



## Berat in albania: The city with a thousand windows

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### Abstract

This work is the result of a study trip to Albania that the author took in the company of architect Ramadan Aliu in September 2012. At that time, architect Aliu was a doctoral student at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Sarajevo, and he worked on his doctoral dissertation (Comparative analysis of selected examples of cities in Macedonia and Albania) under the mentorship of the author. The city of Berat was one of the cities they visited. Apart from Berat, these were Butrint, Durres, Gjirokaster, Kruje, Shkoder, Tirana, Vlore and many natural sights such as the famous source of The Blue Eye (Syri i Kalter, for example). The aim of the study trip was to get to know cities on the spot and to contribute to the author's theory of „Architecturally Defined Space“ through their analysis (through 'cabinet work'). Berat is a city located in the central part of Albania, 70 kilometers south of Tirana and 71 kilometers north of Gjirokaster (Geographic coordinates: 40°42'29.68"N, 19°56'42.50"E, Elevation: 218 m). It developed on the foundations of the ancient Greek city of Antipateria (Greek: Αντιπάτρεια) which dates back to the 6th century BC. During the Byzantine period, the city was known as Pulcheriopolis. The Slavic name for this city is Bel(i)grad, which is known according to a medieval record from Grač (where the city is mentioned as Βελλέγραδα, i.e. Bellegrada). During the Ottoman administration, the city was known as Arnavut Belgradi, and today's name Berat was created by condensing this name from two words into one. The old core of the city consists of three parts: Kalaja (the fort on top of the hill), Mangalem (the city structure below the fort on the hill) and Gorica (a settlement on the left bank of the Osum River). Because of its vivid picture in which the buildings slide one behind the other on the hill, and where each of them 'captures views' of the Osum river valley, Berat is called the „City with a thousand windows“ (also „City of the Floating Windows“).

**Keywords:** Albania, berat, synergy of natural environment, social environment and man

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### 1. Introduction

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Berat is a city located in the central part of Albania, 70 kilometers south of Tirana and 71 kilometers north of Gjirokastr (Geographic coordinates: 40°42'29.68"N, 19°56'42.50"E, Elevation: 218 m). Berat developed on the foundations of the ancient Greek city of Antipateria (Greek: Αντιπάτρεια) which dates back to the 6th century BC. During the Byzantine period, the city was known as Pulcheriopolis.

The Slavic name for this city is Bel(i)grad, which is known according to a medieval record from Grač (where the city is mentioned as Βελλέγραδα, i.e. Bellegrada). During the Ottoman administration, the city was known as Arnavut Belgradi, and today's name Berat was created by condensing this name from two words into one. The old core of the city consists of three parts: Kalaja (fort on the top of the hill dating from the 13th century, founded in the 4th century BC), Mangalem (city structure below the fort on the hill) and Gorica (settlement on the left bank of the Osum River). Because of its vivid picture in which the buildings slide one behind the other on the hill, and where each of them 'captures views' of the valley of the Osum River, Berat is called "the city with a thousand windows". Berat (and Gjirokaster) are listed as rare examples of architectural character typical of the Ottoman period. Berat bears witness to the coexistence of different religious and cultural communities throughout the

centuries. In the area of the citadel, there are many Byzantine churches, mostly from the 13th century, as well as several mosques built in the Ottoman period that began in 1417. The city of Berat is well preserved, and this especially applies to their vernacular buildings. Berat bears witness to a way of life that was influenced over a long period by the tradition of Islam during the Ottoman period, while at the same time incorporating older influences. This way of life respected Orthodox Christian traditions, which could thus continue their spiritual and cultural development. Berat is a city that was fortified but also open, where artisans and merchants lived for a long time [3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8]. Its urban center reflects the vernacular residential tradition of the Balkans, examples of which date mainly from the late 18th and 19th centuries. This tradition is adapted to the city lifestyle, with houses on the slopes, which are predominantly horizontal and make abundant use of incoming daylight (Figures 1-13).



Source: Google Earth. Accessed: October 22, 2023

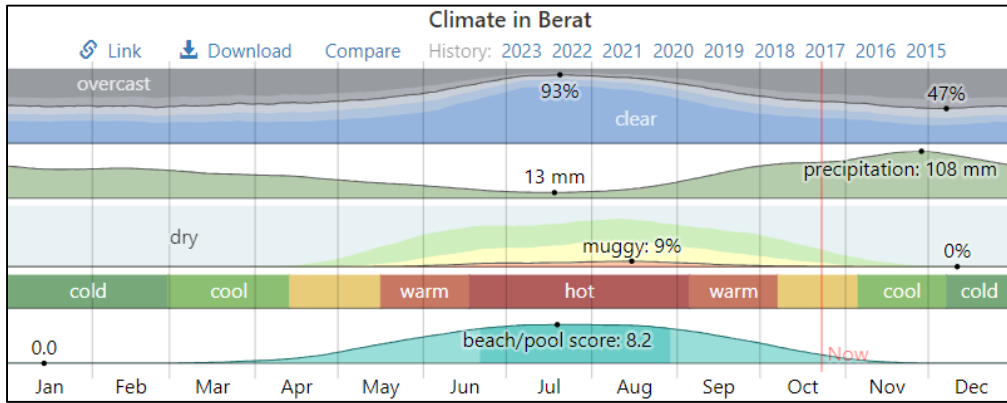
**Fig 1:** Berat in Albania. Location

## 2. Natural resources and sights

Berat is located on the right bank of the Osum river, upstream from the mouth of the Molisht river into the Osum river (Figure 1). The Osum River created wide fertile fields that were the main natural resource for the life of people in this area. The pine forest above the city, on the slopes of Mount Tomor, was an available base of construction material that, in combination with stone from the immediate surroundings, was used to materialize the architectural buildings of the city of Berat.

The city of Berat has a 'Csa' climate type according to the Köppen climate classification system, indicating a hot summer Mediterranean climate. Its geographic location near the river, surrounded by hills and mountains, further shapes the city's weather conditions. Throughout the year, Berat experiences a wide range of temperatures, from the lowest daily temperatures of 2 °C in January to the peak of summer heat in July and August with around 33.6 °C. The city records a significant difference in the amount of precipitation during the year, from a meager 4 mm/m<sup>2</sup> in July to a significant 203

mm/m<sup>2</sup> in December. As for sunlight, Berat has an average of between 9.3 and 15.1 daylight hours, with the longest days recorded in June. Accordingly, the city has a considerable duration of sunlight from 3 hours of sunshine per day in December to 11 hours in July. An upward trend in the UV index can be detected from January, peaking in July at 9 before dropping to 1 in December, representing the effect of seasonal changes [9]. In Berat, summers are short, hot, dry and mostly clear, and winters are long, cold, wet and partly cloudy. During the year, the temperature usually varies from 1 °C to 33 °C and is rarely below -3 °C or above 37 °C [10]. The hot season lasts 2.9 months, from June 12 to September 9, with an average daily temperature above 29 °C. The hottest month of the year in Berat is July, with an average high of 33 °C and low of 18 °C. The fresh season lasts 3.9 months, from November 21 to March 18, with an average daily temperature below 15 °C. The coldest month of the year in Berat is January, with the average lowest temperature of 2 °C and the highest of 11 °C [10] (Figure 2).



Source: <https://weatherspark.com/y/84310/Average-Weather-in-Berat-Albania-Year-Round#Sections-Humidity>, Accessed: October 22, 2023

Fig 2: Berat weather by month

**3. Architectural cultural and historical heritage**

In general, Albanian architecture is a cumulus of cultures and lifestyles derived from numerous civilizations that once established themselves there: Illyrians, ancient Greece, ancient Romans, Venetians, Ottomans. These new colonizers came and introduced new perspectives regarding the building style and techniques of local architecture. Monumental Roman architecture emerged from the period of occupation of the Roman Empire, architecture that now represents an important attraction when visiting the country. This is especially visible in Butrint and Dures. Perhaps the most

outstanding legacy was given by the Byzantine Empire. Cities and surrounding places such as Shkodër, Krujë, Korçë, Berat, Voskopojë, Gjirokaster, for example, are the architectural treasures of Albania. The indigenous residential architecture is the most significant characteristic of this city, where the residential buildings, placed on the slope, move away from each other, catching the sun and the views. It was this architecture that gave the city of Berat its second name, “The city of a thousand windows” (Figures 3-7).



Source: Author (September 26, 2012.)

Fig 3: Berat-The city of a thousand windows



Source: Ramadan Aliu (September 26, 2012.)

Fig 4: Author in abundance of the Berat city





Source: Author (September 26, 2012.)

Fig 5: Streets in Berat



Source: Author (September 26, 2012.)

Fig 6: Residential architecture in the Berat city



Source: Author (September 26, 2012.)

Fig 7: Pasha's palace. The palace was built (1774) by Ahmet Kurt-paha (?-1787), the founder and first pasha of Pashaluk Berat

In addition to the impressive residential architecture, the city of Berat has a number of significant buildings built in different time periods:

- Fortress (13th century) with remains of Byzantine walls from the 5th, 6th and 13th centuries. There are 20 churches and one mosque (mosque of the former Ottoman garrison) in the fortress (Figures 8-12).
- Tekija Helveti (Teqe e Helvetive) from the 15th century (Figure 13),
- Lead mosque (Xhamia e Plumbit) built in 1554 (named after the dome covered with lead), (Figure 14).

Berat Fortress (Albanian: Kalaja e Beratit). The fortress was founded during the time of the ancient Romans (around 200 BC) on a hill above the vast Osum river, and its walls were additionally strengthened (in the 5th century) during the reign of the Roman emperor Flavius Theodosius (Theodosius II, 401-150) and for reign of the Byzantine emperor Justinian I (482-565). Additional strengthening of the fortress was done (in the 13th century) by the Epirus despot Michael I Komnenos (1170-1215). The fortress is located at an altitude of 214 m. A large number of churches and one mosque were built within its walls (Figures 8-12).



Source: Author (September 26, 2012.)

Fig 8: Berat fortress. Plan (View on the panel inside the fortress)





Source: Ramadan Aliu (September 26, 2012.)  
 Source: Author (September 26, 2012.)

**Fig 9:** Berat Fortress (Albanian: Kalaja e Beratit)



Source: Author (September 26, 2012.)

**Fig 10:** Church of St. Michael (Albanian: Kisha e Shën Mëhillit)

Church of St. Michael (Albanian: Kisha e Shën Mëhillit). The church was built in the 14th century, during the Byzantine rule in Berat. It has a cross-shaped base with a dome on a high tambour above the intersection of the arms of the cross (Figure 10). Church of the Dormition of St. Mary (Albanian:

Cathedral of Fjetja e Shën Mërisë). Since 1986, this has been the National Iconographic Museum (Onufri Museum). The museum is dedicated to the iconographic art of Byzantium in Berat. The building dates back to the 16th century (Figure 11).





*Source:* Ramadn Aliu (September 26, 2012.)

*Source:* Author (September 26, 2012.)

**Fig 11:** Church of the Dormition of St. Mary (Albanian: Cathedral of Fjetja e Shën Mërisë)

Church of St. Trinity (Albanian: Kisha e Shën Triadhest). This church was built (13th century) at the time when Berat was under Byzantine rule, with the financial support of the Byzantine emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus (1259-1332).

The church has a square base with an inscribed cross and a central dome on a high tambour at the intersection of the arms of the cross (Figure 12).



*Source:* Author (September 26, 2012.)

**Fig 12:** Church of St. Trinity (Albanian: Kisha e Shën Triadhest).

Tekke Helveti (Albanian: Teqe e Helvetive) was built in 1782 by Ahmet Kurt Pasha and belonged to the Khalwati Sufi

order (Figure 13).



*Source:* Author (September 26, 2012.)

**Fig 13:** Tekke Helveti (Albanian: Teqe e Helvetive)

The lead mosque (Albanian: Xhamia e Plumbit) was built (1554) by Ahmet-beg Ugurliu. This is a one-room mosque with a dome, which is called the Lead Mosque (Xhamia e

Plumbit) because of its roof covering made of lead sheet. The mosque was built in a plain, below the old town of Berat on a steep slope (Figure 14).





Source: Author (September 26, 2012.)

**Fig 14:** The lead mosque (Albanian: Xhamia e Plumbit)

### Conclusion

The Berat city has a favorable natural and geopolitical position. It is located on the right bank of the Osum River, upstream from the mouth of the Molisht river into the Osum river. The Osum river created wide fertile fields that were the main natural resource for the life of people in this area. The pine forest above the city, on the slopes of Mount Tomor, was an available base of construction material that, in combination with stone from the immediate surroundings, was used to materialize the architectural buildings of the city of Berat. Berat was created and throughout its history grew and developed under the influence of various civilizations (Illyrians, ancient Greeks, ancient Romans, Byzantium, Ottoman Empire) <sup>[4,6,7,8]</sup>. Each of these civilizations left a rich cultural and historical legacy that has, more or less, been preserved to this day. Berat is a 'huge open book of history' that testifies to the tolerance of each civilization that inherited the previous civilization, and the result is a city that testifies to the harmony of the natural and social environment <sup>[1]</sup>, which is confirmed by its inclusion on the UNESCO list of world cultural heritage.

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