greece and Italy, but also to other European countries. In 1993 the population decreased by almost 120 thousand units compared to 1990, because of migrations affecting about 300 thousand Albanians. In 1995 the population showed signs of increasing, despite emigration in the period estimated at around 100 thousand units.



^[1] INSTAT – Istituti i Statistikes, *Shqipëria ne Shifra – Albania in Figures*, Tirane , 2004. the figures are also available on the website of the Albanian Institute of Statistics www.instat.gov.al

The growth rate of the population in the five year period between 2000-2005 went from 0.26% in 2000 to 1.06% in 2002, and decreased to 0.51% in 2004 and 0.52 in 2005^[2]. According to the census of 1989 the population in the cities accounted for 35.8%. After the 1990s the free and uncontrolled movement of the population within Albania has changed the ratio between the urban and rural populations. In 2003 the urban population reached 43%, while the rural population fell to 57%².

The Albanian population is relatively young, and according to an estimate of 2006, 24.8% is less than 15 years old, 66.3% is between 15 and 64 years and only 8.9% is aged over 64 years^[3].

Besides the Albanians who live in Albania, about 2,700,000 Albanians live in Kosovo under the protection of NATO and the UNO; about 700,000 live in Macedonia and a further 500,000 live in Montenegro, in Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Slovenia, without taking into account the migrants to Italy (about 200,000), Turkey (about 7,000,000), the United States of America (about 500,000), and many other countries.

2.5.2. Ethnic structure of the population

The ethnic composition of the Albanian population is fairly homogeneous. About 98% of the inhabitants of Albania are of Albanian extraction, descending from the Illyrians, an Indo-European population whose presence in the area as far back as the end of the third millennium BC has been proved. However, the statistics and estimates regarding the ethnic structure of the Albanian population vary as to their origin and nature, and are nearly always inhomogeneous and controversial due to their political overtones. The question relating to the true numbers of the Greek minority in Albania is particularly debatable; it is concentrated in the extreme south of the country in the predominantly Greek-speaking region of *Voiros Ipiros* (Northern Epirus) and is seeking independence. The figures vary from a minimum of 59 thousand in 1989 according to the Albanian Statistical Yearbook for 1991 (reflecting the official position of Tirana), to a maximum of 400 thousand claimed by the more radical wing of the Greek nationalists.

A CIA report of 1995^[4] on minorities in Albania estimated that Greek-speakers of *Voiros Ipiros* numbered 110 thousand (about 3 % of the population), which is in marked contrast with the official data given in the Statistical Year Book for 1991. Moreover a study by J. Pettifer^[5] on the ethnic minorities in Albania shows a rather complex scenario:

- a)** 80 thousand Walachians according to Pettifer (only 4,249 according to the official estimates for 1995), mainly transhumant shepherds living mainly in the areas surrounding the urban centres of Valona (Vlorë) and Koriza (Korçë), near the lake of Prespa on the border with Macedonia and Greece;
- b)** 50 thousand Rom gypsies according to Pettifer (there are no official numbers, as they have never been recorded).
- c)** 15 thousand Gorans and Bulgars according to Pettifer (4.878 according to the Statistical Yearbook for 1991 where they are considered as Macedonian minorities). These are ethnic groups with a Slav language and culture similar to that of the Macedonians and Bulgarians living in the areas bordering on Macedonia.
- d)** About 2 thousand Serbs and Montenegrins according to Pettifer. A small Montenegrin minority is officially recognised but there are no official estimates; they are mainly concentrated in the region of Scutari (Shkodër).
- e)** A small number of Armenians (about 800, according to Pettifer), who arrived in Albania during the First World War following the genocides carried out by the Turks in Anatolia and who live mainly in Tirana (Tiranë) and Valona (Vlorë).

^[2] CIA World Fact Book.

^[3] <http://www.indexmundi.com/it/albania/>

^[4] See: Albanian Country Report for 1995 on the official website of the CIA subsection Albania.

www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/country-frame.html

^[5] Vicker M. and Pettifer J. , Albania. Dall'anarchia a un'identità balcanica, Trieste, Asterios Editore, 1997.

2.6. Brief history

2.6.1. The origins

The Albanian population is one of the most ancient of the Balkan Peninsular and their territory has been inhabited since prehistory, as has been proved by various archaeological remains. It is thought that the progenitors of the Albanians were the Illyrians, an autochthonic population who occupied the area that extends from the Danube to the Balkans. Historians argue that the Illyrians settled in the Balkan peninsular towards the end of the third millennium and the beginning of the second.

Strabo described all the Illyrian tribes and named the

Albanet, while in the II century AD the

geographer Ptolemy

describes the presence of

an Illyrian tribe and their

city *Albanopolis* to the

east of *Dyrrachium* -

Durazzo (Durrës) near the

present-day Croia (Kruja). Later this tribe was to give their

name to the whole Albanian people. After the IV - II centuries

BC the Illyrian states were created against which Rome, with

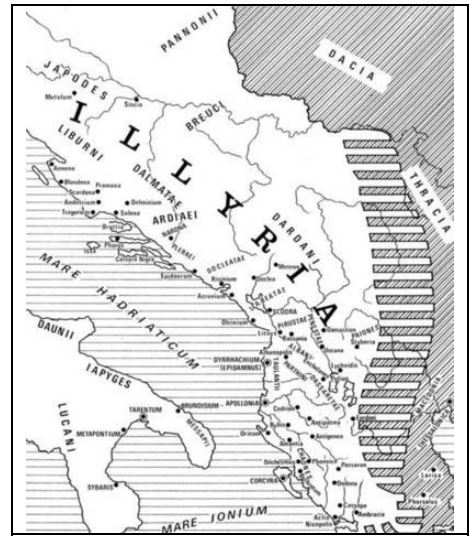
the aim of extending its control over the Adriatic, fought the

Illyrian-Roman wars. They start in 229 BC and ended in 167

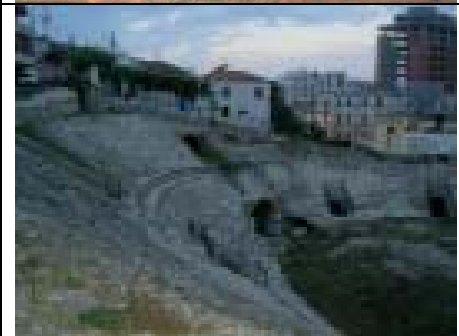
BC with the victory of Rome; the Illyrian people were reduced

to slavery and their territory broken up into small

administrative units.



Lands of Illyrician tribes in ancient times



Starting from the top:
scene representing Illyrian battles;
remains of the Durazzo amphitheatre;
ruins of the ancient cities of Apollonia
and Butrinto.

2.6.2. The fall of Rome and the barbarian invasions

After the division of the Roman Empire in 395 AD, the Albanian territories were assigned to the Empire of the East, which however exercised nominal authority limited to the coastal areas, while the interior was invaded by the Goths, Ungars, Avari and Slavs (IV and V centuries AD). In 1040 the emperor Vassily II managed to bring back Byzantine domination over the country. Only the Illyrians of the south resisted against the barbarian invasions, and reappeared later with the name of *Albanoi*.

In the X and XI centuries the slave-based social system started to decline, and in its place appeared the characteristic features of feudalism: the *arbëreshë* nobles separated from Byzantium and formed the principality of Arberia, the first feudal Albanian state in history. In subsequent centuries the country, where the name "Albanian" is recorded as early as the XI century to designate the descendants of the Illyrians, was the theatre of intense rivalry for its possession. The Bulgarians included it in their state in 1230; in 1272 the Angevins settled in Durazzo (Durrës) which they then ceded to the Venetians in 1363; at the beginning of the XV century the Venetians also annexed Scutari (Shkoder) and Valona (Vlora); then came the Swabians and so on. Local *signorie* were created as at Scutari where the autochthonic dynasty founded by Balsha reigned from 1366 to 1421, until the arrival of the Turkish invaders.

2.6.3. Turkish domination

For a long time Albania was involved in resisting the Turkish invaders against whom the local princes, united under the leadership of Prince Giorgio Castriota (Gjergj Kastrioti), known as Skanderbeg (Skernderbej) (1405-1468), fought and successfully led the insurrection of the Albanian people.

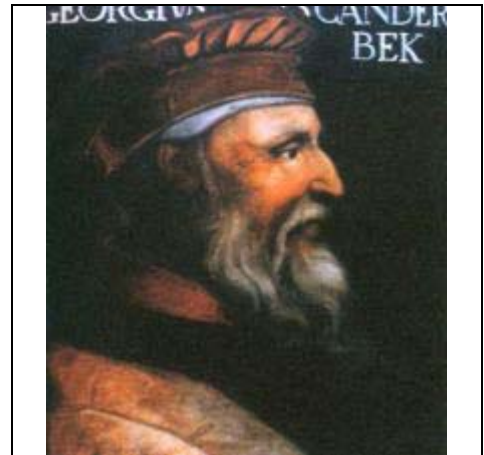
In the spring of 1444 the constituent “League of Albanian peoples” met at Alessio (Lezhe) and the main lords also adhered to it. Skanderbeg was proclaimed head of this League and the process of forming a single state started. The banner of the Castrista (Kastrioti) family with the black two-headed eagle on a red background was adopted as the Albanian national flag. Skanderbeg proved to be a great political leader (he managed to contain feudal disintegration and strengthen the position of Albania in international agreements) as well as able military strategist.

After the death of Skanderbeg, the Albanians resisted for a further 11 years before being conquered by the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman occupation brought about the economic ruin of the country and the decline of the autochthonic culture; cities, works of art and architecture were destroyed and the much of the population was converted to Islam.

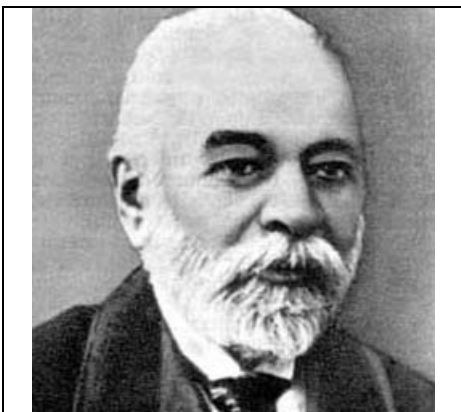
Numerous revolts by the Albanians against the Turkish domination followed, but never managed to defeat it. In the meantime the formation of a new league was being prepared; a few years later, after Turkey was weakened by Russia (1877–78) the league was to lay the foundations for a new Albanian state, starting the modern history of this country.

After the Treaty of Santo Stefano (3 March 1878), in which an agreement between Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro deprived Albania of some of its territories, the movement for Albanian independence took on a more national character not only in the war against Turkey but also against the great powers; at the Congress of Berlin in 13 July 1878 they had decided on the dismemberment of Albania in favour of the victorious Balkan states.

In 1910 the Albanian revolutionary forces led by a General Committee of Insurrection began the revolt against the Turks which started in Kosovo and extended to the whole of Albania. On 28 November 1912, during the first Balkan war, Ismail Kemal Bey (Ismail Qemal Bej) proclaimed independence. The European powers recognised its independence at the Ambassadors Conference (London, December 1912) but in 1913, the same powers, in assigning borders to Albania, left out a number of Albanian areas such as Kosovo and Cameria, whose population was numerically equal to that within the frontiers.



Starting from the top: portrait of Scanderbeg; his seal representing the two-heads eagle; ruins castle of the Kruja, capital city in the Scandenberg principdom.



Ismail Kemal Bey and the moment of the Independence declaration

The actions and initiatives of the government of Ismail Kemal Bey (Ismail Qemal Bej) showed however that the Albanian people were able to govern themselves and live as an autonomous nation, managing to save Albania from the further dismemberment that had already been prepared by the great powers.

2.6.4 Between the First and the Second World War

The outbreak of the First World War upset the fragile political balance of Albania. The northern region of the country was occupied by the Austro-Hungarians; a part of the central area by Serbia and Montenegro and a part of the south by Greece, Italy and France who attempted its partition. In June 1917, Albania became a protectorate of Italy, but in 1920 at the end of the conflict regained its independence.

Continual internal crises split the country until in 1924 the revolution against the reactionary landowners broke out, and led to the first progressive democratic government in the Balkans under F. S. Noli.

Very soon, however, there was a counter-revolution led by Ahmet Zogu with the aid of the Yugoslav army and the democratic government was overthrown. In 1925 Ahmet Zogu appointed himself President of the “Albanian Republic” and in 1928 proclaimed himself king (with dictatorial powers).

On 7 April of 1939 the troops of Mussolini occupied Albania, Re Zogu was dethroned and Vittorio Emanuele III took on the title of King of Albania. The Albanian people heroically opposed this occupation. Meanwhile underground groups of partisans and Socialist intellectuals were being formed and on 8 November 1941 founded the Albanian Communist party under the leadership of Enver Hoxha.

Despite the terror spread by the occupiers, the Albanian people proclaimed their liberation on 29 November 1944 and today this anniversary is celebrated as a national festival. On the 11 February 1945 Hoxha formed a National Front government.

2.6.5 The People’s Republic of Albania



Enver Hoxha and Stalin

On 11 January 1946, the democratically elected Constituent Assembly proclaimed Albania a “People’s Republic”; President Hoxha, leader of the Labour Party established special relations with the nations of the Communist bloc with an alternation of alliances and break-ups that were at times dramatic. He first created a customs and monetary union with Yugoslavia that continued until 1948, when the break-up between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union forced Albania to establish exclusive relations with the USSR. Following the process of de-Stalinization that started in the USSR in 1956, the relations between the two states

cooled off and after the definitive break-up in 1961 Albania allied itself to the People’s Republic of China. In 1968, the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet troops led Albania to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact. In 1977-78 Albania, which in the meantime had completely isolated itself from Europe also distanced itself from China.

Hoxha led the renewal of the country with an iron fist, created a constitution with strong Stalinist features, banned private propriety and the possibility of professing a faith; he got rid of political opponents without any scruples, and built up the *Segurimi*, the fearsome state police with their task of espionage.



Starting from the top: F.S.Noli; Albanian King Zog I; ceremony of the coronation of Vittorio Emanuele III as Albanian King



Enver Hoxha dictator

After the death of Hoxha in 1985, signs of widespread intolerance began to appear against the “dictatorship of the proletariat”. His successor, Ramiz Alia, very cautiously started to open up the country and establish economic and political links with the west. Under the pressure of bloody rebellions he conceded a number of reforms which were however hindered by the followers of Hoxha, who still enjoyed wide support in the country areas. In the elections of 1991 they gained a large parliamentary majority and thus made any democratization of the regime uncertain and difficult.

2.6.6 Contemporary Albania

Following the elections of March 1992, won by the Democratic Party, Sali Berisha became President of the Republic and appointed Aleksander Meksi head of a coalition government. Among the significant episodes of the Berisha presidency is the attempt at constitutional reform but its strong presidential and nationalist bias was blocked by a referendum.

During the elections of May 1996, won by the Democratic Party, the protests against irregularities and electoral fraud were harshly repressed by the police. The protests reached a climax in the following year, triggered off by the collapse of “pyramidal” financial organisations that affected a large part of the Albanian population, and very soon resembled a civil war. At the end of January 1998, the government proclaimed a state of emergency until the revolt forced the Prime Minister Meksi to resign. A government of national reconciliation presided over by the socialist Bashkim Fino was formed.

On 29 June 1998 the socialist party won the political elections

and the Socialist Rexhep Mejdani became President of the Republic in place of Sali Berisha while Fatos Nano was appointed Prime Minister. In September 1998, following the assassination of Azem Hajdari, a popular Democratic leader and right hand of Berisha, violent clashes between the police and the supporters of the Democratic Party broke out.

In October 1998, Pandeli Majko, also of the Socialist Party, succeeded Fatos Nano. Under his government Albania had to confront the humanitarian emergency of the refugees from Kosovo, who arrived in Albania en masse to escape the genocide and ethnic cleansing by the Serbs during the war in Kosovo (Kosovë) (1999-2000).

In the last elections, held in 2004, the Democratic Party won the elections and Sali Berisha became Prime Minister.

2.6 The economy

The Albanian economy is based on agriculture, a sector in which 55% of the active population is engaged. The main crops are maize, rice, wheat, potatoes, barley and oats. Olives, cotton, sugar beet and tobacco are also relatively important economically, as well as many types of fruit. The scarcity of cultivable land, largely limited to the coastal belt and the plain of Corizza (Korce), has given rise to investments aimed at extending the cultivated land areas and to improving productivity.



Starting from the top: Sali Berisha, leader of the Democratic Party and current premier; Fatos Nano, leader of Socialist party and ex premier



*Albanian President:
Alfred Moisiu*

The mountainous areas of the interior are largely occupied by broadleaf woods (oak, Turkey oak, elm, ash) but also beech and conifers. They are an important source of timber though they are still not marketed on any great scale abroad. On the other hand coal is exported to a greater extent.

The rearing of livestock, in particular sheep, but also cattle, horses and poultry, is carried out by semi nomadic shepherds and mountain dwellers in the north still using traditional techniques.

There are important mineral resources in relationship to the size of the country; these are oil, coal, chromium, copper, iron and nickel.

There is little industry and the manufacturing sector is almost entirely made up of plants for the transformation of agricultural products (cheese-making, oil mills, and bread factories) and minerals.

Because of the mainly mountainous nature of the land, the country does not have an efficient transport network of roads and railways. This explains the marked isolation of areas and populations of in the interior of Albania. Even today many means of internal communication are along mule track that limit internal traffic considerably.

In the post war period Albania started a painstaking process of modernization to increase the exploitation of mineral resources and agricultural activity, but until recently, the country has followed a policy of almost total closure to exchanges with foreign countries. Only at the beginning of the 1980s did it start to establish economic relations with other countries of the Balkan area (in particular with Yugoslavia and Greece), as well as with other West and East European countries, and these have gradually increased.

In 1992, the government, elected democratically, launched an ambitious programme of reforms to halt the decline of the economy and make the difficult transition towards a market economy. The economy grew considerably until 1997 when there was a collapse of the social, economic and financial situation with a sharp rise in inflation to 50%. However, in 1998 Albania recovered from the crisis and underwent an intensive regime of macroeconomic restructuring. This painstaking economic conquest, continues to be sustained by the remittances of emigrants, since about 20% of the workforce is active in foreign countries, especially in Italy and Greece.

In recent years the Gross Domestic Product has increased progressively: from 5,6 billion dollars in 1999 it rose to 17,46 billion dollars in 2004, with a rate of increase varying from 8% recorded in 1999 to 5.6% in 2004. Despite this growth, a quarter of the population lives below the poverty line. The official unemployment rate is estimated at 14.3%, but it could be considerably higher.

3. Culture

The traditional Albanian culture is autochthonic, and descends directly from the culture of the ancient Illyrian tribes but has been subject to many external influences: first that of the Greeks,



Starting from the top: Korca textile industry; Elbasan steel mill; Ballsh oil industry; Durazzo commercial port.

who founded several colonies in Albania, such as those of Apollonia and Durazzo, then the great process of Romanization under the Roman Empire and Byzantium. The process of Islamization by the Turks, during the domination of the Ottoman Empire has also left lasting traces. Neither should the influence of the Slav peoples be overlooked. However, despite undergoing all these foreign influences, the Albanian people have succeeded in preserving their own cultural identity.

Traditional Albanian culture separates into two main ethnic groups *Gegh* and *Tosk* which have existed and gradually become more consolidated culturally since the Late Middle Ages. Even today several traditions with roots in the ancient history of these groups survive in the family and social life of the rural populations. Many traditions of a spiritual nature are preserved in the minds of the people and are still evident today in different regions, reflected in their linguistic and musical folklore. The legendary and historical epic is particularly popular.

The traditional Albanian culture shows that the people have never harboured aggressive attitudes towards “the other” who is generally seen not as an enemy or adversary, but simply as something different. The heroes of the ballads and epic songs fall in love with the “beautiful Jevrenina” (Jewish name) with the “*Llatinka bardhe*” (Roman woman), with the daughter of Cezar (from *Kajzer* = king, a term used for foreign kings). These heroes drink chalices of wine like the Christians, then pray 5 times a day like the devout Moslems.

“The other” is always seen as an ally (as in the case of the Balkan battles on the plains of Kosovo against the Turks), but also when seen as enemy and adversary (as in the complicated relationship with the Slavs), he is not considered inferior either in strength, courage or wealth. This concept of “the other” explains the value of solidarity that has marked the Albanian people since ancient times and made it possible, for example, for Albanians, whether Christian or Moslems, to coexist peacefully with the Jewish communities. Anti-Semitism is rare among Albanians. In many historical circumstances, for example during the Balkan war and during the last World War, the Albanian people showed their tolerance and solidarity towards Jews and Italians. In recent years, in 1999, the solidarity of the Albanian people was again demonstrated when about a million Albanians from Kosovo poured into the poor northern areas of Albania to escape the Serbian massacres. An increase of about 1/3 of the population, immediately after the economic crisis that Albania suffered in 1997-1998 could have brought the country to its knees, but the solidarity of the population was able to confront this serious emergency.

3.1. Language and communication

The official language of Albania, spoken by 99% of the population is Albanian; only 1% of the rural population in the extreme south speaks Greek, a minority, in the east of the country, speaks Macedonian and another minority in the north-west speaks Croatian.

The Albanian language, according to scholars, probably evolved from one of the ancient Illyrian dialects, though some linguists argue that the Albanian language is derived from Thracian, or from *Dacio-Misio*. It has retained numerous features of the ancient Indo-European type, which also recur in other Indo-European languages but has also developed elements characteristic of the Balkan languages, as well as peculiar features.



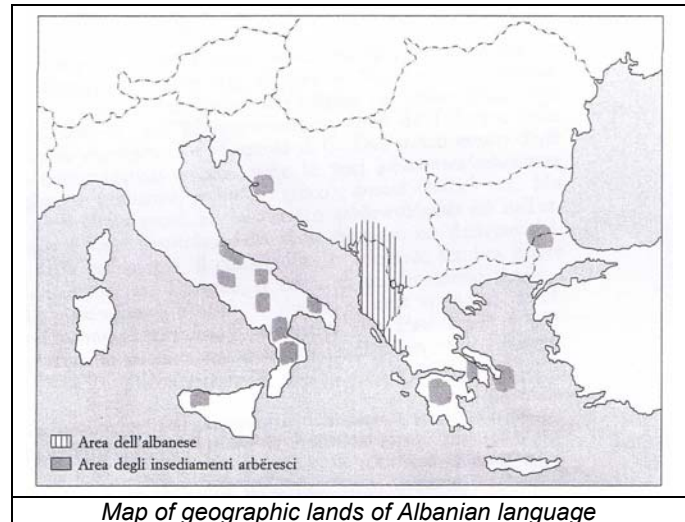
Giovanni Buzuku, “Missale”

Albanian is subdivided into two main dialects, traditionally separated by the river Shkumbin of central Albania, the *ghego* spoken to the north of this river and the *tosco* to the south. This dialectal division probably took place during the gradual transition from the “mother tongue” to the Albanian that took place during the V-VI centuries AD; the two dialects show phonetic and lexical differences that make them only partly reciprocally comprehensible and in their pure and vernacular

forms not at all. The Elbasan dialect acts as pivot between the two main dialects and in the 1920s was proposed as common Albanian for this reason.

Despite being one of the most ancient of the Balkan languages, the written form of Albanian came relatively late, like Rumanian and Lithuanian. The first book printed in Albanian is “*Il Missale*” (1555) by Giovanni Buzuku, written in *ghego* (the northern dialect), while “Christian Doctrine” (1552) of Matranga was written in the dialect of the *arbëresci* of Italy which has features of the *tosco* dialect (southern).

Albanian is currently spoken in Albania, in the former Yugoslavia (Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro), in Greece (to the south of the borders with Albania, in the area known as Çamëria). It is also spoken by emigrants in Turkey, the United States of America, Canada, France, Syria, Egypt, Australia and so on. In northern Albania and among the Albanians of Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia the *ghego* dialect is spoken, while in southern Albania the *tosco* dialect is spoken from which *Arbëreshë* is also derived. This is an archaic Albanian spoken in many communities of *arvanites* in the south of Greece, the Peloponnesus and a number of islands of the Aegean, as well as in numerous villages of the *arbëresci* of southern Italy and Sicily.



After the end of the Second World War attempts were made to unify the Albanian dialects in a common language called “standard or literary Albanian”. In 1972, in a congress on language, the rules of the language were fixed, and today are universally accepted and contained in two books: “*Drejtshkrimi i gjuhës shqipe*” (1976) and “*Fjalori drejtshkrimor i gjuhës shqipe*” (1977).

Many foreign words recur in the Albanian language, especially Turkish, but also Italian, Greek and French, though there is a corresponding Albanian word in many cases.

When one is wishing a person who is eating a good meal the reply is often “*bujrum*”; this is a Turkish word meaning ‘welcome’ but it is now only used as an invitation to join in the meal that is being eaten.

When someone is asked why they have acted in a particular way the reply is often “*Tellos Spandos*” which in Greek means “come what may” (or “I don’t care”) while the Italian “*Ciao*” is now a word in everyday use (not only among young people) when two people say hello or goodbye. The expression “*menefregist*” (from Italian ‘*me ne frego*’ ‘I don’t care’) is used to denote a person who does not commit himself or takes nothing seriously. There are not many loanwords from French, though all the parts of an automobile, including the driver, are of French derivation. Among Albanians, of every generation and ethnic and social group, Italian is the best known language, after the mother tongue, due mainly to Italian television programmes that reach Albania via satellite.

In verbal communication, when the conversation is superficial, there is often no eye contact between those who are talking to each other. However, when the conversation is important, eye contact with the interlocutor is used to show that one’s whole attention is being used. When meeting a person for the first time Albanians pass very quickly from the polite to the familiar form of address. This is not seen as a lack of respect, but rather as a sign of friendship.

As regards non-verbal communication, in Albania, shaking hands is the most widespread form of communication when meeting. It is also very common to kiss cheeks (2 or 4 times) between women but also between men, a gesture that is however limited to only touching each other’s cheeks.

3.2. Religions, myths and beliefs

3.2.1. Traditional myths and beliefs



The top of the Tomor mountain, in the past considered Holy and where the Sun cult was venerated. This place is now considered a holy place for Bektashi religion.

An interesting aspect of Albanian popular culture are the myths, superstitions and religious beliefs that are widespread in the population. One of the most ancient myths that was common in the agricultural and pastoral world and preserved until the beginning of the XX century was the cult of the sun; the sun was venerated on the “summits of the sun” (i.e. the summits of the highest mountains) and pilgrimages were made and great fires lit while waiting for the dawn, which was believed to increase the power of the sun.

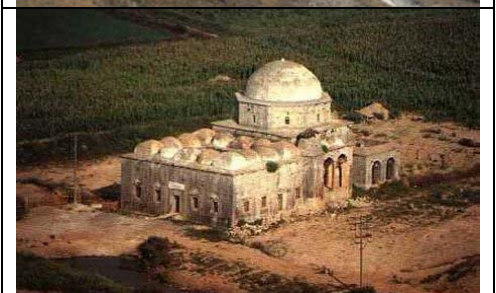
The cult of the serpent was also very common; the boa was particularly venerated and believed to act as protector of the family, and for this reason each family kept one of their own. It is thought that these cults derive directly from Illyrian beliefs, since both the cult of the sun and the cult of the serpent have been ascertained among the Dalmatian peoples in particular.

In the legendary epics there are other mythological figures who protect man; they include the *Ora* and the *Shtojzavalle* or *Zana* (types of fairies). The *Ora* could protect individuals, families, but also the whole clan; the *Zana* or *Shtojzavalle* were beautiful, courageous and warlike women who were believed to live inside caves in the woods of mountains and rest on the plateaux, near rivers or on mountain summits. Scholars argue that *Zana* can be linked to an Illyrian divinity of the woods and rivers, and later integrated into the Roman cult of Diana, a very common cult in the Illyria of the pagan Roman period.

The Dragon, described as a great serpent with several heads that spewed flames, was a supernatural being with extraordinary powers. His main deed was to liberate the rivers occupied by *Kucedra* (Hydra), a mythological being who bore the malignant forces of nature.

3.2.2. Contemporary religions

For centuries two religions have coexisted peacefully in Albania; Islam with its Sunnite and *Bektashi* confessions, and Orthodox and Catholic Christianity. Mutual tolerance has always characterised the Albanian religious scenario: in pre-Communist Albania conversions and mixed marriages were very common, and these practices returned after religious liberty had been regained after the fall of Communism. In this connection it might be pointed out that while marriage between Orthodox and Catholic Christians and between Orthodox and Moslems is frequent, between Catholics and Moslems it is rather rare.



Albanian religious leaders; Catholic Church of Our Lady in Scutari; Orthodox Church of Holy Trinity in Berat; Mosque titled “of lead” in Scutari

Lack of zeal might be considered a feature of Albanian religious feeling; this explains the ease with which, after the XV century, a large part of the population could adopt the belief of the Ottoman invader out of political and economic opportunism or simply for a quiet life. Decades of repression during the Communist regime, when people were forced to profess their religion in secret and in the home, have weakened the feeling for religion; even today, especially in the towns, it is not embraced with any particular zeal and appears to be characterized by tolerance that verges on indifference.

Though Albania is a country with a large Moslem majority, the rigid precepts of Islam seem not to be observed in a very strict form. Alcohol is widely consumed, particularly beer and *raki* (the local aquavit); the clothes worn by young Albanians would not be approved of in an observant country; hardly any women wear the *chador*; the prayers of the *muezzin* only last a few seconds to general indifference.

The early religious fragmentation of the Albanian nation, converted to Christianity by Saint Paul, dates back to the schism of the East in 1054 that divided the Albanian territory into two parts; the river Shkumbin separated the Catholic north from an Orthodox south. Later there came the forced introduction of Islam by the Ottomans in the XV century, which transformed Albania into a country with a Moslem majority, confining the Catholics and Orthodox to the northern and southern margins. In Albania Islam is not unified: alongside the *Sunnite* majority there is a *Bektashi* minority, a heterodox sect of Islam that has its roots in *sufi* mysticism and is characterized by its tolerance of Christianity.

In Albania religion does not represent a dangerous element of division nor does it adopt fundamentalism or integralist views since the Albanian religious mosaic is superimposed onto an ethnically homogeneous sub-stratum.

On average 35% of the Albanian population declares itself to be non-religious or atheist. The religious adherence of the remaining 65% is distributed thus: 70% Moslems (including the *Bektashi*); 30 % Christians (Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant).

In Albania today, besides the traditional faiths, there are about 120 religious groups of various origin and nature; after 1991 they arrived en masse to carry out conversions. The *Baha'i* sect, with over 5,000 adherents, is one of the largest of these groups; besides these there are the Jehovah Witnesses, Baptists, Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists, to name only the largest groups.

□

3.3. Traditional culture

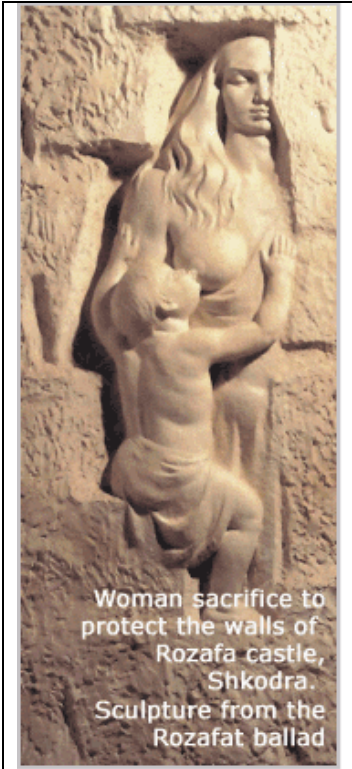
3.3.1. Albanian legends and epics

The *cikli i kreshnikeve* ('Cycle of Heroes') can be considered the first example of Albanian literature, handed down orally in song form. Scholars have been able to reconstruct its development so as to create the complete epic, on the lines of ancient poems like the Homeric poems. The mythological heroes of Albanian epic lie dead on the field of battle for a hundred years and when they awake they say "I dropped off to sleep". When *Muji* (main hero of this epic alongside his brother *Halil* and son *Omer*) thinks, he says "he sees the grass grow".

The great age of the Albanian epic is proved by features of the mythological figures of the northern cycle: for example their matriarchal nature. The Albanian epic heroes are sons of *Ajkuna*,



New Mosque in Scutari;
new Orthodox Cathedral in Coritza;
Catholic Archbishop' palace in Scutari.



Woman sacrifice to protect the walls of Rozafa castle, Shkodra. Sculpture from the Rozafat ballad

the main and authoritarian figure of the mother and the grandmother, to whom they are linked by being descended through the female line.

The Albanian heroic cycle preserves a mixture of forms of ancient and medieval European epics, with the former clearly predominating; the ancient Illyrian origins blend with elements linked to the period of Romanization, to the Slav invasions and the Turkish domination.

From the historical standpoint the Albanian epic reflects the conflict of the autochthonic population with the Slav population that invaded the Balkans; but the Albanian epic did not arise after the first contact with the Slavs, since the listener is told that things were different *"kur kem' pas' bese me kraji"* ('when we were at peace with the Slavs'). Some epic songs speak of danger from the sea, probably alluding to danger from the Romans; others speak of the great black giant that came out of the sea, which have been identified with the Arab and Saracen pirates that devastated the Adriatic and Ionian coasts; others speak about another giant called *"Katallani"*, which can be linked with



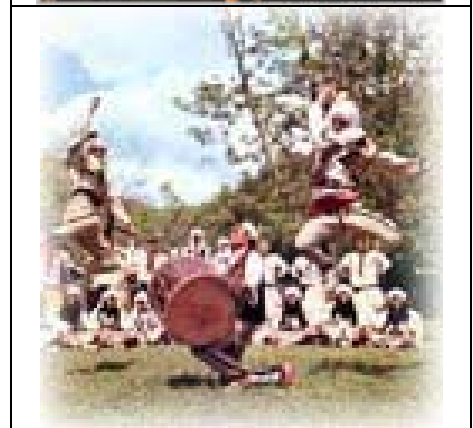
"Muji and maids" painted by Gazmend Leka

the invasions of the Catalan armies in the Kingdom of Naples.

3.3.2. Folk music

Folk music plays an important part in traditional Albanian culture, and is very much alive today. Albanian music has very ancient origins and has only been handed down from father to son orally. The most important musical genre is the *kenge te lehta* (soft songs). The traditional songs (called *popullore*) are usually sung by the old people, with the famous hat of Albanian tradition. The *vallore* songs which are sung and played during elaborate wedding ceremonies are very important. The wealth of Albanian folk musical is reflected in the different musical forms, and include those for solo voice and for several voices. The River Shkumbin that separates the *Geg* (north) and *Tosk* (south) ethnic groups also acts as a natural boundary between two types of folk music. To the north of this river we find the mono-phonic music accompanied by specific musical instruments of this area such as the single chord lute and the two-chorded *cifteli*. To the south of the river polyphonic songs are more common; they are sung without musical accompaniment or with instruments such as the double flute or the bagpipe.

Besides this type of music, which has developed in the villages and rural areas since the end of the XIX century there is also the traditional folk music of the towns that uses important instruments such as the clarinet, violin and accordion, as well as local instruments such as the lute, flute and tambourine.



South dance and North dance in Albania

3.3.3. Traditional costumes



Lord Byron dressing
in Albanian costume

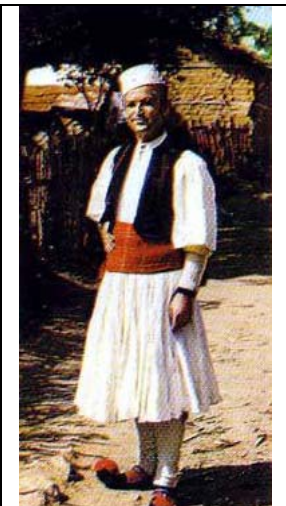
The typical traditional Albanian costumes for men are; the costume with the “*fustanella*” (a type of skirt or kilt reaching the knees), the *cibun* (a type of heavy overcoat) and the *poture* (short trousers that reach the knees). The most decorative parts of the costume are the jerkin (worn over a white shirt) or the *xhamadan* (felt jacket with false sleeves) worn on feast days. The Albanian men also wore silver jewels, such as the little plaques decorating the breast, the decorative buttons of the jerkins, rings, pipes and tobacco containers, but especially, the arms whether sheathed or worn over the shoulder that were finely decorated with filigree patterns in silver and gold.

For the women the main garment was the costume with the *xhubleta* (a bell-shaped skirt). The colours and ornaments of the clothes varied according to the age of the woman. Children and young people normally dressed simply. Unlike with other Balkan peoples, in Albania girls of marrying age had to dress simply with no jewellery, hair covered by a veil and she was not allowed to wear the colour red.



The wedding costume (for both women and men) was a variation

with more ornamentation. The bride used silver jewellery not only for ornamentation but also as an amulet against the evil eye. Hair ornaments played a very important role. A few years after the wedding the costume began to lose the rich ornamentation of the wedding. The traditional Albanian costumes have elements that reflect their origins in medieval costumes as well as elements dating back to Byzantine influences (in the south of Albania) or oriental Turkish and Persian influences (central Albania), but there are also survivals that descend directly from Illyrian antiquity. There are many analogies between the traditional costumes and the Illyrian “Dalmatian” costumes, between the head-coverings, the *opinga* (type of scarf made out of animal skin) and the veils used to cover the hair.



North and Central
Albanian costumes

3.3.4. Food

Albanian food has been strongly influenced by Turkish food: among the most common dishes are the *shishqebap* (whose main ingredient is grilled meat), *romsteak* (pasticcio of minced meat) and the *qofte* (meat balls). The food is simple but a great number of flavours are added. Some dishes are very well-known; these include *dromesat* (made from flour and cooked in a sauce), *shtridhelat* (*tagliatelle* cooked with chick-peas and dried beans) and *byreh* (an open pie made from flour, lard and water).



South Albania costumes



Local dishes of
Albania cooking

Beef is widely used though kid and lamb are also eaten. The most typical dishes include: *çonlek* (a stew made of meat and onions), *fërges* (a substantial meat stew), *rosto*

me salcë kosi (roast meat with sour cream) and *tave kosi* (mutton with yogurt). The omelettes are very tasty; some are made with vegetables like the *veze petul di cicoria* (omelette using wild thistles, endives and capers), *minzetra uligne me bath* (omelette with dried broad beans and olives).

cheeses such as *djathe* (sheep's cheese), the *filicat* (junket), *gjize* (cottage cheese) are a result of the ancient pastoral tradition of the population.

There are some exquisite sweets such as *kanarikuj* (a type of cream puff covered in honey), *kasolle me gjize* (made with ricotta), *kulaç* (a delicious doughnut), *petulla* (delicate fritters), and *nucia* in the form of a doll with an egg for the face.

Besides wine (of which the white wine is best) other typical alcoholic drinks are *raki* (brandy), *konjak* (cognac), *uzo* (liqueur made from aniseed).

Coffee is widely drunk and is usually either *kafe turke* or *kafe ekspres* (espresso)

4. Communities and social life

4.1 Community celebrations

Since Albania is a country with a long and complicated history there are many national festivals where different dates have been chosen to represent and recall significant historical and political moments and events of Albania. Many national religious festivals are also celebrated in Albania (as country has 4 official religions) in which the whole population takes part, reflecting considerable religious tolerance. Festivals in Albania can be divided into three groups:

Festivals with fixed dates



Baklava, local cake of New Year Holidays

1 and 2 January: New Year holidays. On these 2 days relatives are normally visited or close relatives and friends pay visits. Guests are offered a typical Balkan cake (which in Albania is only made at New Year) called *ballava* and traditionally made from several layers of thin pastry and stuffed with walnuts. After they have been cooked in the oven they are covered in syrup.

7 March: Teacher's Day. The day recalls the opening of the first Albanian language school at Coriza (Korce). Pupils to the secondary school level usually present their teachers with large bunches of flowers and put on performances in their honour.

8 March: Women's Day. This is a commemoration marking the international Women's Day but it is also celebrated as Mother's Day. Husbands and children usually give something symbolic to their wives or

mothers and it is normal to eat a meal out. It was once a tradition to go on a family picnic, but this is now being replaced by a meal out in a restaurant.

14 March: Spring Day (or Summer's Day). This festival has pagan origins and is very popular throughout Albania but especially in central Albania and particularly in the town of Elbasan. It is customary of celebrate outside in the early spring sunlight. Families come from all over Albania to near Elbasan where the picnics in the fields are famous. The typical sweet of the festival is a type of large home-made biscuit only made by the families of Elbasan or by families originating from Elbasan.

22 March: Day of Nevruz. This day celebrates the prophet Nevruz. He was the founder of the belief of the Bektashi. It is celebrated especially by the Bektashi communities who prepare public meals and banquets for the occasion. The typical sweet of the festival resembles a pudding prepared with starch, sugar and cooked wheat germ.

1 May: Labour Day. This festival commemorates International Labour Day. Under Communism it was celebrated with grand parades of the working class filing past the dictator who waved from the stand. Nowadays the parades have given way to rallies in the squares organized by the unions for the improvement of the condition of workers.



March 14th, big concert in the place for the Summer day

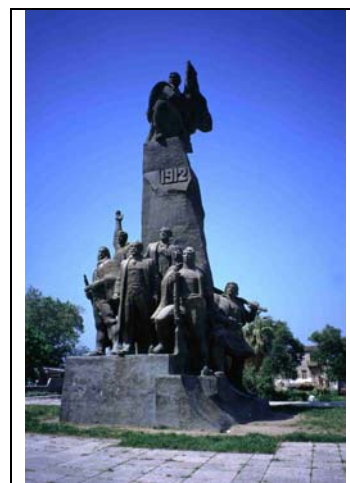
5 May: Day of the Martyrs of the Second War World. On this day the Albanian Communist Qemal Stafa is remembered. One of the founder members of the Albanian Communist party, he was killed by the Fascists. All those who gave their lives for the liberation from Nazi-Fascism during the Second War World are remembered.

19 Ottobre: Mother Teresa's Day. This festival was established after the fall of Communism, and is very popular as Madre Teresa of Calcutta was Albanian and daughter of an Albanian family from an Albanian community living in Macedonia.

28 November: Independence Day or Day of the Flag. The day of the proclamation of the independence of Albania from the Turkish Ottoman Empire is remembered by raising the Albanian flag in the centre of the square of the city of Valona (Vlore), today known as "square of the flag". It is celebrated in squares with different musical concerts with many young people taking part. The military parades of Communism have now given way to the 'white nights' that last until the 29 November. This is also how the Day of Liberation from the Nazi-Fascist occupation of the Second War World is celebrated.

29 November: Day of Liberation of the Second War World. This is celebrated in the same way as the previous day.

25 December: Christmas Day. This festival was introduced after Communism. It is celebrated discreetly partly because it is not associated with strong religious traditions. There is a feast in the home with a family lunch and young people often attend a midnight service between the 24 and 25 December. However, rather than a religious festival it is an opportunity to go out for enjoyment until late. It is a tradition adopted from the west, especially from Italy (which all young people watch attentively).



Independence monument, in the Flag Place of Valona

Festivals with variable dates

First Day of Ramadan. On this day the Moslems celebrate the start of the month of purification, or Ramadan.

Lesser Bajram (end of the month of Ramadan). This day marks the end of the month of Ramadan. Great public banquets for the faithful who want to take part are organised.

Catholic Easter. This day marks the death and resurrection of Christ

Orthodox Easter. The death and resurrection of Christ are recalled. A particular custom for both Catholic and Orthodox is to paint boiled eggs red. These are then offered to those who pay visits to people's houses in this period. It is customary for the egg to be kept in the home until the next Easter when it will be replaced by the a egg.

Great Bajram or Feast of Sacrifice. On this day Moslems offer their sacrifice to God by killing a lamb, whose meat is shared among needy families in difficulty and who cannot afford to buy or sacrifice their own lamb.

Festivals with non-official dates

This group includes festivals that are not recognised or are only partly recognised by the official state calendar, such as those connected with traditional beliefs deriving from pagan celebrations even if they have Christian or Moslem names. These include: Saint George's Day (celebrated by both Christians and Moslems) that marks the day when work on the land starts again after the winter. These are the "good nights" and are calculated according to the Arab Moslem lunar calendar. According to popular belief these are the nights when the particular position of the planets and stars favours miracles and the realisation of wishes. It is normally celebrated within the family, especially in Moslem or mixed families where either the husband or wife is Moslem. A typical cake that is quick to make is prepared from water, oil, flour and sugar.

Another group of festivals of this type are those that take place in individual towns and differ from town to town. These include the day of liberation or, where it exists, the festival of the foundation of the town. Several towns have festivals in memory of famous people from that particular town. There are also festivals organized on anniversaries such as the centenary of the birth of a national hero or poet or other person who is particularly famous or worthy for their commitment to the nation.



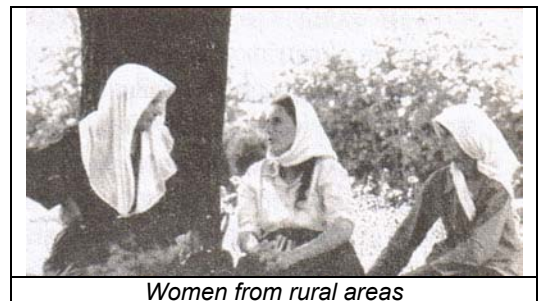
Bust for the Centenary from death date of national hero Scanderbeg

4.2. Clothing and dress codes

The traditional costumes that differ from north to south are no longer used in Albania. Practically the whole population wears "European" clothes

and adolescents and young people especially copy the fashions on the other side of the Adriatic. Only in the rural areas do elderly women continue to wear full dark-coloured clothes with a veil covering the hair, that go back to the traditional ancient costumes. It is very rare to see Moslem women in Albania wearing the *chador*. In Albanian families it is normal on entering the house to

take off one's shoes and to use slippers round the house. Perhaps an ancient memory of the costumes of the past explains why the custom of "good clothes" for the women or the "new suit" for the men is so deep-rooted in Albania. These clothes are only worn on important occasions, such as marriages, baptisms, and religious festivals.



Women from rural areas

4.3. Sex

Sex, originally considered a taboo subject (so deeply rooted that not even the great cultural and social changes introduced by Communism could overcome it), is now slowly becoming a subject that can be discussed freely, especially in the large towns but not without difficulty. Sex education has been introduced into secondary and upper schools.

In Albania the moral norms regulating sex do not, generally speaking, derive from religion but come from the ethical norms of society. Traditionally, in accordance with social norms, girls and boys do not have many opportunities to socialize with the opposite sex before marriage, since especially in rural areas it is discouraged, even if it is not completely prohibited. In these areas girls who are only 15-16 years are betrothed (by their families or with their consent) and married not long afterwards.



Albanian youths

Especially after the conquest of democracy the social norms regarding sex have become more liberal, particularly in the towns. The age at which two young people marry has also increased greatly.

General opinions regarding heterosexual behaviour may be slowly approaching those of the western model, but homosexuality is not viewed at all favourably and is condemned by the Albanian moral and social norms. Because of the widespread stereotype of the “tough man”, calling someone a homosexual in Albania is considered a serious insult. It is not uncommon for homosexuals being forced to move to large towns or emigrate to another country to escape from the prejudice in the communities.

4.4. Violence in the home



Maltreated women assisted by the local NGO for women during the party for the end of the professional course, that should be assure their independence

Albania is one of the European countries with the highest levels of violence in the home affecting women and children, though this fact is not commonly appreciated by public opinion. However, few women report the violence, either to avoid breaking up the family for the sake of the children, or because the lack of a safe job and accommodation force the woman to remain with the violent husband. Moreover, even when the woman reports the violence, she encounters numerous obstacles during the trial, since the basic right of the woman to be free from violence is not adequately protected by the judiciary

system. In the rare cases where a verdict of guilt is reached more often than not the aggressor is fined and hardly ever jailed.

On the other hand the woman often has very little awareness about her rights within family. In Albania there are no specific laws covering violence in the home. A number of female NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations) are trying to solve the problem, on the one hand by informing public opinion, and on the other

by setting up advice and aid centres for the victims of abuse.

The fact that underlying the traffic of women and children there is often a history of violence in the home, mistreatment and sexual abuse is also significant.

4.5. Alcoholism

Alcoholism is widespread in Albania, even among young people. The most popular alcoholic drinks are *raki*, beer and wine, mostly produced domestically but also in the home. The most frequent causes leading to alcohol abuse are economic and family problems or work-related stress.

The reason for alcohol abuse at a young and very young age (often associated with the use of drugs) often lies in problems that young people come up against in the family and at school. Moreover alcohol abuse is the main cause of violence in Albanian families and frequently cited as grounds for divorce.

According to the health authorities most of the crimes committed within the family are linked to drunkenness, as are the high number of road accidents.

4.6. Status of women

In pre-Communist Albania, and in particular in the mountainous areas of the North, the status of women was regulated by the traditional *Kanun* law; Art. 29 stated “The woman is a

leather bag, made only for bearing: a small leather bag that bears weights and burdens”. Equally explicit is Art. 20: “The

woman is superfluous in the family. [.....]. She inherits nothing from her relatives of the house or other property”, Art. 31: “She has no right to choose her husband” and Art. 34: “She has no rights over the children or over the home”. In the case of marital infidelity, “.... the husband kills the wife [.....] and is not punished by any vendetta ...”.^[6]

Under the Hoxha regime there were attempts to eradicate this mentality, and women were allowed to enter politics and the world of work, and formal recognition of equal rights and duties were sanctioned by the Family Code of 1982.

After the collapse of the Communist regime, the rise in unemployment generated by the transition to a market economy affected woman workers in particular and did not benefit this process of emancipation of women. Figures for 2004 regarding employment in managerial and professional roles show that the gap between the sexes is still very wide^[7] and as regards politics the active participation of women is rather limited. However, despite the fact that women are not well represented in the Albanian parliament, a parliamentary group of women has been created that has produced a document containing recommendations for improvements in women’s working conditions which has become part of the new Labour Code and the new Family Code. The presence of women in the NGOs (over 25 of which are aimed at women) is more significant.



*Lek Dukagjini, North Prince,
author of the Traditional Kanun Law*



Albanian youths

In short, from the formal and juridical points of view Albanian women have reached a degree of emancipation comparable to that of many western countries, but in reality there remains a big difference between men and women as regards models of behaviour and levels of participation in social life. Albanian women still live according to a “traditional” model in which their role in society is marginal and subordinate to men, at whose service they often are and feel they are. It is clear that there are still survivals of ancient customary laws in contemporary Albania,

especially in rural areas and small towns.

4.7. Human trafficking

After the radical post Communist socio-economic transformation Albania has had to face previously unknown social problems, among which is the dramatic problem of human trafficking, and in particular trafficking of women for prostitution. It has been argued that the patriarchal culture of the country with its lack of respect for the rights of women is the substratum for this type of trafficking.

The areas of Albania most affected by the trafficking of women are Berat, Fier, Shijaku, Laçi, and Valona. These places are all located in the western part of the country and from here it is easier to transfer people to Italy. These are also areas where the trafficking of drugs, arms and clandestine activity in general is most widespread. The women who are most likely to fall victim to this traffic are girls from poor rural areas or from small urban centres who have had a difficult childhood and have often been subjected to physical violence or sexual abuse by members of the family.

On January 2001 a law was approved in Albania that considered people trafficking as a crime. This included trafficking women for prostitution, and the trafficking of children, and the Albanian government formulated “National Strategy Against the Illegal Trafficking of People”.

^[6] Gjecov S.C., Codice di Lek Dukagjini or Diritto Consuetudinario delle Montagne d'Albania, Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1941.

^[7] According to UNICEF data for 2004 women account for 28% of university professors, 21% of magistrates, 14% of lawyers and 22% of doctors

One of the institutions operating on behalf of the victims of human trafficking, apart from the United Nations, is the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and is the only one with specialized staff able to operate over the whole country. One of the foreign non-governmental organizations is the Save the Children fund which is involved in a joint project with the Centre that assists girls in Valona.

4.8. The old

There are different institutions for the care of the old; these are run by the state as well as by non-profit making or private foundations and organizations. A very high percentage of old people are affected by mental illness with dementia being the most common. This seems to be due to inadequate medical assistance of the elderly.

However, in most cases the old remain within the family nucleus of the youngest son who also inherits the home of the parents. This is linked to the poly-nuclear conception that characterised Albanian families until a few decades ago, but also to the particularly precarious economic condition of pensioners, and to the difficulties young people have in affording their own home.



Old man

4.9. Funeral ceremonies

Funeral ceremonies in Albania still maintain some traditional medieval rites. After a person dies there is a wake that lasts for a whole night during which the closest family members weep aloud with special funeral chants and watch over the body of the dead person. The next morning the home of the dead person normally remains open to receive visits from relatives and friends who in the early afternoon will accompany the dead person to the cemetery in a funeral procession. After the dead person has been laid to rest it is the duty of the family members of the dead person to organize a meal in honour of the dead person (a type of funeral banquet). The family normally isolates itself for a period of mourning openly expressed by the women of the family who wear black and avoid using makeup. The period of mourning depends on the closeness and degree of relationship with the dead person; it normally lasts 40 days for people who are not particularly close and for men, but for elderly women who lose their husbands and for mothers who lose a child it can last for ever.

5. Family and society

5.1 Family structure



Albanian family

An important aspect of family structure is the average number of members per family. In recent decades the Albanian family has changed from being an extended poly-nuclear family typical of traditional and rural societies, to a mono-nuclear family common in towns where there is a “modern” lifestyle. This is a result of changes imposed by the Communist regime on the socio-economic structure of the country with forced industrialization programmes, a consequent growth of the workers in the manufacturing sector and thus of an urban population with an apparent weakening of the sense of belonging to a clan or tribe.

Despite this, the average number of family members in the mononuclear family has changed little since the 1950s until today: from an average of 5.8 members in 1950, which remained practically stable until the end of the 1970s, there were 4.7 in 1989 with an average of less than 4 in 2003 (the latest available figure).

Although couples are producing fewer children, economic factors such as the lack of dwellings, low family income and longer life expectancy have often made it necessary for different generations (grandparents, parents, and children who are themselves married and perhaps with their own children) to live together under the same roof, thus countering the effect of the decline in the fertility rate and slowing down the transition towards smaller families. Figures relating to single people are significant; they show a tendency to decrease in the period under consideration, going from 6.1 to 4.2% of the total of family nuclei, while families with 4-6 members are increasing from 41.3 to 55.2%.

The markedly rural nature of post-war Albania is evident even in the structure of the family: in 1950, 80% of the population was classified as rural, which comes as no surprise considering that until the Second World War industrialization was unknown in Albania except in embryonic form and the *latifundium* was the main model for social and land organization.

5.2. Birth and death rates

An analysis of the birth and death rates for the years of the general censuses (1950, 1960, 1980, 1990) shows two precise trends which confirm the overall demographic pattern: the birth rate (i.e. number of births per thousand inhabitants) rose sharply between 1950 (38.5) and 1960, the year when a record figure of 43.3 was reached (by analogy with the pattern of the fertility rate throughout the 1950s); it then declined steadily to 25.2 in 1990. This decline, however, was relatively low considering that between 1950 and 1990 the rate decreased by only 34.5%. Since 1990 there has been a further decline in births due to the heavy migration of the fertile population, the higher average age of marriage for both females and males, the use of family planning methods and so on. After 2000, when the rate was 19.47 births per 1000 inhabitants, in 2004 and in 2005 the figure was 15.08 per 1000. Similarly in 2005 the fertility rate declined to just over two births (2.04) per woman, while in 2000 it was 2.37 births per woman^[8].

The death rate (i.e. number of deaths per 1000 inhabitants) has declined significantly (60%) from 14 in 1950 to 5.6 in 1990. According to other figures, after 2000 the death rate fell steadily from 6.5 deaths per 1000 to 5.02 in 2004 and subsequently rose slightly in 2005 to 5.12. Infant mortality has steadily decreased from 41.33 deaths per 1000 live births in 2000 to 21.52 in 2005⁸.

Since the post-war period the average life expectancy in Albania has made remarkable improvements: in 1950 life expectancy at birth was 50.4 years for males and 49.5 for females and in 1995 this increased to 68.5 and 74.3 years respectively, with an average of over 71 years for the population as a whole. In the last five years it has increased from 71.57 years in 2000 to 77.24 in 2005. For 2006 it was estimated to be 77.43 years (74.78 for males; 80.34 for females). This figure does not greatly differ from that of industrialized countries⁸.

5.3. Marriage

In Albania marriage is still a very powerful institution, though in recent years there has been an increase (mainly in the larger towns like Tirana) in the number of couples choosing to cohabit before deciding whether to marry later. The years of transition that Albania is experiencing have also affected the age of marriage. Although an increase in the average age of marriage generally leads to more stable families, the number of divorces per 100 marriages has increased from 9.6 in 2001 to 14.2 in 2004. This, however, can also be explained by the improvement in the status of women, since most divorces are requested by women. Since 1990 the average age of couples getting married has risen steadily and it has now reached European levels.



Lay marriage

^[8] CIA World Fact Book, 2005; www.indexmundi.com

Most marriages are celebrated with a non-religious ceremony; this is because many Albanians are non-believers and because there is a high incidence of mixed marriages. Normally marriage takes place after a period of engagement during which the engaged couple gets to know each other, but the engagement is sometimes considered binding and it is not always possible to break it off. This applies mostly to rural areas or to small towns where the engagement is official with the consensus of both the families of the young couple. In small towns and rural areas marriage at an early age is very common; girls especially (but also boys) are engaged at the age of 16 and already married with children at the age of 18. There are frequent cases where the girl is given in marriage by the family at the age of 14-15.

5.4. Relations between the generations



Old women at park

In Albania great respect is shown towards the old, who are seen as pillars of authority, wisdom and knowledge. In rural villages the highest authority has always been the council of old people with the figure of the oldest man at its head. This tradition was so strong that it became an institution. In large towns the situation is different. In a period marked by social change, the authority of the old is crumbling, partly because of the older generation finds it difficult to understand and accept the “new things” that have come with the opening up to the western world. However, the Albanian population is very young and the reforms for modernizing society introduced during Communism, as well as afterwards, have made allowances for the social needs of the younger classes in view of the fact they represent the future of the country.

6. Health, education, work

6.1. Health

Among the most alarming facts regarding the health of the Albanian population is the infant mortality rate, which is twice the average of the UE, and the fact that contaminated food and water are responsible for the infectious diseases.

A striking fact that emerges when analysing the figures for the health service is the sharp decline in the number of hospitals, maternity wards and beds between 1990 and 1993. In the following years and since 1995 this decline has been arrested and the trend has begun to reverse. The numbers of those involved in the medical profession is relatively high, but conspicuously lower than the European standard.

In any case the numbers involved in health are insufficient and expenditure on health too little. According to the WHO, better coordination and structuring of the health system is required.

In Albania there is a widespread tradition of folk medicine that has been handed down from generation to generation; it has played an important role in treating different illnesses, especially before the advent of the communist regime. Albanians have an old saying: “for each illness there is a plant to treat it, and each plant is useful for treating an illness”. Many species of medicinal plants grow in Zadrime and other parts of the country due to the favourable conditions of the soil brought about by the geography, altitude, and climate. This tradition is still very much alive in the country and towns, and in the homes of many families there is every likelihood of finding camomile, lime, garlic, onion, essential oil of hypericum and many other plants used to treat diseases of the respiratory tract, the digestive system and a variety of wounds.

6.2. Care and education

The traditional Albanian cultural system is coming up against the changes taking place in the lifestyle of the family: these include the exodus from the rural areas to the large towns, the

increasing divorce rate, and emigration to other countries. In this unstable social context, children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable, since they are often left to their own devices.

The only places where boys can go to amuse themselves are often only billiard halls and bars, where they spend their day drinking alcohol, smoking and often quarrelling with each other. On the other hand 13-year old girls are made to stay in the house to look after their younger siblings and do the housework before they get married, an arrangement often decided by their parents. Adolescents are practically not allowed to experience their own adolescence. The responsibility of bringing up and educating children falls mainly on the mothers.

Learning within the family is almost non-existent and few signs of affection are displayed; children grow up without any rules and are confused and disorientated. There are no initiatives within the family (for promoting the rights of children, educating them on nutrition and hygiene, or literacy) or in civic society (knowledge of rights and duties, commitment and participation in social life, sense of belonging and sharing in community initiatives). Fathers have absolutely no role in bringing up their children, and often play no part in their lives.

As regards education, the communist regime invested heavily in the education system, enabling Albanians to reach a literacy rate approaching 100% and levels of schooling comparable to those of industrialized countries in the 80s. However, in recent years the literacy rate of the total population has shown a marked decline: in 1997 it was 93%, in 2003 it decreased to 79.5%.

Apart from the state education system, after 1996 numerous private religious and non-religious schools were established. These schools provide a general education (classical and scientific high schools) or are professional schools providing proper professional training courses varying in length.



First day of school for students

State education is free of charge. However, expenditure on education is not adequate and equipment insufficient. The private schools, whether religious or non-religious, are called "alternative" and differ from the state schools in being more specialist. Some of them are integrated into the state system.

Compulsory education includes a cycle of eight classes, unified administratively and subdivided into two levels: elementary (classes I-IV) and secondary (classes V-VIII). At the end of the eighth year an exam is taken to obtain the compulsory education certificate. The reform of 1990 extended compulsory education from eight to ten years, but this ruling has never been fully realised.

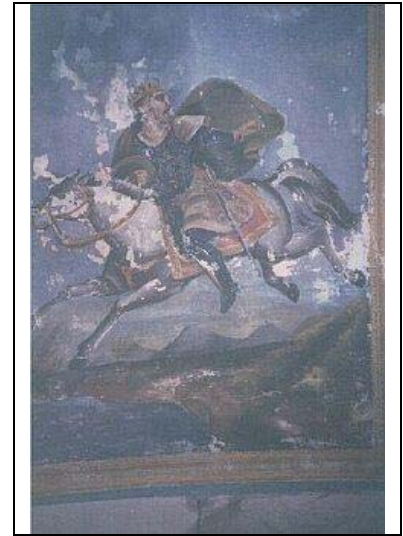
6.3. Employment and work

During the communist regime unemployment was virtually non-existent but today it is among the highest in the former socialist countries and is another aspect of the economic changes. In 1990 1,433 thousand people were engaged in work, while in 1993 this figure fell to 1,063 thousand, namely 380 thousand fewer in less than three years, with an unemployment rate of 22%. This largely involved the labour force affected by the decline in the manufacturing sector and state employees who lost their jobs following the scaling down of state administration. In the following years the situation has improved. The unemployment rate fell to 18 % in 1994 and to 12% in 1996. The crisis of 1997 was also reflected in the employment level, which again showed a sharp decline: in December of 1997 the number of unemployed was over 193 thousand, 35 thousand more than the previous year. To counteract this, in February of 1998, the new executive set up a packet of measures for professional training and developing entrepreneurial initiatives with the aim of creating 200 thousand new jobs by 2001 (partly achieved). The figures for 2004 show that unemployment declined steadily, from 14.4% in 2001.

7. Albanian Communities in Italy

7.1. Historical migrations

Albanian migrations towards the Italian coast are not a recent phenomenon: the first waves of migrants date back to 1400, affecting various areas of the then Kingdom of Naples (of which Calabria and Sicily were part). According to historical studies, there were eight waves of Albanian migrants to Italy. The first migration probably dates back to 1399 – 1409 and the most recent to 1774. One of the first and most significant migrations took place in 1448, when a group of soldiers of Albanian extraction from Epirus settled in Sicily and Calabria after fighting for Alfonso of Aragon, King of Naples. This was followed by the exodus led by Giorgio Castriota Scanderbeg himself in 1459-1461, coming to the aid of the Aragonese in their struggle against the Angevins. However, the most numerous migration took place after the death of Scanderbeg (1468) and the advance of the Ottoman Empire that forced many Albanian people into voluntary exile to escape subjection and forced Islamization. Further migrations took place in the following centuries mainly to the Kingdom of Naples.



Fresco represents Scanderbeg while the unhorses water, preserved in an Italian church of the Arberesh community

Albanians continued to follow the Orthodox Christian rite, and this is still one of the features that distinguishes these Albanian ethnic groups from the rest of the Italian population and from the Albanians left in the mother country, who mainly converted to Islam .

Over the course of time, and especially in this century, a number of these places have lost the use of the language along with other original Albanian features. Currently there are about fifty Albanian-speaking centres in Italy, with a population estimated to be around 100,000, though there are no precise figures for the actual numbers of Italo-Albanians. The most recent precise figure is given in the census for 1921; the number of Albanian speakers was 80,282, far fewer than the 197 thousand mentioned in the study of A. Frega of 1997^[9].

7.1.1. The arbëreshë communities

Today the *arbëreshë* communities are spread throughout almost the whole of southern Italy, and all together number over 100.000 people, though the population of Albanian origin that speaks *arbëreshë* is a minority of the total number of members of the Italo-Albanian communities. Calabria is the region that where the greatest number of *arbëreshë* communities is to be found: important communities live in at least 30 Communes of the Region, in particular in the province of Cosenza.

The most numerous communities of Albanian origin are those in Apulia, though only a small percentage (at *Casalvecchio* and *Chieuti* in the province of Foggia, and at *San Marzano* in the province of Taranto) still speak *arbëreshë*.

Other communities are found in Sicily (in the *Piana degli Albanesi*) and in Molise (in the Communes of *Campomarino*, *Ururi*, *Montecilfone* and *Portocannone*), in Basilicata (in the Communes of *S. Paolo Albanese*, *S. Costantino Albanese*, *Barile*, *Ginestra* and *Maschito*). The Italo-Albanian communities of Campania and Abruzzo are much smaller.

Taken together the *Arbëreshë* live in 41 Communes and 9 Wards scattered throughout 7 Regions of southern Italy. There are also 30 communities with a marked historical and cultural *arbëreshë* heritage, but which for different reasons have lost the use of the Albanian language.

Other important *arbëreshë* communities are to be found in large urban areas, especially in Milan, Turin, Rome, Naples, Bari, Cosenza, Crotone and Palermo.

^[9] Frega A., *Gli Arbëresh dimenticati*, in "Albania. Tutta d'un pezzo. In mille pezzi...e dopo? Futuribili, n. 2-3, F. Angeli, Milan 1997.

Thriving *arbëreshë* communities still survive in America: U.S.A., Canada, Argentina and Brazil and keep the language and traditions of their countries of origin alive.

7.1.2. The *arbëreshë* culture

Arbëreshë indicates both the spoken language and the name of the Albanians of Italy, while Arberia identifies the geographical area of the Albanian settlements in Italy. In many Albanian towns the *arbëreshë* culture is still evident in the traditions, costumes, art and food.

7.1.3. Religion

In their religion the Albanians in Italy followed the Byzantine rite in Greek, which was fully recognised by Pope Paul II in 1536 within the Catholic faith. However, over the centuries many Albanian communities have lost the original Greek Byzantine rite. Today the Byzantine rite survives in the Albanian communities of the Province of Cosenza and in those around Piana degli Albanesi in Sicily.

The main festivity for the Italo-Albanian communities of Greek Byzantine rite is Easter. Many ancient rites and symbolic customs survive; these include removing the curtains from the windows of the church on the Saturday before Easter, or the rite of “stealing the water” performed by the women in many villages who go to a spring outside the town to “steal the water” after midnight

On Easter morning there is the “dawn service” at the beginning of which the sacristan imitates the devil and tries to prevent the priest from entering the church, who after aver knocking repeatedly makes his triumphal entry chanting songs. In many *arbëreshë* communities the traditional *vallje* takes place in the village square on the Monday and Tuesday.

Instead of at the beginning of November the commemoration of the dead takes place when spring begins and takes on the features of a traditional feast during which the dead mingle with the living. The *collivi*, slices of bread with boiled wheat grains on top have a symbolic meaning in honour of the dead. In the evening friends and relatives eat supper together remembering their dear ones until late in the night, while a place is “kept” at table for the dead. The following Saturday, on the other hand, is a day of great sadness, because according to tradition the dead are obliged to return to their graves in the beyond.

In the Greek Byzantine rite instead of the statues that are typical of the churches following the Roman Catholic rite a central role is played by icons depicting characters from the Bible.

7.1.4. Language

The language spoken by the Albanians in Italy is *Arbëreshë*, a variety of *tosco* with inflections from *ghego* and interference attributable to residence in Italy. It is calculated that only 45% of *arbëreshë* words are common to the Albanian language, and that another 15% is made of neologisms created by Italo-Albanian writers while the rest is the result of interference from Italian and local dialects. One of the peculiar features of the *arbëreshë* language is the lack of lexis denoting abstract concepts, and over the centuries these have been substituted by periphrases or by loanwords from Italian.

7.1.5. Traditions and folklore

One aspect of *arbëreshë* culture that is worth mentioning is the profound respect for the guest: in the mountains of Albania, and in the Italian communities it is still the custom today to consider the house of an Albanian as the house of God and of the guest who should be honoured with gifts of bread, salt and ‘the heart’. Another important aspect of the *arbëreshë* traditions is that they are handed down orally.

In the various forms of folklore the memory of the motherland emerges time and time again: in songs, whether religious or folk songs, legends, stories, proverbs there is a strong sense of ethnic community and solidarity. The awareness of belonging to a single ethnic group, albeit scattered round the world, is unmistakable in a saying that recurs when two Albanians meet and which translated means something like “our blood shed”.

The recurrent themes in traditional Albanian culture are nostalgia for the lost homeland, memory of the legendary deeds of Skanderberg, the hero recognised by all the Albanian communities in the world, and the tragedy of the Diaspora following the Turkish invasion.

Some of the elements on which the culture of the Albanian communities is based, and which is preserved to the present day, include: the “*vatra*” or the hearth as the centre of the family; the “*gjitonia*” or the neighbourhood, the main social grouping outside the home; the “*vellamja*” or brotherhood, rite of spiritual relationship; the “*besa*” or fidelity to a commitment.

A special mention should be given to the “*vallja*”, a traditional dance that took place at festivals evoking a great victory won by the military leader Giorgio Castriota Skanderberg against the Turkish invaders.



Arberesh traditional dance

7.1.6. Costumes

The traditional gala costume is particularly beautiful; it is worn by women on particular occasions like weddings or festivities such as Easter or the local patron saint. The costumes are authentic works of art that replicate ancient symbols in the embroidery of stars or branches bearing blossoms.

The traditional costume of *Piana degli Albanian* in the Province of Palermo is justly famous for its splendour and beauty.

Another beautiful traditional female costume is found in S. Costantino Albanese; it includes a characteristic head covering (*keza* and *cofa*), a white silk blouse with lace edgings, a red bodice with narrow sleeves embroidered in gold and a skirt on which are sewn three bands of white and yellow satin.



Arberesh traditional costumes

7.1.7. The protection of ethnic minorities in Italy

Italian legislation considers the *Arbëreshë* as a long established ethnic minority which is protected under Law 482 of 15 December 1999 “*Norms regarding the protection of historical linguistic minorities*”. The law also provides for the study of the minority language as a school subject.

7.2. Present-day migrations

Since 1991 there has been a dramatic increase in emigration to other countries. During the communist regime it was repressed but it has recently taken on the features of a mass exodus. The historical date of the Albanian exodus to Italy is 7 March 1991 when 20 thousand refugees entered the port of Brindisi in a single day. A second mass exodus to Italy took place in the month of August of the same year when about 10-12 thousand refugees were gathered in the “Della Vittoria” stadium in Bari and subsequently repatriated.

Since then illegal migrations across the Strait of Otranto to Italy and Greece continued uninterruptedly leaving from Valona (*Vlorë*), which now replaced Durazzo (*Durrës*) as the main centre for migrations to Italy.

Figures from the Italian Home Ministry show that on the 26 September 1996 57,593 Albanians had immigrated to Italy and were legally registered. During the political and economic crisis of 1997 there were further massive waves of refugees, estimated at around 15-17 thousand. The number of Albanian migrants attempting to enter Italy illegally and succeeding has now decreased considerably, due to patrols carried out by the Italian and Albanian Customs and Excises Authorities and to inter-governmental cooperation agreements stipulated in 2000. In addition, numerous non-governmental organisations such as the IOM (International Centre for Migration) have created programmes in conjunction with the Italian and Albanian state for local migration of people based on Italy's labour requirements.

Useful information

Visas: at the borders (land, sea, air), a payment of 10 Euros is requested for a compulsory visa on entering the country and on leaving a further payment of 10 Euros (with diplomatic and service passports being exempted).

Health risks: the main health risk is from infectious gastro-intestinal disease; it is advisable to avoid drinking tap water (even if it is drinkable) and eating in cheap facilities; medical care in state hospitals is relatively good but conditions in the hospitals are rather unsafe and backward with antiquated or obsolete equipment.

Time zone: one hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time.

Electricity: 220V, 50Hz.

Weights and measures: decimal metric system.

Local currency: lek (1 Euro = approx. 125 lek), but both euros and dollars are accepted almost everywhere.

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Guide to Internet websites and Albanian newspapers with e-mail addresses

<http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/albania-statistics>

Statistics for Albania

<http://www.cestim.it/dossier.paesi/albania.htm>

Information on Albanian geography, history, society, and economics including reference to reports, studies, publications and links relating to Albania.

<http://www.iomtirana.org.al>

International Organization of Migration in Albania.