

= Gjirokaštër =

Gjirokaštër is a town and a municipality in southern Albania . Lying in the historical region of Epirus , it is the capital of Gjirokaštër County . Its old town is a World Heritage Site described as " a rare example of a well @-@ preserved Ottoman town , built by farmers of large estate . " Gjirokaštër is situated in a valley between the Gjerë mountains and the Drino , at 300 metres above sea level . The city is overlooked by Gjirokaštër Fortress , where the Gjirokaštër National Folklore Festival is held every five years . Gjirokaštër is the birthplace of former Albanian communist leader Enver Hoxha and notable writer Ismail Kadare . It hosts the Eqrem Çabej University .

The present municipality was formed at the 2015 local government reform by the merger of the former municipalities of Antigonë , Cepo , Gjirokaštër , Lazarat , Lunxhëri , Odrie and Picar , that became municipal units . The seat of the municipality is the town Gjirokaštër . The total population is 25 @, @ 301 (2011 census) , in a total area of 469 @. @ 25 square kilometres (181 @. @ 18 sq mi) . The population of the former municipality at the 2011 census was 19 @, @ 836 .

The city appears in the historical record in 1336 by its Greek name , Argyrokastro (????????????? , often written Argyrocastro or Argyro @-@ Castro) , as part of the Byzantine Empire . It later became the center of the principality ruled by John Zenevisi (1373 @-@ 1417) before falling under Ottoman rule for the next five centuries . Taken by the Hellenic Army during the Balkan Wars of 1912 @-@ 3 on account of its large Greek population , it was eventually incorporated into the newly independent state of Albania in 1913 . This proved highly unpopular with the local Greek population , who rebelled ; after several months of guerrilla warfare , the short @-@ lived Autonomous Republic of Northern Epirus was established in 1914 with Gjirokaštër as its capital . It was definitively awarded to Albania in 1921 . In more recent years , the city witnessed anti @-@ government protests that lead to the Albanian civil war of 1997 .

Alongside Albanians , the city is home to a substantial Greek minority . Gjirokaštër , together with Sarandë , is considered one of the centers of the Greek community in Albania , and there is a consulate of Greece .

= = Etymology = =

The city appeared for the first time in historical records under its medieval Greek name of Argyrocastron (Greek : ?????????????) , as mentioned by John VI Kantakouzenos in 1336 . The name comes from the Medieval Greek ??????? (argyron) , meaning " silver " , and ??????? (kastron) , from the Latin castrum meaning " castle " or " fortress " , thus " silver castle " . The theory that the city took the name of the Princess Argjiro , a legendary figure about whom 19th century author Kostas Krystallis wrote a short novel and Ismail Kadare wrote a poem in the 1960s . It is considered a folk etymology , since the princess is said to have lived later , in the 15th century .

The definite Albanian form of the name of city is Gjirokastra , while in the Gheg Albanian dialect it is known as Gjinokaštër , both of which derive from the Greek name . Alternative spellings found in Western sources are Girokaštër and Girokastra . In Aromanian the city is known as Ljurocastru , while in modern Greek it is known ????????????? (Argyrokastro) . During the Ottoman era the town was known in Turkish as Ergiri .

= = History = =

Archaeological evidence points out that during the Bronze Age the region was inhabited by populations that probably spoke a northwestern Greek dialect . Archaeologists have found pottery objects of the early Iron Age in Gjirokaštër , which first appeared in the late Bronze Age in Pazhok , Elbasan District , and are found throughout Albania . The earliest recorded inhabitants of the area around Gjirokaštër were the Greek tribe of the Chaonians .

The city 's walls date from the third century . The high stone walls of the Citadel were built from the sixth to the twelfth century . During this period , Gjirokaštër developed into a major commercial center known as Argyropolis (Ancient Greek : ????????????? , meaning " Silver City ") or

Argyrokastron (Ancient Greek : ????????????? , meaning " Silver Castle ") .

The city was part of the Despotate of Epirus and was first mentioned by the name Argyrokastro by John VI Kantakouzenos in 1336 . During 1386 ? 1418 it became the capital of the Principality of Gjirokastër of John Zenevisi . In 1417 it became part of the Ottoman Empire and in 1419 it became the county town of the Sanjak of Albania . During the Albanian Revolt of 1432 ? 36 it was besieged by forces under Thopia Zenevisi , but the rebels were defeated by Ottoman troops led by Turahan Bey . In 1570s local nobles Manthos Papagiannis and Panos Kestolikos , discussed as Greek representative of enslaved Greece and Albania with the head of the Holy League , John of Austria and various other European rulers , the possibility of an anti @-@ Ottoman armed struggle , but this initiative was fruitless .

According to Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi , who visited the city in 1670 , at that time there were 200 houses within the castle , 200 in the Christian eastern neighborhood of Kyçyk Varosh (meaning small neighborhood outside the castle) , 150 houses in the Byjyk Varosh (meaning big neighborhood outside the castle) , and six additional neighborhoods : Palorto , Vutosh , Dunavat , Manalat , Haxhi Bey , and Memi Bey , extending on eight hills around the castle . According to the traveller , the city had at that time around 2000 houses , eight mosques , three churches , 280 shops , five fountains , and five inns .

In 1811 , Gjirokastër became part of the Pashalik of Yanina , then led by the Albanian @-@ born Ali Pasha , and was transformed into a semi @-@ autonomous fiefdom in the southwestern Balkans until his death in 1822 . After the fall of the pashalik in 1868 , the city was the capital of the sanjak of Ergiri (the Turkish name for Gjirokastër) . On 23 July 1880 , southern Albanian committees of the League of Prizren held a congress in the city , in which was decided that if Albanian @-@ populated areas of the Ottoman Empire were ceded to neighbouring countries , they would revolt . During the Albanian National Awakening (1831 ? 1912) , the city was a major centre of the movement , and some groups in the city were reported to carry portraits of Skanderbeg , the national hero of the Albanians during this period .

Given its large Greek population , the city was claimed and taken by Greece during the First Balkan War of 1912 ? 1913 , following the retreat of the Ottomans from the region . However , it was awarded to Albania under the terms of the Treaty of London of 1913 and the Protocol of Florence of 17 December 1913 .

This turn of events proved highly unpopular with the local Greek population , and their representatives under Georgios Christakis @-@ Zografos formed the Panepirotic Assembly in Gjirokastër in protest . The Assembly , short of incorporation with Greece , demanded either local autonomy or an international occupation by forces of the Great Powers for the districts of Gjirokastër , Sarandë , and Korçë .

In March 1914 , the Northern Epirote Declaration of Independence was announced in Gjirokastër and it was confirmed in the Protocol of Corfu . The Republic , however , was short @-@ lived , as Albania collapsed at the beginning of World War I . The Greek military returned in October ? November 1914 , and again captured Gjirokastër , along with Saranda and Korçë . In April 1916 , the territory referred to by Greeks as Northern Epirus , including Gjirokastër , was annexed to Greece . The Paris Peace Conference , 1919 restored the pre @-@ war status quo , essentially upholding the border line decided in the 1913 Protocol of Florence , and the city was again returned to Albanian control .

In April 1939 , Gjirokastër was occupied by Italy following the Italian invasion of Albania . In December 8 , 1940 , during the Greco @-@ Italian War , the Hellenic Army entered the city and stayed for a five @-@ month period before capitulating to Nazi Germany in April 1941 and returning the city to Italian command . After the capitulation of Italy in the Armistice of Cassibile in September 1943 , the city was taken by German forces and eventually returned to Albanian control in 1944 .

The postwar communist regime developed the city as an industrial and commercial centre . It was elevated to the status of a museum town , as it was the birthplace of the leader of the People 's Socialist Republic of Albania , Enver Hoxha , who had been born there in 1908 . His house was converted into a museum .

The demolition of the monumental statue of the authoritarian leader Enver Hoxha in Gjirokastër by

members of the local Greek community in August 1991 marked the end of the one @-@ party state . Gjirokaštër suffered severe economic problems following the end of communist rule in 1991 . In the spring of 1993 , the region of Gjirokaštër became a center of open conflict between Greek minority members and the Albanian police . The city was particularly affected by the 1997 collapse of a massive pyramid scheme which destabilised the entire Albanian economy . The city became the focus of a rebellion against the government of Sali Berisha ; violent anti @-@ government protests took place which eventually forced Berisha 's resignation . On 16 December 1997 , Hoxha 's house was damaged by unknown attackers , but subsequently restored .

= = Religion and culture = =

In 1925 , Albania became the world center of the Bektashi Order , a Muslim sect . The sect was headquartered in Tirana , and Gjirokaštër was one of six districts of the Bektashi Order in Albania , with its center at the tekke of Baba Rexheb . The city retains a large Bektashi and Sunni population . Historically there were 15 and tekkes and mosques , of which 13 were functional in 1945 . Only Gjirokaštër Mosque has survived ; the remaining 12 were destroyed or closed during the Cultural Revolution of the communist government in 1967 .

The city is home to a diocese of the Eastern Orthodox Church , part of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania .

17th @-@ century Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi , who visited the city in 1670 , described the city in detail . One Sunday , Çelebi heard the sound of a vajtim , the traditional Albanian lament for the dead , performed by a professional mourner . The traveller found the city so noisy that he dubbed Gjirokaštër the " city of wailing " .

The novel Chronicle in Stone by Albanian writer Ismail Kadare tells the history of this city during the Italian and Greek occupation in World War I and II , and expands on the customs of the people of Gjirokaštër . At the age of twenty @-@ four , Albanian writer Musine Kokalari wrote an 80 @-@ page collection of ten youthful prose tales in her native Gjirokaštërian dialect : As my old mother tells me (Albanian : Siç me thotë nënua plakë) , Tirana , 1941 . The book tells the day @-@ by @-@ day struggles of women of Gjirokaštër , and describes the prevailing mores of the region .

Gjirokaštër , home to both Albanian and Greek polyphonic singing , is also home to the National Folklore Festival (Albanian : Festivali Folklorik Kombëtar) that is held every five years . The festival started in 1968 and was most recently held in 2009 , its ninth season . The festival takes place on the premises of Gjirokaštër Fortress . Gjirokaštër is also where the Greek language newspaper Laiko Vima is published . Founded in 1945 , it was the only Greek @-@ language printed media allowed during the People 's Socialist Republic of Albania .

= = Landmarks = =

The city is built on the slope surrounding the citadel , located on a dominating plateau . Although the city 's walls were built in the third century and the city itself was first mentioned in the 12th century , the majority of the existing buildings date from 17th and 18th centuries . Typical houses consist of a tall stone block structure which can be up to five stories high . There are external and internal staircases that surround the house . It is thought that such design stems from fortified country houses typical in southern Albania . The lower storey of the building contains a cistern and the stable . The upper storey is composed of a guest room and a family room containing a fireplace . Further upper stories are to accommodate extended families and are connected by internal stairs . Since Gjirokaštër 's membership to UNESCO , a number of houses have been restored , though others continue to degrade .

Many houses in Gjirokaštër have a distinctive local style that has earned the city the nickname " City of Stone " , because most of the old houses have roofs covered with flat dressed stones . A very similar style can be seen in the Pelion district of Greece . The city , along with Berat , was among the few Albanian cities preserved in the 1960s and 1970s from modernizing building programs . Both cities gained the status of " museum town " and are UNESCO World Heritage sites

Gjirokaštër Fortress dominates the town and overlooks the strategically important route along the river valley . It is open to visitors and contains a military museum featuring captured artillery and memorabilia of the Communist resistance against German occupation , as well as a captured United States Air Force plane , to commemorate the Communist regime 's struggle against the imperialist powers . Additions were built during the 19th and 20th centuries by Ali Pasha of Ioannina and the government of King Zog I of Albania . Today it possesses five towers and houses a clock tower , a church , water fountains , horse stables , and many more amenities . The northern part of the castle was turned into a prison by Zog 's government and housed political prisoners during the communist regime .

Gjirokaštër features an old Ottoman bazaar which was originally built in the 17th century ; it was rebuilt in the 19th century after a fire . There are more than 500 homes preserved as " cultural monuments " in Gjirokaštër today . The Gjirokaštër Mosque , built in 1757 , dominates the bazaar .

When the town was first proposed for inclusion on the World Heritage list in 1988 , International Council on Monuments and Sites experts were nonplussed by a number of modern constructions which detracted from the old town 's appearance . The historic core of Gjirokaštër was finally inscribed in 2005 , 15 years after its original nomination .

= = Climate = =

Gjirokaštër is situated between the lowlands of western Albania and the highlands of the interior , and has thus a hot @-@ summer Mediterranean climate , though , (as is normal for Albania) , much heavier rainfall than usual for this climate type .

= = Economy = =

Gjirokaštër is principally a commercial center with some industries , notably the production of foodstuffs , leather , and textiles . Recently a regional agricultural market that trades locally produced groceries has been built in the city . Given the potential of southern Albania to supply organically @-@ grown products , and its relationship with Greek counterparts of the nearby city of Ioannina , it is likely that the market will dedicate itself to organic farming in the future . However , currently trademarking and marketing of such products are far from European standards . The Chamber of Commerce of the city , created in 1988 , promotes trade with the Greek border areas . As part of the financial support from Greece to Albania , the Hellenic Armed Forces built a hospital in the city .

In recent years , many traditional houses are being reconstructed and owners lured to come back , thus revitalizing tourism as a potential revenue source for the local economy . However , some houses continue to degrade from lack of investment , abandonment or inappropriate renovations as local craftsmen are not part of these projects . In 2010 , following the Greek economic crisis , the city was one of the first areas in Albania to suffer , since many Albanian emigrants in Greece are becoming unemployed and thus are returning home .

= = Education = =

The first school in the city , a Greek language school , was erected in the city in 1663 . It was sponsored by local merchants and functioned under the supervision of the local bishop . In 1821 , when the Greek War of Independence broke out , it was destroyed , but it was reopened in 1830 . In 1727 a madrasa started to function in the city , and it worked uninterruptedly for 240 years until 1967 , when it was closed due to the Cultural Revolution applied in communist Albania . In 1861 ? 1862 a Greek language school for girls was founded , financially supported by the local Greek benefactor Christakis Zografos . The first Albanian school in Gjirokaštër was opened in 1886 . Today Gjirokaštër has seven grammar schools , two general high schools (of which one is the Gjirokaštër Gymnasium) , and two professional ones .

The city is home to the Eqrem Çabej University , which opened its doors in 1968 . The university has recently been experiencing low enrollments , and as a result the departments of Physics , Mathematics , Biochemistry , and Kindergarten Education did not function during the 2008 ? 2009 academic year . In 2006 , the establishment of a second university in Gjirokaštër , a Greek @-@ language one , was agreed upon after discussions between the Albanian and Greek governments . The program had an attendance of 35 students as of 2010 , but was abruptly suspended when the University of Ioannina in Greece refused to provide teachers for the 2010 school year and the Greek government and the Latsis foundation withdrew funding .

= = Sports = =

Football (soccer) is popular in Gjirokaštër : the city hosts Luftëtari Gjirokaštër , a club founded in 1929 . The club has competed in international tournaments and played in the Albanian Superliga until 2006 ? 2007 . Currently the team plays in the Albanian First Division . The soccer matches are played in Gjirokaštër Stadium , which can hold up to 8 @, @ 500 spectators .

= = Demographics = =

The town has 43 @, @ 000 inhabitants . Gjirokaštër is home to an ethnic Greek community that according to one source numbered about 4000 in 1989 , although Greek spokesmen have claimed that up to 34 % of the town is Greek . Gjirokaštër is considered the center of the Greek community in Albania . Given the large Greek population in the town and surrounding area , there is a Greek consulate in the town .

= = Transport = =

Gjirokaštër is served by the SH4 Highway , which connects it to Tepelenë in the north and the Dropull region and Greek border 30 km (19 mi) to the south .

= = International relations = =

= = = Twin towns ? Sister cities = = =

Gjirokaštër is twinned with :
Sarandë , Albania

= = Notable people = =

= = Gallery = =