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The historical krujë city in Albania

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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. Butrint was one of the places/cities they visited. Besides Butrint, these were Berat, Durrës, Gjirokastër, Krujë, Shkodër, Tirana, Vlorë and many natural sights such as the famous source of 'The Blue Eye' ('Syri i Kaltër', 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').

Keywords: Albania, Krujë, Synergy of natural environment, social environment and man

1. Introduction

Krujë is a city (with about 60,000 inhabitants) ^[1] located at the foot of the Krujski Mountains, in the central part of Albania, 20 km from Tirana and 37 km from Durrës (Geographic coordinates: 41°30'53.01"N, 19°47'18.08"E, Elevation: 498 m), (Figures 1,2). West of the city is the spacious and fertile valley of the river Ishëm. The city got its name from the Albanian word 'kroi' ('krua') meaning 'fountain' ^[2,3]. In early Byzantine writings (7th century) the city is mentioned as Kroai, according to the Greek word 'Κροαί', and in Latin writings as Croya and Croarum. During the Ottoman Empire, the city was called Ak Hisar (White Fort). The first inhabitants of Krujë (Iron Age) were the Albanian tribe Albani. During the Illyrian Wars (229-168 BC), Krujë conquered ancient Rome ^[3]. In the period from the 6th to the 9th century, a fortress was built in Krujë. After the foundation (1190) of the first independent Albanian state in the Middle Ages (Principality of Arbanon), Krujë became its capital, and later the capital of the Kingdom of Arbëria ^[3]. During the 13th and 14th centuries, the town of Krujë was ruled by Byzantium, and from 1343 by the Serbian Empire. From 1385, the Ottomans gradually conquered the territory of today's Albania. Krujë remains an impregnable fortress where the Albanian national hero Gjergj Kastrioti-Skenderbeg (1433-1468) had his seat. Not long after Skanderbeg's death, Krujë was in the possession of the Republic of Venice and resisted Ottoman attacks until 1478, when the Ottomans finally took possession of it and held it until 1912 ^[4]. After the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire, Essad Pasha Toptani (1863-1920), a former Ottoman officer from the famous Albanian Toptani family, included Krujë (1914) in the newly formed Republic of Central Albania, and the Young Turk Prenk Bib Doda (1860-1919) joined it to the Principality of Albania ^[4]. At the beginning of the Second World War, the area of Krujë was occupied by Italy, where it remained until the capitulation (1943), when Germany took over the administration of this area ^[4]. Albanian partisans liberated (1944) this city.

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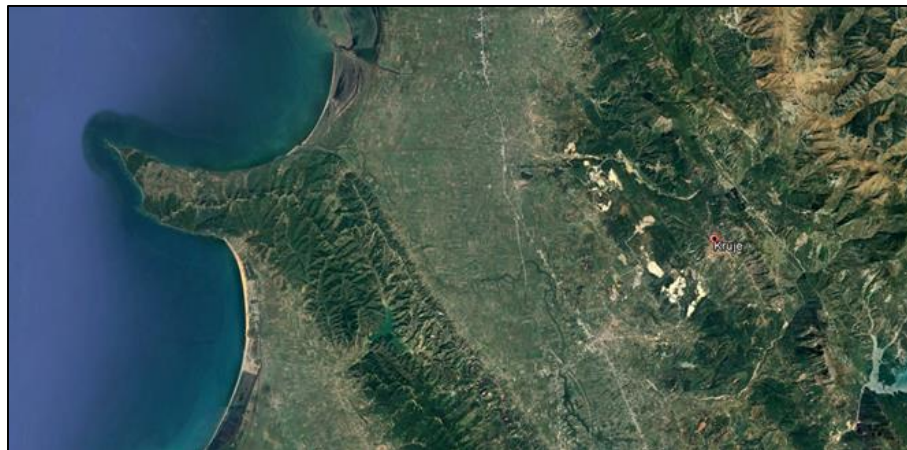
The aim of the study trip was to get to know the cities on the spot and through their analysis (through 'cabinet work') to

contribute to the author's theory of „ Architecturally defined space“ [5, 6, 7] (Figure 1).



Source: Hadrovic, A. (2018) [6], Architecture in the travelogues of an architect. Book 1: Balkan, Faculty of Architecture University in Sarajevo, Sarajevo, pp. 25 - 105 (in Bosnian)

Fig 1: Map of Albania. (Places visited by the Author are marked with red squares and rectangles)



Source: Google Earth. Accessed: November 11, 2023

Fig 2: Krujë in Albania Location

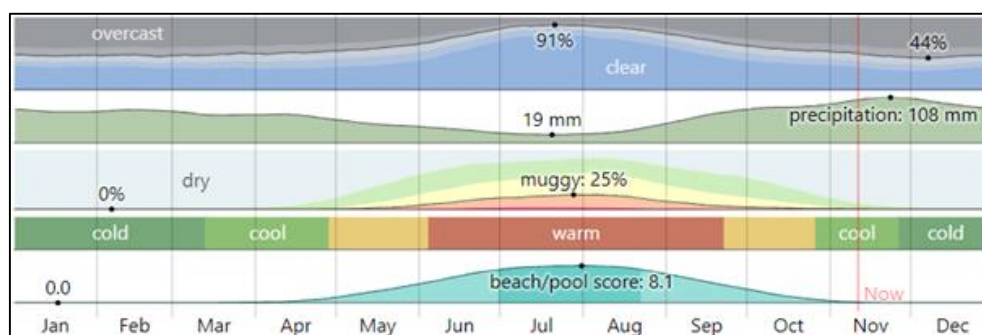
2. Natural resources and sights

The climate in Krujë is warm and temperate. There is a lot of rain there even in the driest month. This climate is considered Cfa according to the Köppen-Geiger climate classification. In Krujë, the average annual temperature is 13.0 °C. 1355 mm/m2 of precipitation falls annually. Krujë is located in the northern hemisphere. Summer here starts at the end of June and ends in September. The summer months are: June, July, August, September [8]. In Krujë, the summers are warm and

mostly clear, and the winters are long, very cold, humid and partly cloudy. During the year, the temperature usually varies from 0 °C to 29 °C and is rarely below -5 °C or above 33 °C. The warm season lasts for 3.0 months, from June 14 to September 12, with an average daily temperature above 25 °C. The warmest month of the year in Krujë is July, with an average high of 29 °C and a low of 17 °C. The cold season lasts 3.8 months, from November 23 to March 16, with an average daily temperature below 13 °C. The coldest month of

the year in Krujë is January, with an average minimum temperature of 0 °C and a maximum of 9 °C. In Krujë, the average percentage of the sky covered by clouds experiences significant seasonal variation over the course of the year. The brighter part of the year in Krujë starts around June 6 and lasts for 3.4 months, ending around September 19. The clearest month of the year in Krujë is July, during which the sky is clear, mostly clear, or partly cloudy 91% of the time. The cloudier part of the year begins around September 19 and lasts for 8.6 months, ending around June 6. The cloudiest month of the year in Krujë is December, during which the sky is cloudy or mostly cloudy 44% of the time. The wet season lasts for 8.0 months, from September 13 to May 12, with a greater than 23% chance of a given day being a rainy day. The month with the most rainy days in Krujë is November, with an average of 9.9 days with at least 1.00 millimeters of precipitation. The drier season lasts for 4.0 months, from May 12 to September 13. The month with the fewest rainy days in Krujë is July, with an average of 3.4 days with at least 1.00 millimeters of precipitation. Among rainy days, we distinguish those that have only rain, only snow or a mixture of the two. The month with the most rainy days only in the city of Krujë is November, with an average of 9.9 days. According to this categorization, the most common form of precipitation throughout the year is rain itself, with a peak probability of 36% on November 20. It rains in Krujë throughout the year. The month with the most rain in Krujë is November, with an average rainfall of 105 mm/m². The month with the least rain in Krujë is July, with an average rainfall of 20 mm/m². Day length in Krujë varies significantly throughout the year. In 2023, the shortest day is December 22, with 9 hours and 10 minutes of daylight; the longest day is June 21, with 15 hours and 11 minutes of daylight. We base the humidity comfort level on the dew point, as it determines whether sweat will evaporate from the skin, thus cooling the body. Lower dew points appear drier and higher dew points appear wetter. Unlike temperature, which usually varies significantly between night and day,

dew point tends to change more slowly, so although the temperature may drop at night, a sultry day is usually followed by a sultry night. Krujë experiences some seasonal variation in perceived humidity. The stronger period of the year lasts for 3.6 months, from May 30 to September 18, during which time the comfort level is sultry, oppressive, or miserable at least 6% of the time. The month with the most humid days in Krujë is July, with 7.0 days that are humid or worse. The least humid day of the year is February 6, when humid conditions are actually unheard of. The average hourly wind speed in Krujë experiences significant seasonal variation over the course of the year. The windiest part of the year lasts for 5.7 months, from October 19 to April 8, with an average wind speed greater than 3.2 m/s. The windiest month of the year in Krujë is February, with an average hourly wind speed of 3.9 m/s. The calmer time of the year lasts 6.3 months, from April 8 to October 19. The calmest month of the year in Krujë is June, with an average hourly wind speed of 2.6 m/s. The prevailing average hourly wind direction in Kruja varies throughout the year. The wind is most often from the south for 1.9 weeks, from March 31 to April 13, with a peak percentage of 35% on April 6. The wind is most often from the east for 1.8 months, from April 13 to June 7, and for 8.8 months, from July 5 to March 31, with a peak percentage of 35% on May 12. The wind is most often from the west for 4.0 weeks, from June 7 to July 5, with a peak percentage of 34% on June 29. Krujë is located near a large body of water (e.g. ocean, sea or large lake). The average water temperature experiences extreme seasonal variations throughout the year. The season with warmer water lasts 3.3 months, from June 19 to September 28, with an average temperature above 23 °C. The month of the year with the warmest water in Krujë is August, with an average temperature of 25 °C. The colder water season lasts 4.1 months, from December 19 to April 23, with an average temperature below 16 °C. The month of the year with the coldest water in Krujë is February, with an average temperature of 14 °C^[9] (Figure 3).



Source: Climate and Average Weather Year Round in Krujë, Albania

<https://weatherspark.com/y/84366/Average-Weather-in-Kruj%C3%AB-Albania-Year-Round>

Accessed: November 11, 2023.

Fig 3: Krujë weather by month

The Krujë city was created and developed in its history thanks to its exceptional natural-geographical position on the western slopes of the Krujë mountain and the spacious fertile valley along the Ishëm (Ishmi) river. Arable fields on the one

hand and mountain pastures on the other have always been the most significant natural resources that generated life in the town of Krujë (Figures 4,5,6).



Source: <https://activities.marriott.com/things-to-do/V28Hi3L7Z0LnpL-kruje-and-holy-mountain-half-day-tour-from-durres>
 Accessed: November 11, 2023.

Fig 4: Krujë mountain above the Krujë city

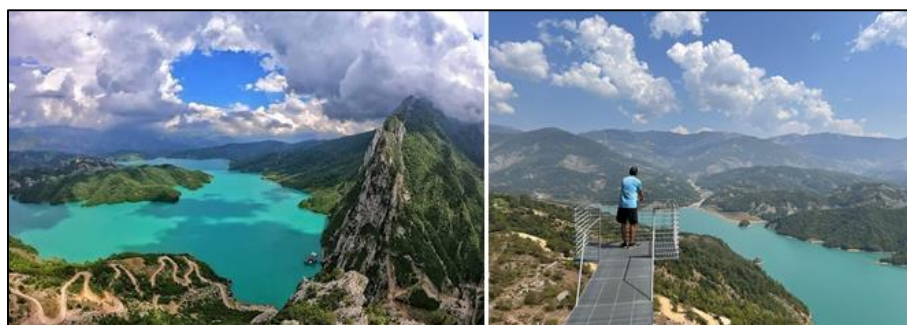


Source:
<https://lh5.googleusercontent.com/p/AF1QipNA7NY2lnugxK1EWYvoGY-YK3s0SWupvAdwtoN0=w2560-h1440-pd>
 Accessed: November 11, 2023.

Fig 5: Fertile fields along the Ilishëm river near the Krujë city

Bovilla Lake is an extremely important natural resource of the Krujë city. In this area, some tour operators offer a backup

itinerary for walking, hiking and rock climbing. Itineraries vary in difficulty, from simpler to more difficult (Figure 6).



Source: https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g3575835-d12292810-Reviews-Lake_Bovilla-Tirana_County.html#/media-atf/12292810/?albumid=-160&type=0&category=-160, Accessed: November 11, 2023.

Fig 6: Bovilla Lake

As an important road from the port of Durrës to Burrel and on to Debar in North Macedonia passes through the city, the city has developed over time as an important trade center, and in modern times a strong economic, cultural and tourist center.

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. Monumental Roman

architecture emerged from the period of the rule of the Roman Empire in this area, 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.

Krujë is a city whose history, more than any other city in Albania, is a place of national pride and the struggle of the Albanian people for freedom. The connection of this city with the Albanian national hero, Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeg

(1405-1468) is visible and legible both in the view of the city on the rocky slopes of the Krujë mountain from the plain along the Ilishëm river and in the view of the spacious valley of the Ilishëm river from the Krujë Fortress. Many individual objects complete these broader pictures of the city in detail (Figures 7-17).

Krujë Fortress rises on a rocky ridge separated from the Sarisaltëk mountain and the surrounding rocks. It is one of the most valuable monuments for the local community of Krujë, and it also has a special significance for all Albanians because it is considered the place where the first resistance to the Ottomans was given with Skenderbeg (Figure 7).



Source: Author (September 25, 2012)

Fig 7: Remains of the fortress in Krujë. View from the fortress to the valley below the city

It is assumed that the Clock Tower in the Krujë Fortress was built around the 11th-12th century, initially as a watchtower and signal tower, which was also equipped with a bell. In its lower part, the technique of the Byzantine period is discernible, where masonry is combined with stones and rows of bricks. Today it is one of the most visited heritage sites in Albania and is included in the monument of the first category. An earthquake in 1617 damaged the upper part of the tower. Interventions after the earthquake changed the shape of the trunk of the pyramid at the top. The earthquake that hit central Albania in 2019 caused extensive damage to the walls of the Clock Tower, threatening its collapse. In response to this risk

and taking into account the cultural and historical value of this location, CHwB Albania, thanks to the support of the Prince Claus Fund and Sweden, in March 2021, he started carrying out urgent consolidation works in order to reduce the risk of a total collapse in the short term while the final operations are planned. The purpose of the project is to secure the clock tower and prevent further degradation even under seismic activity. Strengthening will improve the capacity of the structure for a significant period of time by creating opportunities for further documentation of the tower as well as the realization of the final renovation project ^[10] (Figure 8).



Source: Author (September 25, 2012)

Fig 8: The clock tower within the walls of Krujë Fortress



Source: Author (September 25, 2012)

Fig 9: Krujë Fortress (Private residential buildings within the former fortress)

Pazari Krujë (Bazaar Krujë) is a complex treasure that preserves indisputable historical and architectural values, and is located on both sides of the stone road that leads to the city fortress. Among the local population, the bazaar is known as the Derexhik bazaar. This bazaar has been functioning since the time of Skenderbeg in the 15th century, when his shops reached the entrance of the castle. The shops have wooden

walls, ceilings and shutters. This is also the main tourist area of the city, located in its center on the road leading to the castle. Various trades such as copperware, embroidery, weapon making, for example, used to be grouped in its wooden shops. You can also buy interesting handicrafts there, such as household items, jewellery, tablecloths and carpets, many of which are handmade (Figure 10).



Source: Author (September 25, 2012)

Fig 10: Pazari Krujë (Bazaar Krujë)

Tekke Dollmë (Albanian: Teqja e Dollmës) or Tekke Hadzi Mustafa Baba (Turkish: Mustafa Baba Dolma tekkesi) is a cultural monument of Albania, located in Lagjja Kala, Krujë. Before its destruction by the communist dictatorship, Krujë tekija had 360 holy graves and was known as „Little Khorasan“^[11, 12] (Figure 11). The tekija was built in 1193 AD (1779-1780) by Adem aga Toptani (died 1784), whose

marble tomb is located inside the tekija. It may have originally been a mosque instead of a Sufi shrine, as there is a mihrab (prayer niche) inside. Pilgrims gathered in the tekke on the holiday of August 11. The Dollma family is buried inside, and some of the graves are revered as shrines: dervish Baba Mustafa Dollma, dervish Hysen Dollma^[13].



Source: <https://tropter.com/en/albania/kruje/dollma-tekke?gid=1&pid=315854>, Accessed: November 11, 2023.

Fig 11: Tekke Dollmë in Krujë

Tekke Baba Maksur (Albanian: Teqja e Baba Maksurit) was designed as a cave, and was used as a mosque for almost 600

years (Figure 12).



Source: https://ozoutback.com.au/Albania/kruja/slides/25_2007061309.html, Accessed: November 11, 2023

Source: <https://nomadicniko.com/2013/10/02/kruje/>, Accessed: November 11, 2023

Fig 12: Baba Maksurit tekke. The tekke is carved into the rock with a small extension next to the rock, in an open area

The public bath has been an important element of social life in these areas since ancient times. From the Roman baths as a place for meeting, exercise and exchange to the Ottoman-style baths as a space for conversation, intrigue and political debate, both promoted a healthy recipe for cleanliness, relaxation and companionship. Albania inherited numerous baths from both the Roman and Ottoman Empires, including:

Roman Baths in Durrës (1st century), Hamam in Shkodër (1540), Hamam in Lezha (1560), Hamam in Tirana (1614), Baths in the Bazaar (17th century) and in the castle of Sinan Pasha in Elbasan, the hamam in Gjirokastra and the hamam from the 15th century located in the Krujë Fortress. The hamam in Krujë was forgotten for many years. Hammam in Krujë was restored by Cultural Heritage without Borders in

cooperation with the Institute for Cultural Monuments, and was financed by the Government of Sweden during the years 2013-2015. The hammam in the town of Krujë is located on the edge of the southwestern part of the fortress, near the Dolma tekija. Built at the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century, the Krujë hamam is the oldest in Albania. This swimming pool consists of four rooms, a bath and a water tank. The hammam was renovated in 2015 with the help of a Swedish foundation (Figure 13). CHwB

Albania's objectives in this restoration and revitalization project included the sustainable development of cultural heritage for income generation, by returning this monument to its original function. This renovation promises renewed financial incentives for community members, revitalization of the surrounding neighborhood, increased tourism, and the start of a larger initiative aimed at building a national network of functional traditional hammams.



Source: https://ozoutback.com.au/Albania/kruja/slides/24_2007061315.html, Accessed: November 11, 2023

Fig 13: Hammam in Krujë

Tekke Sari Salltik in Krujë is a holy place of the Bektashi order, a Sufi branch of the Islamic religion, located on the top of Sarisalltik mountain at 1176 m above sea level. At its peak, Sarisalltik mountain has a large cave, which is 15 m deep and 4 m high. Inside the cave there is a holy fountain. Next to the cave is the Masjid – a small mosque, which was the first built in Albania. Inside which is the grave of Sari Salltika. Sari Salltik is a legendary figure of the Bektashi order. According to the Bektashi legend, Sari Salltik came to Krujë on his way during a missionary journey. A dragon nested on top of the mountain, which threatened the villagers of Krujë to burn down the town if they did not sacrifice a virgin girl. When the villagers decided to sacrifice their princess to the dragon, Sari

Salltik went with the princess and finally killed the dragon with one stick. Although part of the mountain turned into ashes, the mountain belonged to the locals after they built the mosque. The story of the dragon is certainly a legendary myth, but its name is mentioned in several historical works of literature, including that of the 14th century Moroccan traveler and geographer Ibn Battuta. Numerous Bektak pilgrims regularly visit this holy place. For believers of the Bektashi order, the very climb to the mountain is a sacred experience. But many people also come to visit this mountain to enjoy the panoramic view from the 'Balcony of the Adriatic', which overlooks the surroundings towards the Adriatic Sea (Figure 14).



Source: <https://stock.adobe.com/de/images/tekke-of-sari-salltik-sari-saltuk-in-cave-in-skanderbeg-mountains-mali-i-krujes-kruja-kruje-durres-qar-durres-albania-europe/232373877>, Accessed: November 11, 2023

Fig 14: Turbe dervish Sari Saltuk Baba

Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu National Museum. The museum was founded in 1982 within the old Krujë fortress. It houses artifacts from the 15th century that relate to the Albanian-

Ottoman conflicts during the frequent Ottoman attacks on the town of Krujë. The remains of the Fethiye mosque, which was built in 1479, stand directly next to the building of this

museum. The mosque was demolished (1948) during the reign of Enver Hoxha (1908-1985), (Figure 15).

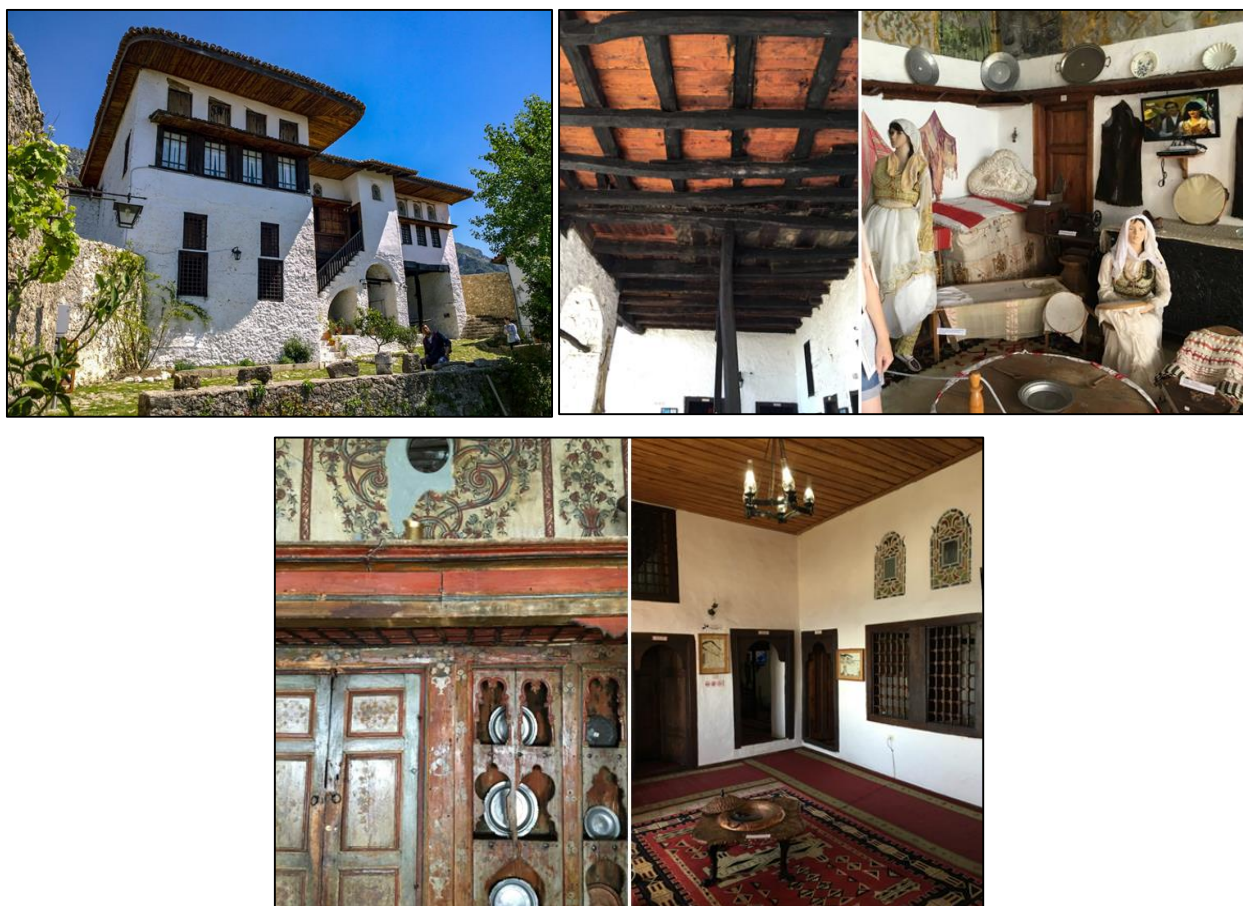


Source: Author (September 25, 2012)

Fig 15: Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu National Museum in Krujë

Krujë National Ethnographic Museum. The museum was founded in 1989 in the villa of the famous Albanian noble family Toptani, built in 1764. The central place of this

museum are exhibits related to craftsmanship in the town of Krujë, which are 50 to 500 years old (Figure 16).



Source: <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/ethnographic-museum-of-kruje>, Accessed: November 11, 2023.

Fig 16: Krujë National Ethnographic Museum

The monument to Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeg in the town of Krujë was erected in 1958 and is the work of sculptor Janaq Pac. Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbegu (1405-1468), widely known as Skanderbeg, was an Albanian nobleman from the 15th century. Sultan Murat II (1404-1451) took him as a hostage in 1423 and he fought for the Ottoman Empire for the next twenty years. In 1443, he deserted and became the ruler of Krujë. In 1444, he organized the local leaders, uniting their forces for a war against the Ottomans. Skanderbeg's first

victory against the Ottomans in the same year marked the beginning of more than 20 years of war with the Ottomans. Skanderbeg's forces achieved more than 20 victories in the field and withstood three sieges of his capital, Krujë. Today, Skanderbeg is considered a leading figure not only in the national consciousness of Albanians, but also in the European history of the 15th century. He already gained a reputation as a hero in his time. The failure of most European nations to support him against the Ottomans meant that none of

Skanderbeg's victories permanently prevented the Ottomans from invading the western Balkans (Figure 17).



Source: <https://equestrianstatue.org/skanderbeg-george-kastrioti/>, Accessed: November 11, 2023

Fig 17: Monument to Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeg in the Krujë city

4. Conclusion

The Krujë city was created and developed in its history thanks to its exceptional natural-geographical position on the western slopes of the Krujë mountain and the spacious fertile valley along the Ishëm (Ishmi) river. Arable fields on the one hand and mountain pastures on the other have always been the most important natural resources that generated life in the town of Krujë. Krujë is a city whose history, more than any other city in Albania, is a place of national pride and the struggle of the Albanian people for freedom. The connection of this city with the Albanian national hero, Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeg (1405-1468) is visible and legible both in the view of the city on the rocky slopes of the Krujë mountain from the plain along the Ishëm river and in the view of the spacious valley of the Ishëm river from the Krujë Fortress. Many individual objects complete these broader pictures of the city in detail. Kruja Fortress rises on a rocky ridge separated from the Sarishtëk mountain and the surrounding rocks. It is one of the most valuable monuments for the local community of Krujë, and it also has a special significance for all Albanians because it is considered the place where the first resistance to the Ottomans was given with Skenderbeg.

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