Skender Luarasi

Survival through Architecture

A Survey and Analysis of the Architectural Oeuvre of Skënder Kristo Luarasi, 1908 – 1976

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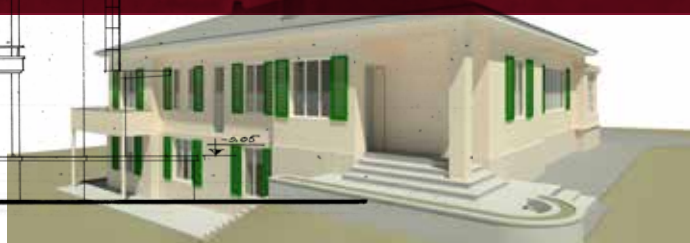

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Vol. 9 Survival through Architecture
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for my family

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Abbreviations:
TCAC: Technical Central Archive of Construction
SLPA: Skënder Luarasi Personal Archive

Preface and Acknowledgements

On December 4, 2021, the historic city of Gjirokastër—a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2005—posthumously awarded Skënder Kristo Luarasi the Honorary Citizen Prize, with this dedication: "For the important contribution in the construction of several sociocultural works, for the architecture of Gjirokastër, and for co-authoring the first regulatory plan for Gjirokastër." The ceremony took place at the Obelisk, a panoramic high point from where it is possible to see all of Luarasi's projects punctuating a city that—in Luarasi's words: "looks like a huge building"[1] stuck into a mountain. Agron Doraci, his lifelong collaborator, recalls that after the war, while other architects tried to avoid commissions outside Tirana as far as possible due to transportation and construction difficulties, Luarasi sought out commissions in Gjirokastër. What would make someone who, starting at the age of ten, had lived and studied in Austria for seventeen years, from 1919 to 1936, to become enamored with a supercilious, seemingly *anachronistic* old 'Balkan' town? Or did such sympathy arise from the city's contemporaneity and its subtly camouflaged modernity—an argument that will be elaborated later on? The 'old' stone city is a metonymy for Albania, a country slowly opening up to modernity after centuries of a feudal regime, which found itself in a time of change that Luarasi and others of his generation would be part of. Luarasi completed his studies at the Technische Hochschule (Technical College) in Graz (today, the Technische Universität Graz [Graz University of Technology]) in 1935 (figs. 1 and 2). For forty years, until his death in 1976, Skënder Kristo Luarasi designed and managed the construction of more than 250 buildings throughout the country. They were of all types and scales: individual houses and villas, public housing and apartment buildings, cultural centers, cinemas, churches, administrative buildings, conference halls, hospitals, hotels, factories, hangars, thermal baths, dormitories, gyms, schools, café-bars, storage facilities, horse stables, and renovations. This book addresses key moments in Luarasi's oeuvre by framing it as an integral part of the emergence and development of modern architecture in Albania.

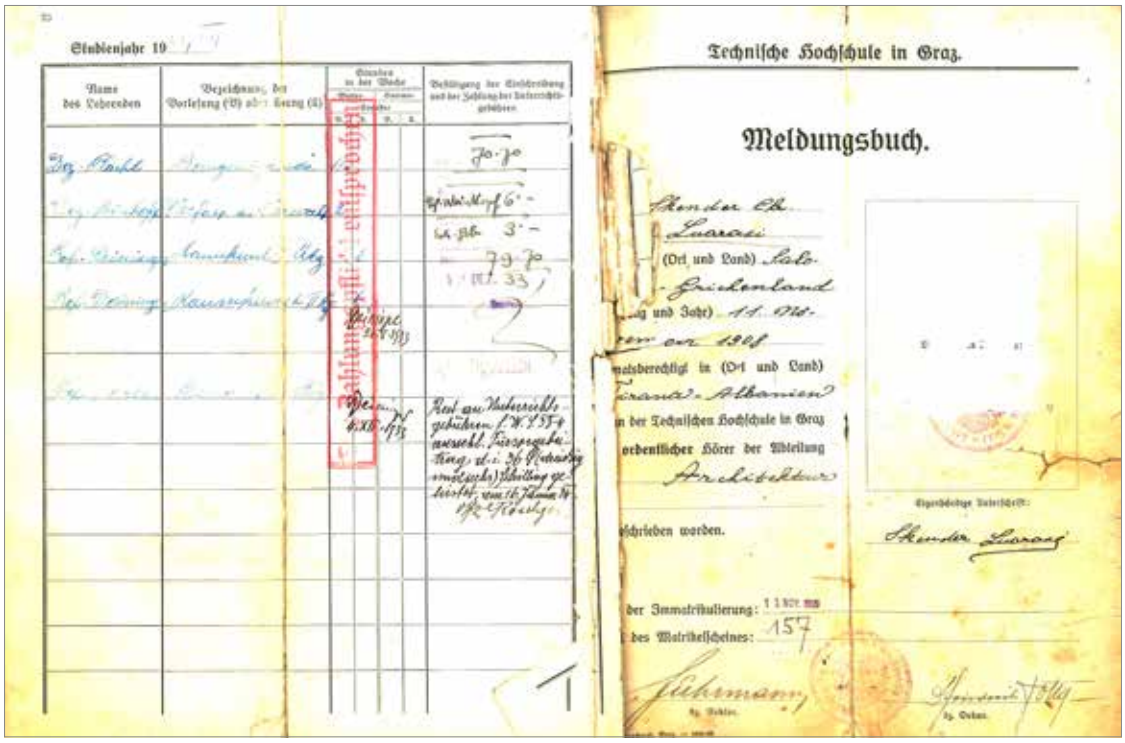
[1] These are Luarasi's words as recounted to the author by Agron Doraci.

Figure 1

Photo of Skënder Kristo Luarasi with his classmates at the TU Graz, probably sometime between 1929 and 1935. Luarasi is standing on the left in the back, wearing a dark suit. (SLPA)

Figure 2

Transcripts of Skënder Luarasi at the TU Graz (SLPA)



Technische Hochschule in Graz.

Meldungsbuch.

I would, first of all, like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the TU Graz Verlag and its wonderful staff—Gabriele Groß, Sara Weichselbaum, Norbert Prem, and Amy Klement, with whom I have communicated the most, as well as those behind the scenes that I have not communicated with—yet—for welcoming, supporting, sponsoring and patiently sustaining, developing, and seeing this project to fruition. I would like to thank the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Architecture of the Graz University of Technology for contributing to sponsoring this project. I thank my father, Pavllo Luarasi, for encouraging me to write this book, for providing me with firsthand information on many of Skënder Luarasi's projects and professional career and factual information about his life, and for helping me assemble and navigate through his archive. I also warmly thank my wife, Irida, and my first cousin Evis for reading, editing, and preparing the images for this book.

Writing this book meant treading cautiously between an assumed familiarity with the subject matter and an exaggerated sense of the *unheimlich*, which was bound to arise due to my proximity to the subject matter, since I am both an architect and the grandson of Skënder Kristo Luarasi. I would like to thank all the individuals who encouraged me to write this book and at the same time helped me maintain a critical distance from the object of study, sometimes simply by allowing me to talk and share my thoughts about this book with them, and by their taking on the indispensable dialogical role of interlocutor. I thank my cousin and friend Andi Papastefani for encouraging me to write this book, for reading and commenting on its drafts, for his foreword, and especially for the informal conversations we have had on modern architecture, urban planning, and heritage in Albania, conversations that have prompted and privileged the birth of new and unexpected ideas. I also express my gratitude to my aunt's husband, Pirro Thomo, a central figure and veteran of conservation and preservation practices in Albania with whom I have often shared thoughts about the vernacular and modern heritage in Albania, for encouraging me to write this book, and for providing a foreword for the book. Thanks go as well to my two Yale friends and former colleagues Gary He and Adil Mansure for their careful reading of the material, their incisive suggestions and, naturally, their forewords, which support one of the most fundamental ambitions of this book: to contextualize its topic and subject within a larger discursive context.

I am grateful to Agron Doraci, a lifelong collaborator of Luarasi in Gjirokastër, for his enthusiastic assistance and support in organizing the Honorary Citizen Prize ceremony in Gjirokastër, and for sharing various details and stories of Luarasi's work in Gjirokastër with me. Gratitude is also extended to Sotiraq Mantho, another of Luarasi's lifelong collaborators, for supporting the Honorary Citizen Prize, for the generous description he provides of Luarasi's work in his book *With the Master Builders of My City*, and for the help he has provided in connection with a range of historical clarifications regarding Luarasi's projects in Gjirokastër. I thank the City Hall of Gjirokastër for honoring Skënder Kristo Luarasi with the Honorary Citizen Prize of Gjirokastër. My thanks also go to Gjergj Thomai and the staff of the Technical Central Archive of Construction for patiently and generously aiding me in accessing original archival material. I am grateful to Sari Çakmakxhian and Anastas Dodbiba for sharing the original drawings of their houses, which were designed by Luarasi. I thank my colleagues at POLIS University, who have pioneered a number of key publications on the heritage of modern architecture in Albania and invited me to publish a few articles on this topic in the journal *Forum A+P*. Gratitude is expressed to my colleagues and friends Doriana Bozgo and Ermal Bleta for our mutual affinities and multiple discussions with regard to the topic of modern architecture in Albania. I thank Artan Shkreli, one of the few to have written about the modern architecture in Albania and the work of Skënder Kristo Luarasi in particular, for also encouraging me to write this book and for his archival help. Thanks go as well to Armand Vokshi, the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Design at the Polytechnic University of Tirana, for the conversations we have had on the heritage of modern architecture in Albania and for also encouraging me to write this book. I posthumously extend my gratitude to the architect, painter, and man of letters Maks Velo, one of the few intellectuals—if not the only one—who publicly and intransigently denounced the erasure of modern buildings in Albania over the last thirty years on many occasions, who wrote professionally and sympathetically about the works of early modern architects and Luarasi after the 1990s, and who, whenever we met, did not fail to remind me—with his characteristically acerbic and critical yet passionate look—that this book was long overdue and that *I* had to write it.

Foreword by Prof. Dr. Pirro Thomo: "A long-awaited monograph"

Starting in the 1920s, a new reality appeared in the history of Albania, related to the re-creation of the Albanian State at the Lushnja Congress on January 21–31, 1920. The consolidation of the new state, as well as the designation of Tirana as the capital of the country, posited a number of requirements in the field of architecture as well. The increase in the population of the capital gave rise to a demand for housing and the need to densify the city and expand it in new areas; the functioning of the state gave rise to the demand to construct administrative, industrial and economic, social, cultural, military, as well as residential buildings. But fulfilling these requirements could not be realized empirically. They necessarily required the introduction of specialized engineering and architectural thought. It was during this particular era of development in Albania, in the mid-1930s, that Skënder Kristo Luarasi returned to his homeland after his studies in Graz, Austria. Equipped with a broad cultural background and sound professional training, he immediately distinguished himself with a very large creative output. In the field of residential buildings alone, Luarasi built over forty villas in a period of no more than ten years.

In his creativity, he relied on the modern architecture of Central Europe in general and Austrian architecture in particular. Its buildings are structured in such a way as to ensure comfortable living. They are distinguished by a rational functional solution, an elegant design, and a harmony between the architectural and decorative detail and the general treatment.

Luarasi continued working with the same intensity even after the Second World War. But the repertoire of his creativity was much now wider. It included collective housing, hotels, schools, socio-cultural buildings, administration buildings, industrial buildings, and above all more than fifteen hospitals, all over the country.

Luarasi's work in the city of Gjirokastër, where he left us many buildings, should be mentioned in particular. Thanks to his culture, Luarasi not only appreciated this city for the values it contained, but also felt a deep responsibility to intervene sensitively in such centers with an amazing heritage. With rare intelligence, he created modern works, without imitations, that were harmoniously integrated into traditional ensembles.

The monograph on the work of Skënder Luarasi introduces us to his oeuvre as a whole. But being aware that this creativity is at the same time part of the background of the history of architecture in Albania, the author does not stop at simply addressing Luarasi's works. The value of the monograph lies in the fact that the author interprets these works and frames them within the general development of the most advanced architectural currents of the period, as well as within the relationship of this activity to the heritage of Albanian and Balkan construction and beyond. This monograph, with the poignant title *Survival through Architecture*, is fully justified by the incredibly impressive list of over 200 works that Skënder Luarasi has left us, which based not only their quantity, but also primarily on their quality, quite appropriately make Luarasi one of the pioneers of modern architecture in Albania.

Foreword by Andi Papastefani

The long-awaited publication of the book *Survival through Architecture: A Survey and Analysis of the Architectural Ouevre of Skënder Kristo Luarasi, 1908–1976,* puts the role of Albanian architects in modern architecture, an architecture that, surprisingly, emerged in Albania at a quite early point in time, in the right balance. The researcher and architect Skënder Pavllo Luarasi, the nephew of Skënder Kristo Luarasi, provides us for the first time with a comprehensive, well-structured, and fluent historical and theoretical study of the work of Skënder Kristo Luarasi, one of the main protagonists of modern architecture in Albania. At the same time, the author initiates a debate about this period and stimulates curiosity for further archival research.

For Albanian architects, Skënder Kristo Luarasi remains a hard-to-reach example. This is not only because of the large number of his built and unrealized projects, but also because of their freshness and contemporaneity. Just like Antheus of mythology, who was strengthened every time he touched the earth, each time Skënder Kristo Luarasi touched a new project, he treated it with care, attention, and sensibility, as if it was his very first project. Skënder Kristo Luarasi breathed architecture.

Private residences make up the majority most of his work during his first period (1935–44). Though young and having just recently completed his studies as an architect, he emerged as one of the pioneers of modern architecture in Albania by embodying in his work the modernity of the Wagnerian and Loosian schools that he had acquired during his studies at the TU Graz, combined with a functional and aesthetic originality that is demonstrated in many villas, particularly the one for Thodhor Kristo Luarasi, which is one of the best residences of this period—perhaps the best.

The range of the architect's projects, especially in the years following the Second World War, is diverse. The architect responded to different political and regional contexts in innovative ways. The Agimi Apartments, a large-scale residential block in Tirana, exemplifies this best. Here, the architect gives us a work that combines the virtuosity of designing in an eclectic classical style—the 'official' style in Albania in the 1950s—with nuances of Central European architecture and a functional modernist subtext. In Gjirokastër, on the other hand, Skënder Kristo Luarasi would design in a modernism of a critical regionalist style.

Starting from the late 1930s, with the reconstruction of the Gymnasium, and until well after the Second World War, Skënder Kristo Luarasi had a special relationship with the stone city of Gjirokastër. As the author of this book points out, modernity entered this city early on. Luarasi was a protagonist in this modernity. What attracts one to Luarasi's works is the unexpected and unanticipated. The objects that he designed, such as the Gymnasium and Çajupi Hotel, are large buildings, yet they stand gracefully at the heart of the urban ensemble and in a pleasant dialogue with its characteristic silhouettes and objects such as the Castle and the old town. They retain their typological individuality without having to strain themselves through fragmentation.

In the works of Skënder Kristo Luarasi, one reads humanism. More clearly than anywhere else, this unfolds in the design of hospital facilities, among which the Gjirokastër Hospital holds a special place. These buildings from the communist era presented funding and construction difficulties. Luarasi nonetheless dedicated his energy, talent, and professional maturity to this field, emerging as a pioneer of hospital designs in Albania. With his architectural work Luarasi affirms, just like Jože Plečnik in Slovenia, what the rest of us do not always believe, namely that you can do great architecture even in small places.

On that beautiful December day in 2021, on the hill of the Obelisk, during the ceremony awarding of the title of Honorary Citizen of Gjirokastër to Skënder Kristo Luarasi, light mixed with fog among the silhouettes of the city, including Luarasi's objects. The expression came naturally to me: God bless your soul, Architect!

Foreword by
Gary Huafan He

Survival through Architecture surveys the architectural works of Skënder Kristo Luarasi (1908–1976), an oeuvre that reflects the history of modern architecture in Albania. In addition to shedding sorely needed light on a historical period, the book is also a critical meditation on the role that ideology and discourse play in shaping that history. The author Luarasi works against a simplistic inclusion and reduction of the 'modern vernacular' of Albania in the inter- and postwar periods within a putatively 'universal' modernism, and instead presents the story of Albanian modernism as a series of *negative* discourses that nonetheless reveal an international, modern dimension of such a vernacular. The book does not focus on affirming, but rather on revealing omissions and erasures, not by architects, but by various powerful external forces, be they governmental regimes, developers, or their agents.

Those of us who have operated largely in the cultural West and largely take the stability of modernism for granted would do well to remind ourselves of the fragility of narrative and that architecture always has the potential to be emptied out or pulled apart, whether by political excavation or crass commodification. Counter to the romanticized notion of vernacular, it is the hostile conditions faced by modern architects in ontic or peripheral spheres, and their tactful, tempered, even strategic response to such conditions that form a true regionalism. The acknowledgement of difference alone, whose historical project is merely the outward expansion of a global, 'universal' canon, cannot but fail to question its ideological assumptions. This book is a reading of regional architecture that is free from the illusion of an expansive, universal modernism and that accommodates regional characteristics and retains its relevance by simply becoming ever more 'inclusive.'

At the risk of invoking a presumptuous and troublesome term, Luarasi attempts to depict an autonomy of architecture that is not simply a theoretical construct. It is an architecture that ratifies itself not through a precise and austere method of self-expression, but rather by means of a carefully restrained and strategically muted practice of self-preservation amidst shifting political realities. It thus mirrors the experience of so many around the world for whom the idea of the modern seemed so far away even when it was close enough to touch. This distance, which cannot be patched, bridged, or rescued from the past, and can therefore never be fully assimilated into a new, positive rendition of a 'globally' aware present, continues to speak to us through its silence.

The lessons to be gained here are many and concern some of the most basic concepts of modern architecture: the meaning and function of style, the duality of form and content and central and peripheral consciousness, and the monumental potential of architecture in relation to cultural history and identity. *Survival through Architecture* systematically questions our standard understanding of each of these concepts, not by means of a direct or polemical refutation of them, but simply by placing them in the actual historical context and lived experience of modern architects in twentieth-century Albania. Those of us who are engaged in ongoing reflection on modernity in architecture today—no matter what our respective affiliations might be—might thus also shine a more critical light on our own contexts, commitments, and motivations.

Foreword by Adil Mansure: Notes on the Makings of a Modern Vernacular

With a growing appreciation of generic rather than individualist architectures in the twenty-first century and with an increasing will to take a new look, to think about, and learn from less-heroic, unsigned, hardly shiny—but nonetheless significant—buildings of the past century, Skender Luarasi's book takes us to Albania to explore the work of his grandfather Skënder Kristo Luarasi. The communist era in which Luarasi practiced resulted in suppressed authorship and the lack of a patented personal style, the absence of a bold Albanian architectural image, and perhaps also in a lack of a historical or theoretical framework for architectural discourse. What this unusual monograph offers, however, are precisely the discursive contours of a generic modernity as vernacular at work beneath and often counter to the narratives of a presumably local 'non-modern vernacular' and an imported 'non-vernacular, natural modern,' and how Luarasi engages with and in such discourse.

Despite the architect's Austrian training, the book examines projects that do not simply follow or reflect those of his Western mentors. Even modern compositional gestures—such as the diagonal extending through the corners of his villas—are not only disguised by, but also combined with other strategies and building motifs. What we witness here is the effect of an endless series of combinatorial tendencies, formed based on a palette of a finite set of architectural elements. While one project displays an architecture of sloped roofs and cubic volumes, another shows the use of a rather Romanesque series of arches. Nonetheless, something palpable appears to underlie all of them. With his notion of "family resemblance," the philosopher of language Ludwig Wittgenstein described how it might be hard to pin down what all the members of a family have in common; resemblances between one and another member can nevertheless be observed, forming a vague locus that can perhaps be identified even if not dissected precisely. Luarasi's buildings in Albania, like some by his colleagues, form precisely such a locus. This book is the thus story of an individual, but also of a *genera*—and a generation.

In the book Luarasi the author describes Albanian vernacular architectural tradition as misused and instrumentalized by—various internal or external agents of—power to provide "a 'safe' distance from a disavowed modernist discourse." Continuity has commonly been associated with the vernacular and a rupture with the modern. Luarasi the author, however, presents an alternative to such fraught binaries: he offers Luarasi the architect's work as a modern vernacular, as a series of inflections caused, for example, by serendipitous imports of contemporary influences, by the availability of inher-

ited forms and building materials, or by the appropriateness of a structural design method to a certain topography. Somewhat like the *spolia* of ancient Rome, in Albania valuable 'building material'— which is used here in the expanded sense of various architectural motifs, style(s), and knowhow—had to be used, integrated, and recomposed into new building projects, as and when found. The vernacular must thus not refer solely to the innocent propensity to build on Rudofsky's "architecture without architects"; neither must the modern refer only to heroic blank-slate projects. By unpacking inflections of various motifs, styles, and so on, Luarasi reveals how the "vernacular tradition [can be] subsumed in the field of modernity." Furthermore, Luarasi works past socialist realism's imposition of collectivist agency on architecture, and tactfully discusses the shifting balances between collective versus individual agency, which are both invariably at work behind the scenes in Luarasi's architecture. While narratives about society may be quick to change along with regimes and the times, what characterizes architectural genera are inevitably stories of inflections and slow becomings, of the reintegration of heavy masses into a different coda of arrangements. But it is herein that 'a modernity' lies: in the very ability to make whole—and to make wholes—of the various slowly drifting masses and concepts of architectural material.

Luarasi the author attempts to articulate this modernity less by untangling the con-fusion, as it were, and more by attempting to understand the mechanisms of fusion itself. With a focus on processes of slow change—rather than on the banners, treatises, and manifestos of 'the new'—he walks us through not only Luarasi's buildings, but also one particular modernism and how it emerged from various origins. This history is itself not genealogical, but rather horizontal, a bustling landscape of migrating motifs, materials, influences, and style tags. And this is precisely what makes it a global history, and indeed what inevitably makes modernity itself global—and the global itself modern.

Introduction

Skënder Kristo Luarasi was born in Thessaloniki in 1908. He was one of the four children and the third son of Kristo Papastefan Luarasi and Polikseni Dhespoti. Kristo and Polikseni were actively involved in the Albanian National Awakening—also known as the Rilindja Kombëtare, or Albanian Renaissance, a cultural, political, and social movement that spanned the nineteenth century and culminated in Albania seceding and gaining independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912. The Renaissance movement strove to harness and construct a national identity with various means, the most palpable of which was the Albanian language. It is primarily in this realm that Kristo and Polikseni's contributions lay. In collaboration with Kostë Jani Trebicka, they opened the Mbrothësia (Progress) publishing house in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1897, which published the first *Abetare* (Albanian primer or ABC book). In collaboration with Shahin Kolonja, they edited the journal *Drita* (The Light). They also published the *Kalendari Kombiar* (National Calendar), an annual encyclopedic, cultural, literary, and political publication of the Dëshira (Desire) Society in Sofia.[2] As the first of its kind in Albania, the calendar was essentially an illuminist platform at the service of the Renaissance movement, consisting of critical essays and articles by the finest authors of the Albanian Renaissance, translations into Albanian of scientific, philosophical, and political texts by European illuminist and enlightenment thinkers, and annual reports of the Albanian Patriotic Societies in Exile. The aim was both epistemological and political: to

[2] The *Kalendari Kombiar* was republished in 2017 in four volumes edited by the late Prof. as. Dr. Genci Luarasi, a nephew of Kristo Papastefan Luarasit, under the aegis of the ALSAR Foundation. "The first issue was published in 1897 with the title *Ditërrëfenjësi* (National Calendar) and from 1901 until its final issue, it was titled the *Kalendari Kombiar.* During the years 1897 to 1900, it was managed by Kristo P. Luarasi along with Kosta Trebicka and subsequently Nikola Naçon. After 1900, Kristo Luarasi was the sole publisher until the last issue. Between 1909 and 1910, it was published in Thessaloniki, and from 1911 to 1916 in Sofia. In 1926, the publication resumed in Tirana under the direction of Mit'hat Frashëri (Lumo Skëndos), who was able to publish a final issue in 1928. The series as a whole thus consists of twenty-two issues. Many writers of the Arbëresh, or Albanian Renaissance, wrote articles for these publications based on topics chosen by the publisher. In order to improve the intellectual cultural level of readers, besides Albanian authors, the publishers also selected material by foreign authors, always with the aim of bolstering a sense of Albanian culture and a national feeling. Translated texts on history, geography, the natural sciences, technology, et cetera were also published, thus underscoring Mit'hat Frashëri's great educational and cultural significance. Of interest as well are the summaries of the events of the previous year and advertisements and announcements, and a novelty was the publication of a list of financial assets around the world, which served as a link between Albanians from Russia to Argentina and Australia to North America. The *Kalendari Kombiar* was written in the three alphabets used at the time. After 1908, it was written in the alphabet of the Congress of the Monastery, which is still used today." https://sq.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalendari_Kombiar_(1897–1916, 1926,1928), accessed January 5, 2022 (translated by the author).

provide knowledge and to foster a national consciousness. Mbrothësia reopened in Tirana in 1921 as the Kristo Luarasi Publishing House, located on Kavajë Street (fig I.1). It operated until 1946, when the new communist government appropriated it and made its premises into state property. Kristo Papastefan Luarasi died on July 7, 1934. This is what Mid'hat Frashëri wrote about Kristo and the *Kalendari Kombiar* in an essay written three days later:

> *... me duart e tij Kristua pregatit bukën e shpirtit dhe tëmendjes, gjellën e dritës, në formë grishime, se, në atë periodë, çdo e shtypur me "abecenë", makar edhe një fletë sa pëllëmba, dukesh një gjë me rëndësi fort të madhe, mirrte një karakter të veçantë, pothua të shenjtë. Ata që kanë rrojtur atë kohë duhet të mbajnë mënt akoma entusiasmën e atyre viteve, moshë dashurie mistike, e qendrësuarë në një ideal.. . Dymbëdhjetë vjet me radhë, nga moti 1897 gjer më 1908, Kristua përhapi fjalën e drejtë, mbolli farën e mirë, jo vetëm në Shqipëri, po tekdo që gjendesh nje Shqiptar, në gjithë qytetet e së gjerës imperatori Otomane, në vise të largë te dy Amerikave, gjer në çipa të ngrirë të Siberisë e në shkretina të përvëluara të Afrikës.*[3]
>
> With his hands Kristo prepares the bread of the soul and the mind, the dish of light, in the form of tears, so that, in that period, every print with the "alphabet," even a leaf the size of a palm, looked like something of great importance, took on a special, almost sacred character. Those who have survived that time must still remember the enthusiasm of those years, the age of mystical love, centered on an ideal...Twelve years in a row, from 1897 to 1908, Kristo spread the word, sowed the good seed, not only in Albania, but wherever there was an Albanian, in all the cities of the vast Ottoman Empire, in remote parts of the two Americas, all the way to the frozen outskirts of Siberia and the scorching deserts of Africa.

[3] *Kalendari Kombiar*, "Vitet" [Years) 1913–1928, "Preface," ibid. For other sources on Kristo and his activities, see the following prefaces to the *Kalendari Kombiar*: Ferit Duka, "Një tribunë e mendimit kombëtar Shqiptar" (A Tribune of the National Albanian Thought), "Vitet 1897–1902"; Uran Asllani, "Kristo Luarasi dhe epoka e tij" (Kristo Luarasi and his Epoch), "Vitet"1908–1912"; Laurant Bica, "Kristo Luarasi dhe Frashërlllinjte" (Kristo Luarasi and the Frashëris), "Vitet" 1903–1907." Also see: Sotir Mantho, *Me ndërtuesit duarartë të qytetit tim (With the Masterful Builders of my City)* (Gjirokastër: Argjio, 2014), pp. 236–37; Robert Elsie, ed., *A Biographical Dictionary of Albanian History* (I B Tauris, 1912); Stavro Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

Figure I.1

The building on Kavajë Street where the Kristo Luarasi Publishing House was located from 1921 to 1946. It was designed by Ricardo Masoni in 1931, and supplemented with an additional story by Roberto Vaja in 1935. Photo by the author, January 2022

Kristo Papastefan Luarasi's tomb, where the remains of his wife, Polikseni, are also buried, was probably one of Skënder Kristo Luarasi's first projects in Albania, directly after he completed his studies in Graz, in 1935 (fig. I.1). The tomb consists of seven volumes, five of dark marble and two of white stone. Six of them have a cubic form; only the one that contains the photos of the deceased is chamfered into a 45-degree volume to provide a better view of the photos to someone standing and looking down. The tomb is characterized by a distinct asymmetrical balance, a compositional attribute manifested throughout Luarasi's oeuvre. The volumes are asymmetrically positioned, or dispositioned, to move away from one another, yet are held together by a subtle eurhythmic distribution of their compositional weight. Such *dis*-position symbolizes, perhaps, the homelessness of Kristo and his family, of their having to migrate to different countries, while his true home and what unified the exiles in his family was the work he did for the Renaissance of a homeland that he was away from for most of his life.

These words by Kristo are written on his tombstone:

DERI SA SHQIPËRIJA ISHTE NËNË
ROBËRI, PUNOVA PËR LIRIMIN E
SAJ. TANI QË ËSHTË E LIRË, DO
TË PUNOJ PËR PËRPARIMIN E SAJ

WHILE ALBANIA WAS UNDER
SLAVERY, I WORKED FOR HER
FREEDOM. NOW THAT SHE IS FREE,
I WILL WORK FOR HER PROGRESS

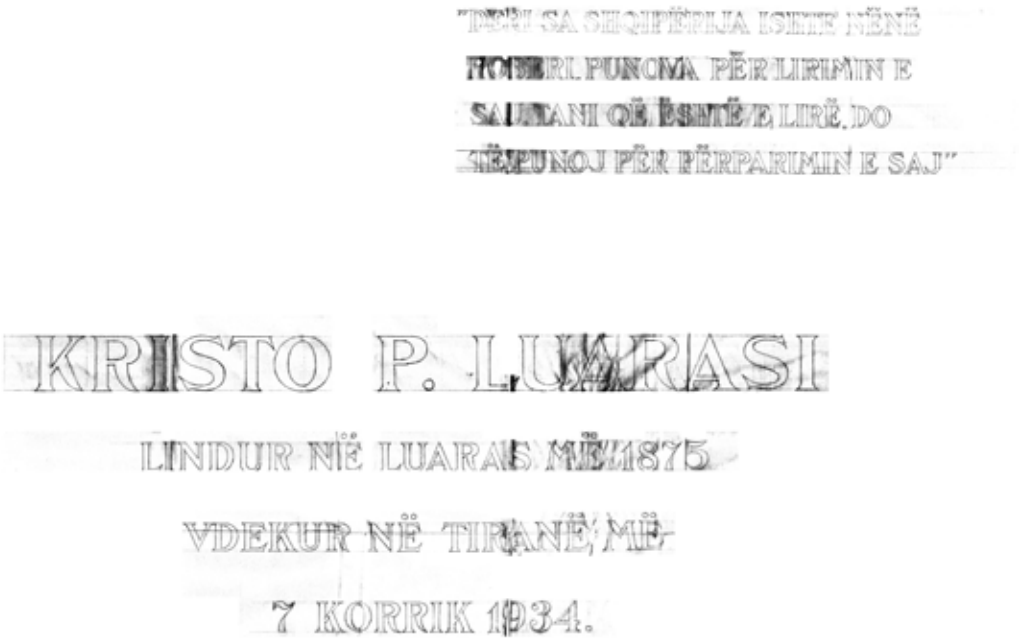
This text is more than simply an epitaph on Kristo's life. It can also be read as a testamentary demand for his children to continue the Awakening project with other means. Inspired by the illuminist ideals of autonomy and free will, the Awakening project aimed at national freedom and nation-forming based on the medium of a unified national language. Once national freedom had been realized, it was imperative to redirect the modern ideals toward the nation's progress—the true inter-national ambition of modernity. Such a testamentary message is also provided by the architectural language of its container: the tomb. With its asymmetrical and elemental constructivist form, the tomb marks the continuation of the Awakening project as the construction of a new, modern Albania in various forms and with different means, one of them being modern architecture.

Figure I.2

Skënder K. Luarasi, tomb of Kristo Papastefan Luarasi, ca. 1936, Tirana, photo by Pavllo Luarasi

Figure 1.3

Skënder Kristo Luarasi, design of the lettering on the tombstone, ca. 1936 (SLPA)



There is a growing interest in the modern architecture in Albania, yet research and texts on this topic remain scarce and episodic. Such historiographic poverty and indifference toward the country's modern heritage are directly related to the economic poverty and institutional instability of Albania, which is manifested in the frenzied erasure of much of the modern urban fabric of the 1920s and 1930s as a result of the building speculations of the past two decades. These urban lobotomies are structurally equivalent to 'archipelagos' of imported contemporary architecture dropped into a city often perceived as having no form or modernism of its own. Such an-aesthetic attitude is a direct result of the unfinished enlightenment and modern project in Albania, which started too late—with the emergence of the Albanian bourgeoise at the turn of the century and after the country gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912—and ended too early—with the absolute eradication of this class by the communist regime after the Second World War. What is at stake on a larger scale here is showing through Luarasi's work that despite its brief and enfeebled existence, modern architecture in Albania is more than just an episodic, imported affair. Along with architects like Qemal Butka and Anton Lufi, Luarasi contributed to a modern architecture that persisted after the war, even if in a muted form and detached from the broader international discourses of modernism.

While most of Luarasi's work took place after the war, it belongs to the time before the war. This does not mean that his work did not change and develop after the war, but instead that its character and principles originated in the education that he received in Graz in the late 1920s and early 1930s and were consolidated in his early practice in Albania in the late 1930s and early 1940s, a period during which Luarasi designed and built more than forty buildings, most of them houses. Working outside one's own time is not uncommon. For example, Joše Plečnik (1872–1957), who inherited the Wagnerian idiom and unapologetically designed in an eclectic classicism, produced most of his architecture at a time that privileged international style and high modernism. He worked outside of and against the grain of the dominant discourses of modernism on the one hand and the political and ideological context of the former Yugoslavia on the other, even as he dutifully served this context with his architecture. However, if Plečnik's being outside of his time maintained its discursive edge insofar as his architecture contrasted clearly with the modernist idiom, Luarasi's being outside of his time was, tragically and comically, quite literal. After the war, Albania was isolated under a communist regime that regarded any modernist influence inherited from Western countries with suspicion and distrust.

What was prohibited was not simply the modern 'style' per se, which contrasted with or was opposed to what was officially sanctioned—the architecture of socialist realism—but rather the very discursive platform based on which such contrast or opposition could be articulated and practiced in the first place. There were, of course, professional and educational mobility and exchange with the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries until 1960, with China until the late 1970s, and in some cases even with some Western countries, and such exchanges did have an impact on the architectural image of the period. But this image never became a discursive object as such. To put it bluntly, no one talked systematically, or even positively about it.[4] For example, in the 1950s, architects built in the so-called 'Soviet style,' but the latter was never discussed in its own terms: How and why, for instance, it was 'better'—or truly more 'communist'— than the architecture of the bourgeois countries, say that of Le Corbusier? While in literature or cinematography there were ideological 'guidelines' that guarded and demarcated more or less clearly which forms constituted Socialist Realism and which did not, and, more significantly, *why* architecture lacked a discursive framework and vocabulary of its own. It is significant that there were no architectural journals, apart from one, which was called *Ndërtuesi* (The Builder), which, poignantly, did not include the term 'architecture,' let alone the term 'modern.' Building became the site where reality and ideology collapsed.

Such discursive prohibition paralleled and, I would argue, was structurally coupled with an emerging interest in cultural heritage, which culminated in the founding of the Institute of Monuments of Culture in 1965 by Gani Strazimiri. This institution was characterized by different motivations: while it aimed to be on the same page with the international practices of preservation and restoration of cultural heritage, it also served the communist regime to maintain a distance from precisely such internationalization. To refer to the very Western, 'bourgeois' discourse that the communist regime was militating against: if the communist ideology was the 'natural,'

[4] In this context, it is worth mentioning the National Meeting of Architects on May 6, 1971, as a rare case of the practice of architectural discourse, where various architects tried to frame and elevate Albanian architecture within a contemporary framework by addressing topics relating to composition, shape, and color, or, in other words, the 'autonomy' of architecture. These lectures were published in June 1971 in issue number 6 of the journal *Nëndori* (November). The architects whose texts were published in it were Sokrat Mosko, Misto Mele, Valentina Pistoli, Koço Miho, Kostaq Sahatçiu, Niko Titka, Petraq Kolevica, Anton Lufi, Enver Faja, Vasilika Cicko, Fadil Paçrami, Kristaq Rama, Ilir Fico, Maksim Mitrojorgji, and Violentina Shehu. There was no second such meeting. As in other fields of art, in the 1970s, architecture and its discourse was subjected to total censorship.

then the folk architecture or tradition was the 'customary,'[5] with the latter, of course, under strict ideological supervision by the former. That 'our new architecture' had to reflect and learn from the folk tradition became both an ideological alibi and an imperative. As the Stalinist formula would have it: "socialist in content, national in form," a mantra that became almost naturalized in Eastern European countries. But, in practice, rather the opposite was the case: socialist was the form that aimed to govern and represent the national content.

Reality, however, is always more complex than all the ideologies. On the one hand, cultural heritage provided the communist ideology with both a nationalist narrative cover and a safe distance from a disavowed modernist discourse that had to be held at bay at all costs. On the other hand, the historical studies and preservation practices related to this cultural heritage also served to offset the discursive poverty of professional architectural practice through detailed and extensive studies and close readings of the Albanian vernacular. These historiographic and preservation practices provided precisely that discursive density that was lacking in architectural practice, and this is attested to by the Institute's prestigious journal, *Monuments*, one of the few Albanian scholarly journals that is known internationally. This historiographic and preservation practice, however, did not extend to modern architecture. The first, albeit belated, attempt to rectify such exclusion was made in the textbook *The History of Architecture in Albania (1912–1944)*, written by Isuf Sukaj, Koço Miho, Pirro Thomo, and Vera Bushati in 1988, just three years before the official collapse of the communist regime. The book was a collaboration between the Faculty of Engineering (which, symptomatically, included architecture but did not name it) and the Institute of Monuments of Culture. While modest in scope and size, it surveys some key examples of modern architecture and urban transformations in Albania during this period. It is in this book that Skënder Kristo Luarasi is mentioned for the first time for his work before the war, and as one of the main protagonists of modern architecture in Albania. To this day, this book remains one of the few accounts, if not the only one, that provides a historiographic tableau, however modest, of modern architecture in Albania, between the two World Wars.

[5] Claude Perrault defined the 'natural' as "very apparent, and [that it consists] in the relationship the parts have collectively as a result of the balanced correspondence of their size, number, disposition, and order," and the 'artificial' as what "appears agreeable not by reasons within everyone's grasp but merely by custom and the association the mind makes between two things of a different nature." Claude Perrault, *Ordonnance for the Five Kinds of Columns after the Method of the Ancients*, trans. Indra Kagis McEwen (Santa Monica: Getty Center, 1993), pp. 40 and 51.

There must always be a discourse, even if it seems to lack content—whether as a result of having been lost, or because it does not yet exist. Whichever the case might be, discourse needs to be re-found or re-invented. This study gives Luarasi's architecture a practicing discourse: an approach to reading, interpreting, and talking about it. It does so by tracing a relationship between what in this study will be referred to as the *modern vernacular* and a *formal*, *compositional density* that consistently characterizes Luarasi's architecture. The modern vernacular stands for modernism *before* modernism, which spans from the mid-nineteenth century to the Second World War. This was an era when the ornamental density of historical styles inflected toward the formal density of the smooth modernist object. Let us thus call formal density what transpires through a phenomenological reading of a project—in all the ways and forms it presents itself to us, whether built or not. By phenomenological reading I mean a close reading of a compositional intentionality that underlies the form of the building, achieved through different notational, descriptive, representational, and architectural means. Such a reading takes place against a backdrop of the modern vernacular and the local and inter-local, national and inter-national contexts in which Luarasi's oeuvre is situated. On a larger note, it is only by highlighting the specificities of such a context that modern architecture in Albania can begin to be unearthed and contoured in its complexity and multiplicity. In Merleau-Ponty's words, "it is always by looking more deeply into how [an event] came about that we make and will go on making new representations of it."[6]

Skënder Kristo Luarasi did not write much about architecture, but he did write *through* his architecture. The first chapter of this book, "Introduction: Contexts and Beginnings," focuses on Luarasi's education in Graz within the specific context of Austrian modernism, and on the modern architecture in Albania in the interwar period, its historiography, and related bibliography. How Luarasi engaged with such specificity is the topic of the chapters that follow. The second chapter, "The Modern Object: The Construction of the Modern Idiom," examines the house as both a dominant typology and a laboratory of

[6] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetic Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), p. 139. The quote reads: "In a sense everything that may have been said and will be said about the French Revolution has always been and will henceforth be within it, in that wave arising from a roil of discrete facts, with its froth of the past and its crest of the future. *And it is always by looking more deeply into how it came about that we make and will go on making new representations of it*."

the modern style. The third chapter, “Urbanism: Large Buildings,” shifts to the scale of the city and takes a look at housing projects, hotels, and hospitals. The latter was one of Luarasi’s preferred typologies, and the one in which he experimented and innovated to the greatest extent. The fourth chapter, “Punctuating Gjirokastër: An Untimely Critical Regionalism,” is dedicated to the city of Gjirokastër and Luarasi’s architectural interventions there. The chapters are followed by an appendix that consists of a treatise by Luarasi on the design of hospitals.

1. Contexts and Beginnings

1.1 Education in Graz and Modern Architecture: Two Projects

Toward the end of his studies in Graz, Skënder Kristo Luarasi sent a picture of an architectural model to his family in Albania, in which various parts are indexed with numbers (figs. 1.1.1–1.1.3). On the back of the picture, one finds the sentence: "Kjo është fotografia e projektit qe kisha ne provimin e shtetit me shkrim, nje kafene im *Ausstellungsgebäude*" (This is the photo of the project I had in the written state examination, a café in an exhibition building). Below this description is a legend in which some words are completely effaced: "1. *Hyrja* [Entrance); 2. _____ *me trapeza* [_____with tables); 3. _____ *e kafenesë* [_____ of the café)." This is the earliest documented project by Luarasi, probably done sometime in 1935, the final year of his studies in Graz, or directly thereafter. It consists of three parts: a central volume and two wings. Their form is purist and geometric, and their surfaces plain and unadorned. The main architectural element is the wall, which is articulated variably as both a solid mass and a pier, the latter positioned either between the windows or as a freestanding element of the pergola. The overall composition gives rise to multiple readings of and correspondences between its parts. The central volume has a bilateral symmetry, emphasized by an axial arrangement of a rectangular and a cylindrical projection on the side of the veranda, which is framed by the two wings. The latter are not symmetrical in themselves or in relation to one another. The one on the northeast consists of a rectangular volume and a pergola, which is also attached to the main volume. The southwest wing consists of two overlapping volumes—a short one attached to the main volume, and a longer one that protrudes further than the other. The latter relates both to the volume of the northeast wing by virtue of its massing articulation, and to the pergola owing to its proportions and its disposition in the overall composition. The relation with the pergola is further emphasized by the entrance arcade and the spacious openings on the southwest façade. The volumes are staggered in both plan and elevation. The main volume forms a T-shape with the northeast wing and an L-shape with the southwest wing. The two masses of the latter are also staggered and overlap in both plan and elevation. This results in a diagonal entrance, which contrasts with the bilateral symmetry of a rather neoclassical horse-shoe composition. As a result of a subtle distribution and intertwining of different axial dispositions, the overall composition emerges as both dynamic and balanced, abstract and expressive, contained and dispersive, centripetal and centrifugal, and modern and traditional. Such compositional density would persist throughout Luarasi's oeuvre, from small single-family houses to complex buildings like the hotel and hospital in Gjirokastër, or the sanatorium in Tirana, about which more will be said later on.

Figure 1.1.1

Skënder Luarasi, postcard from Graz showing the final examination project, model, ca. 1935 (SLPA)

Figure 1.1.2

Skënder Luarasi, postcard from Graz showing the final examination project, model, ca. 1935 (SLPA)

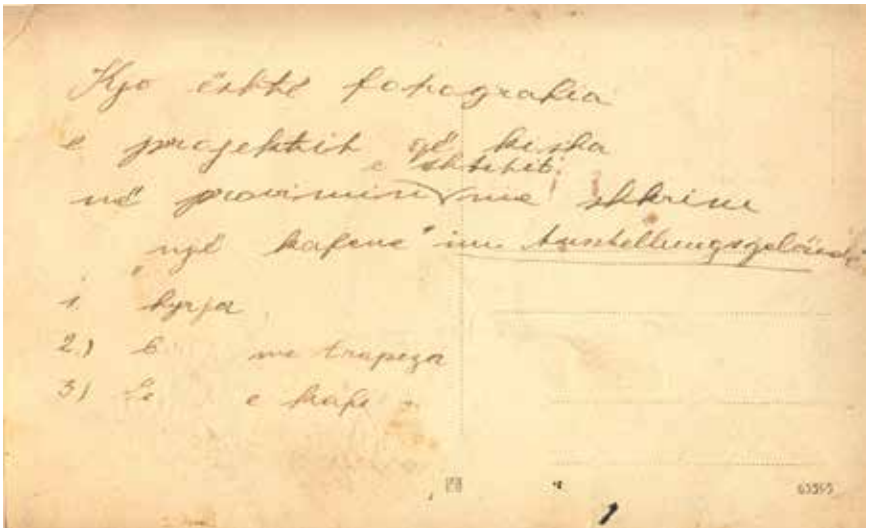


Figure 1.1.3

Skënder Luarasi, postcard from Graz ca. 1935 (SLPA)

Luarasi's architecture aligns with the modern architecture of Central Europe in general and that of Austria in particular. Among the most notable of Luarasi's professors in Graz would have been Wunibald Deininger (1879–1965), Friedrich Jäckel (1877–1960), Karl Hoffman (1887–1957), and Friedrich Zotter (1894–1961). Deininger had studied with Otto Wagner at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, while the other three graduated from the Technical University of Vienna and had studied with Karl Mayreder, a notable professor and the rector of the university at the time.[7] Like many of their generation, they were profoundly influenced by the work of Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos, both seminal figures and protagonists of modern architecture, whose influence went well beyond the borders of Austria and the Empire.

If Wagner was associated with the Vienna Secession,[8] then Loos would be the person who intransigently denounced the Secession's view of ornament as immoral and criminal. Contemporary research, however, reveals that such opposition was not as unequivocal as it was purported to be, and that it does not fully account for the specificity of Wagner or Loos's architecture. Wagner was influential both as a result of his iconic buildings in Vienna and his book *Modern Architecture*, first published in 1896. As Harry Francis Mallgrave has pointed out, in this book, "Wagner was the first European architect to state publicly his break with the [stylistic eclecticism of the] past,"[9] and to propose a new style based on new technologies and methods of construction.[10] While embracing the historical significance of Gottfried Semper's theory of form, Wagner challenged the latter's theory of "dressing" as a "symbolism of construction," by arguing that "the architect always has to develop the art form [directly] out of construction,"[11] without mediation. Such an absolutist claim, however, does not reflect the specificity of Wagner's architecture, which, as Mallgrave points out with reference to the flowery skin motif of his Majolica House (1898), "remain[s] Semperian in its visual or 'dressing' formulation."[12]

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7 I thank Berhnard Reismann, Head of Archive and Documentation at the TU Graz for providing me with this information about Luarasi's professors.

8 The Vienna Secession was an art movement similar to Art Nouveau, which announced a break with the past—hence its name: Secession. It included figures like Otto Wagner, Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser, and Josef Hoffman. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vienna_Secession (all URLS here accessed in September 2022).

9 Otto Wagner, *Modern Architecture*, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave (Santa Monica, CA: The Getty Center, 1988), 93.

10 Ibid., p. 29.

11 Ibid., p. 93.

12 Ibid., p. 40.

Semper's concept of "dressing" remained central to Loos as well. In "The Principle of Cladding" (1898), Loos argues in Semperian and rather anthropological terms that "the architect's general task is to provide a warm and livable space" by, for instance, hanging carpets on the wall, and that the primordial function of structure was precisely "to hold [these carpets) in the correct place."[13] For Loos, a richly dressed interior would be separated from an "anonymously dressed" exterior. Such non-ornamental dressing, however, became ornament itself, as in the well-known case of the Loos House (1909), where the richly veined marble of the lower stories contrasts quite ornamentally with the stucco surfaces above it. For both Wagner and Loos, dressing was both a compositional principle and an effect that transcended both construction and stylistic reference.

The discursive and stylistic influences of Wagner and Loos are combined in various ways in the larger context of Austrian modernism, as, for instance, in the Kiesel Publishing House Building in Salzburg, erected in 1924–26, after a design by Luarasi's professor in Graz, Wunibald Deininger (fig. 1.1.4). Here the walls are articulated in a distinctly Loosian manner, yet a Wagnerian and a distinctly Austrian baroque influence can be read in the articulation of the southwest corner. The concave façade contrasts with the convex vestibule on the ground floor. The façade is articulated by means of a cascade of receding concave surfaces and floor cornices. The vestibule and the façade are unified by a cornice that frames the vestibule rotunda and then folds upward to become a doubly articulated corner, thus facilitating an elegant transition from a receding concave façade toward the southeast façade. The latter is articulated in two parts: one with punched openings, which forms a continuation of the corner façade, and one with giant orders, but stripped of their classical ornaments. The tall pilasters both provide a compositional balance and contrast with the length of the façade. The first part is articulated with a loggia with piers on the upper floor, an element that relates both to the projection on the final floor of the concave façade and the tall orders of the longer part of the southeast façade. The 'seam' between the two dressings is articulated and deliberately accentuated by a sequence of ornamented balconies—no doubt a Wagnerian and Secessionist feature. This building also shares an affinity with the early Expressionist architecture of Erich Mendelson with respect to the horizontal articulation of the façades,

[13] Adolf Loos, "The Principle of Cladding" (1898), in idem, *Spoken into the Void* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987), p. 66.

particularly that of the corner and the vestibule. The composition of a conceptually endless urban wall with various dressings is a fundamental feature of the Kiesel building. As will be shown later on, such a feature would also be a fundamental characteristic of Luarasi's architecture, particularly in the Agimi Apartments and the sanatorium in Tirana, the hospital buildings in Tirana, and the gymnasium, hospital, and hotel in Gjirokastër, among others.

Figure 1.1.4

Wunibald Deininger, Kiesel Building, Salzburg, 1924 (Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication)

Luarasi's café project shown above is characterized by a fusion of both Loosian and Wagnerian attributes. In terms of their unornamented surfaces and asymmetrical disposition in relation to one another, the volumes are unmistakably Loosian. Yet, if in Loos the volumes are subsumed under the overall logic of a spatial plan and covered or 'dressed,' as it were, with one cubic white dressing, here, as in Wagner's works , the volumes are articulated as self-contained pavilions, most of which have their own symmetry and fenestration logic. Such a composition, however, bears an affinity not only with Wagner, but also with Dutch Constructivism in particular as well as early Mies van der Rohe, insofar as—in the words of Alan Colquhoun—the functional elements or volumes are not contained in a "generalized cubic container,"[14] but instead "create systems flexible enough to respond to any imaginable life situation, [and] every building [takes] on a unique configuration while being made from similar elements."[15]

[14] Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 171.
[15] Ibid., pp. 171–72.

Another project by Luarasi that evinces various modernist tendencies is the unbuilt project for a bus station (1937) where the intersection of Kajo Karafili Street and Kavajë Street is located today, but was then the intersection of Hotel International Street and Nëna Mbretëreshë (Mother Queen) Street, an area with the oldest urban texture of the city of Tirana, as well as the site of several modern interventions in the interwar period (figs. 1.1.5–1.1.8). The entire building is curved, while the center of the curvature and the bisymmetrical axis align with the central axis between the two streets. The building completes or caps the urban block with a space, both inside—with the waiting area or lobby—and outside the building—with an open space marked with a drive-around island. The central part of the ground floor is articulated with six piers clad with highly grained dark marble, undoubtedly a clear reference to the Loos House on Michaelerplatz. The other vertical elements—walls and columns—are also of a dark veined marble, which contrasts with the white stucco horizontal elements. The lower floor is not symmetrical; it is curved on the north side, while it ends with a free-standing column on the south side. Though it may have been conditioned by internal functions, such asymmetry primarily relates to different urban conditions: the free-standing column serves as a hinge that folds the flows of a major thoroughfare like Kavajë Street into the space in front of the station and vice versa, while the rounded corner on the north side provides a smooth transition from a narrow secondary street to a larger urban space. The piers repeat on the first floor but are set back and aligned with the curved wall below, which is also curved at the corners. While the spanning of the first-floor piers is almost the same as that of those on the ground floor, though it must of necessity be slightly greater due to the curved radial geometry, they appear misaligned due to the setback of the former. This misalignment, however, prompts a dynamic reading and perception of the building. Since they do not continue on the ground floor, the piers on the first floor are not structural—a design choice that thus qualifies the piers as dressing rather than structural elements. A thin cantilevered canopy offsets the curvature of the walls, on both the lower and upper floor. The overall composition echoes J. J. P. Oud's social housing in Holland, particularly in terms of its "frontality" and its Constructivist "smooth, machine-like surfaces and extensive glazing."[16] Its curvilinear articulation also recalls Mendelson's Expressionist architecture. This project consists of a subtle composition of various modernist formal qualities, while responding to a particular urban and architectural context.

[16] Ibid., pp. 118–20.

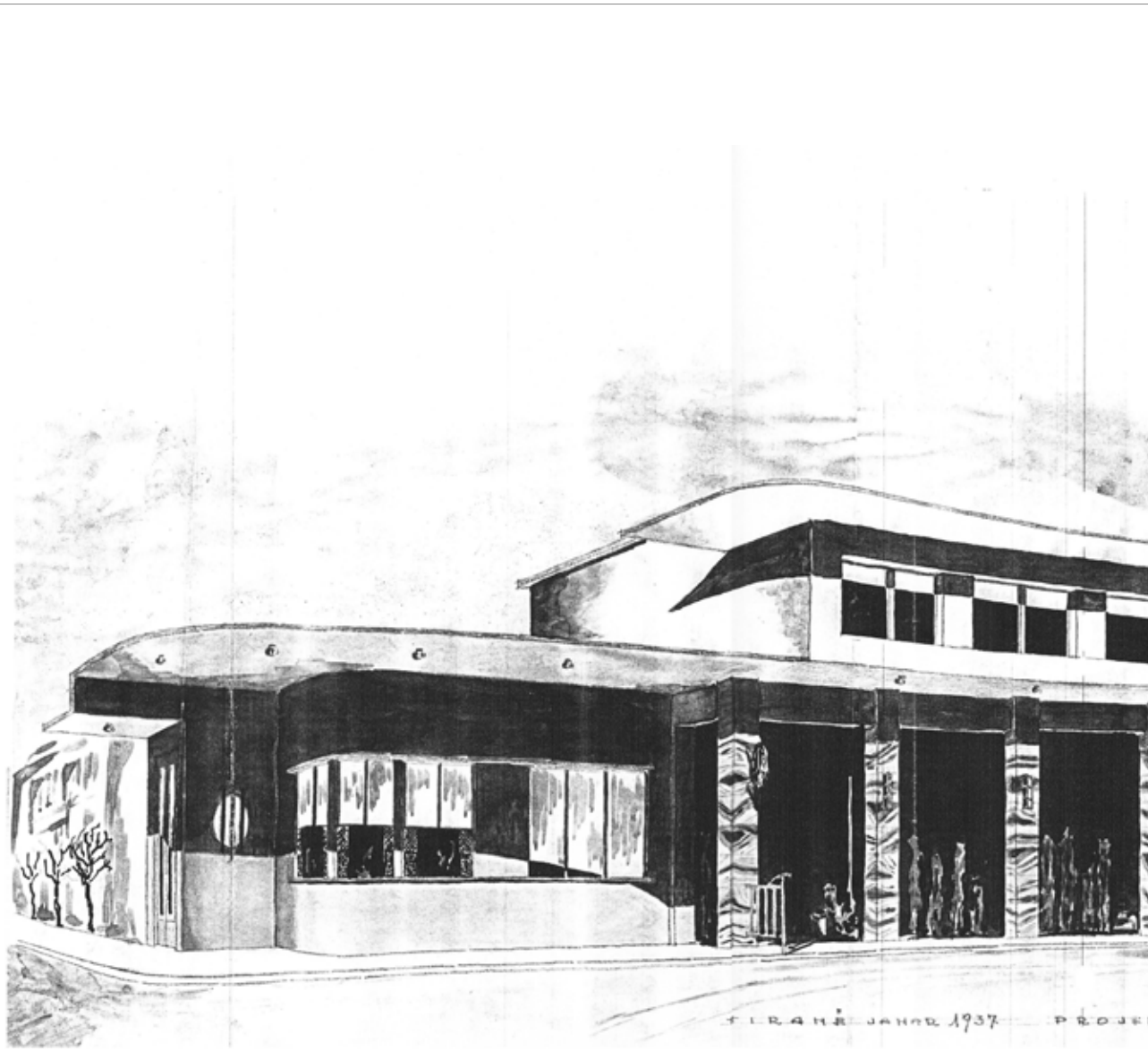
TIRANË JANAR 1937

Figure 1.1.5 Skënder Luarasi, Bus Station, Tirana, 1937, perspective drawing, unbuilt (TCAC)

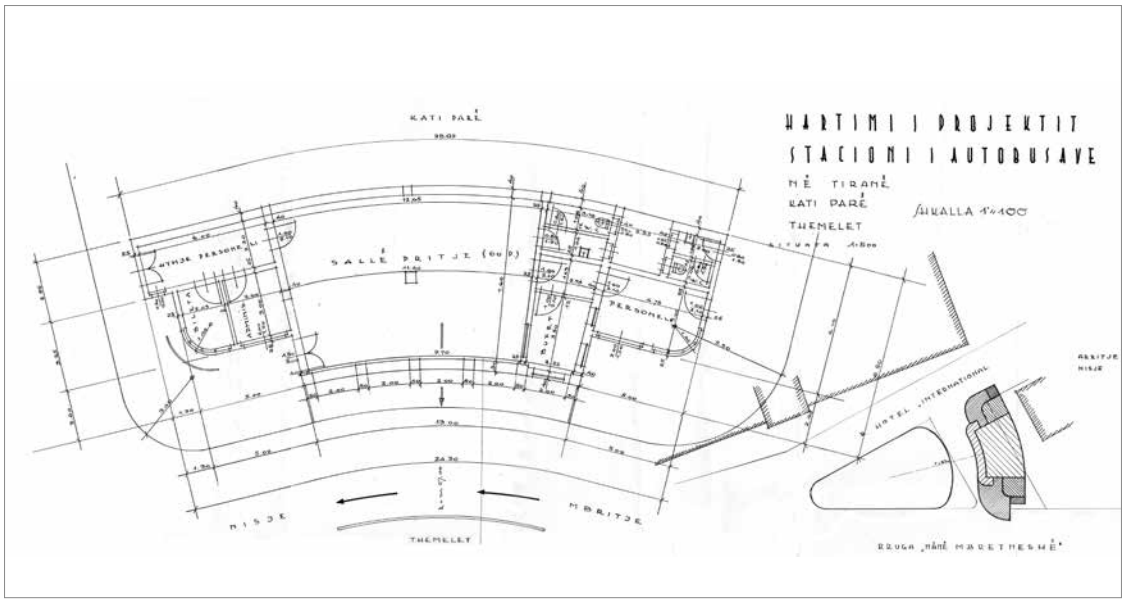

Figure 1.1.6

Skënder Luarasi, Bus Station, Tirana, permit and construction plan drawing and site plan (TCAC)

Figure 1.1.7

Skënder Luarasi, Bus Station, Tirana, rendering by Irida Bitri Luarasi

Figure 1.1.8

Skënder Luarasi,
Bus Station, Tirana,
rendering by
Irida Bitri Luarasi

1.2 The Modern Vernacular

These two early (unbuilt) projects situate Luarasi's work within the Austrian and larger European modernism of the time. Was this modernism, then, simply imported into Albania, into a context without a modernism of its own, as has often been argued, explicitly or implicitly? Or was there also what I have already referred to as a modern vernacular in Albania that anticipated the emergence of the modernism of the 1920s and 1930s? Even if there were no such vernacular(s) in Albania—which, as we will see, was not the case—there would still have been a vernacular tradition 'caught' in the field of modernity, which gave specificity to the modernism of the 1920s and 1930s. The argument here is not that this modernism emerged organically from an autochthonous vernacular, but instead the opposite, namely that such a vernacular assumed the structural function of tradition in relation to the new, modern style(s). Modernity is all about a new style. Nonetheless, the latter is predicated on tradition, precisely insofar as it aims to surpass the latter—including its very own modern traditions as well—and be contemporary. Modernity is caught in a structural bind with the very thing that it tries to outrun, always having to be outside tradition—its dialects and style(s). To echo Jacques Derrida, modernity is a style that is not a style.[17]

It is beyond the scope of this book to expand on the complex topic of modernity as a critical category and its figuration in modern architecture, apart from distinguishing between what Andrew Benjamin in *Style and Time*, based on a close reading of Walter Benjamin, identifies as two politics of temporality in modernity: one of "historicism [that establishes] continuity" and in which the new is merely the next "new ruffle" along an order of power relations that always remains the same, and one of "interruption," a new style as temporality that severs the very identifying relation between style and appearance. In this way, the present is "released from the hold of appearances" and the determination of a past justified by historicism, and is opened up to the "potentiality" of change or the "really new."[18] But how this "severance" and *dis*-position figured in architecture in relation to the styles of the past and the "ruffles" of the present—which become past as soon as they appear—has been interpreted in various ways in modern historiography.

[17] Jacques Derrida writes that the center has always been regarded as "the center is not the center, [as] that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality." Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," in idem, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 279.

[18] See Andrew Benjamin, *Style and Time: Essays on the Politics of Appearance* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2006), pp. xiii, 31, and 36.

Sigfried Giedion, the spokesman of modern architecture, framed the new style as a break or rupture with the styles of the past and as having emerged solely from the anonymous aesthetics of the engineering features of nineteenth-century constructions. Giedion considered historical styles to be merely "transitory" and engineering feats to be "unconscious" yet "constituent" facts that would first be transformed into a self-conscious praxis only in twentieth-century architecture. Unlike Giedion, but in direct reference to him, Walter Benjamin framed the very same transformation more dialectically and structurally in the *Arcades Project*; he saw nineteenth-century constructions as playing "the role of bodily processes"— around which 'artistic' architectures gather, like dreams around the framework of physiological processes."[19] These "'artistic' architectures" are precisely the styles of the nineteenth century. Otto Wagner, for instance, built in a neo-Renaissance style even as he denounced nineteenth-century historicism and praised modern construction in his book *Modern Architecture*. As Mallgrave argues in the introduction to his translation of this book, it was, indeed, the excessive use of historical styles that led to their being rejected: "History had been the specter haunting the efforts to create a new style throughout the nineteenth century, but only the coming together of the most diverse tendencies in the last two decades of the century exposed to *full view* the seductive tyranny of the past, thus preparing the way for its denial."[20] We can thus think of modern architecture not so much as ruptured with nineteenth-century historical styles, but rather as an inflection in and from an historical process during which historical styles assumed the structural role of a mask or dressing, a process that anticipated their very disappearance, their being shed from the surface. It was then only a small step toward the 'clean' surfaces of Loos and Le Corbusier, which were still masks, but white, too ornamentally white. In hindsight, nineteenth-century architecture played the role of a vernacular crust out of which rose the smooth modern object. I use the term vernacular in an expanded sense, to include not only the traditional—so-called architecture without architects of Bernard Rudovsky[21]—but in particular also a field of a multiplicity of competing styles and idiomatic approaches, from which the larger twentieth-century modernism was formed.

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[19] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedeman, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), p. 858.

[20] Wagner, *Modern Architecture*, p. 14 (my emphasis).

[21] See Bernard Rudovsky, *Architecture Without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964).

How did the modern vernacular figure in Albania? To answer this question means decoupling and distinguishing the modern vernacular in Albania from both what is commonly regarded as the 'Albanian vernacular'—variously also referred to as folk, Balkan, or Ottoman architecture—on the one hand and the architecture of Fascist Italy of the 1920s and 1930s on the other. These narratives are like two black holes that swallow up all the cultural heritage of Albania: an artifact must belong to either one category or the other; it must be either traditionally Balkan or imported, modern Western, but never modern *in* or *from* Albania. The Balkan vernacular has frequently been perceived as a repository of motifs to be selected from by modernism, but without being modern in its own right. Think, for instance, of Le Corbusier who went on *Le Voyage d'Orient* to find the 'true' modern idiom. While denouncing what was customary at his time, he traveled with a natural/customary structure at hand, a *dispositif* that processed oriental vernacular(s). The latter furnished only the customary, presumably emptied out part of the structure, but not the natural—the imagined natural domain of the West, consisting of universal geometry and technology, or a natural conflation of the two. The very availability of a Balkan vernacular as a repository of idioms to be 'found' and selected from in the first place is a result of modernity's ethnographic bias of systematically concealing its structural displacement in relation to the vernacular(s), whether at home or abroad, by fixing the natural as a constant outside history (e.g., geometry), and by keeping the vernacular as something variable. It is therein that modernity's colonizing power lies. As Derrida puts it: "Form fascinates when one no longer has the force to understand force from within itself."[22]

1.3 The 'Balkan' Vernacular

Le Corbusier was not alone in his endeavor to borrow motifs from the Balkan vernacular. Several modernist architects from the Balkan countries like Dimitris Pikionis in Greece or Sedad Hakki Eldem in Turkey attempted to construct a national or regional modern architecture by emphasizing certain modern-looking morphological elements of the vernacular and by dimming

[22] Jacques Derrida, "Force and Signification" (1963), in idem, *Writing and Difference*, as quoted in Felicity D. Scott, *Disorientation: Bernard Rudovsky in the Empire of Signs, Critical Spatial Practice* 7 (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), p. 30.

its more ornamental aspects.[23] The myth of a Balkan vernacular—precisely that of potentially having a lot to offer modernism yet existing outside the structure of the latter; of being infinitesimally close to modernism yet without ever finally reaching it; of being available to be selected from and picked up by modernism, yet without a self-transformative force of its own so as to become modern—is already a Western and modern methodological product fully naturalized by historiographic practices from abroad and in the Balkans, on the ground, as it were.

The narratives of Balkan architectural heritage oscillate between two extremes: that of an autochthonous vernacular or so-called folk architecture and that of an Ottoman heritage. In both cases, however, the methodology used to construct and sustain the narratives is the same and would be best described by what Erwin Panofsky calls a "*circulus methodicus*."[24] This is a corrective methodological principle that interprets, calibrates, and regulates the relationship of an "individual observation" or "fact" "to other, analogous observations in such a way that the whole series 'makes sense.'"[25] In both narratives, the facts or observations are, or stand for, recognizable typologi-

[23] See Tchavdar Marinov, "The 'Balkan House': Interpretations and Symbolic Appropriations of the Ottoman-Era Vernacular Architecture in the Balkans," in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. 4: *Concepts, Approaches, and (Self-)Representations*, ed. Roumen Daskalov, Tchavdar Marinov, Diana Mishkova, and Alexander Vezenkov (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), pp. 440–593, on Academia: https://www.academia.edu/38121065/_; see in particular pp. 572–93; and Sibel Bosdoğan, "Reading Ottoman Architecture through Modernist Lenses: Nationalist Historiography and the 'New Architecture' in the Early Republic," *Muqarnas* (2007), vol. 24, *History and Ideology: Architectural Heritage of the "Lands of Rum"* (2007), pp. 199–221, esp. pp. 213–20.

[24] Erwin Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books), p. 35, note 3.

[25] Ibid., p. 35, note 3. The complete footnote is: "To correct the interpretation of an individual of art by a 'history of style,' which in turn can only be built up by interpreting individual works, may look like a vicious circle. It is, indeed, a circle, though not a vicious, but a methodical one" (see E. Wind, *Das Experiment und die Metaphysik*. Cited above, p. 6; idem, "Some Points of Contact between History and Science," cited ibid.). Whether we deal with historical or natural phenomena, the individual observation assumes the character of a 'fact' only when it can be related to other, analogous observations in such a way that the whole series 'makes sense.' This 'sense' is, therefore, fully capable of being applied, as a *control*, to the interpretation of a new individual observation within the same range of phenomena. If, however, this new individual observation definitely refuses to be interpreted according to the 'sense' of the series, and if an error proves to be impossible, the 'sense' of the series will have to be reformulated to include the new individual observation. This *circulus methodicus* applies, of course, not only to the relationship between the interpretation of motifs and the history of style, but also to the relationship between the interpretation of images, stories and allegories and the history of types, and to the relationship between the interpretation of intrinsic meanings and the history of cultural symptoms in general."

cal and compositional characteristics of artifacts from different regions and historical periods. The whole, by contrast, is the idea that would have structured and unified these facts—in terms of both their similarities and differences—into one coherent entity.

In the context of the historiographic and preservation practices in Albania, which aimed at the formation and consolidation of a body of knowledge and discourse of Albanian cultural heritage, (the morphological and typological facts of) urban and rural houses, northern and southern houses, or *kulla* in Albania, were to be seen as parts of one transhistorical Albanian national identity that is both distinct and also irreducible to other external and transitory influences.[26] In "The 'Balkan House,'" Tchavdar Marinov argues for the opposite, namely, that the vernacular residential architecture of different Balkan countries is not as nationally distinct and original as is claimed, and that they share a "common cultural heritage from the Ottoman era."[27] Marinov identifies particular morphological and typological facts of the Ottoman house, and then proceeds to identify a virtually dominant "Ottoman" style across different Balkan vernaculars based on these facts, some of which are cantilevered upper stories, closed or open central verandas—called *hayat* or *çardak* in Turkish—around which the other rooms are organized, various types of inbuilt seating and wall furniture, and conical fireplaces.[28] Marinov challenges the nationalist argument of Albanian historians regarding the autochthony of the Albanian house by finding "Ottoman" or "Balkan" elements both in rural and urban dwellings, and in southern and northern *kulla*.

In his criticism, however, Marinov relies on the very same methodology used by the nationalist historiographies he is attempting to deconstruct, namely that of "*circulus methodicus*." The problem with this methodology is that the very same facts, within a spectrum of similarities and differences, can sustain both an autochthonous and an 'Ottoman' or 'Balkan' reading of the Albanian vernacular. The "*circulus methodicus*" can be broken only by means of an extra-morphological and extra-typological dimension. Such a dimension is pointed out, even if not spelled out explicitly, by Emin Riza—one of the Albanian historians whose nationalist arguments Marinov challenges—in his book *Qyteti-Muze i Gjirokatrës* (The Museum-City of Gjirokastër). Riza argues that

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[26] See Emin Riza, *Qyteti-Muze i Gjirokatrës* (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1988), particularly the sixth chapter, "The Origin of Gjirokaster's House and its Place in the Balkan House," pp. 224–30.

[27] "The Balkan House," ibid., p. 440.

[28] Ibid., p. 444.

in contrast to those houses in Gjirokastër with defensive attributes, which were built in the first half of the nineteenth century and belonged mostly to the feudal and landowners class, those of the second half of the century evince a greater emphasis on and sophistication of decoration.[29] This aesthetic shift reflects the emergence of a bourgeois class and an economy that facilitated not only the circulation of goods, but also of styles from different regions of the empire. The Ottoman or Balkan morphological and typological facts did not disappear, but instead took on a different, modern role and significance with a new aesthetic intentionality, which often combined the vernacular and classical vernaculars. One example that Riza mentions, however, albeit without explicitly distinguishing its modernity from the other vernaculars of Gjirokastër, is the Fico House (fig. 1.3.1). This house displays a *stylistic intentionality* by mobilizing morphological facts that are part of different canons. It thus undermines the canon by treating the latter precisely as one stylistic alternative among others, to be chosen or rejected, enhanced or dimmed. The combination of cantilevered upper stories—a distinct morphological fact of the Ottoman vernacular—with a central and quite transparent 'penthouse' above them has a classical disposition and is unique among the other houses in the city. The upper volumes are not supported by the characteristic *payanda*,[30] but by classical yet exaggerated corbels. The roof eaves, while seeming to follow those of the other vernacular houses, are shallow cornices that articulate the volumetric contour rather than being part of the heavy stone roofs. There is also a subtle and balanced play of vertical and horizontal recesses and projections. Such morphological qualities cannot be explained based merely on the building techniques available to the vernacular master builder, as is often argued, but by a compositional and stylistic engagement that escapes and thus cannot be reduced to the vernacular canon, regardless of whether the house was built by an architect with professional training or by one of those vernacular master builders. It is this stylistic intentionality or indeterminacy that makes this house modern, and what distinguishes the new emerging class structure from the older, feudal order.

[29] Emin Riza, *Qyteti-Muze i Gjirokatrës* (Tirana: "8 Nëntori," 1988), p. 88. Agron Doraci, a local architect, goes even further than Riza and argues that the fortified character of houses in Gjirokastër was "more an illusion than a fact." See Agron Doraci, *Gjirokastra qyteti magjik* [*Gjirokastër the Magic City*] (Gjirokastër: Edlora, 2020), p. 51.

[30] An Ottoman term referring to the diagonal beam used in timber construction that supports a roof eave or cantilevered volume and it is usually supported in the lower stone floor.

Figure 1.3.1

Fico House, Gjirokastër, photo by the author

Gjirokastër evinces other explicit examples of modern vernaculars of the late nineteenth century that, on a morphological and typological level, have little to do with the 'Ottoman' or 'Balkan' vernacular as described by Marinov—more details about which will follow later on. Yet such a modern vernacular layer is not identified in Marinov's account. If and when it is mentioned, in passing, it is regarded as a non-Albanian event imported from Europe, and from Italy in particular. For Marinov, such architecture would have to be a derivation from "Western academic styles" and simply a "fact" in a "process of 'Europeanization'" that some Albanian coastal towns underwent at the end of the nineteenth century.[31] For Marinov, this Europeanization even turns out not to be a direct imitation, but rather a second hand copy of Western styles—a copy of a copy, since, as he points out: "European academic influences did not arrive directly from Western Europe but were mediated by the important urban centers of the region—primarily Istanbul, but also Athens and Bucharest."[32] Marinov thus implies that there is an authentic or autochthonous modernism and an imported inauthentic one; an "ontological" modernism in Europe, in the center, and an "ontic" one on the peripheries. Such colonizing discursive topoi played out during what is known in Albania as the 'Time of Italy.'

[31] Ibid., p. 501.
[32] Ibid., pp. 501–2.

This is the time between the two World Wars, from the early 1920s to the invasion of Albania by Fascist Italy in 1939, and until its capitulation in 1943. This also the period of Albanian nation-building—from the Congress of Lushnjë in 1920, following Albanian independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, to the end of Ahmet Zog's monarchy in 1939. During this period, Austrian, Italian, as well as Albanian architects and engineers were occupied with urban and architectural projects of various scales throughout Albania, the most of notable of which were the master plans for the city Tirana—the newly appointed capital of Albania as of 1920. These master plans were financed by Italy's economic aid to Albania. On the one hand. they structured the growth and modernization of the city of Tirana. On the other hand, they served Mussolini's expansionist aspirations in the Balkans. Such aspirations were both symbolic and economic, political and administrative, qualitative and quantitative. For example, Gherardo Bosio and Ferdinando Poggi's regulatory plan of 1940, while extending and expanding on previous plans, was also conceived to provide space for many Italian colonists—administrators and citizens who would reside in Albania permanently.[33] Yet the 'Time of Italy' was more than just an urban project: it was, above all else, a concept of periodization and branding that mysteriously renders all the things produced in this period as 'Italian,' as if 'made in Italy,' even though some them were made in Albania by Albanian architects, regardless of whether we are consciously aware of this fact or not. Show a 1930s modernist building to anyone on the street, even an architect, and insofar as she or he identifies it at all as belonging to that historical period, such identification will almost always by default be regarded as Italian, and be accompanied with admiration for a sophistication and elegance that could only have come from 'beyond the sea'—with the sea in question being the Adriatic. And if, God forbid, you try to criticize, say, Di Fausto or Bosio—the imperial architects, you will in Albania be rebuked at the minimum with a look that says: Shouldn't we be grateful to the Italians for giving us an architecture, a memory, a boulevard, our Champs Elysée.

[33] The Italian architects Armando Brasini, Florestano di Fausto, and Gherardo Bosio, and the Austrian Wolfgang Köhler were involved in the planning of Tirana from the late 1920s to the early 1940s. For more information on the development of the center of Tirana in the interwar period and its subsequent transformations after the war, see Sotir Dhamo, Gjergj Thomai, and Besnik Aliaj, eds., *Tirana: qyteti i mungar* (Tirana: Polis Press, 2016); Adolph Stiller ed., *Tirana: Planning, Building, Living* (Salzburg: Müry Salzmann Verlag, 2010); Patrizai Capolino, *Tirana 1923–1943: Architetture del Moderno* (Rome: Prospettive Edizioni, 2011). For Italian architecture outside Italy in the interwar period, see Guliano Gressleri, *Architettura italiana d'oltremare: 1870–1940* (Venice: Marsilio, 1993).

Such a default is both an effect of the Italian colonialist project and what sustained it on the ground. In "Building the Cities of Empire," Besnik Pula distinguishes between the classical type of "racial colonialism" and "paternalist-assimilationist colonialism." If the former is defined by a "legal, social, and institutional division and segregation of colonizer and colonized according to an officially sanctioned racial hierarchy," the latter—which was also the predominant type in Albania—is defined "by military and political domination of a colonizing state over a colonized society, with the goal of remaking native culture to conform to the image of its own," that is, the image of empire. The Italians carried out such "paternalist-assimilationist colonialism" by taking "advantage of local elite conflicts to draw 'collaborators' into political institutions and the bureaucratic apparatus, but also used Fascist ideology to attract an intellectual following among part of Albania's cultural elites, who partook in the new regime and wrote favorably about Italy's imperial project."[34] Such "paternalist-assimilationist colonialism" is manifested in various ways. The very notion of a native culture—variously referred to as Balkan or Ottoman—that can never be modern by itself but can only wait to be modernized from the outside, as it were, is a mythical effect of such a "paternalist-assimilationist colonialism." Like Le Corbusier, armed with the natural/customary *dispositif*, the Italians did not hesitate to include Albanian morphological facts in their architecture, such as in Gherardo Bosio's incorporation of *kulla* in his *Casa del Fascio* in 1940 (fig. 1.4.1). Such a reprocessing of national images has acquired a postmodern edge today in the towers designed by MVRDV in Tirana, which incorporate images of Skanderbeg's (National Hero's) portrait and Albania's map (fig 1.4.2) in their facades. Here Bosio's 'diplomatic' abstraction of the Albanian vernacular is turned into a sign of Albania itself as a vernacular decorating real estate. In the planning of Tirana, however, there are also instances of explicit "racial colonialism," as in the case Bosio and Poggi's regulatory plan of 1940, which unambiguously segregated the areas where the Italian settlers were going to live from those of the 'natives.' And in what can be characterized as an act of racial displacement, Bosio and Poggi's plan completely obliterates the so-called old Tirana. The old Tirana was not just old, but also contemporary insofar as it contained many modern buildings designed by both Albanian and foreign architects. The 1940 plan was one of those instances when the Empire undiplomatically showed its teeth, not through bombs but through architecture.

[34] Besnik Pula, "Building the Cities of Empire: Urban Planning in the Colonial Cities of Italy's Fascist Empire," in *Sociology and Empire*, ed. George Steinmetz (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 375. All rights reserved (URL accessed from Academia.edu in October, 2022).

Figure 1.4.1

Gherardo Bosio, Casa del Fascio, on the former Piazza del Littorio, 1940, today the Polytechnic University of Tirana on Mother Teresa Square (Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International)

Figure 1.4.2

MVRDV, Downtown One, Tirana, 2019, photo by the author

It is somehow inconceivable that modernity with its manifold manifestations could have emerged in and across Albanian society; it instead seems much easier to conceive it as implanted in a society that could never take charge of or have agency in its own modern (r)evolution. While modern architecture in Albania is already beginning to be recognized as cultural heritage, it is regarded as consisting mostly of works by Italian or foreign architects, and rarely of works by Albanian architects. Not to mention the fact that works of modern architecture are often attributed to Italian architects such as in the case of Saint Procopius Church, which is attributed to Gherardo Bosio, and the restoration of the Gjirokastër Gymnasium, attributed to the 'Italian architects of the time,' when both were actually designed by Skënder Kristo Luarasi. Such a colonialist mindset is also in operation in the institutional contexts of the preservation of cultural heritage. For example, the city of Gjirokastër is a UNESCO World Heritage Site based solely on its so-called 'Balkan' or folk vernacular, but not on its modernity, which is virtually unknown; its modern red roofs— not the vernacular ones with slate roofs—remain both in ruins and silence.

Architecture and urban planning played—and still plays—an important role in sustaining the 'Time of Italy' in history by default. What I am referring to here are not only the actual architectural and urban artifacts designed and built by Italian architects, but also, and especially, the discursive network in and through which these projects are re-produced, re-presented, perceived, and imagined in history. "I have seen cities without boulevards, but I have not seen boulevards without cities."[35] So claims Adrian Guma, an Albanian intellectual in Ismail Kadare's novel *The November of a Capital* with regard to the Italian urban interventions in Tirana during the 'Time of Italy.' Its rhetorical elegance notwithstanding, such a claim would virtually *script* all the urban transformations and erasures in the city of Tirana, from Gherardo Bosio's regulatory plan of the late 1930s to the recent 'rehabilitations' of Tirana by star-architecture firms. Guma's paternalist-assimilationist colonialism lies precisely in subsuming an 'unrecyclable,' 'Oriental' Tirana under a new progressive directionality, and in discursively representing the boulevard as coming prior to the city, without or before history. The boulevard surrounded by nothingness is a retroactive projection of the plan as a dominant technique in the making of Tirana, structuring a future *poché* onto what was then perceived as an empty

[35] As cited in Ismail Kadare, *Nëntori i një Kryeqyteti* (The November of a Capital) (Tirana: Naim Frashëri publishing house, printed by the 8 Nentori Press, 1975), p. 62 (translated by author).

drawing board, not unlike Le Corbusier's plan as the generator of architecture.[36] The boulevard-as-plan functions colonialistically not because it looks (in plan) like a lictor's axe (fig. 1.4.3),[37] but rather because it is discursively framed as what enables and sustains such an a-historical reading. More than just an urban street, the boulevard is an ideological and methodological axis that structures (our perception of) history and (our imagination of) the future—an axis that both separates the 'Ottoman' past from modernism and simultaneously unifies them into a narrative axially directed toward the future. Such a temporal unity is reenacted in history through the phenomenologically unified spatial experience furnished by the boulevard itself as spatial axis, quite simply and effectively, by strolling along it on a Sunday afternoon. Even if many of the modern artifacts along this axis were not designed by Italian architects, they are all rendered as 'Italian' insofar as the spatial-temporal axis that *orders* them is identified as 'Italian.' The content along the axis varies, the axis itself (as form) does not. The former appears as a variable customary content, the latter as a natural and non-historical constant.

Figure 1.4.3

Gherardo Bosio, General Plan for Tirana, 1939. The boulevard is the axe's haft, while the stadium and the Piazza del Littorio at the lower, southern end is the axe's head, from Tirana e munguar

[36] I expand on this topic in Skender Luarasi, "A White Pyramid and a Center that Is Not a Center," *Log 47, Overcoming Carbon Form* (New York: Anyone Corporation, Fall 2019), pp. 76–84.

[37] Such a reading was facilitated in the plan particularly by the boulevard itself and the stadium: the boulevard reads as the handle of the axe and the stadium as the blade.

Figure 1.4.4

Aerial view ca. 1939, with Old Tirana in the bottom left and the new boulevard in the top right, pictures from Tirana e munguar

Such an ideological axis still functions today as Tirana sprawls feverishly and irrationally both from within and without with expensive high-rise real estate. Think about the naturalness with which, say, Marco Casamonti's architecture in Tirana is perceived as a direct and inevitable descendant of Gherardo Bosio's—even if the former's soccer arena replaced the latter's historical stadium. The ideological function of the spatio-temporal axis is precisely to render such a genealogy as natural. Somehow, we are still willing to believe and claim that Tirana was a boulevard without a city, even if several sources exhaustively evince that this was not the case. As is shown, for example, in figure 1.4.4, many modern and modern vernacular structures preceded the boulevard. It is not the intention here in any way to diminish or ignore the work of Italian architects in the Albanian architectural landscape, which can hardly be imagined without their various contributions. What is intended here, however, is to challenge a particular *ideological ordering*, according to which what is identified as 'Italian modernism,' or the 'Time of Italy' fully coincides with the genesis of modernism in Albania. Such ideological ordering prevents us from grasping the multiplicity of modernisms in Albania. It is also not the intention here to suggest that the boulevard, for instance, or other architectural and urban interventions, are reducible to a particular colonialist ideology. What is suggested, instead, is that—in this case—the boulevard and the buildings around and along it are implicated in a particular discursive and ideological ordering. Yet the latter is not some sort of destiny or fate that absolutely determines and guarantees our perception and imagination of re-

ality in history, or in the present or future. There is always a potential to imagine things otherwise, by reshuffling and re-ordering their ideological ordering. For example, rather focusing on the boulevard as an original axis drawn on an empty territory, we might imagine it as a montage of different urban zones and microhistories. Zooming in on such zones reveals that the work of other Albanian and foreign architects, as well as that of other Italian architects working in Albania, was far from homogeneous; that their residential architecture, for instance, was distinctly more avant-garde than the official architecture of De Fausto and Bosio that is arrayed along the boulevard (figs. 1.4.5 and 1.4.6). On the other hand, if one takes a closer look at the urban masterplans by Tirana by these last two individuals, one discovers crucial differences on both a formal and a symbolic level, even if they both served the larger imperial aspirations of fascist Italy from an ideological perspective.[38]

[38] I have argued elsewhere that Frashëri, Castellani, and Weiss's plan for Skanderbeg Square of 1926, and De Fausto's plan of 1930 are quite ingenuously conceived as a series of acupunctural interventions that respect and engage with the existing city—even if part of this city was still empty at the time, particularly on the southwest side. The square consists of a 'necklace' of new buildings (the ministries) and existing ones (the mosque and the clock tower) around a void, which 'locks' the city into the square. Bosio's masterplan, on the other hand, obliterates the existing city quite imperiously by replacing it with new urban blocks. Insofar as Bosio erases De Fausto's City Hall in his master plan, the latter becomes a trigger of a process of undoing Skanderbeg Square. On this topic see Skender Luarasi, "A White Pyramid and a Center that Is Not a Center." I examine this topic more extensively in the context of Skanderbeg Square in "The Life and Death of Skanderbeg Square: The Chronicle of an Undoing Foretold, In a Hundred Years," presented at the Histories of Urban Design event at the ETH in November 2021.

Figure 1.4.5

Qemal Butka, Villa Frashëri on Asim Zeneli Street, 1940, now demolished, pictures from Vilat e Tiranës

Figure 1.4.6

Villa Simonidhi on Asim Zeneli Street, 1940, architect unknown, pictures from Vilat e Tiranës

1.5 The Modern Vernacular in Albania

Modernism is never autochthonous, but always inter-national. Between the so-called Ottoman, Balkan, or just Albanian vernacular on the one hand and the 'Time of Italy' as a natural harbinger of modernism in Albania on the other, there was already a layer of a modern vernacular, designed by both anonymous and known architects and builders.[39] Some of them were Albanians who brought architectural influences from different European countries and various parts of the Ottoman empire (before and after its dissolution), and from as far away as the United States, as architects and engineers who had studied in or emigrated to these countries, or both.[40] Others were foreigners, many of whom were no doubt Italians, but also French, Austrian, Greek, and from other Balkan regions.[41] It is not the intention here in any way to propose a 'national identity' for Albanian modernism as opposed to the Italian one or the Ottoman or Balkan vernacular. There is no such thing as a national modern architecture *of* Albania. There is only modern architecture *in* Albania, whose vernacular specificity is its multiplicity. Such a vernacular corresponds to the European modern vernacular of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which was characterized by the re-invention and re-interpretation of multiple historical styles.

Ornament was the medium and expression of such stylistic profusion. It may be hard for us—as the progenies of smooth twentieth century modernism that we are—to fully appreciate modern ornament before modernism: how with the grammar of historical styles in particular it anticipated the seemingly ornament-less and style-less modernism of the twentieth century. In relation to styles, ornament was not only an aesthetic, but also a political, economic, and social 'currency' of the emerging bourgeoise.[42] Ornament can be regarded as an emancipating and generic force or category, insofar as absolutely anyone—any '*I*' in the Kantian sense—could adopt and identify with such category, could ornament, and could become modern. In the Benjaminian terms referred to earlier, ornament would be the manifest content or customary means that indexed and pulled to the surface the latent 'body' of

[39] In *Korça: Urbanistika dhe Arkitektura*, Pirro Thomo recounts how local specialists, the architects and builders of Korça, changed the design by Florestano di Fausto, which was distinctly monumental and expressed the official language of fascist Italy. Local architects changed the façades completely, as well as their proportions and decorations. See Pirro Thomo, *Korça: Urbanistika dhe Arkitektura*, (Tirana: Morava, 2012), p. 339.

[40] See ibid., p. 35.

[41] Ibid., p. 344.

[42] On this topic, I am indebted to the discussions I have had with Gary Huafan He, a friend and a colleague at Yale.

nineteenth-century steel constructions. It is precisely this generic force of ornamenting—one of *sur*-facing—that dissolved the large neo-Renaissance and neo-Gothic stylistic camps of the early nineteenth century into the stylistic multiplicity of its final decades and the unstoppable lines of Art Nouveau, which then could not but yield the smooth white surfaces of twentieth-century modernism.

The modern vernacular in Albania is an embodiment of such an emancipation process. For instance, in the work of Kolë Idromeno (1860–1939), a polyhedric figure in the Albanian Renaissance from the city of Shkodër, we find a dexterous and free interpretation of both neo-Renaissance ornamentation, as in the case of the Grand Café in Shkodër (fig. 1.5.1), built in 1920, and of the neo-Gothic style, as in the case of the bell tower of the Vaut të Dejës Church. Idromeno's residential architecture, on the other hand, evinces a combination and synthesis of a neo-Palladian style—learned during his architectural studies in Venice—with the vernacular urban houses of Shkodër.[43] Another example of the neo-Renaissance style is the much beloved former House of Officers in Tirana, designed by the infrastructure engineer Dhimitër Dhespoti (1906–1996) in 1932, which consists of an elegant loggia with round arches that protrude from the main volume and set up a direct yet unimposing relationship with the street (fig. 1.5.2).

[43] See Skënder Luzati, *Qyteti i Shkodrës: Urbanistika dhe Arkitektura gjatë Rilindjes e Pavarësisë Kombëtare* (The City of Shkodër: Urbanism and Architecture during the National Renaissance and Independence) (Tirana: Botimet Kumi, 2012), esp. pp. 175–211.

Figure 1.5.1

Kolë Idromeno, Kafja e Madhe (Grand Café), Shkodër, 1920, mostly demolished after 1990, photos by Andi Papastefani

Figure 1.5.2

Dhimitër Dhespoti, House of Officers on Kavajë Street, 1932, period photo from Dhespoti's personal archive, provided to the author by Hektor Ruci

A similar modern vernacular is displayed in the Thoma Turtulli Public Library in Korçë, erected from 1927 to 1930 (fig. 1.5.3) and designed and built by the engineer-architect Anastas Pilika (1892–1976), who studied at Taubman College in Michigan in the late 1910s and early 1920s. This small and graceful building, which faces Themistokli Gërmenji Park, consists of a frontal stairway leading to an open loggia framed by two pillars on the outside and two Ionic columns from the inside. The loggia is flanked by two symmetrical wings articulated with classically proportioned windows and orders. Any citizen of Korçë who had spent time in the United States would not fail to recognize the lineage and affinity of this building with the thousands of Carnegie libraries built in the United States and all over the world in the period between 1883 and 1929.[44] The choice of the historical style is not accidental. Since Henri Labrouste's St. Genevieve library in Paris from 1851, the neo-Renaissance style was chosen for libraries and academic buildings to symbolize knowledge and enlightenment. A more modern concept of dressing is found in the Prefecture (today the City Hall) of Korçë, designed by Qemal Butka in 1935–36 and built in the late 1930s by Pilika (fig. 1.5.4). Here, in a typical Viennese fashion, the classical ornament is replaced with stone cladding in combination with stucco surfaces.[45]

Figure 1.5.3

Anastas Pilika, Thoma Turtulli Library, Korçë, 1927–30, photo by Andi Papastefani

Figure 1.5.4 Qemal Butka, Korçë City Hall, 1927, built by Anastas Pilika, period photo provided to the author by Andi Papastefani

[44] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnegie_library.

[45] Recent research reveals that the use of local roughly hewn stone was a decision made by the engineer and builder Pilika rather than the architect.

Another notable modern institution of this period is, no doubt, the Albanian-American Institute of Kavajë, designed by Howard Raymond Meyer of the Thompson and Churchill architectural firm in New York in 1930 (fig. 1.5.5). This building, which was recently partially demolished, would perhaps have been consigned to oblivion, if it were not passionately resuscitated by Shpend Bengu in his research work and film documentary *Damnatio Memoriae*.[46] The articulation of the volumes has a neo-classical style but is stripped of all ornament except for the exterior window cornices. Its massing and how it engages with the landscape has affinities with both Frank Lloyd Wright and a proto-modernist and hacienda-like Californian architecture. Bengu even discerns a certain resemblance between the vertical tower-like volume of the school and the medieval castle of Krujë. The modern was always already multireferential and international well before the International Style.

Figure 1.5.5

Howard Raymond Meyer, Charles Telford Erickson Agricultural School, Kavajë, 1925, period photo provided to the author by Andi Papastefani

[46] For a brief historical of the founding of this institution and the design of its buildings see Shpend Bengu, "Project of the Balkan University in Albania at the Beginning of the 20th Century: The Albanian-American Institute of Kavajë, Near East Foundation, a Pedagogic and Aesthetic Model," *ICRAE2015* Conference ISSN: 2308-0825; and Shpend Bengu, "Instituti i Kavajes, si u ngrit a para shkollë Amerikane në Shqipëri" (The Institute of Kavajë, how the first American School in Albania was established), *Gazeta Si* (September 24, 2020), https://gazetasi.al/instituti-i-kavajes-si-u-ngrit-e-para-shkolle-amerikane-ne-shqiperi/. Also see Shpend Bengu's documentary film *Damnatio Memoriae: Albanian-American Institute of Kavajë, Near East Foundation, 1925–2020*, which was presented at the non-profit organization Tirana Ekspres on September 20, 2020.

While a more explicit historical reference was sought for public and institutional buildings, the residential architecture was composed and articulated more freely. This architecture became a site for experimenting with various formal strategies and stylistic expressions, ranging from the most ornamental and eclectic to the most restrained and rational. In Korçë, for instance, Themistokli Koçu's residential urban architecture of the 1920s and 1930s evinces a whole spectrum of styles, including Expressionism, Functionalism, rationalism, and in some instances even certain nuances of Art Deco. Koçu's buildings are to Korçë what the waterfront architecture of Leoforos Nikis is to Thessaloniki: a playful, sophisticated, and almost baroque-like modernism, in the composition of both the whole and the details. As the newly appointed capital, Tirana eventually became the main center where the modern vernacular unfolded in all of its dimensions.[47] For example, the Petrela House, designed and built by Anastas Pilika in 1927, is an early instance of how ornament was no longer a function of a particular historical style, but an act of dressing the *sur*-face (fig. 1.5.6). The early work of Kristo Sotiri (1870–1953), who studied architecture in Rumania and the Veneto region and practiced in both countries, is another example in which a neo-Renaissance and neo-Romanesque vernacular gave rise to a modern expressionist idiom in the mid-1930s, as shown in the Villa Flower of 1935 (fig. 1.5.7),[48] which was unfortunately demolished in the 1990s.

[47] See Vera Bushati, *Vilat e Tiranës* (The Villas of Tirana) (Tirana: POLIS University, 2012). This is and remains the first extensive survey dedicated to the pre-modern and modern residential architecture in Tirana.

[48] For a first though brief account of Sotiri's work, see Koço Miho, *Profesor Arkitekt Kristo Sotiri: Jeta dhe Vepra* (The Professor and Architect Kristo Sotiri: Life and Works) (Tirana: Extra-R Publishing House, 2003).

Figure 1.5.6

Anastas Pilika,
Petrela House, Tirana, 1927,
photo by the author, 2021

Figure 1.5.7

Kristo Sotiri, Vila Lule
(Villa Flower), Durrës Beach,
1935, demolished after 1990,
copyright of the Sotiri Family

Luarasi's early works, particularly his institutional and public buildings, show an interplay of various modern vernaculars, thus parallel to the more explicitly modern and rationalist language of his residential projects. A good example is the Saint Procopius Orthodox Church, which was built in 1941 at the top of the Grand Park of Tirana (figs. 1.5.8–1.5.15). The church has a traditional basilica form with narthex, nave, dome, and apse. In line with the Christian Orthodox architectural canon, the altar is positioned behind the iconostasis. The dome establishes the vertical axis directly in front of the iconostasis. On the lower level, all these elements are composed within a rectangular plan. It is only above a height of 3.5 meters, that is on the second level of the narthex, that the church is spatially and volumetrically differentiated into two transepts and the upper nave topped with a gable roof, at the intersection of which the dome is positioned; it is on this level that the plan takes the form of a cross. On the lower level, the nave wall is framed between the colonnade of the interior aisles and an exterior arcade. The latter consists of five piers and rounded arches topped with a gable roof. The columns and the piers are of reinforced concrete, and the walls of load-bearing brick. There is a cascading of rhythmic and scaling correspondences among the architectural elements along both the vertical and the horizontal axis. The roof of the arcade on the lower level corresponds to the gable roofs of the nave and transepts on the upper level. The round-arched window at the base of the dome is reiterated below and along the upper wall of the nave and the transept and composed into three sets of round-arched windows, and then scaled up into a rounded arch and the piers of the arcade below. The latter concludes at the narthex, just one bay before the western façade, which is a separate architectural element and ties in and anchors the spatial and ordering sequences. The façade consists of three tall arches, which reciprocate the internal spaces of the church indexically but not proportionally: the middle, wider arch with the nave and the two side arches with the side aisles. The piers of the arches are clad in rough stone and the upper parts in smooth stone, while the wall inside the arches is finished with stucco. The piers slant toward the top, animating and perceptually emphasizing the verticality of the entire façade. The central arch is wider than the other two and has a cornice inside it and two openings: the round-arched main door and the window above it. The other two arches, which belong to the series of lower-level arches, have one window each and create a triangle with the upper window of the central arch. The western façade is the most provocative part of the church, often interpreted as being at odds with the Christian Orthodox architecture and more in line with Venetian Catholic religious architecture. What makes the western façade striking

and provocative, however, is not its Catholic reference as opposed to the Orthodox one, but rather the fact that its compositional density exceeds or is irreducible to a particular religious reference or iconography, whether Orthodox or Catholic. During the cultural revolution and anti-religion movement of the late 1960s in Albania, the church was closed and converted into a restaurant, to such an extent that it was no longer recognizable. In the early 1990s the building resumed its religious function, and the Orthodox Episcopate has plans to return the church to nearly its original form, without, of course, its 'Catholic' western façade. While almost completely defaced, the image of the original church nevertheless remains in the memory of Tirana, as vividly as in the film *Skënderbeu*.

Figure 1.5.8

Photo of the model of Saint Procopius Orthodox Church with Skënder Luarasi working on it, Tirana (SLPA)

Figure 1.5.9

Skënder Luarasi, Saint Procopius Orthodox Church, Tirana, 1940, period photo (SLPA)

Figure 1.5.10

Skënder Luarasi, Saint Procopius Orthodox Church, perspective drawing, Tirana, 1940 (SLPA)

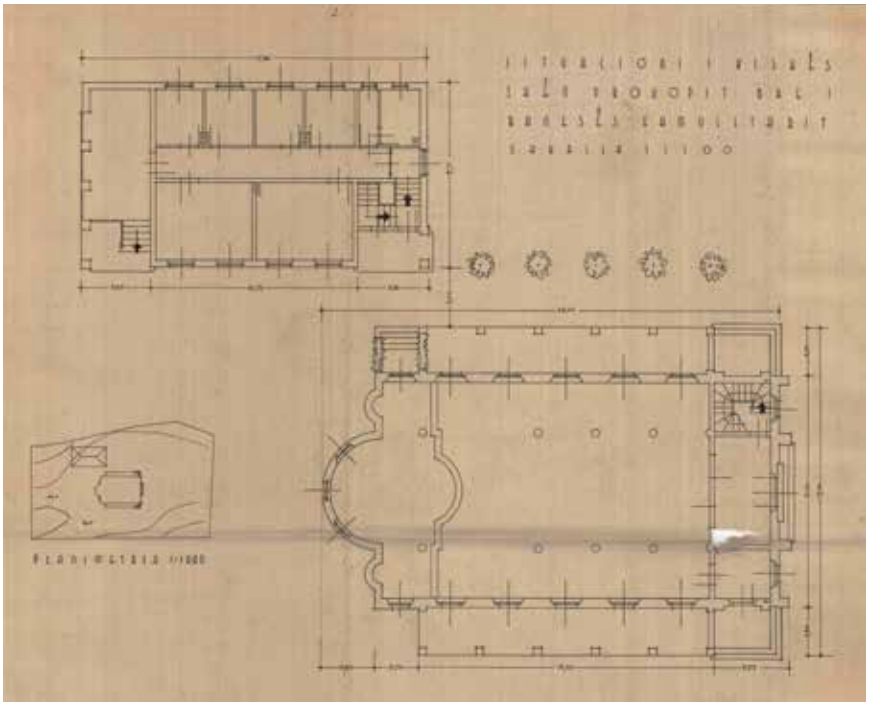


Figure 1.5.11

Skënder Luarasi, Saint Procopius Orthodox Church, plan (TCAC)

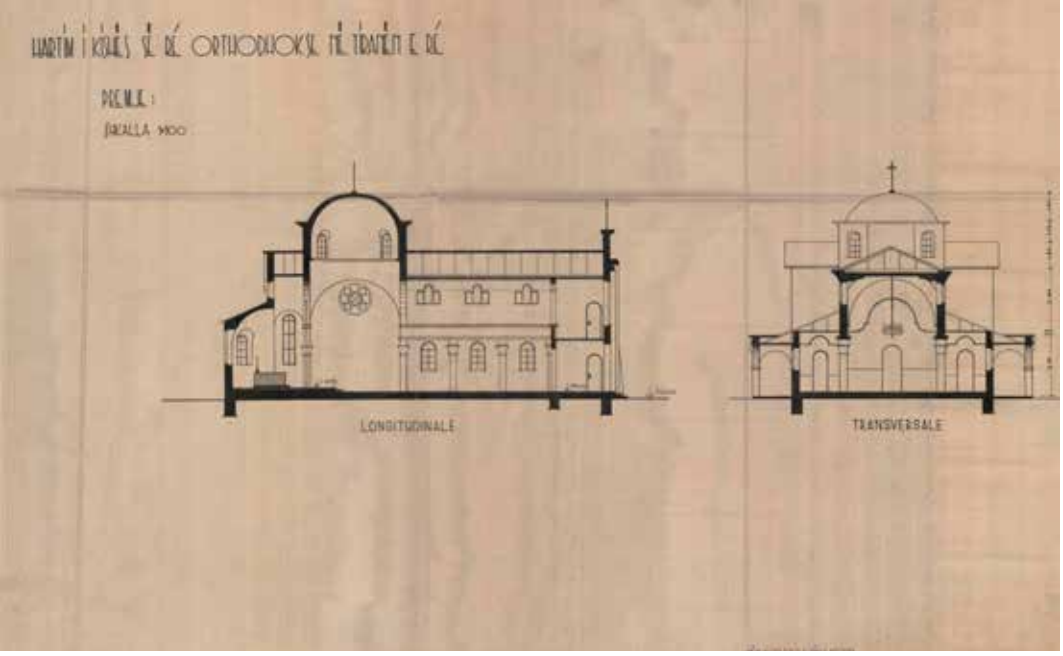


Figure 1.5.12

Skënder Luarasi,
Saint Procopius Orthodox
Church, sections (TCAC)

Figure 1.5.13

Skënder Luarasi, Saint Procopius
Orthodox Church, western
façade (TCAC)

Figure 1.5.14

Skënder Luarasi, Saint Procopius Orthodox Church, period photo during construction, with Luarasi standing on the left (SLPA)

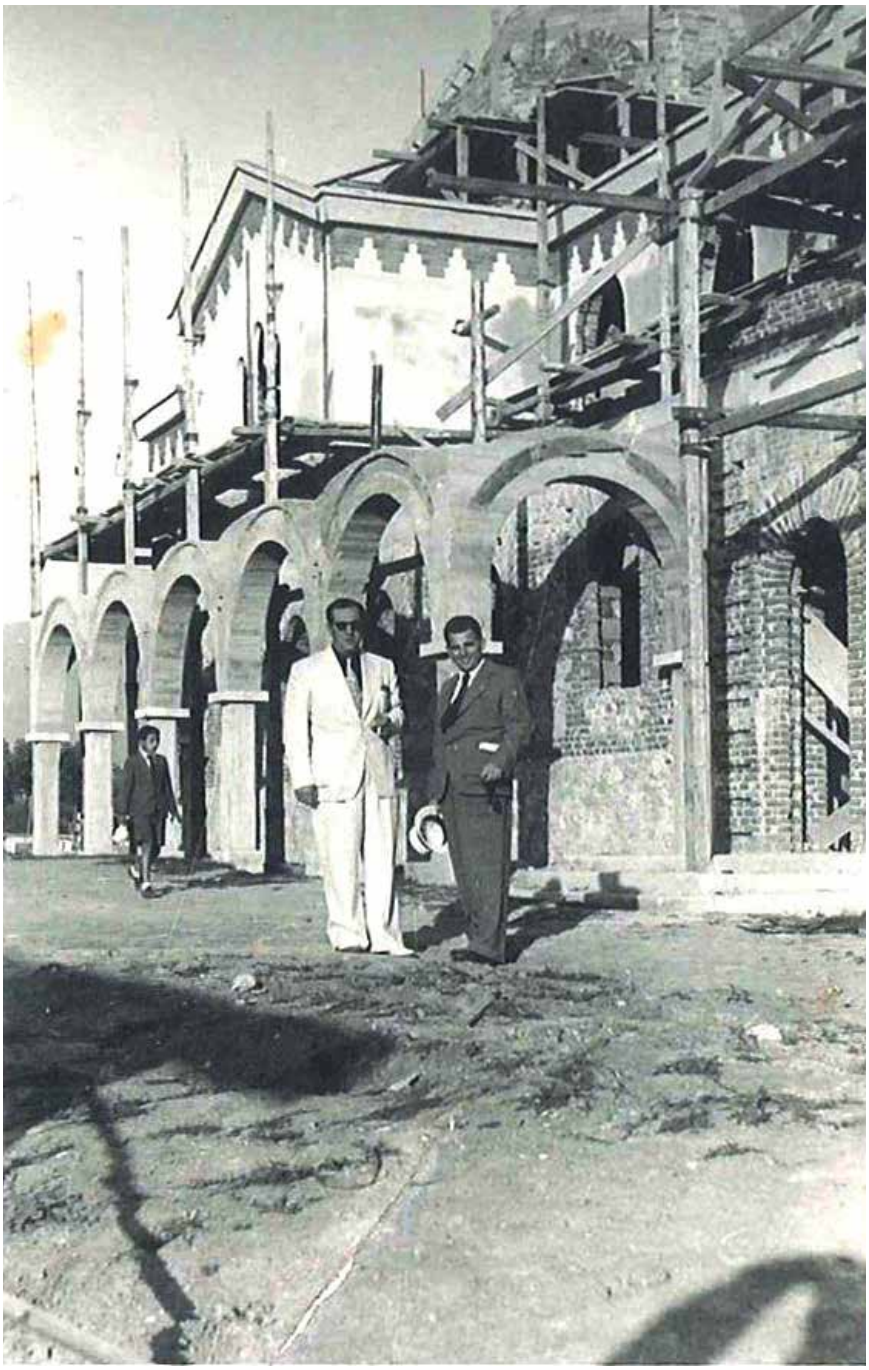


Figure 1.5.15

Original plaque mounted at the entrance of the church (SLPA). It reads: "Founded in 1940 during the time when Monsignor Kristofor was the Archbishop of all Albania, with the participation and cooperation of the ecclesiastical elders and custody of the Tirana church, built with the proceeds of the expropriation of the old Church of St. Procopius and with the help of the Orthodox people, designed and administered by Eng. Arch. Skënder Luarasi, built by the enterprise Eng. Lucca C. of Milan."

An Orthodox church that is similar in size and scale to Saint Procopius is the one near Kavajë Street, designed by Luarasi in 1962, five years before religion institutions in Albania were closed (fig. 1.5.16). The church has the same basilica typology and nearly the same form and proportions as Saint Procopius. The main difference lies in an open one-story arcade at the front, which morphs vertically into a bell tower on the north side. The tower anchors the church visually in relation to Kavajë Street vis-à-vis a narrow alleyway. The western façade and narthex, which includes a choir, are part of a one-bay-wide temple-like volume, which becomes a clear story structure in the bays that follow. Unfortunately, the renovation of the tower after the church reopened in the 1990s does not adhere to the original design. The arcade was closed in the late 1960s when the building was adapted for utilitarian warehouse functions, but it unfortunately remained closed even after the renovation in the 1990s. The original volume of the nave has also been covered over by later one-story additions. The interior is elegant and airy, and apart from the iconostasis, which is a later design, it provides a faithful sense of what Saint Procopius Church might have been and felt like.

Figure 1.5.16

Skënder Luarasi, Orthodox Church on Kavajë Street, Tirana, 1940, interior view, photo by the author, January 2022. The iconostasis is not original.

Another project by Luarasi that is a good example of the modern vernacular is the 17 Nëntori Cinema (called the "Rex" before the war), one of the most beloved buildings in Tirana, which was erected in the late 1930s.[49] The building was situated in the dense urban fabric between the memorable Barricades Street and the Boulevard (figs. 1.5.17–1.5.19). It was a renovation and expansion of the Nasional Cinema, which was originally built around 1926. If Saint Procopius Church was the victim of the communist cultural revolution, the 17 Nëntori Cinema became a victim of capitalist 'evolution,' when it was demolished around 2000 for real estate speculations. The building is still remembered by many for its intimate urban atmosphere on the ground floor as people elbowed and mingled with one another trying to buy a ticket and then vanished through the narrow arcade toward a tight entrance clad

[49] 17 Nëntori (17 November) refers to the day Tirana was liberated in 1944.

with dark marble and the cinema's elegantly modeled auditoriums. Luarasi's intervention consisted of the addition of the entrance volume and arcade, the renovation of the existing entrance and the main projection room, and the addition of an open-air summer auditorium. The entrance arcade, which consisted of a series of elegant, rounded arches on piers, engaged with the street and urban flows with its rhythmic porosity and by occupying the sidewalk, while allowing the passage of people. The fluidity of the arcade and the overall skewed angle from which the building was perceived contrasted with the symmetry of the façade and in particular with the impossibility of experiencing it from a frontal view. Such tension, in combination with the transparency of the ground floor and the cantilevered projection of the projection room above, created an atmosphere that would resonate with the exciting, before-the-movie atmosphere of being channeled toward the dark entrance followed by the auditoriums. The interior auditorium was characterized by subtle moldings and by a nearly baroque articulation of the edges and corners. This room contrasted with the more austere exterior auditorium, marked by the deep sculptural articulation of the threshold between the existing building and the open space by means of layers of piers and arches. Embedded in the old urban fabric of Tirana, the building introduced an interval or event-space. While today virtually no more than a memory of a Tirana of another era, forever evanescing, the building should be remembered if only as a lecture on how to intervene in urban space.

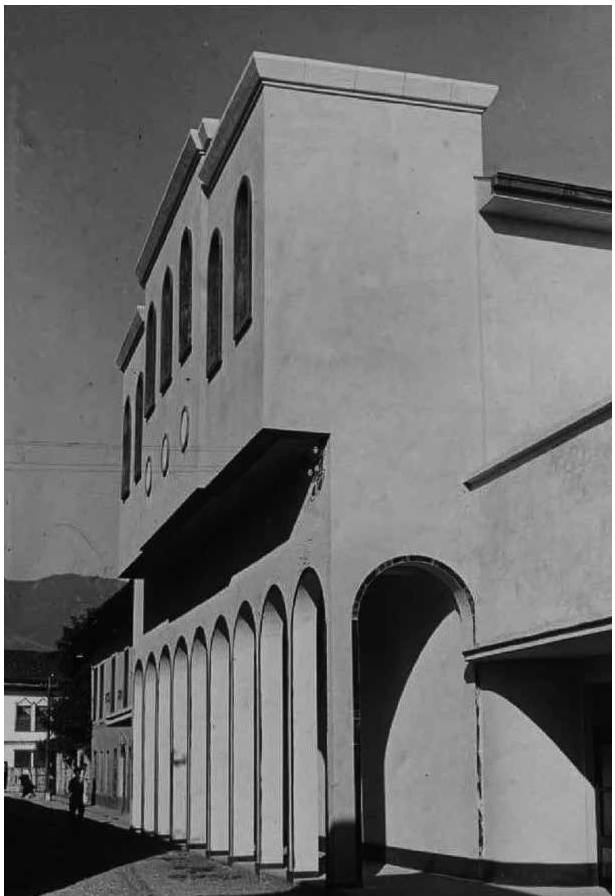


Figure 1.5.17

Skënder Luarasi, 17 Nëntori Cinema, Tirana, 1940, photo provided to the author by Andi Papastefani and copyright granted to the author by the Archivio Luce

Figure 1.5.18

Skënder Luarasi,
17 Nëntori Cinema,
open-air, Tirana, 1940,
photo provided to the
author by Andi Papastefani
copyright granted to the
author by the Archivio Luce

Figure 1.5.19

Skënder Luarasi,
17 Nëntori Cinema,
or Nasional Cinema
after the war, interior,
Tirana, 1940 (SLPA)

As elsewhere, there was already an inter-national modern vernacular in Albania well before (what is commonly recognized as) international modernism. This modern vernacular evinced a stylistic disposition away from explicit historical references and toward self-referential dressing. The modern vernacular served as the basis for a more explicit modern idiom in the mid- to late-1930s, which alongside the most well-known and, let us say, more official Italian architects like Giulio Bertè, Di Fausto, and Bosio, was also represented by a generation of Albanian and foreign architects and engineers like Qemal Butka, Roberto Waja, Hans Nechvatal, Skënder Luarasi, and Anton Lufi, among others. These architects embraced and practiced modernism as a multi-idiomatic tendency, shaped by specific histories, genealogies, and identities that were no less inter-national, inter-ethnic and inter-cultural. The following chapters trace such specificity by looking at some of the key projects that Luarasi carried out over the forty years of his architectural practice. We start, naturally, with the house.

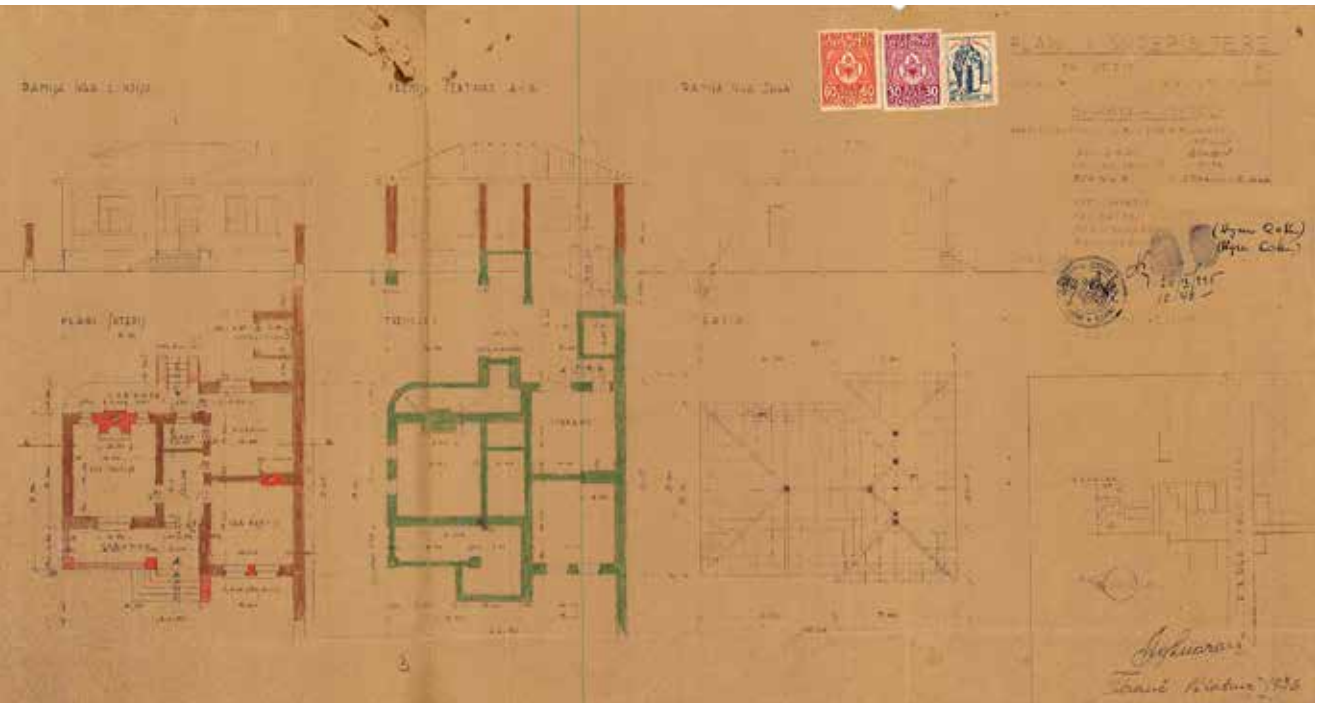
2. The Modern Object and the Construction of a Modern Idiom

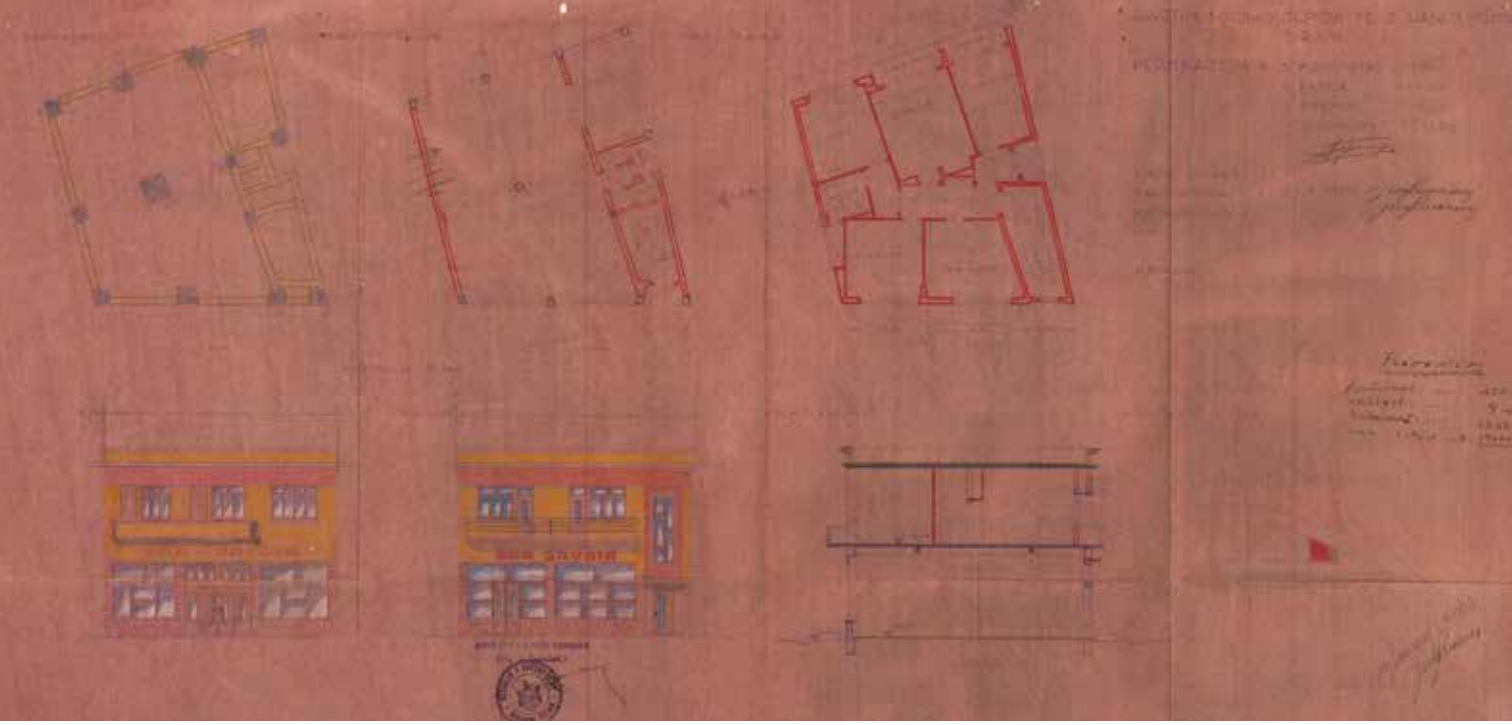
2.1 The Individual House

The individual house is central to Luarasi's oeuvre as a site of finding, articulating, and expanding the modern idiom. While dominant in his work mostly in the pre-Second World War era, the house—in the form of the single-family house or villa—punctuates his entire career and embodies important shifts and sophistications in formal expression and composition. Luarasi's houses can be grouped into three typologies: the *cubic house* with sloped hip roof(s); the *horizontally dispersed house*, which is characterized by more or less distinct volumes, with flat or sloped roofs; and a third type that is a synthesis of the two: the *staggered cubic house* with a flat rather than sloped roof. This latter type appears in the late 1930s and early 1940s and would dominate in the later part of Luarasi's career. These are not rigid typological categories, and there are many overlaps and hybrids among them, thus giving architectural specificity to each house or context. The cubic house, for instance, draws its compositional specificity from the encounter between a geometric cubic-ness, perceived particularly in the overall outline of the plan, and a multilayered architectural articulation of the façade by means of architectural elements such as cornices, apertures, cantilevers, loggias, protruding volumes, and stairs, and freestanding piers and columns. Such specificity is displayed by many houses of the mid- to late-1930s, such as those for Alek Lubonja (fig. 2.1.1), Kel Ben, Dr. Harxhi, Harilla Theodhosi, Hasan Murat Toptani (fig. 2.1.2), Anton Sopi, Sokrat Dodbiba, Petraq Korca, Fadil Hidi, Izet Dibra (fig. 2.1.3), Dum Doku, and Agop Aleksanian and Diran Cakmakxhian, among others.

Figure 2.1.1

Skënder Luarasi, House for Alek Lubonja, Tirana, 1936, set of permit and construction drawings (TCAC)





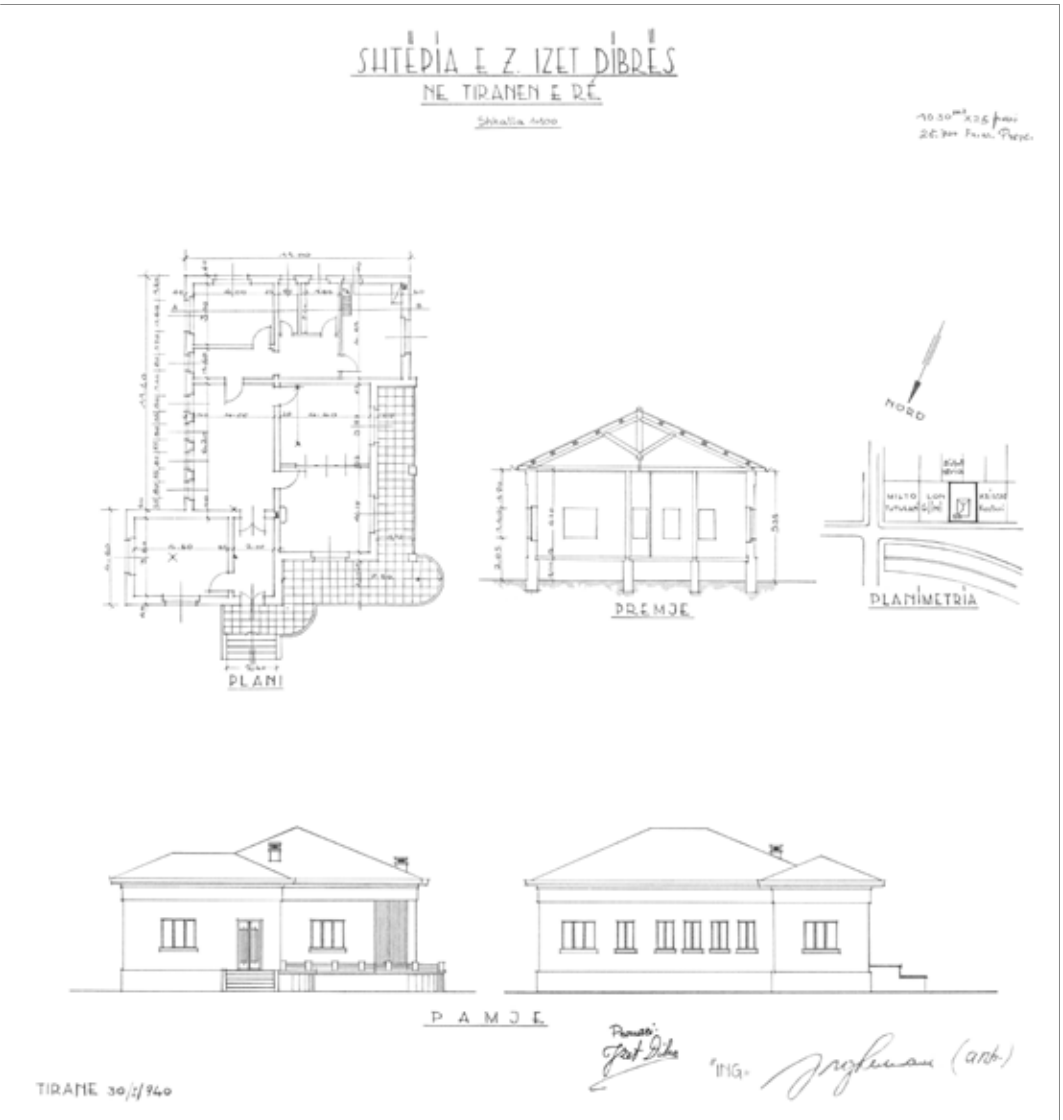


Figure 2.1.2

Skënder Luarasi, House for Hasan Murat Toptani ca. 1937 (demolished ca. 1980), set of permit and construction drawings (TCAC)

Figure 2.1.3

Skënder Luarasi, House for Izet Dibra, Tirana, 1940, set of permit and construction drawings (TCAC)

The house for Anton Sopi, which was built in 1937 and recently demolished, in 2019, is a distinct example of the cubic typology (figs. 2.1.4–2.1.7). This house was located on Dibra Street, one of the oldest and most important thoroughfares of the city of Tirana, which ends at Skanderbeg Square. The client, Anton Sopi, was a paint producer, and the ground floor was dedicated to paint production and extended beyond the volume of the house to accommodate a laboratory. The living quarters were located on the upper floor. Programmatically speaking, this house was not a villa, but rather a live-work house. With the exception of the laboratory on the ground floor, which took up the shape and extended all the way to the edge of the property, the house measured 12 by 11.5 meters, and was situated directly at the center of a plot of land surrounded and separated from the street by a wall. It was a house in a garden, a typology that is manifested in varied ways both in the modern and traditional vernacular of Tirana. This typology gave Tirana the distinct flavor of a garden city, which is now rapidly disappearing under the concrete of unbridled urban speculation. In this typology, the house plunges into the garden, which mediates between the private space of the house and the street. The combination or alternation of the typology of the urban house in the garden with that of the urban house as a continuous street front is a distinct characteristic of Dibra Street as well as of other key throughfares like Qemal Stafa, Hoxha Tahsin, and Frotuzi Street, among others. We find both typologies in Luarasi's oeuvre.

Figure 2.1.4

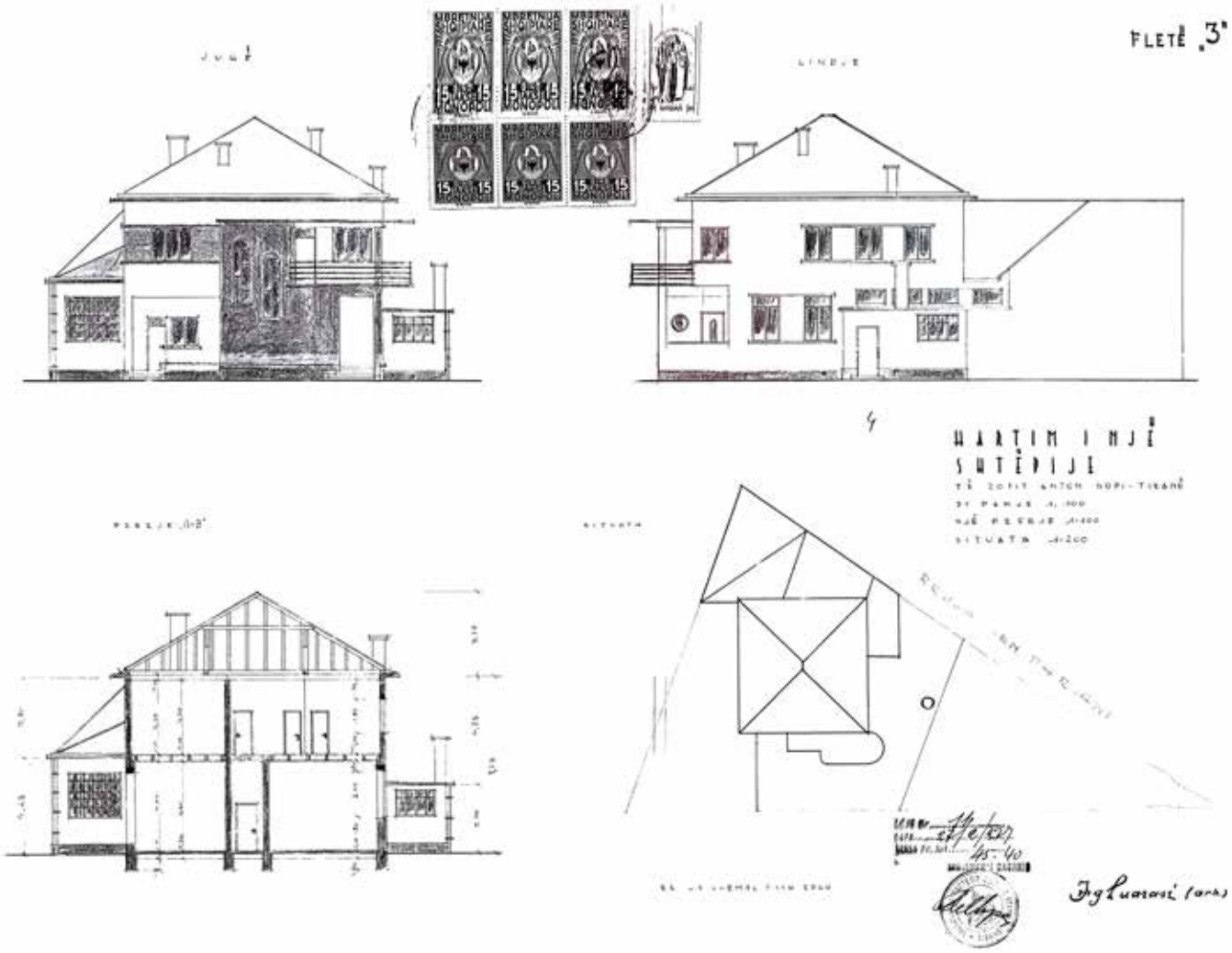
Skënder Luarasi, Sopi House, Tirana, 1937, now demolished, period photo (SLPA)

Figure 2.1.5

Sopi House, photo taken by author in 2009. The color of the exterior of the house is original.

Figure 2.1.6

Skënder Luarasi, Sopi House, Tirana, 1937, permit and construction plan drawings (TCAC)



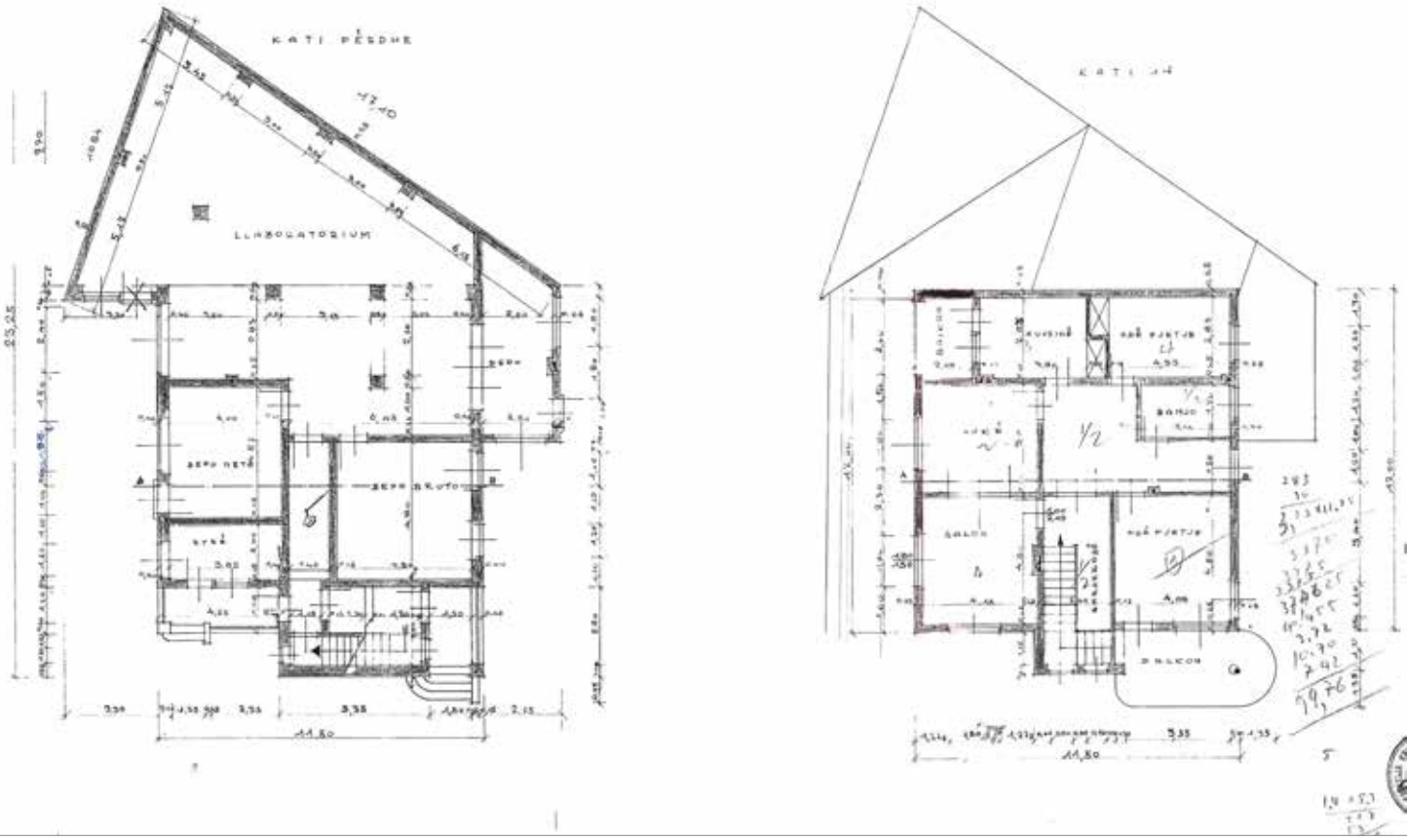


Figure 2.1.7

Skënder Luarasi, Sopi House, Tirana, 1937, permit and construction elevation drawings (TCAC)

The house of Anton Sopi seems to have a simple shape, yet, upon closer examination, it is found to consist of multiple and complex formal layerings and articulations. The stairs protrude as a volume directly at the center of the southern façade. The symmetry, however, is broken up by a spacious balcony on the right on the second floor, which cantilevers from the outer plane of the stair volume with the same distance as that from the balcony to the main plane of the cubic volume. The outer plane of the stair volume aligns with a freestanding column on the right, which supports a flat roof and aligns with both the plane of the stair volume and that of the eastern façade. The flat roof above the balcony is set about 70 centimeters below the roof cornice, thus suggesting a reading that is distinct from the overall cubic mass. The balcony and stair volume, along with a freestanding pier directly below the column above, form a loggia on the ground floor, which provides the entrance to both the first floor of the house and second floor via the stairs. All these elements form a frontal portico-aggregate that is distinct from the main cubic volume of the house and reads as a modern interpretation and transformation of the classical frontal portico. This portico-aggregate is further emphasized and distinguished by the maroon color of the outer plane, which contrasts

with yellowish color of the other facades and the white color of the loggia/balcony on the second floor. The coloring of the façade made reference to the owner's business as a paint producer. While a classical portico is generally positioned symmetrically in relation to the main volume, thus enhancing the symmetry of the latter, in this case the frontal portico has an asymmetrical disposition both in itself and in relation to the main cubic volume of the house. While the symmetry of the latter is engaged with by the stair volume, it also dissolves into a void as the frontal portico turns the corner. Such a turning is enabled by the loggia and the pier on the ground floor and the rounded balcony and the column on the second floor. The corner is opened up by the void of the second-floor loggia, which spills out beyond the boundaries of the cubic volume. As a result of its elemental singularity, the column both punctuates the void of the second-floor loggia and yields a spinning centripetal effect that liquefies the corner and the overall cubic-ness of the main volume. The turning of the corner is also emphasized by the cornice of the windows of the second floor, which also turn the corner, thus establishing a continuity with a horizontal composition of windows further down the eastern façade. In addition to the frontal portico-aggregate, the southern façade can also be read in another way. To the left of the stair volume there is a loggia, but now carved out of the main cubic volume. This loggia corresponds with the loggia on the right, while the window above the loggia on the left reciprocates the corner window above the right one. Such a reading is also supported by the light color of the façade and the interior part of the loggia. The two readings hence intertwine and overlap with one another, creating a formal density that arrests one's gaze. Meanwhile, the two arched windows of the stairs introduce an inflection between the two readings and a diagonal tension throughout the building. The loggia on the left was an entrance to an office space and the painting laboratory. The stairs take one to a hall directly at the center of the house, from which the salon, dining room, two bedrooms, and a bathroom could be accessed. All the spaces are tightly packed in a cubic volume, organized without a corridor. The structure consists of perimetric loadbearing brick walls, two internal loadbearing brick walls offset from the western and northern walls, and reinforced concrete slabs spanning between the walls. In a typical Loosian manner, the structure is not expressed but subordinated to the overall architectural effect, which is one of lightness and airiness and evokes the thinness of the painting surface as dressing. Ornament is reduced to the virtually infinite thinness of the painted surface; dissipates into thin air, only to be transubstantiated into another modality—that of the formal density of the front portico-aggregate, the true ornament of the house.

We see similar compositional densities in other houses of this cubic typology. For example, we find various versions of the curved balcony in both the Harilla Theodhosi House on Fortuzi Street, built in 1937 (figs. 2.1.8 and 2.1.9), and in the House of Sokrat Dodbiba on Elbasani Street, of the same year (figs. 2.1.10 and 2.1.11). While in the former the curved balcony is part of a loggia partially carved out of the cubic volume on the upper floor and part of the protruding rounded volume of the dining room on the lower floor, in the latter the rounded balcony cantilevers from the upper floor slab and hovers above a loggia carved out of the cubic volume and contoured by a corner column. As in the Sopi House, in the Theodhosi House one enters through a corner loggia that takes one to the center of the house, from where the other rooms are accessed. It is only at the Dodbiba and Rrok Gera Houses (figs. 2.1.12 and 2.1.13) that the corridor has been removed completely, and there are only rooms packed together asymmetrically into a compact spatial sequence.

Figure 2.1.8

Skënder Luarasi, Harilla Theodhosi House, Fortuzi Street, Tirana, 1937, photo by the author, 2021

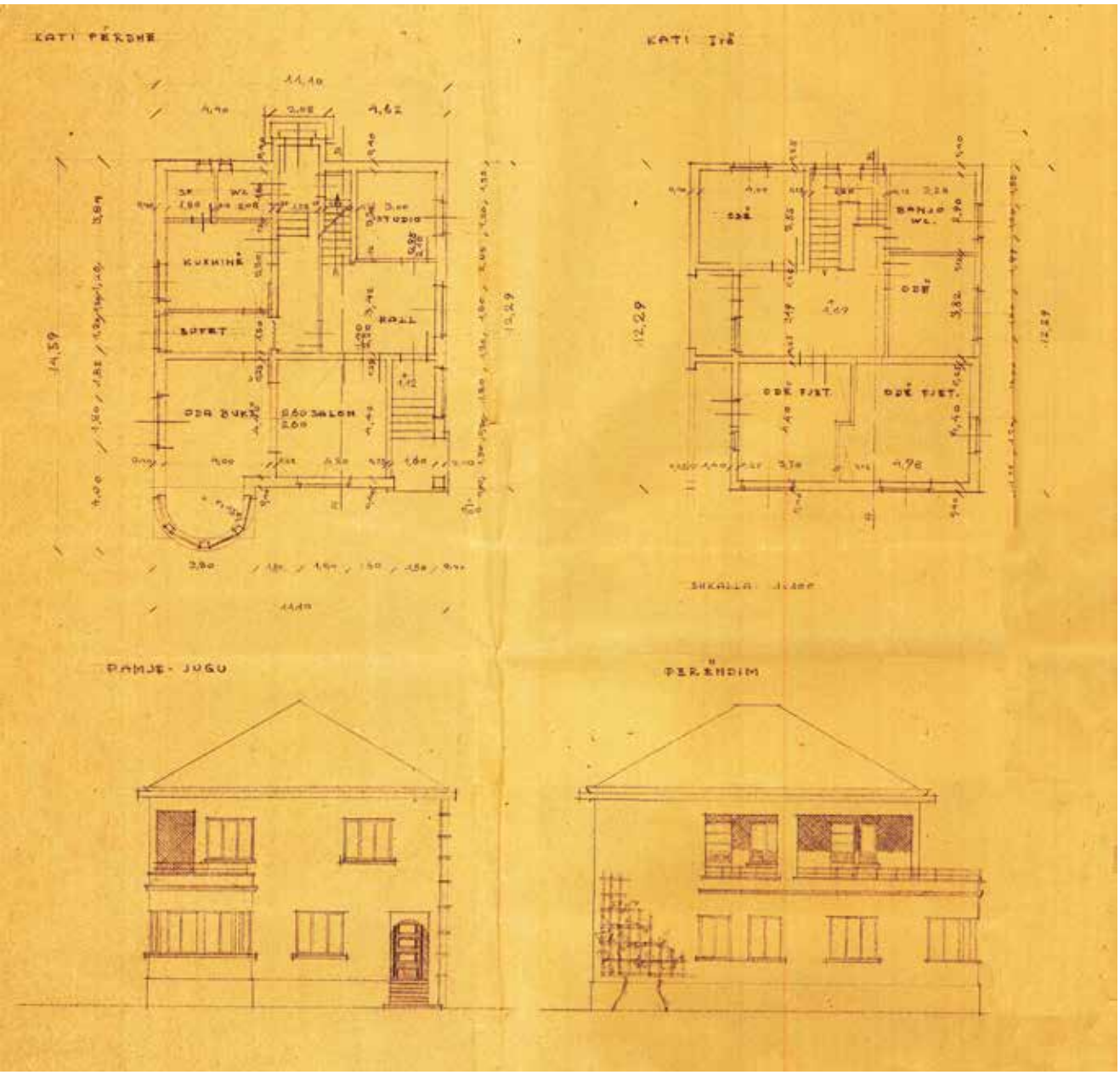


Figure 2.1.9 Skënder Luarasi, Harilla Theodhosi House, Fortuzi Street, Tirana, 1937, permit and construction drawings of the floor plan (SLPA)

Figure 2.1.10

Skënder Luarasi, House for Sokrat Dodbiba, Tirana, 1937, converted into a hotel in ca. 2010, 3D model of the original house by Irida Bitri Luarasi. In its current form, the house has been transformed considerably both in the interior and on the exterior. The balcony/entrance loggia on the first floor is closed and the eave cornice has been thickened in comparison with the original detail. A new ornamental band has also been added under the eaves. The interior, on the other hand, has been completely gutted and rebuilt to meet the needs of the hotel.

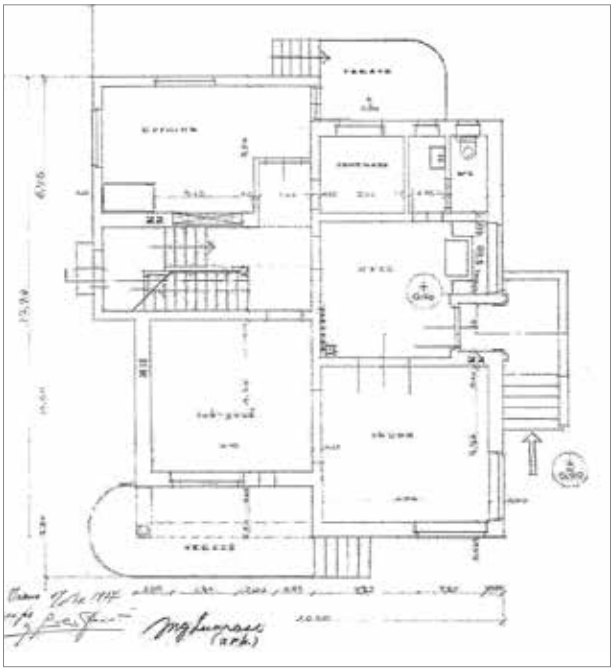


Figure 2.1.11

Skënder Luarasi, House for Sokrat Dodbiba, Tirana, 1937, permit and construction drawings of the floor plan (TCAC)

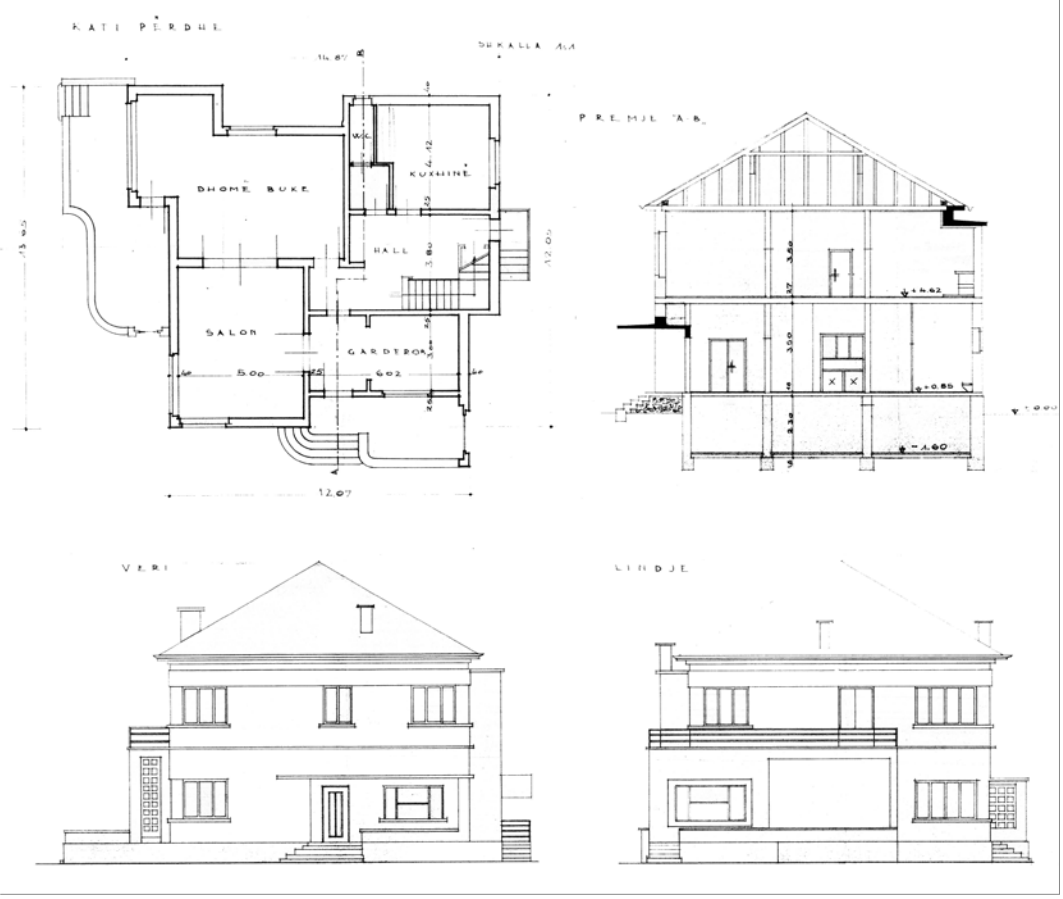


Figure 2.1.12

Skënder Luarasi, House for Rrok Gera, Tirana, 1937, permit and construction drawings of the floor plan (TCAC)

Figure 2.1.13

Skënder Luarasi, House for Rrok Gera, Tirana, 1937, photo by the author, 2022

The horizontally dispersed house: One of the best examples of this typology is the Villa of Thodhor Luarasi (the brother of Skënder Kristo Luarasi) on Elbasani Street, built in 1939, and recently demolished, in 2010 (figs. 2.1.14–2.1.18). The house has an L-shaped composition stretched out in the landscape, while at the same time maintaining a distinct formal relationship with the cubic typology. Such a disposition of being between a cubic and a horizontally dispersed composition gives the house its specificity and complexity. Like the other houses examined thus far, this is also an urban garden house, but located in what used to be considered an area outside the city. The house was surrounded with trees and greenery, and according to old photos as well as the memories of those who lived there, it offered a distinct sense of *villeggattura*—that of an urban house thrown into the natural landscape. In comparison with the neighboring houses, such a sense was enhanced by the rather substantial, almost 60-meter distance of the house from the street. Upon entering the garden from the west, one encountered a rather long, nearly 20-meter one-story volume. The façade is differentiated into a one-meter-high base that is part of the lower story, which is revealed as a full story on the eastern side due to the sloped topography, white stucco walls, and a hip roof. As in the houses of the cubic typology, there is a multilayered play of various strong and weak symmetries and axes, as well as different planimetric and altimetric dispositions. The western façade is articulated with a 50-centimeter recess at the center, which, however, concludes just 50 centimeters below the eaves. This articulation produces two readings of the façade: a neo-classical one of three planes with a recessed one in the middle, or a modern reading of one single plane with a recess in the center. The recess is further enhanced by the central positioning of two windows wrapped in one cornice and two other compressed windows on the lower floor. This central or symmetrical composition of the western façade is, however, challenged, or rather displaced by the asymmetry of the roof and by two peripheral articulations: the open entrance loggia on the left corner of the western façade, which is anchored by a freestanding corner pier, and the curved wall of the orangery on the right, which turns the volume. These articulations pull the gaze from the center to the periphery, taking one either into or around the house. Upon entering the house, one found oneself in an elongated hallway, which provided access to the bedroom suite on the left, to the dining room and the saloon straight ahead, and to a studio on the right. The sequence of spaces was linear, from the relatively contained and dim space of the studio to the well-lit and transparent space of the orangery, through the saloon, which formed another sequence with the dining room. The latter

served as a spatial hinge that provided access to all the spaces on the upper floor: the studio-saloon-orangery sequence, the veranda, which was also accessed from the orangery, and the bedroom suite vis-à-vis the hallway, right next to the stairs that took one to the lower floor. The spatial sequence of these spaces did not unfold centrally or along their axes of symmetry. Each space along the sequence was instead displaced in relation to the other adjacent space, and one always found oneself displaced from the center. This compositional principle was adhered to throughout the house, from the entrance, which was in the corner and thus displaced from all the other altimetric and planimetric axes, to the interior spatial sequences. This gave rise to a dynamic tension between the room as a spatial container and the movement across the spatial sequence, or the *Raumplan* (spatial plan), to borrow a term from Loos. The ground floor contained the kitchen and a suite of bedrooms and living spaces, mostly oriented toward the eastern side, where the terrain drops. Like the western façade, the northern façade was articulated with a recess, but off center and in clear correspondence with the void of the loggia. On the south, the house opened up to the landscape through the orangery and the veranda leading to the garden. From the garden, cultivated with a variety of citruses and fruit trees, one would encounter a small creek and the unfolding of hills and Dajti Mountain in the distance, a majestic landscape that now has now been completely obliterated by the irrational urban sprawl, which also ultimately devoured this house.

Figure 2.1.14

Skënder Luarasi,
House of Thodhor Luarasi,
Elbasani Street, Tirana,
1939, demolished in 2010,
period photo (SLPA)

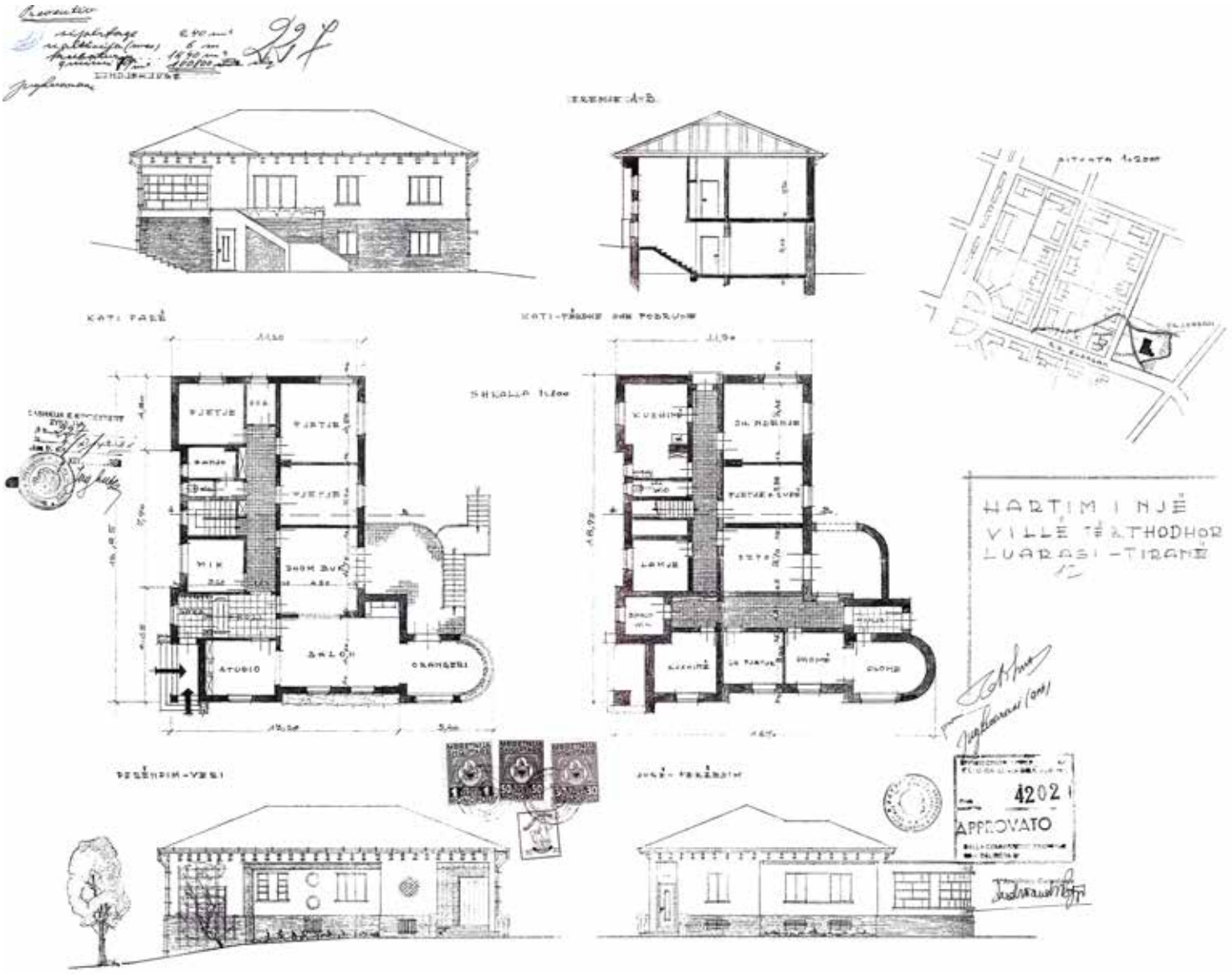


Figure 2.1.15 Skënder Luarasi, Villa of Thodhor Luarasi, Elbasani Street, Tirana,1939, demolished in 2010, permit and construction drawing (TCAC)

Figure 2.1.16

Skënder Luarasi, Villa of Thodhor Luarasi, Elbasani Street, Tirana, 1939, demolished in 2010, 3D model by Irida Bitri Luarasi

Figure 2.1.17

Skënder Luarasi, Villa of Thodhor Luarasi, Elbasani Street, Tirana, 1939, demolished in 2010, 3D model by Irida Bitri Luarasi

Figure 2.1.18 Skënder Luarasi, Villa of Thodhor Luarasi, Elbasani Street, Tirana,1939, demolished in 2010, 3D model by Irida Bitri Luarasi

Another example of the horizontally dispersed typology is a house that Luarasi built for himself in 1941. It was from the roof terrace of this house that the photo of the villa we just walked through was taken (figs. 2.1.19–2.1.21). This house is similar to the Villa of Thodhor Luarasi in both plan and section, and like the latter, was supposed to have a sloping hip roof and a stone base. However, unlike what is indicated in the project drawings, the house was eventually built with a flat roof and a brick base, which reveal the cubic and abstract geometries of the plan more distinctly. The brick base contrasts with the upper floor finished with white-painted stucco. This articulation produces the abstract effect of two stacked bands—one dark and one white—that wrap the house along its volumes. Of particular interest are the loggias on the ground floor, which are coupled with either another loggia or grouping of windows on the upper floor. The loggias animate and furnish the ground floor with an effect of airiness and lightness, which contrasts with the solidity of the base. Another feature of the loggias is the flat arch on the wider front side, which corresponds with the round, but narrower opening on the side. This house was demolished in the late nineties. A photo of the living room of this house is one of the few extant pieces of evidence of Luarasi's interiors. One of the main features of the interior was the fireplace, which projected into and shaped the interior. The fireplace was a conceptual miniature of the house inside the house. The fireplace was not located in the center, but instead extended from the right to the left, thus leaving part of the wall empty. This articulation pulls the architectural centroid away from the geometrical center of the room, and lower from the upright position, thus inviting people to sit in front of the fireplace.

Figure 2.1.19

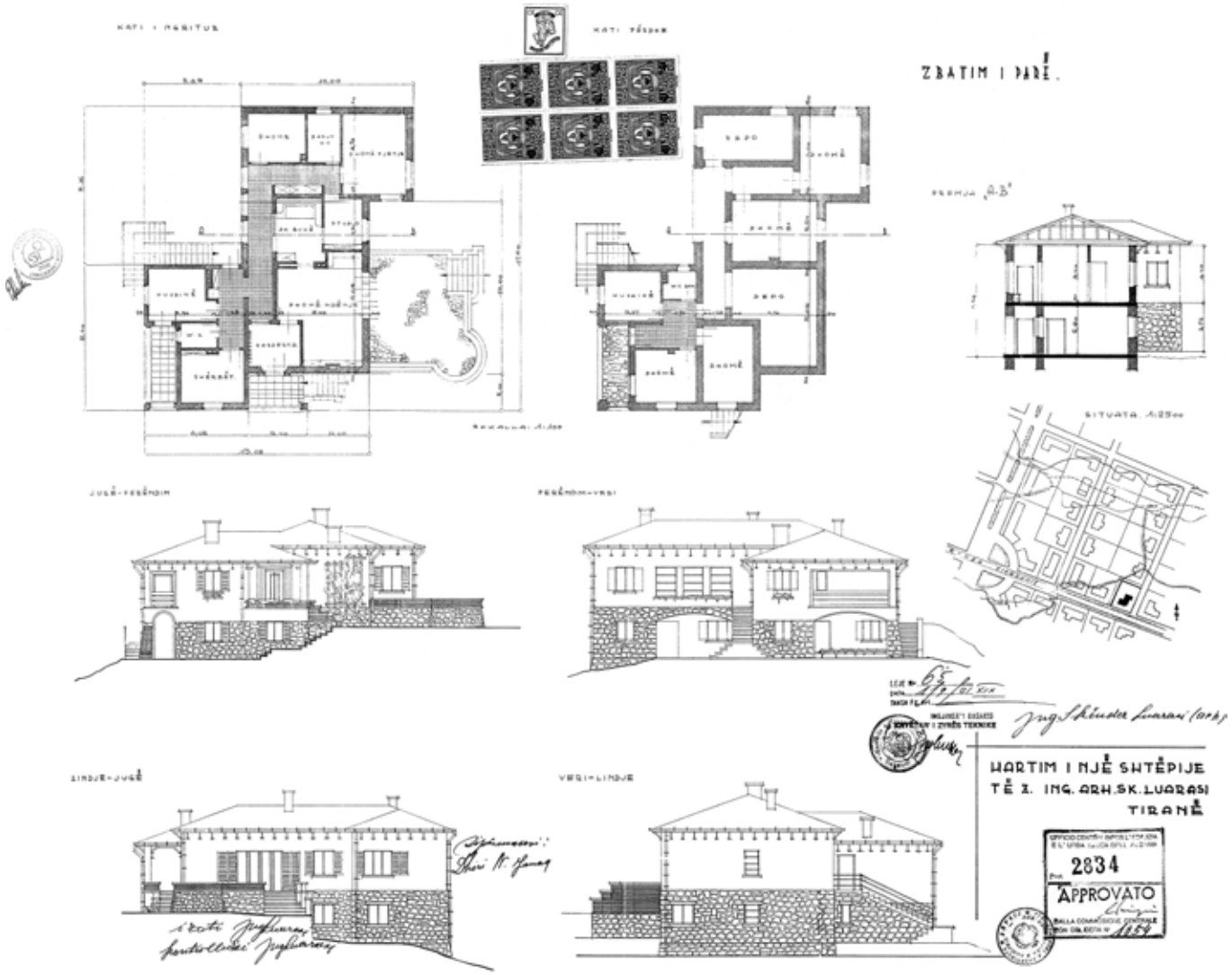
Skënder Luarasi, House on Elbasani Street, Tirana, 1941, demolished in 2010, period photo (SLPA)

Figure 2.1.20

Skënder Luarasi, House on Elbasani Street, Tirana, 1941, demolished in 2010, period photo, interior (SLPA)

Figure 2.1.21

Skënder Luarasi, House on Elbasani Street, Tirana, 1941, demolished in 2010, permit and construction drawing. As shown in the photo on the previous page the actual building was built with a flat rather than a sloped roof (TCAC)



The staggered cubic typology emerged in Luarasi's oeuvre in the late 1930s. This typology combines the asymmetrical disposition of the horizontally dispersed house with the cubic typology, and consists of various cubic articulations staggered with respect to one another. The houses of this typology generally have flat roofs, which was not yet a widespread architectural or structural element of modern houses in Albania at the time. The flat roof gave these houses the effect of a horizontal slipping and staggering away from the stability and vertical axiality of the hip roof, and simultaneously of being wrapped in a cubic-like dressing. Good examples of this typology are the Villa Luarasi and the Villa Sheko, both built around 1940 (figs. 2.1.22–2.1.25). What we see in these houses, particularly in the Villa Sheko is an almost mechanical, marching-like ordering of the openings. This quality, which we find in all Luarasi's villas from this point on, recalls more the architecture of Robert Mallet Stevens than that of Loos. In addition to such an ordering, in this house we still find the characteristic groupings of windows found in the other houses. As clearly shown in both plan and elevation, the windows of the salon on the first floor and the master bedroom on the second are spaced more closely together than the other windows of the façade. Together they mark a symmetrical axis of the façade from the western edge of the stairs to the inner wall of the loggia on the east on the first floor. On the western end of this axis is the axis of the entrance. These two axes are read together vis-a-vis a balcony on the upper floor. On the right, or to the east of this grouping, there is another axis defined by two wider windows on the lower and upper floors. These axes are then counteracted by two peripheral articulations, the corner window of the stairwell on the west and a loggia on the east. There seems to be another, nearly central axis, which is mostly visible in the plan and the northern façade, marked by the back stairs. They are positioned almost in the center, but not quite, between the recessed western wall and the eastern façade. As in Loos's houses, the front and back façades are different from one another, yet obey a similar logic of staggering: the stair volume is to the southern façade what the northeast volume is to the northern one. These volumes anchor the overall massing of the house by stopping or counteracting the horizontality of the marching windows, thus yielding an overall pinwheel effect. The plan has an asymmetrical organization structured by means of various planimetric and altimetric axes. The lower floor accommodates the living quarters, and the upper floor the bedrooms. On the first floor there are two movement itineraries: one through a spatial sequence of rooms—the salon, fireplace room, and dining room, and the other one along a spacious corridor that also provides access to the spatial sequence of the

living spaces on the one side and a studio, kitchen, office, and bathroom on the other. The corridor and the stairs in the back facilitate the functioning of the functional spaces and their connection with the upper floor and the basement, without interrupting the sequence of living spaces. The Villa Sheko was one of the most modern and elegant villas of the pre-Second World War period in Tirana, until quite recently. Around 2012, it was transformed into a restaurant and was covered with a pastiche of decorations, to such an extent that the villa is now barely recognizable. Demolishing it entirely would have been a better option.

Figure 2.1.22

Skënder Luarasi, the Villa Sheko is the second house after the one in the foreground, which is the Villa of Gaqo Turtulli and Skënder Luarasi, designed by Luarasi in 1941, where the Luarasi family still lives, period photo, ca. 1942 (SLPA). The Villa Sheko was converted into a restaurant in 2012 and then transformed into an embassy in 2013, which profoundly changed its look and character.

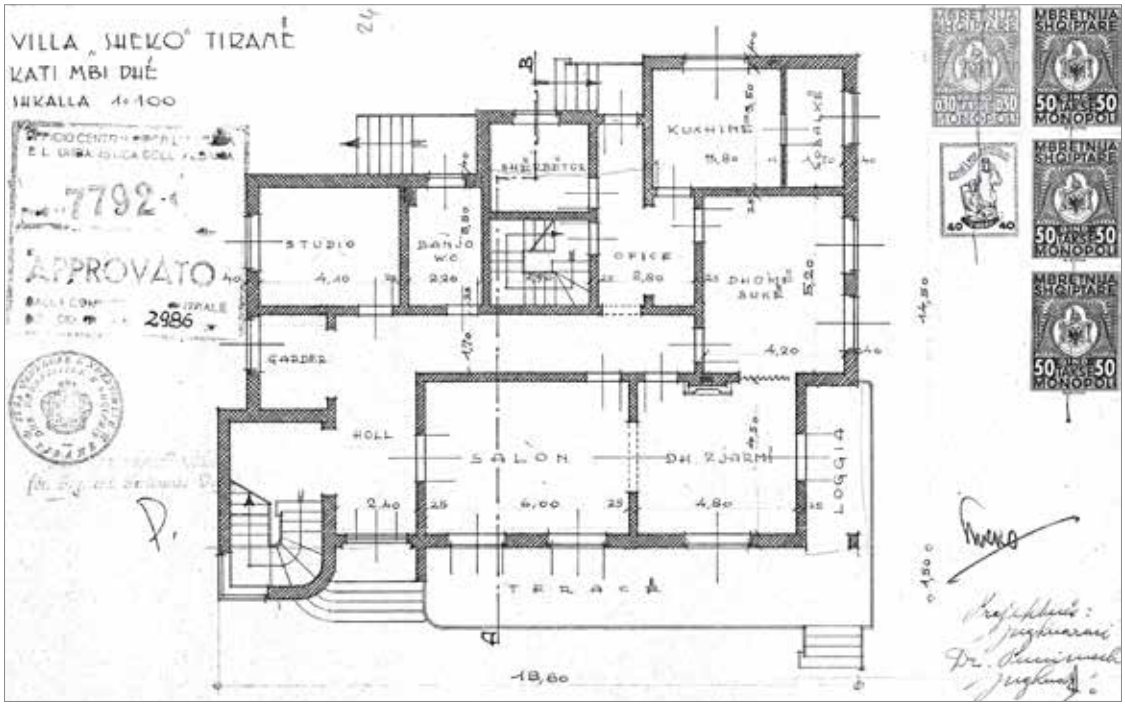


Figure 2.1.23 Skënder Luarasi, Villa Sheko on Asim Zeneli Street, Tirana, 1941, plans and façades, permit drawing (TCAC)

Figure 2.1.24

Skënder Luarasi, Villa Sheko on Asim Zeneli Street, Tirana, 1941, 3D model by Irida Bitri Luarasi

Figure 2.1.25

Skënder Luarasi, Villa Sheko on Asim Zeneli Street, Tirana, 1941, 3D model by Irida Bitri Luarasi

While Luarasi's prewar villas were commissioned by the then-emerging Albanian bourgeoisie, those from the postwar period were mostly commissioned by the communist government, and were intended as vacation houses for the highest-ranking members of the Polit Bureau. Among them, one finds the villas in Dhërmi, Pogradec, Dajt, Durrës, and Vlora, most of them built or designed in the sixties. Sitting right on the rocky beach, between the water and citrus plantations, the Villa in Dhëmi, erected in 1963, evokes a maritime atmosphere characterized by the proximity of wild nature to habitation that is rarely encountered along the Albanian coast. (figs. 2.1.26–2.1.29). With its ostensibly simple shape, the villa is a sophisticated reinterpretation and transformation of a nine-square grid. One does not enter at the back but on the side of the building through a spacious and almost monumental entrance. The back bay of the nine-square grid consists of serving spaces and a spacious hallway that contains the stairs to the second floor and a door that takes one to the main living area or central hall. The latter occupies the second, narrow bay of the nine square grid in order to provide space for a veranda framed by two volumes, which belong to the third and widest bay of the nine-square grid, right next to the water. The central hall is symmetrically organized in relation to the veranda, but assymetrically in relation to the side spaces. The space on the right has a rounded front, reminiscent of the round balconies and loggias of the 1930s villas, while the space on the left is cubic in shape. On the second floor, these volumes become terraces that can be accessed from the bedrooms. The stepped massing evokes both a sense of repose and maritime lightness; it refers both to Mediterranean vernacular structures and to modern ships and machines. The diagram of the villa in Dhërmi is reenacted in the Villa in Durrës and in the more programmatically complex villas in Pogradec.

Figure 2.1.26

Skënder Luarasi, Villa in Dhërmi, Vlorë, 1962–63, period photo, with Luarasi standing in the foreground (SLPA)

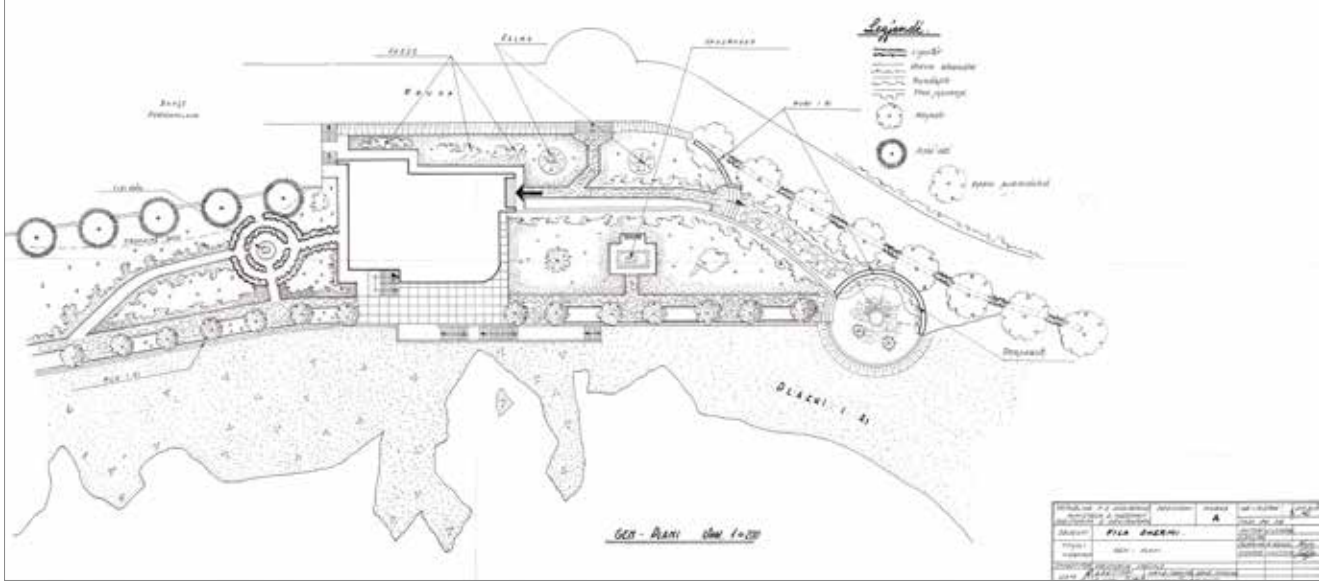


Figure 2.1.27 Skënder Luarasi, Villa in Dhërmi, Vlorë, 1962–63, construction document, site plan (TCAC)

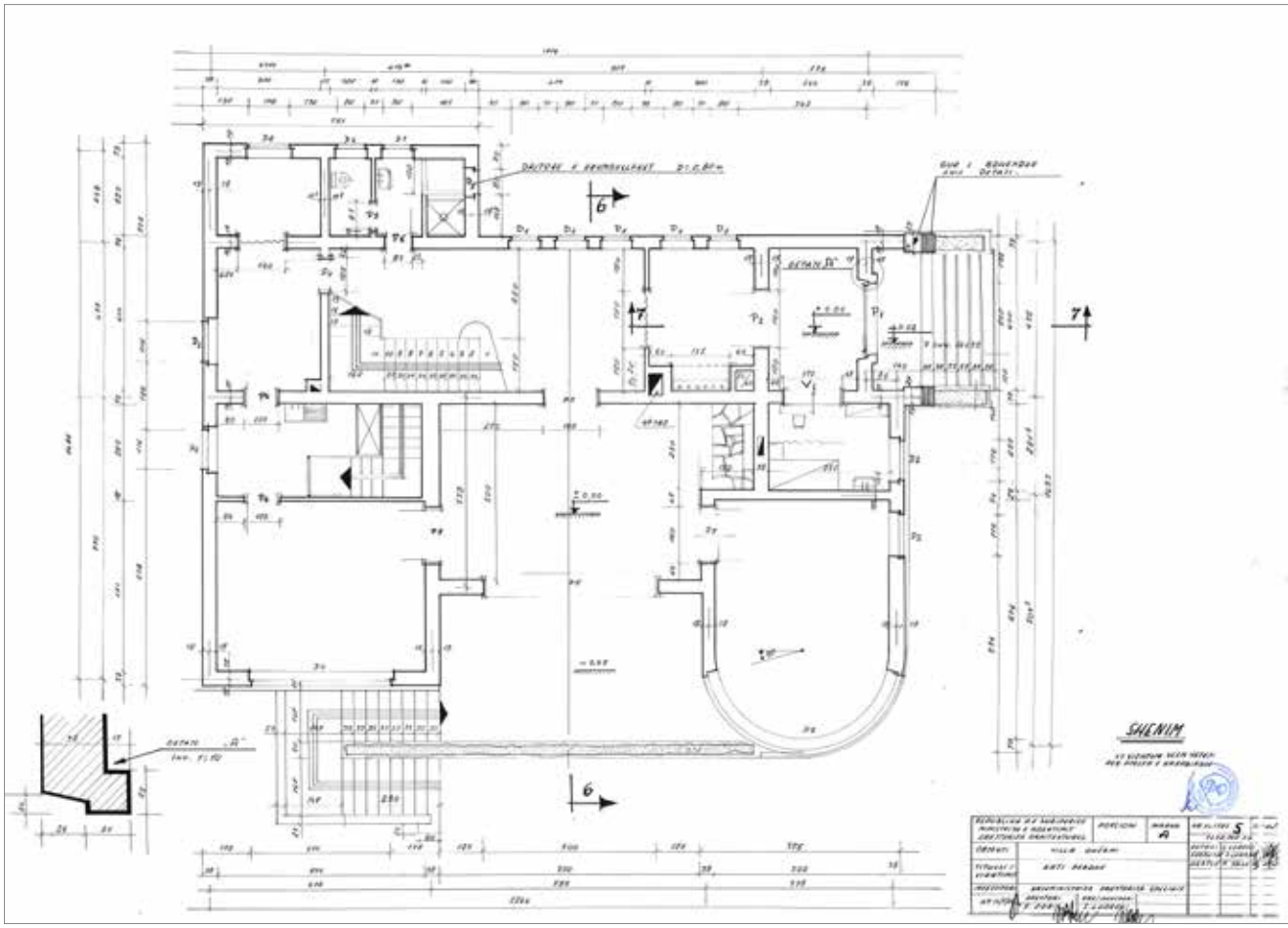


Figure 2.1.28 Skënder Luarasi, Villa in Dhërmi, Vlorë, 1962–63, construction document, first floor plan (TCAC)

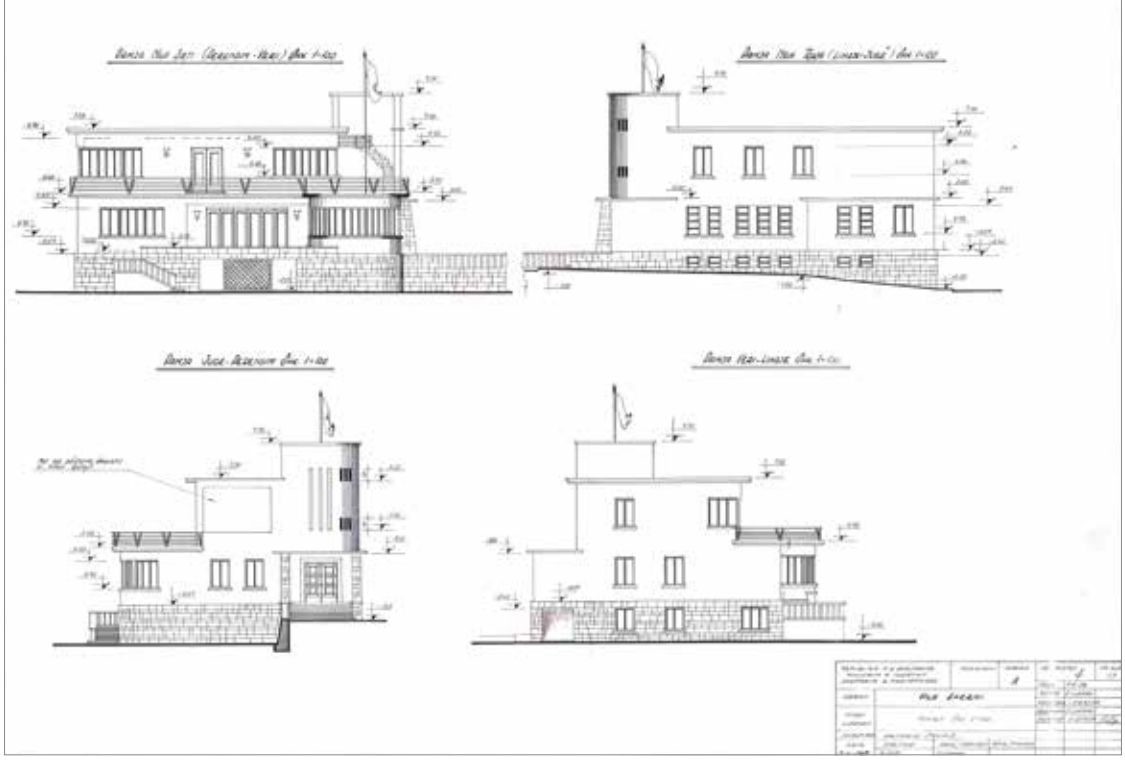


Figure 2.1.29

Skënder Luarasi,
Villa in Dhërmi, Vlorë, 1962–63,
construction document,
elevations (TCAC)

The villas in Dajt, Vlorë, and Pogradec mark the full maturation of a formal trajectory that began with the Villa Sheko. The one in Dajt, built around 1961–62, is perhaps the first modern alpine house in Albania (figs. 2.1.30–2.1.33). It is also one of the most rational in terms of both its planimetric and façade articulation. This is the first house in Luarasi's oeuvre that does not have the characteristic grouping of windows consistently found in the other houses. The windows are instead ordered in an equally spaced and a rather mechanically regimented manner, very much à la Robert Mallet Stevens, a sort of *rappel a l'ordre* in an unordered environment. The proximity of a mechanical-like compositional rationality to an isolated natural and non-urban setting is what gives the house a certain sense of humor. The house has an elongated parallelepiped shape with a gabled roof throughout its length, which is situated along the contour lines. This elongated composition is locked and anchored by two ground floor terraces with a curved shape, positioned diagonally in relation to one another: a small one on the northeast corner and another, larger one, on the southwest corner. These two terraces structure a pinwheel composition that is further enhanced by a closed arcade or loggia on the southwest corner, which is clad in stone and is thus part of the terrace in terms of its materiality, but part of the main volume in terms of its geometry and composition. This closed arcade becomes a balcony on the upper floor, while the cubic volume on the southeast corner facilitates an extension of the gabled roof, thus breaking up the symmetry of the entrance façade. Movement between these two corners is hinged by means of a lobby near the entrance.

Figure 2.1.30

Skënder Luarasi, Villa in Dajt, 1961, period photo (SLPA)

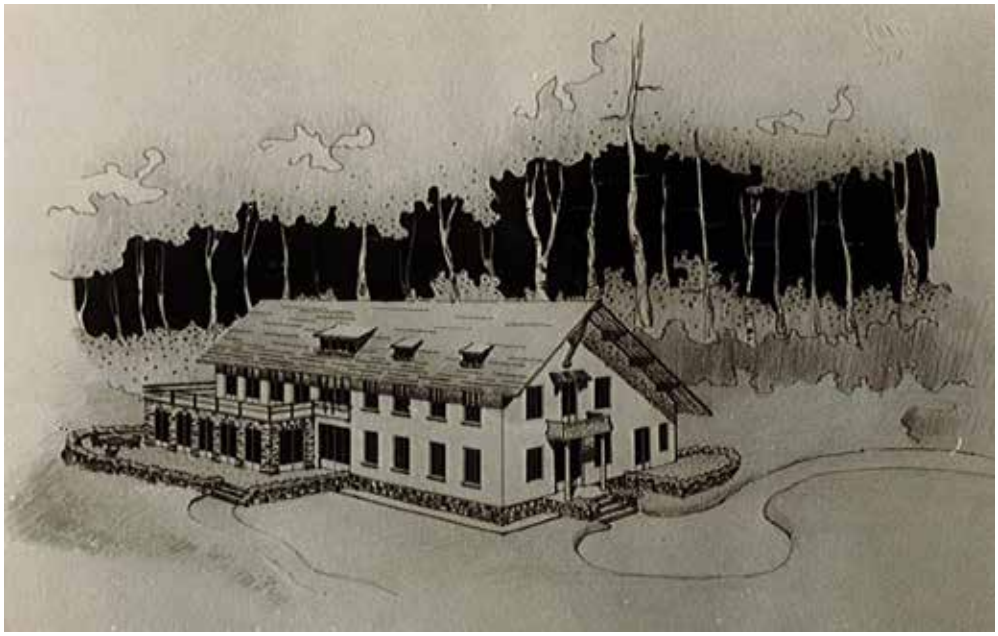


Figure 2.1.31 Skënder Luarasi, Villa in Dajt, 1961, rendering (SLPA)

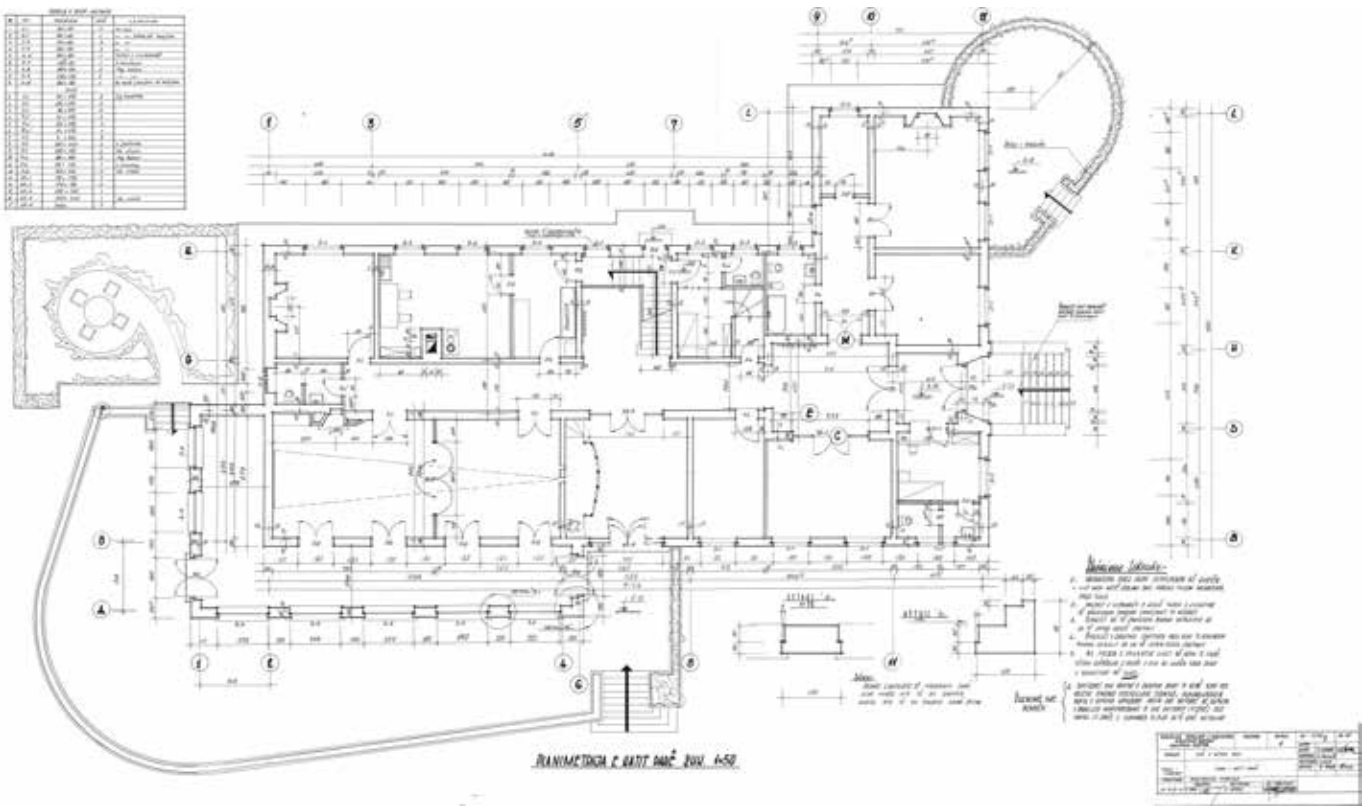


Figure 2.1.32 Skënder Luarasi, Villa in Dajt, 1961, construction documents, floor plan (TCAC)

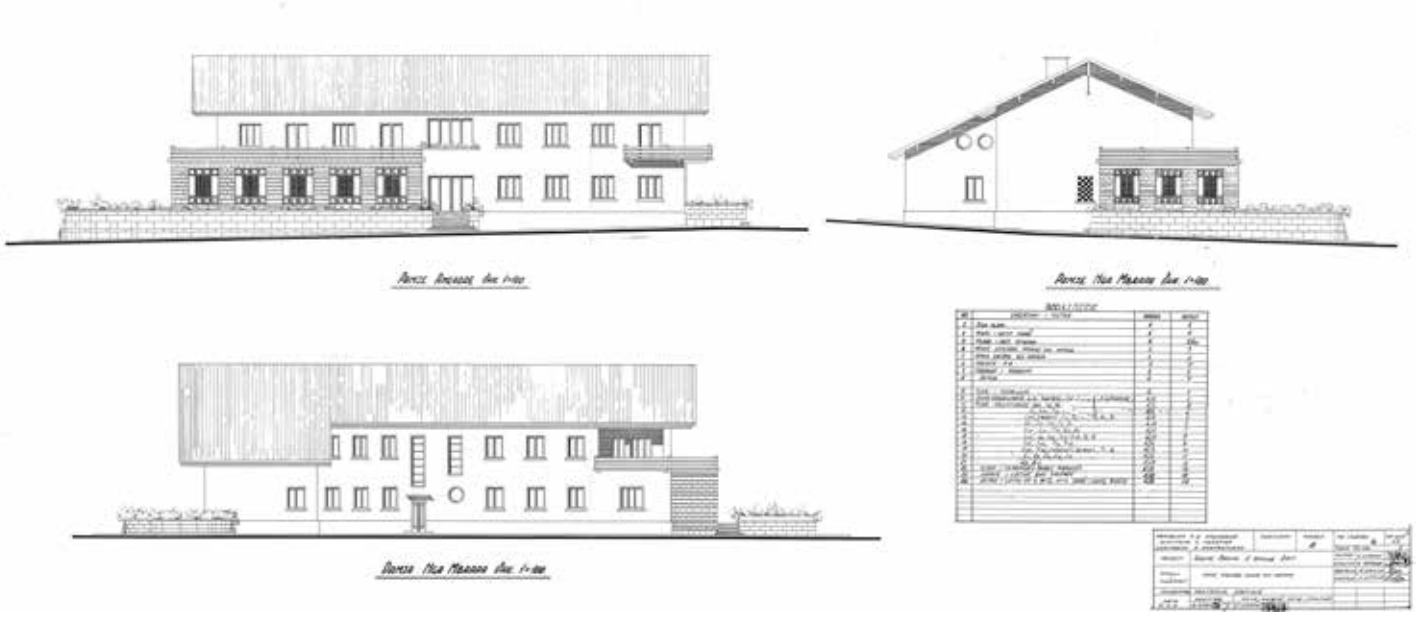


Figure 2.1.33 Skënder Luarasi, Villa in Dajt, 1961,
construction documents, façades (TCAC)

The Villa in Vlorë, which was never built, is similar in many respects to the Villa in Dajt, but adapted to a maritime context (figs. 2.1.34–2.1.37). Essentially, the villa is both an elongated stepped parallelepiped that is 43 meters long and 12 meters deep on the lower floor. It is one of the most cinematic of Luarasi's villas. The cinematic quality is provided by an S-shaped terrace and canopy that wrap the elongated volume and frame the seascape in the distance. This framing is further augmented by an array of reinforced concrete columns supporting the canopy. As in the case of the ordering of the windows in the Villa in Dajt, the repetition of the columns and the thin canopy conjures up a mechanical image, but in this case, a maritime one, referring mostly to the decks of ferries. The canopy also makes reference to the unbuilt bus station project of 1937 and the early modern architecture, which celebrated new materials and technologies. The sequence of columns, however, does not end mechanically or abruptly, but instead organically and expressively by wrapping around the northern corner of the volume along with the terrace and canopy and merging with the outer edge of the terrace. Before they merge, the last columnar bay is axially aligned with the orangery-saloon-dining room interior sequence. On the southern corner, the terrace follows the movement of the S-shape into a circular area, while the canopy above ends just as it starts to follow this S-shape, thus producing a tangential force that guides the gaze into the distance. The columns are positioned, rather curiously, at the middle longitudinal axis of the terrace or the lower floor veranda—a rather unorthodox solution for a space whose center would usually have been occupied by the resident: it is only possible to walk either on the outside or inside of the terrace, but never in the middle. The rounded columns, on the other hand, create a spinning effect that throws one toward the distant seascape and simultaneously pulls one back into the house. The terrace on the lower floor both protrudes beyond the columnar sequence, with the canopy becoming a balcony on the upper floor, and carves out the parallelepiped volume to form a loggia. The columnar sequence, which aligns with the wall of the upper floor, marks the transition from the loggia to the balcony. The columns align with the wall of the upper floor volume, which accommodates the bedrooms. In an earlier version of the project, the S-shape was counteracted by a garage rotated 45 degrees, providing an entrance to the house through a service corridor along the longitudinal axes. The main entrance was at the back of the house, along the central axis of the upper floor volume, leading to a central lobby, also accessible from the service corridor. Upon entering the lobby, in a rather non-classical mode, one encounters a pier right on the central axis instead of an opening. Next to the pier there are two openings

that provide two divergent, diagonal views toward the distant seascape, vis-à-vis the salon and the dining room and through two wide openings in the terrace. This diagonal change of direction animates the whole house. Once one is in one of these rooms, one engages with a longitudinal axis parallel to the sequence of columns, which runs through the dining room-salon-orangery enfilade. The doors of these rooms could slide completely inside the transversal walls, thus creating a distinct open plan. This is one of the most sophisticated houses by Luarasi in terms of both its formal articulation and density on the one hand and the variety of spatial experiences on the other.

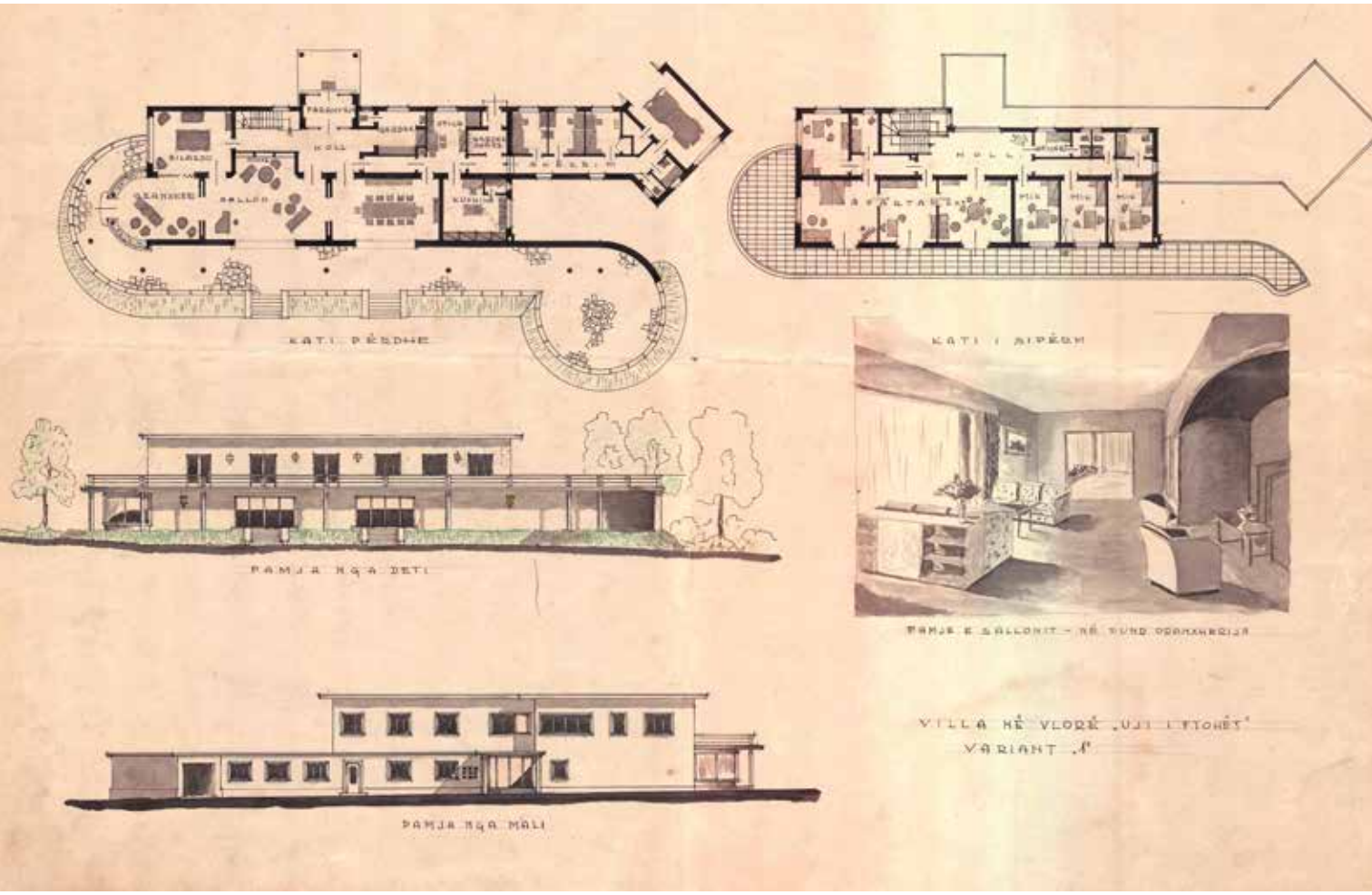


Figure 2.1.34 Skënder Luarasi, Villa in Cold Springs, Vlorë, 1964, unbuilt, schematic design (SLPA)

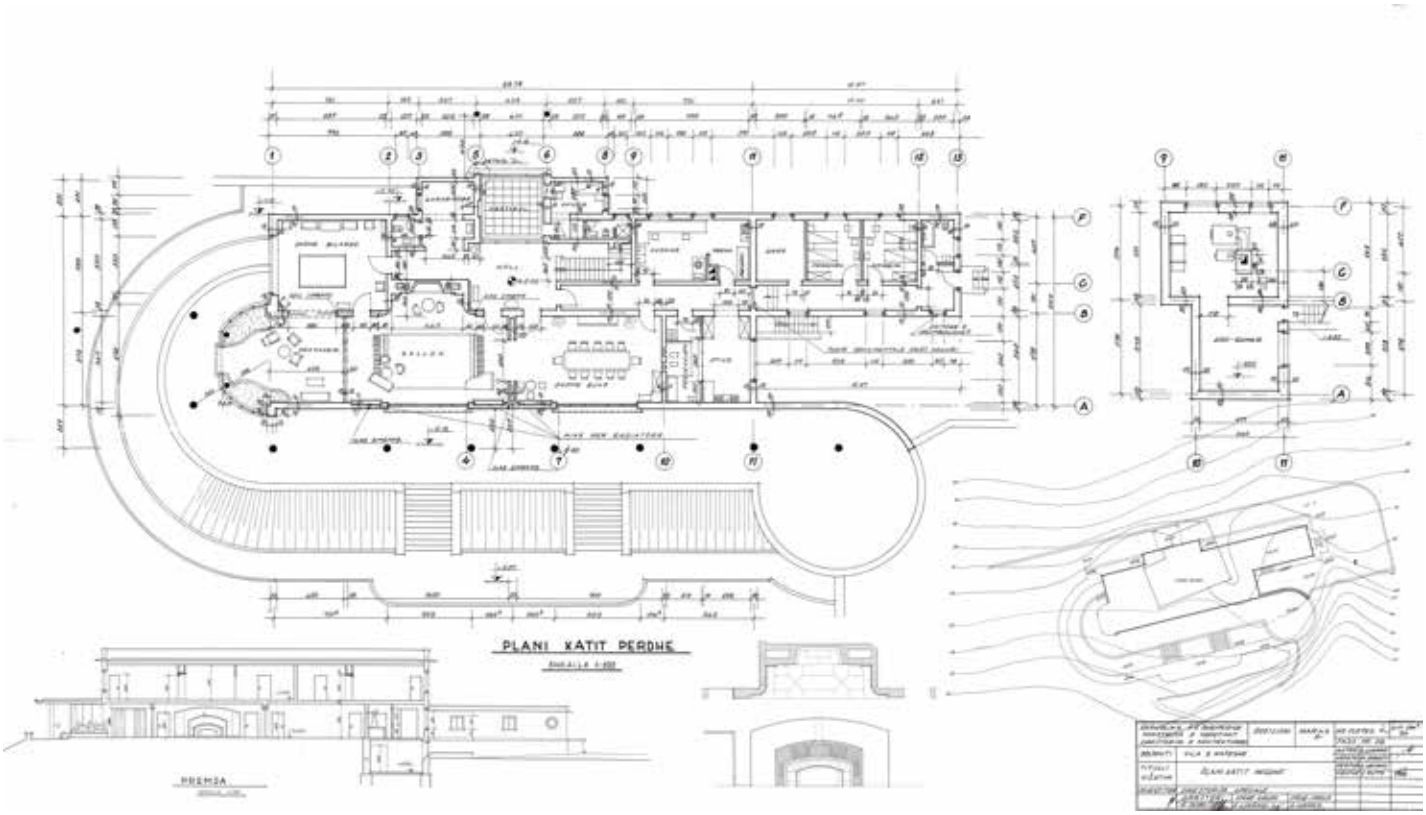


Figure 2.1.35 Skënder Luarasi, Villa in Cold Springs, Vlorë, 1964, unbuilt, construction documents, site and floor plan (TCAC)

Figure 2.1.36 Skënder Luarasi, Villa in Cold Springs, Vlorë, 1964, unbuilt, 3D model by Irida Bitri Luarasi

Figure 2.1.37

Skënder Luarasi, Villa in Cold Springs, Vlorë, 1964, unbuilt, 3D model by Irida Bitri Luarasi

The Villa in Pogradec, built in 1964, is yet another unique villa (figs. 2.1.38–2.1.41). Its most unique feature is its split-level organization in both plan and section. The villa is articulated into two volumetric masses, one in the back, on the street side, and one in front, overlooking the lake. The overall effect reads as either that of two volumes sliding or being displaced in relation to one another, or one volume cut or broken up into two pieces shifted slightly away from their original position as a result of the force of this breaking, thus yielding a series of minor shifts—projections and recesses that break up and deviate from a strong symmetry. The house is entered slightly off center, directly next to a façade projection. Upon entering a rather dimly lit entrance lobby, one goes up a flight of stairs, turns left and then right, hence further away from the imagined central axis of the house, and then reaches a hallway from which it is possible to either go upstairs or enter the living area in the front. This transition is articulated by a wall—an architectural curtain, which accommodates a series of structural piers and a narrow space that mediates between the living areas at the front looking toward the lake and those in the back. In this second hallway, one is confronted with two doors, which lead to different zones of the same spatial sequence. Entering this enfilade on the side, off center, is one of the unique features of the house. Once inside, one not only looks at, but also finds oneself wrapped by an almost dioramic lakeview, an effect that is achieved by the enlargement of the windows and by the opening up of the corners and both ends of the enfilade. The house provides a form and experience of inflecting or hinging from dark to light, from closed to open spaces, from the city to the lake.

Figure 2.1.38

Skënder Luarasi,
Villa in Pogradec, 1964,
construction document,
floor plan (TCAC)

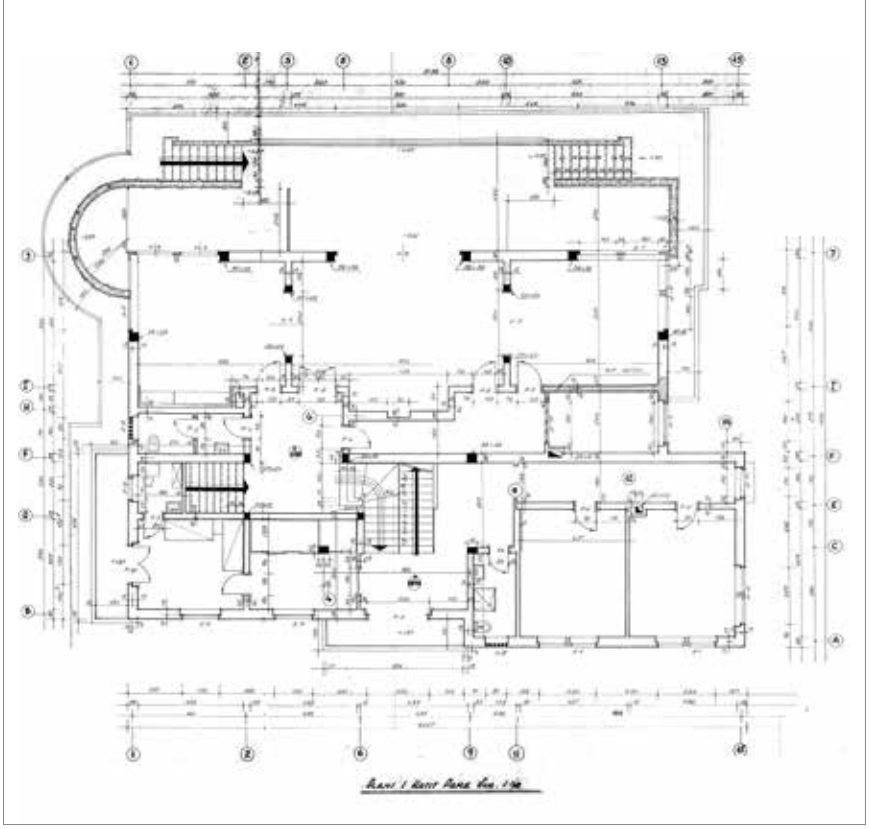


Figure 2.1.39

Skënder Luarasi,
Villa in Pogradec, 1964,
construction document,
façades (TCAC)

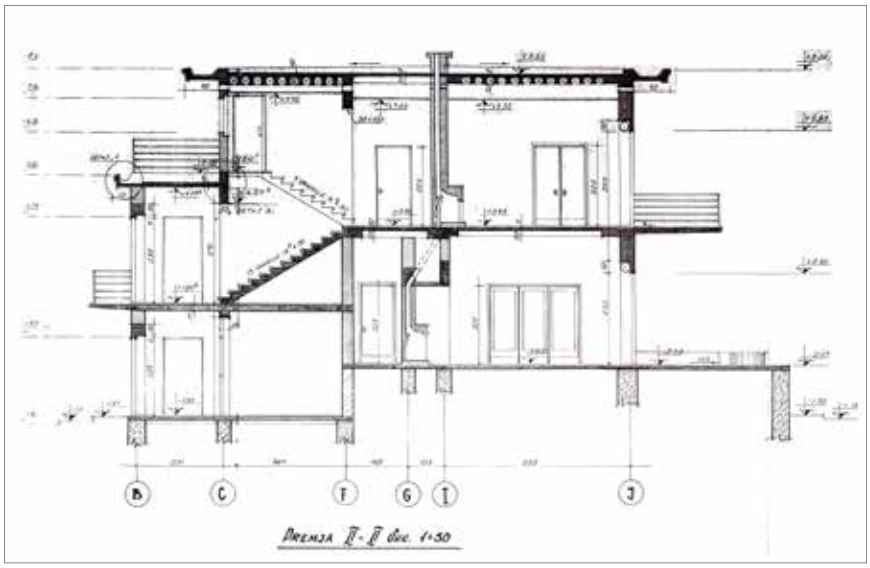


Figure 2.1.40

Skënder Luarasi,
Villa in Pogradec, 1964,
construction document,
sections (TCAC)

2.2 Urban Houses

In his prewar phase Skënder Kristo Luarasi also designed several urban houses. Unlike the urban garden houses, the urban houses are all situated at the edge of the urban street, or in urban situations with dense and multiple adjacencies. These houses, which were mostly built in the old part of Tirana, are, or were, both single-family and apartment houses. They include the House of Hasan Toptani (demolished in the early 1980s), the House of Petraq Korça, the House of Agop Aleksanian and Diran Çakmakxhian, the House of Palok Koka (unbuilt), and the House of the Çoka Brothers. These houses often negotiate the irregular geometries of the sites. Some of them bring these geometries into their internal organization, like the house of Hasan Toptani, while others do not, but instead allocate the extra spaces left between the regular and irregular geometries to entrances and gardens, like the House of Petraq Korça (figs. 2.2.1–2.2.4). Located at the corner of the intersection of the notable Hoxha Tahsin Street and Shemsi Haka Street, this is one of the most remarkable urban houses. It, like Luarasi's House on Asim Zeneli Street, combines the villa typology with the functional organization of an apartment building. The cubic-shaped house with a hip roof has two stories, each of them a separately accessed apartment. The entrance to the first-floor apartment is on the street side, and it protrudes as a small vestibule into the exterior by taking advantage of the irregularity of the site, and thus frees up

additional space in the interior, which is raised above the ground floor by five steps. The other entrance, to the second floor, is at the corner of the building on Hoxha Tahsin Street, and leads to a staircase that takes one to the second floor. The spatial organization of the apartments is tightly packed in order to both maximize the living space in a constrained urban situation and maintain the privacy of each room as the minimal unit of the interior. In both apartments, the entrance leads to a room-like hall at the center of the house, from which all the other rooms are accessed directly. The exterior façade is framed by the entrance to the second floor and three circular windows on the far-left edge of the building from the perspective of Hoxha Tahsin Street and by the first-floor entrance situated on the far-right edge of the building when viewed from Shemsi Haka Street. In between these two peripheral articulations there is an array of windows and a balcony/loggia that turns or folds around the corner. The latter also turns with a stucco band just below the roof cornice, which projects five centimeters from the main plane of the facade, and a relatively high base that is separated from the rest of the façade by a cornice. This subtle articulation both engages with the street and provides privacy for the first-floor apartment.

Figure 2.2.1

Skënder Luarasi, House on Hoxha Tahsin Street, Tirana, façade details, 1937, photo by the author. The house was originally painted yellow, but was painted gray when renovated in 2005.

Figure 2.2.2

Skënder Luarasi, House on Hoxha Tahsin Street, Tirana, 1937, exterior details with the original color, photo from Vilat e Tiranës

Figure 2.2.3

Skënder Luarasi, House on Hoxha Tahsin Street, Tirana, 1937, first floor plan, drawing provided to the author by Anastas Dodbiba in 2021

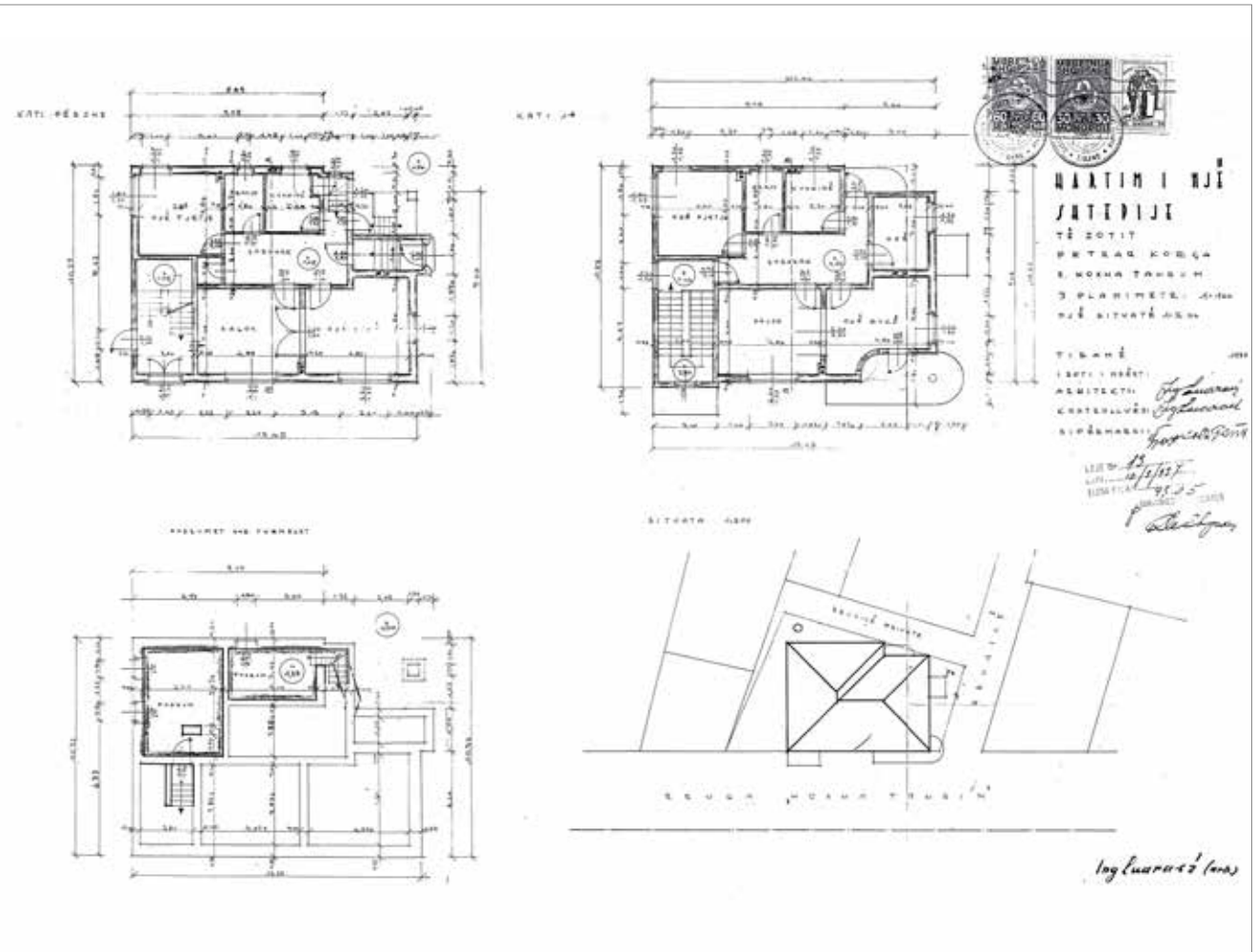


Figure 2.2.4

Skënder Luarasi, House on Hoxha Tahsin Street, Tirana, 1937, elevations, drawings provided to the author by Anastas Dodbiba, photo by the author

The house of Aleksanian and Çakmakxhian, built in 1944 and located on Konstandin Kristoforidhi Street—between Qemal Stafa and Dibra Street and equidistant from the latter and Barrikada Street—is a shallow building with a shop on the ground floor and living quarters on the upper floors (figs. 2.2.5–2.2.8). Around 2012, it was transformed into a hotel—the Sar'otel—and a third floor was added. There is a previous version of the project in which the upper part of the façade is articulated with a series of unornamented pilasters and spandrel beams, which correspond to the underlying reinforced concrete structure, which is visible on the ground floor. The final version, however, is much closer to Luarasi's idiom, consisting of the characteristic asymmetrical grouping of windows. In a rather Loosian fashion, in both versions, the façade of the ground floor is distinctly more ornamented than that of the upper floors. The exterior was left unfinished until the early nineties, and it was finished with stucco only recently, in the way that was planned in the original

project. The composition as shown in the original architectural drawings reveals the dense, almost baroque play with symmetries and proportionalities that we have already seen in Luarasi's buildings. The façade and the plan are organized in five bays; the ones on the side are occupied by stairs: the one on the left on the northern side, which is also a blind wall, goes all the way to the flat terrace of the house, where the third floor is now located, while the one on the southern side leads solely to the basement and becomes a loggia on the first floor, looking toward the south, a view that was eventually blocked by the polyclinic building. Of the three bays in the middle, the one on the left is bigger than the other two, which seem to be of equal size. The entrance door in the center is on an axis with the windows above, which, along with the windows on the right and the corresponding bay on the ground floor, form a distinct grouping, which is further enhanced by the frame of the concrete pergola on the terrace. The windows on the left, above the wide bay of the ground floor, however, are connected with the entrance axis by means of balconies. The horizontal windows along the stairs form a vertical marching rhythm that guides the gaze to the terrace pergola and the top cornice, thus wrapping and unifying the façade. In the built version, however, the façade is simpler than that of the unbuilt version. The windows are not grouped as shown in the drawing of the façade, but are instead equally spaced, and hence give rise to a more static composition. There is another curious little detail, both in the unbuilt version and the building actually realized, that may have been either intentional or a technical accident—while I would vouch for the former since it is found in both versions of the project: the slightly concave façade. While barely perceptible from a distance, it becomes clear when the building is approached from the rather spacious open urban space in front of it. Along with a garden in the front—now a café for the hotel, surrounded by bushes—this building feels like an island of memory from another time, hidden from a city determined to undo its past, to a point of no return.

Figure 2.2.5

Skënder Luarasi, Aleksanian and Çakmakxhian House, Tirana, 1944. This restoration of 2005 comes closest to the original project. The conversion into the current hotel added a third floor and altered the window details and cornices. Photo provided to the author by Sari Çakmakxhian in July 2021

Figure 2.2.6

The urban situation with the old Barricada Street, before its erasure in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The freestanding building on the left, at the intersection of Qemal Stafa and Barrikada Street, is the War Museum, now also demolished. Drawing provided to the author by Sari Çakmakxhian

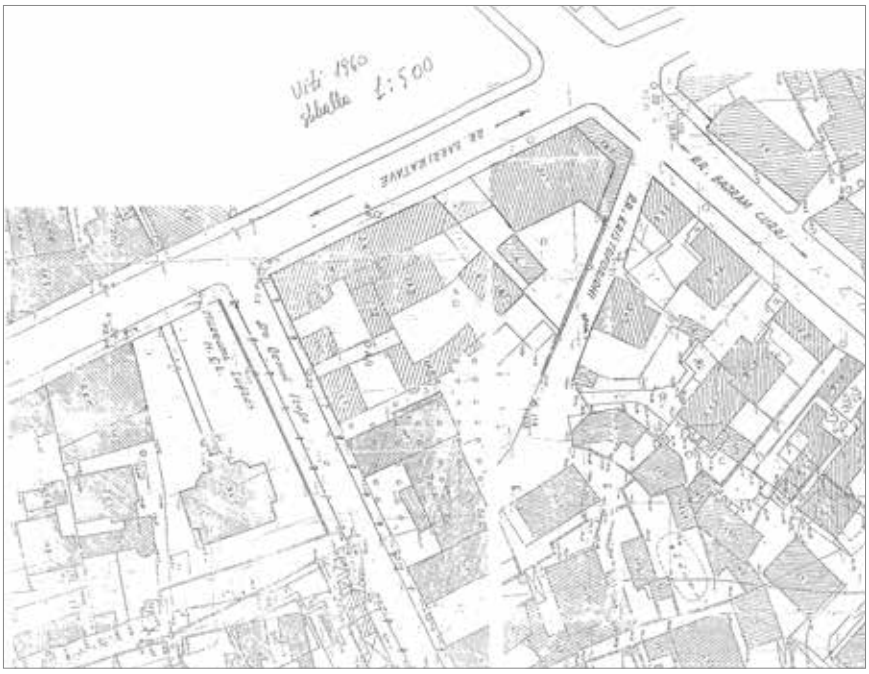


Figure 2.2.7

Skënder Luarasi, Aleksanian and Çakmakxhian House, Tirana, 1944, western façade

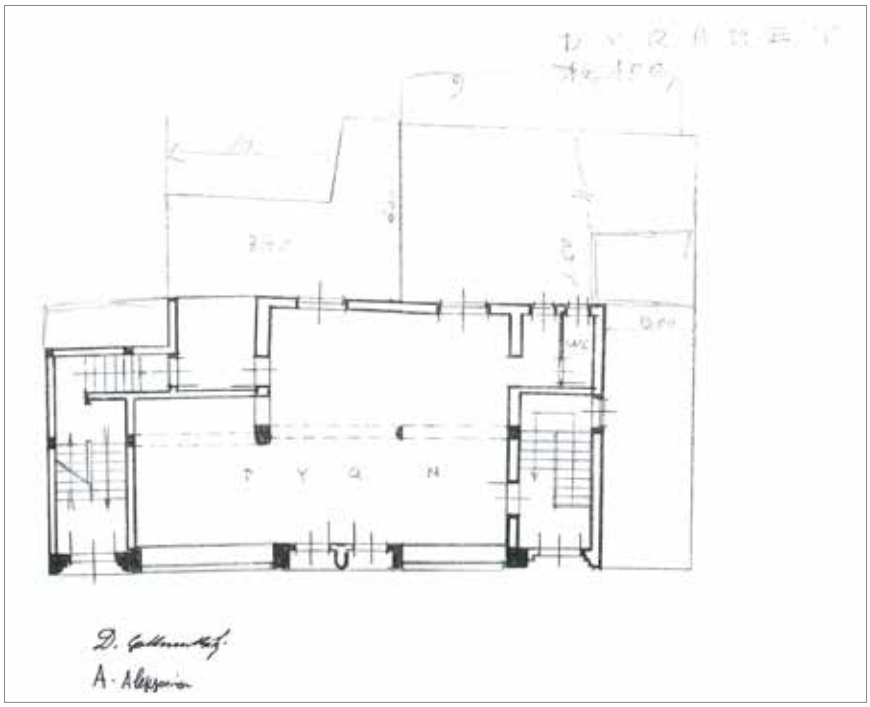


Figure 2.2.8

Skënder Luarasi, Aleksanian and Çakmakxhian House, Tirana, 1944, floor plan, drawing provided to the author by Sari Çakmakxhian

The compositional complexity of the Aleksanian and Çakmakxhian House is taken to another level in the House of the Çoka Brothers—one of the most remarkable urban houses, erected around 1942, and situated in a prominent location along Zog I Boulevard (figs. 2.2.9–2.2.11). The building is a large villa on the scale of an apartment building, a hybrid typology that we find in other notable buildings of the period in Tirana, like the House of the Kasmi Brothers. On each floor there are two apartments that can be accessed from the stairs located at the corners of the two façades. They display the characteristic tension between the horizontal ordering of the windows and their differentiation or grouping. This tension is achieved through the variation of both the spacing of the windows and balconies and other volumetric protrusions on the façade. The balcony in the front façade next to the stairs both enhances the symmetry of the grouping of windows and also suggests a horizontal continuity with the balcony on the left, which turns the corner and is related to the volumetric projection at the far end of the side façade. The façade engages directly with the street. The House of Palok Koka (unbuilt) is a similar apartment building consisting of two apartments per floor. Unlike the House of the Çoka Brothers, here the massing is articulated with

a central grouping of loggias bound together by two cubic volumes on the corner. While in the House of the Çoka Brothers the balconies cantilever from the main volume and turn the corner, in the House of Palok Koka the balconies are half loggias resulting from the recessed volume (fig. 2.2.12). These urban houses formed an important precedent for the postwar collective housing and the typology of the large buildings in general, which will be the subject of the following chapter.

Figure 2.2.9 Skënder Luarasi, Çoka Brothers' new building, Tirana, 1943, 1980s photo by author in 2009. The building adjacent to it, designed by Maks Velo in the 1970s, was recently demolished in January 2022.

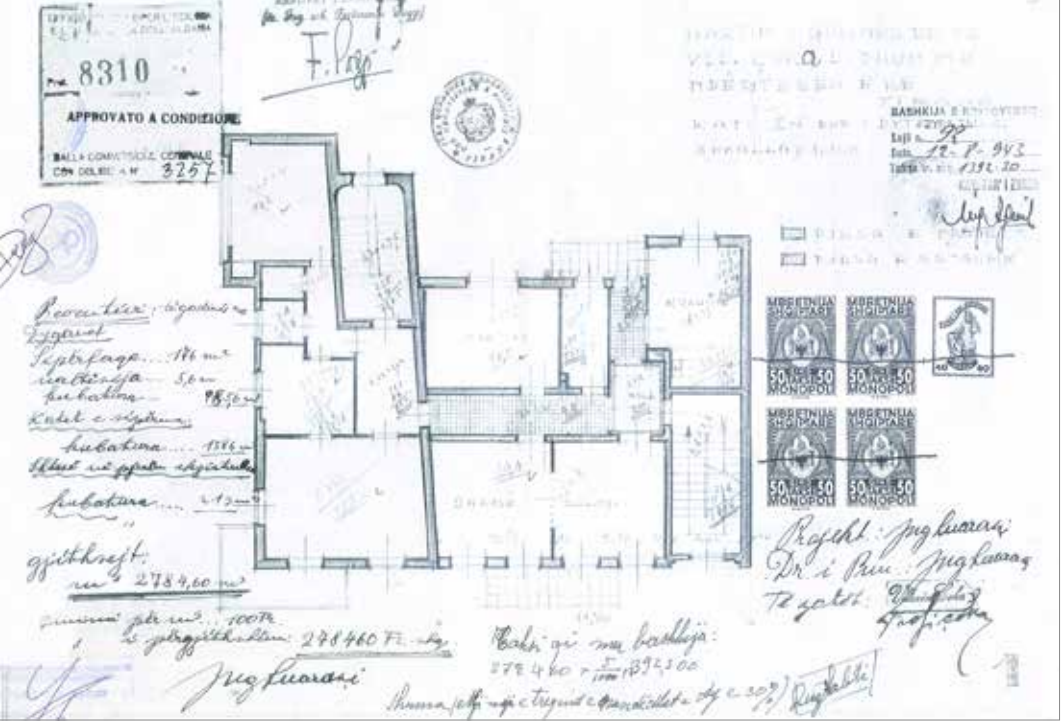


Figure 2.2.10

Skënder Luarasi,
Çoka Brothers' new building, Tirana, 1943, permit drawings, floor plan. The original drawings were provided to the author by Sonila Abdalli.

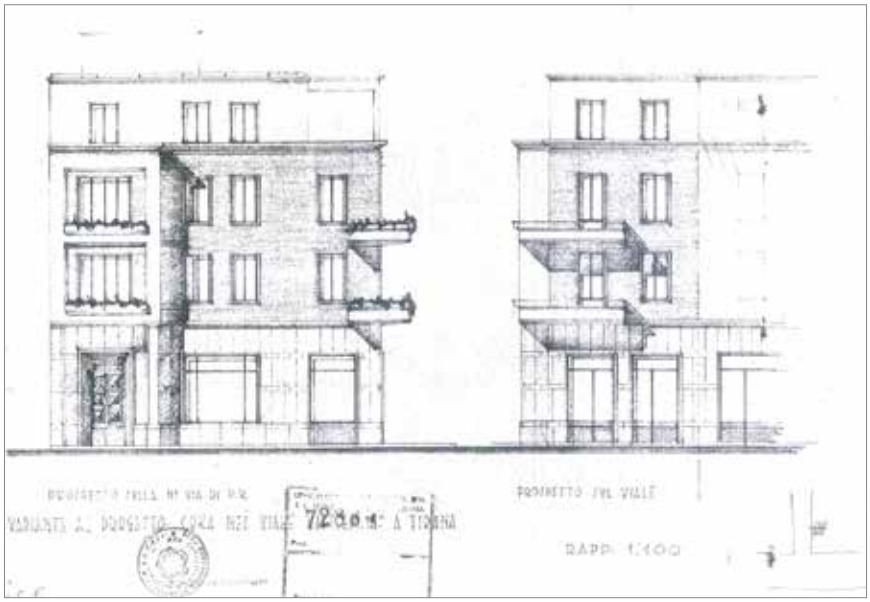


Figure 2.2.11

Skënder Luarasi,
Çoka Brothers' new building, Tirana, 1943, permit drawings, elevations. The original drawings were provided to the author by Sonila Abdalli)

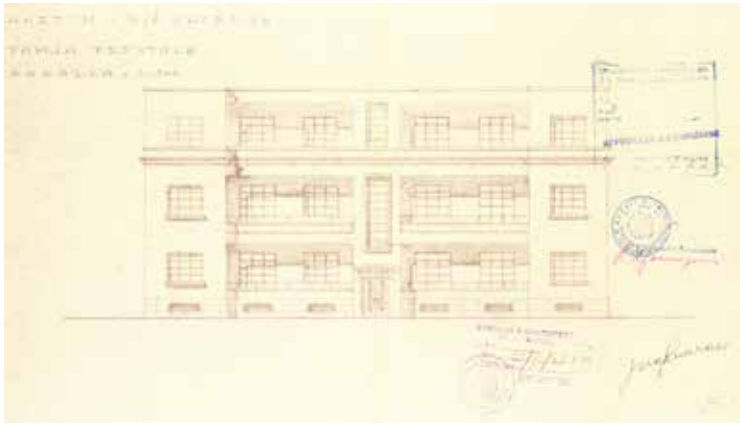


Figure 2.2.12

Skënder Luarasi, House of Palok Koka, Tirana, 1943, permit drawings, elevations (TCAC)

3. Urbanism: Large Buildings

3.1 Collective Housing

The best example of postwar collective housing in Luarasi's oeuvre is, no doubt, the Agimi Apartments, designed in 1954 (fig. 3.1.1). From an urbanistic perspective this building is coupled with the Shallvare Apartments on the opposite side of the Lana River, which were designed by Gani Strazimiri in 1952 (fig. 3.1.2). The fact that there was a design team in charge of these projects, which included other notable architects like Anton Lufi and Besim Daja, among others, shows that these projects held a paradigmatic architectural and urbanistic promise for socialist postwar housing. Each consisting of about 300 apartments and extending almost half a kilometer, the Agimi and Shallvare apartment houses are large urban buildings, even megastructures[50]; they are the *Unite d'habitation* of Albania.[51] While on an architectural level the Shallvare and Agimi apartment buildings are not mirror images of one another—for instance, the former has a round corner at the intersection of Ibrahim Rugova Street and Bajram Curri Boulevard while the latter has a corner with a 45-degree angle—on an urban level they form a symmetry along the axis of the Lana River. This symmetry is followed by a cascade of axial compositions from the urban scale to that of the interior courtyards—rhythmically articulated by means of windows, loggias, and other elements. The massing of Shallvare is broken up into three more or less equal volumes, the middle of which is set back to allow for an urban courtyard facing the street, which is one of the busiest and most popular urban spaces in Tirana. A ground floor arcade connects the three volumes and wraps around the courtyard, providing access to the ground floor and the stairs to the apartments positioned at the corners. The Agimi Apartments, on the other hand, consist of an alternation of protruding and receding volumes throughout the building's length, each of them containing both multifunctional and specific spaces, such as the Agimi Cinema on the ground floor, and six apartments per floor, accessed via three sets of stairs.

[50] The Shallvare Apartments, with a length of roughly 400 meters, is more or less L-shaped, bounded by Myslym Shyri Street, Ibrahim Rugova Street, and Bajram Curri Boulevard. The Agimi Apartments, which extend for almost half a kilometer, are bordered by Sami Frasheri Street, Bajram Curri Boulevard, and Ibrahim Rugova Street. Because the Agimi Apartments are interrupted in the middle by Vaso Pasha Street, where they also turn the corner on both sides of the street, they may also be read as two symmetrical housing complexes.

[51] I refer here to Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation* in Marseille.

Figure 3.1.1

Skënder Luarasi,
Agimi Apartments,
Tirana, 1954, façade detail,
corner at the intersection
of Bajram Curri Boulevard
and Ibrahim Rugova Street,
photo provided to the author
by Andi Papastefani

Figure 3.1.2

Shallvare Apartments, Tirana,
designed by Gani Strazimiri in
1952, photo provided to the
author by Andi Papastefani

Such a formal and organizational scheme was first explored in the Block D-1 Apartments on Durrës Street (figs. 3.1.3–3.1.5), but on a smaller scale and in a distinctly plain, non-ornamental idiom. This is one of the earliest long buildings that both shapes a major thoroughfare and an urban corner and accommodates a dense arrangement of apartments. The long massing is counterpointed with volumetric projections and recesses and various groupings of the loggias. Around the same time, Luarasi designed similar but smaller apartment blocks in the Kombinat (Plant) neighborhood (fig. 3.1.6). Unfortunately, even in well-researched articles, the Kombinat neighborhood is regarded as having been designed entirely by Soviet architects, even though this is not the case.[52] The apartment buildings consist of two-story bar-like volumes arranged in two-layered courtyards, where the voids in the first layer alternate with the solids in the second, inner layer. Though erected under difficult economic and technological circumstances, these apartment buildings are characterized by well-calibrated proportionalities and elegant massing. Two important features are the transparent corner with loggia and the chamfered corner. Conceptually, the Agimi Apartments are formed by stacking the two-story buildings of the Kombinat neighborhood.

Figure 3.1.3

Skënder Luarasi, Block D-1 Apartments, Durrës Street, Tirana, 1950, photo by the author, 2022

[52] See, for instance, Rando Devole, "Kombinati: Periferia si pasqyre," *Përpjekja* (The Effort), pp. 34–35, 109–27, and 117–18. Apart from the error of attributing these buildings to the Soviets, this is an inspired and critical article on the Kombinat neighborhood.

Figure 3.1.4 Skënder Luarasi, Block D-1 Apartments, Durrës Street, Tirana, 1950, construction document, typical residential floor plan (TCAC)

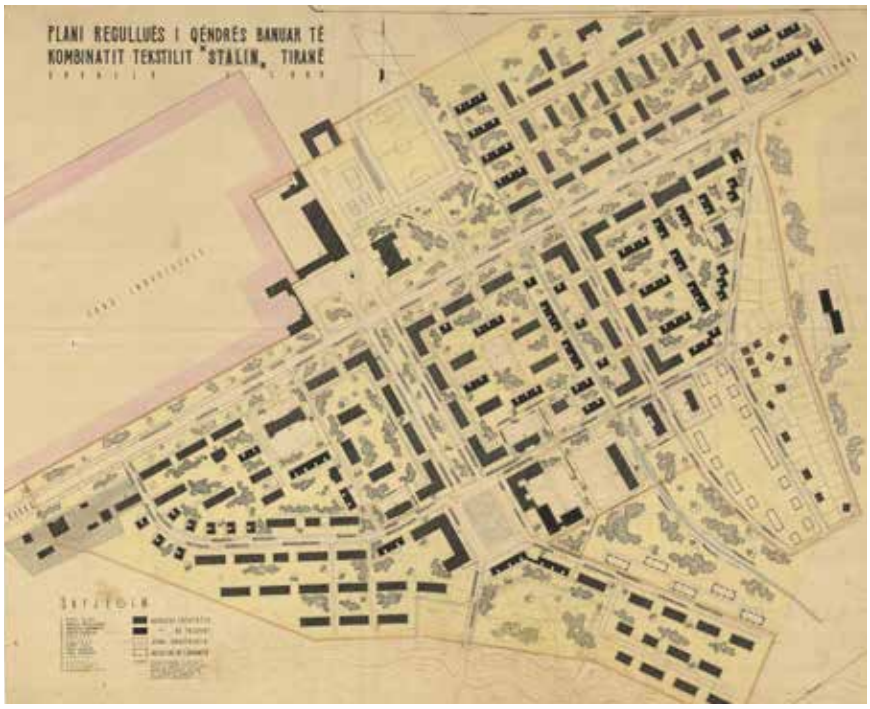


Figure 3.1.5

Skënder Luarasi, Block D-1 Apartments, Durrës Street, Tirana, 1950, construction document, street façade (TCAC)

Figure 3.1.6

Skënder Luarasi, Kombinat neighborhood, Tirana, 1953, urban plan (TCAC)

Both the Agimi and Shallvare apartment buildings offer Tirana a rarely found combination of two aspects that often seem to exclude one another: large, monumental urbanism on the one hand and an intimate human scale and character on the other. These buildings belong to the urban block typology, even if they were never completed as blocks. Conceptually, however, the Agimi and Shallvare Apartments go beyond the urban block typology, toward the infinite (urban) building, thus evoking a sort of Obus Plan. Le Corbusier's idea for the Obus Plan was inspired as much by infinite modern highways as by Haussmann's endless avenues and façades in nineteenth-century Paris. Conceptually, these large buildings could extend forever, and it is the contrast between such conceptual infinity and the finite urban space that gives them their distinct urban aura and largesse, which is profusely distributed, from their volumetric configuration to their courtyards, corridors, stairs, capitals and pilasters, guardrails, rusticated base, balustrades and window sills, the keystones of their arches, and their arcades and bay windows. Despite their innovative aspects and sophistication, the Agimi and Shallvare apartment buildings remained exemplars of an urbanism that, with very few exceptions,[53] did not become a common urban and planning practice in Albania, neither then, during the communist regime, nor today. Their very incompletion as urban blocks would foretell their destiny after the nineties, when their spacious courtyards, which were once loved by the community, were highjacked by massive building speculation. In contrast to the large-scale urbanism of the other Eastern Bloc countries, it was the replication of small apartment buildings with weak urban adjacencies rather than of the large Agimi and Shallvare Apartments that became the dominant urban housing practice prior to the 1990s. In hindsight, these small, detached buildings would anticipate the Godzillas of the post-1990s market economy—a heap of real estate without any urbanistic or public intentionality, and a veritable symptom of larger, unprecedented territorial crimes ranging from irresponsible mining and deforestation in the mountains to empty mega-ghettos along the seacoast (figs. 3.1.7 and 3.1.8).

[53] Some of the few exceptions are the Block D-1 and the other apartment blocks on Durrës Street, the apartment block on Luigj Gurakuqi Street designed by Ibrahim Prushi, and the apartment block at the intersection of Ibrahim Rugova and Kavajë Street designed by Petraq Kolevica. It should be pointed out, however, that these buildings are still of a smaller scale than the Shallvare and Agimi Apartments.

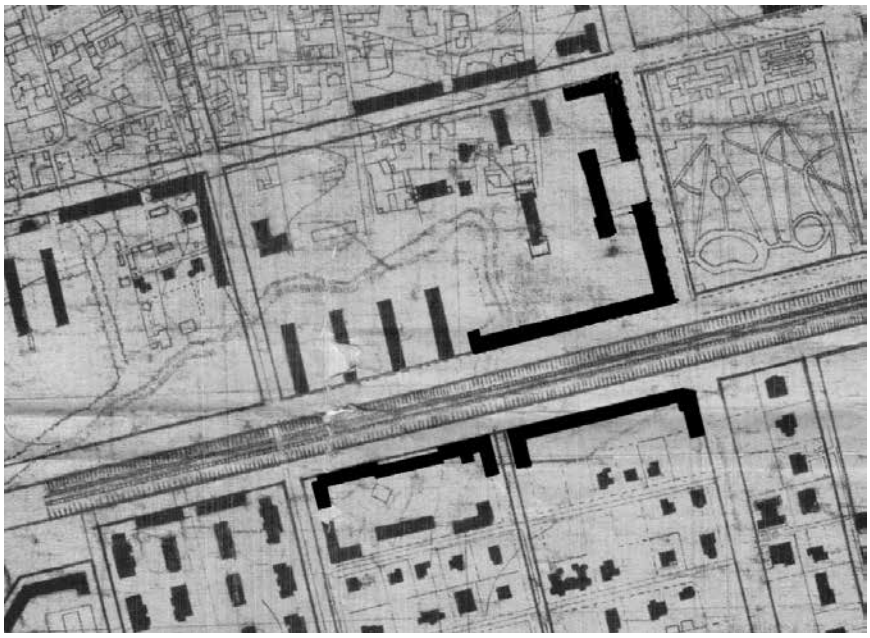


Figure 3.1.7

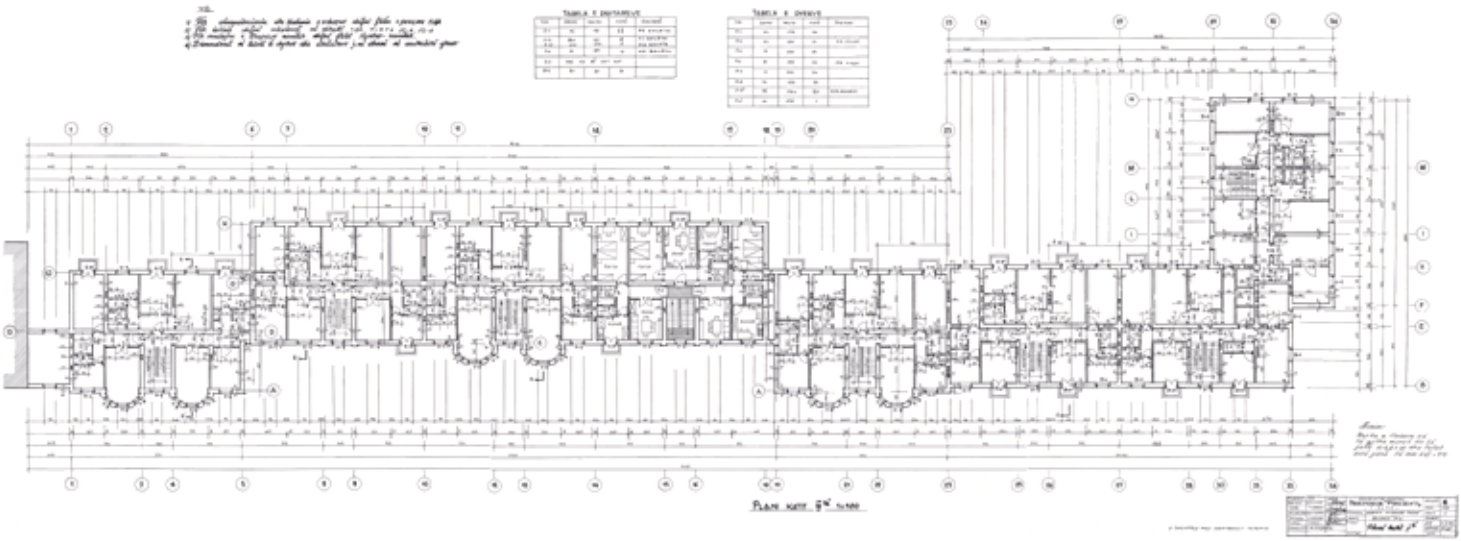
Agimi and Shallvare Apartments, drawing showing the original footprint in black, map of 1958. Map provided to the author by Ermal Hoxha

Figure 3.1.8

Agimi and Shallvare Apartments, drawing showing the occupation of their interior courtyards after the 1990s

Their being only an exemplar but never an example for large-scale urbanism in Albania is also accompanied by what could perhaps be called a discursive indifference, neglect, or even denunciation, insofar as it is mentioned at all, of their so-called Soviet style. At the time when the Shallvare and Agimi Apartments were constructed, there was an imperative to design in a Soviet style, which was characterized by historicist references. This imperative was imposed from both above, as is confirmed by the presence of the Soviet architect Vorobjov in the design team for the Shallvare project,[54] and below through the influence of those who had studied architecture in the Soviet Union—Gani Strazimiri, Shallvare's architect, being one of them. The identification of these buildings with the Soviet style, however, does not account for their architectural specificity, other than the fact that they make use of a particular historical language, as well as specific forms and motifs. With their massive and uninterrupted façade walls and volumes, the style of the Shallvare Apartments is more neo-Renaissance and Italianate in character, arguably due to the fact that Strazimiri had already studied architecture in Italy before continuing his studies in the Soviet Union. The style of the Agimi Apartments on the other hand feels more baroque owing to their volumetric projections and recesses, and thus reflects a particular Central European bias (figs. 3.1.9–3.1.12). There is always an official, large style, and the so-called Soviet style was the official one at the time. Yet the fact that these buildings utilized classical motifs does not make them exclusively Soviet. In its long durée, modernity has often engaged with various vernaculars. For instance, architects like Severio Muratori in Italy and Jože Pleçnik in Slovenia continued to design in the classical idiom well into the 1960s and 1970s. Such a classical vernacular is as inter-national as the international style. The Agimi and Shallvare Apartments are part of this tradition.

[54] See the seal of the original drawings in figures 3.1.9–3.1.11.



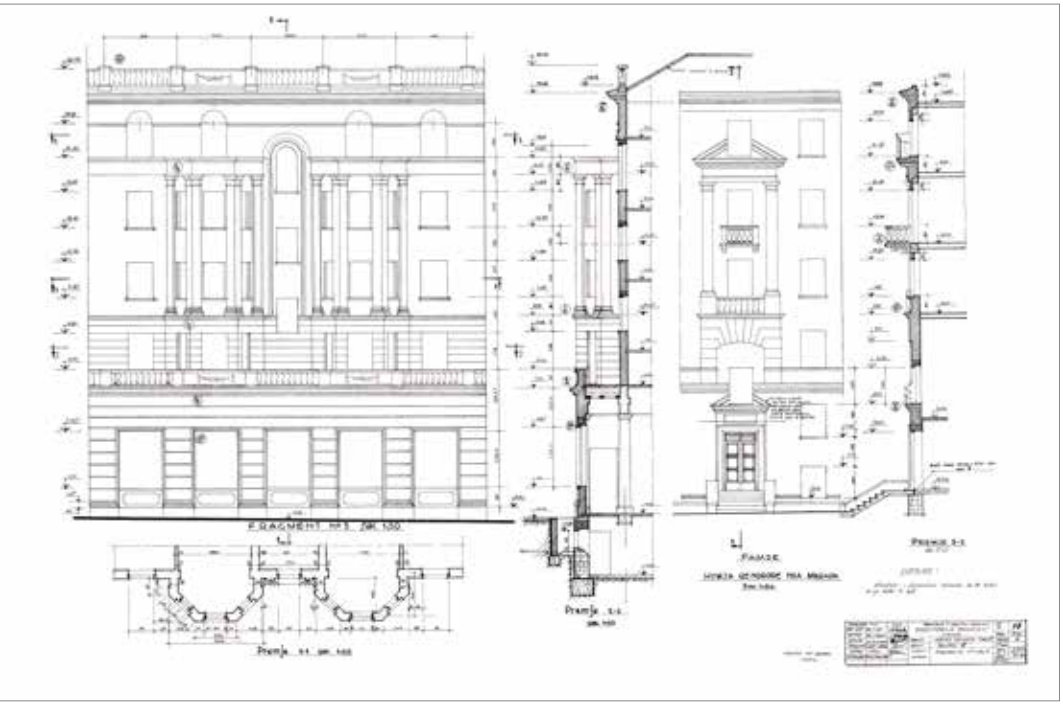


Figure 3.1.9

Skënder Luarasi, Agimi Apartments, 1954, construction document, typical floor plan (TCAC)

Figure 3.1.10

Skënder Luarasi, Agimi Apartments, 1954, construction document, façade detail (TCAC)

Figure 3.1.11

Skënder Luarasi, Agimi Apartments, 1954, façade detail, photo by the author, 2022

Figure 3.1.12

Skënder Luarasi, Agimi Apartments, 1954, corner, photo by the author, 2022

A rich syntax of architectural elements and motifs is woven profusely through the façade of the Agimi Apartments. The building engages firmly with the ground and street by means of what looks from far away like a rusticated stone base, but is in fact detailed with bands of concrete and stucco. The base has alternating doors and windows of different sizes and with different architrave and reveal details. The base is punctuated by sets of six round pilasters and interrupted by large round-arched passages leading to the internal courtyard. This arch is higher than the base, yet lower than a cornice from which a second upper base with evenly spaced windows begins. In the initial plan, it is articulated with a finer rustication detail, but is finished with plain stucco in the version realized. Compositionally, this second band functions as a transition or threshold between the lower and upper part of the building, and runs throughout the façade, except when it is interrupted by the round-arched passages. The façade above is articulated with punched-wall openings and two-to-three-story bay windows, which animate the façade three-dimensionally throughout its length. There are various types and combinations of bay windows: single ones articulated with pilasters, spaced with four window bays in between and starting at the top of second base; pairs of bay windows articulated with pilasters, spaced with the stairs in between and starting at the top of the first base; a single bay window articulated with two-story Doric orders and loggias, starting at the upper base and positioned at the chamfered corner of Bajram Curri Boulevard and Rugova Street; and a singular pair of bay windows articulated with two-story Doric orders. The latter along with a sequence of rusticated pilasters in the base, flat pilasters on the upper two floors, and a pediment at the top create a vertically symmetrical ensemble that catches the eye and counterbalances the long length of the building along the boulevard. The bay windows periodically alternate with a vertical sequence of staircase windows that interrupts the horizontal cornices. The combination of these different façade elements and fragments gives rise to serendipitous juxtapositions that give the building an inexhaustible compositional density, a layered richness that makes one gaze intently at the façade, in a close-up or long-distance view, and make one wish that these large buildings would never end.

3.2 Hotels and Hospitals

The hotels and hospitals that Luarasi designed after the war can be grouped into distinct architectural typologies combining recreation and curative spaces, programs, and protocols. As in the Agimi and Shallvare Apartments, these typologies are characterized by large and horizontally elongated volumetric configurations, arranged in stand-alone, linear, L-shaped, or courtyard blocks. But unlike the Agimi and Shallvare Apartments, these buildings are no longer articulated in a Soviet style, which had already dissipated by the late 1950s, but instead in a distinctly modern one. Nonetheless, this style does not represent a return to, but rather a reassessment and reinterpretation of the modern idiom: a form of post-modernity. In its hyphenated form, the term postmodern here does not stand for what is generally known as the postmodernism of the eighties, but rather for what led to it (retroactively): a general postwar discursive turn toward a self-reflexive and critical dimension of the modern idiom in its engagement with history, technology, culture, site, territory, and environment.[55] While such a discursive dimension was virtually non-existent in Albania at the time due to its isolation and censuring state ideology, its discursive pressure was nonetheless felt, vis-à-vis the occasional state-sponsored mobility of architects to and from various European countries and as a result of a modest and intermittent circulation of architectural periodicals, mostly from Eastern, but also occasionally Western European countries. Luarasi's projects in Gjirokastër, for instance, evince a modern monumentality that arises from a combination of modern and regional idioms, about which more will be said in the final chapter. The Tourism Hotels on Durrës Beach also embody a distinct image of monumentality, specifically in the way they engage with the landscape (figs. 3.2.1 and 3.2.2). This engagement occurs by means of a horizontal articulation of the façade, enhanced by horizontal bands of loggias and the intermediate two-story volumes that are situated at the end of the main volumes and project out further from their façade. They facilitate a transition between the long volumes and the ground, which is articulated as a series of baroque-like gardens. The two-story volumes, on the other hand, mediate between the buildings and the sandy beach. The hotels evoke an image of a chain of cruisers stranded on the long beach, both punctuating and framed by this landscape.

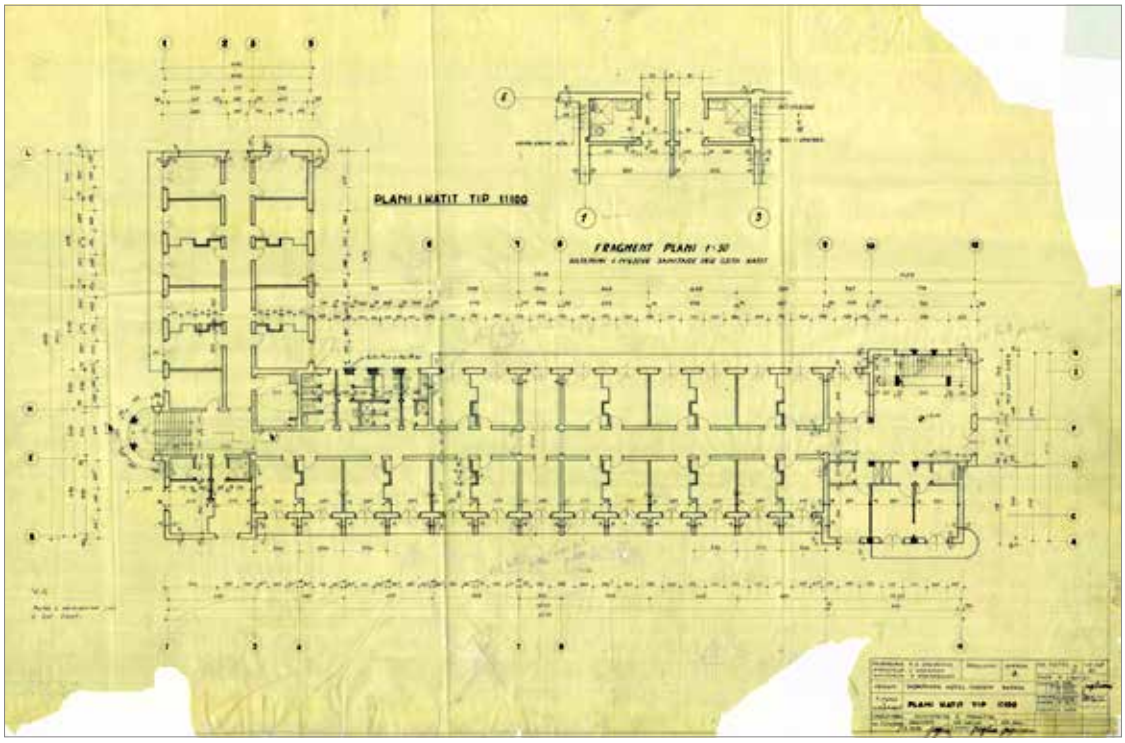
[55] This postmodern turn was manifested in various forms and identities, like those of New Monumentality and Critical Regionalism, among others.

Figure 3.2.1

Skënder Luarasi, Tourism Hotels on Durrës Beach, 1958, period photo (SLPA)

Figure 3.2.2

Skënder Luarasi, Tourism Hotels on Durrës Beach, 1958, construction drawing, typical floor plan (TCAC)



Over a span of thirty years, Luarasi designed more than thirty-five hospitals, hotels, thermal baths, and convalescence facilities. For Luarasi, the hospital and the convalescence facility generally belonged to the same organizational typology. He writes about this in detail in a hitherto unpublished draft on "Medical Facilities."

> It should also be noted that sanatoriums resemble holiday accommodations with respect to their organization, with the difference that special treatments are performed in the former. Since sanatoriums and holiday accommodations share similarities, they are designed based on a similar program, with the exception of the special treatment facilities that are found at sanatoriums.[56]

In this unfinished text, Luarasi outlines detailed specifications for the design of hospitals and sanatoriums. After providing a brief history on the origin and development of hospitals from antiquity to the present day, he specifies architectural and technological norms for contemporary hospitals in general and those in Albania in particular: their planimetric organization and relationships between areas for general and specific medical treatments, intensive care and critical care units, emergency rooms, polyclinics, laboratories, and various diagnostic and treatment facilities; the functional and spatial organization between the spaces served and serving spaces; the 'centralized,' 'pavilion,' and 'mixed' typologies of hospitals; their construction with regard to specific programmatic imperatives and preferences; the different finishes for specific spaces; the relationship between the shape and size of various spaces and specific climatic considerations; and the orientation of the building in the landscape with respect to both specific and general medical requirements, as well as general preferences for convalescence and well-being, including panoramic considerations. This essay is hence a succinct treatise on general principles of sustainability—the earliest and perhaps one of the few in Albania—that goes beyond hospital typology and attempts to address the whole spectrum of the built environment, from the scale of the rooms to that of the grounds and the climate.

In hindsight, however, this essay is more than just a technical treatise on the sustainable design of medical facilities; it can also be seen as a technical foil to justify a formal game that could not have been legitimized

[56] Skënder Luarasi, "Medical Facilities," unpublished manuscript, see the appendix, p. 220.

through other discursive means in Albania at the time. Indeed, the hospitals and convalescence structures in general became a laboratory for formal and typological experimentation in and as a result of their specific technological and functional complexity. Some of the best examples are the Hotel and Hospital in Gjirokastër, the Sanatorium in Tirana, the Pathology, Pediatric, and Infectious Diseases Hospitals at the University Hospital Center of Tirana, the Pediatric Hospital in Durrës, the Hospital in Kukës, the Hospital and Thermal Baths in Peshkopi, and the Hospitals in Librazhd, Sarandë, and Ersekë, among others. These are large and complex buildings in terms of their spatial and formal layout, and are characterized by expressive volumes and multilayered façades.

No doubt, the Sanatorium in Tirana, today the Shefqet Ndroqi Hospital, named in honor of one of Albania's most famous pulmonologists and erected in 1959, is one of the best representatives of Luarasi's hospitals (figs. 3.2.3–3.2.8). The building is situated in the hills southeast of the city, almost at the midpoint between the Grand Park of Tirana and Farka Lake, and between the University Campus and the town of Sauk. Before the urban sprawl extended over the hills in the past two decades, the Sanatorium was continuously visible as one went up Elbasani Street, resonating serenely with the unfolding panorama of the Dajti Mountain. From such a distance, the sanatorium would appear as a stretched, long volume floating across the hilly landscape, articulated horizontally and planarly by means of long balconies and a vast array of window and balcony doors. When it is approached and looked at obliquely, however, one encounters a dramatic shift of the frontal planes and sculptural volumetric modulation, since the cantilevered, flying balconies dematerialize the heavy mass. Indeed, not only one, but three volumes are juxtaposed in an almost pinwheel fashion. On the northern side there is a long linear volume, or Block A as it is labeled in the drawings, which accommodates patient rooms and is articulated with continuous cantilevered balconies. Due to a drop in topography, this block sits on two lower stories that form a heavy, earth-like base, articulated with punched windows. On the southern side, there is an L-shaped volume, or Block B in the drawings, which also accommodates patient rooms and is articulated with cantilevered balconies. They are supported by a sequence of cantilevered beams, which, while economically fulfilling a structural function, are also stylized to express the structural load and rhythmically balance the horizontality of the balconies. On the western side, the façade of Block B is pushed back or recessed in relation to that of Block A. This shift is mediated by the semicircular volume of Block C, as it is labeled

in the drawings, which extends from east to west and forms a cross-like configuration with the rest of the building. This block accommodates the dining room and other social functions on the western side and specific medical services on the eastern side. On the western side, this volume is articulated with a columnar order consisting of curved spandrel beams and a semicircular array of rounded columns with glass in between them. The transparency of the rounded volume contrasts with the massiveness and solidity of the main volume, while the verticality of the columnar order contrasts with the 'infinite' balconies. The semicircular columnar order animates the whole building. Due to the frontal shift between Block A and Block B, the balconies of Block B elegantly turn the corner to become a loggia and then stop at the southern wall of Block C, which is articulated with punched windows that are proportionally modulated as a continuation of the transparent semicircular columnar order. The latter turns south to north, to then hit and contrast with a solid wall of Block A, punctuated solely with a vertical column of punched windows, just before the balconies begin again. This juxtaposition of elements emphasizes the pinwheel effect of the complex. Due to the frontal shift between Block A and Block B, the latter forms an L-shaped configuration with Block C, which provides access to and frames a garden-island in the southeast. The island serves as a compositional counterpoint to the heavy base and contrasts with the drop in elevation on the northwest side. The volumetric and topographical modulations animate both the site itself and the landscape beyond it, both from close up and from a distance.

Figure 3.2.3

Skënder Luarasi, Sanatorium, today the Shefqet Ndroqi Hospital, Tirana, 1959, period photo (SLPA)

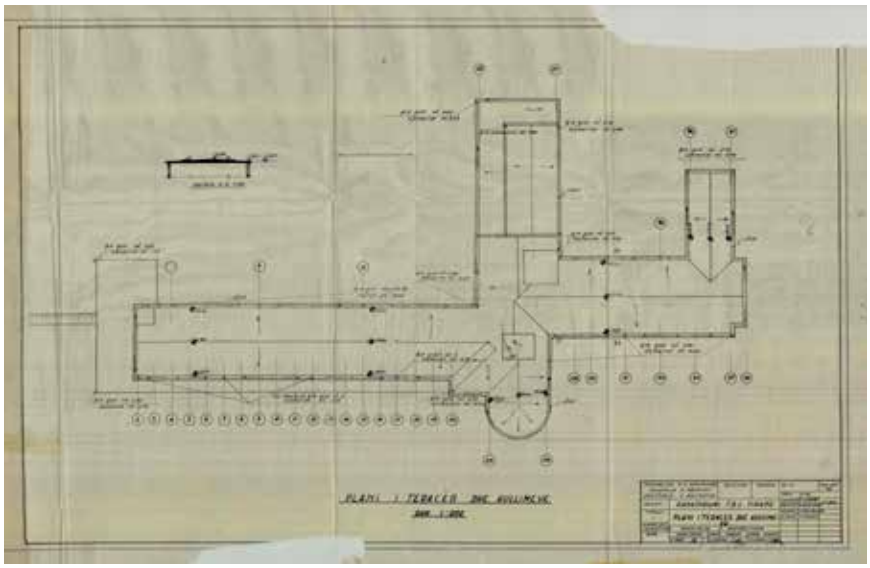
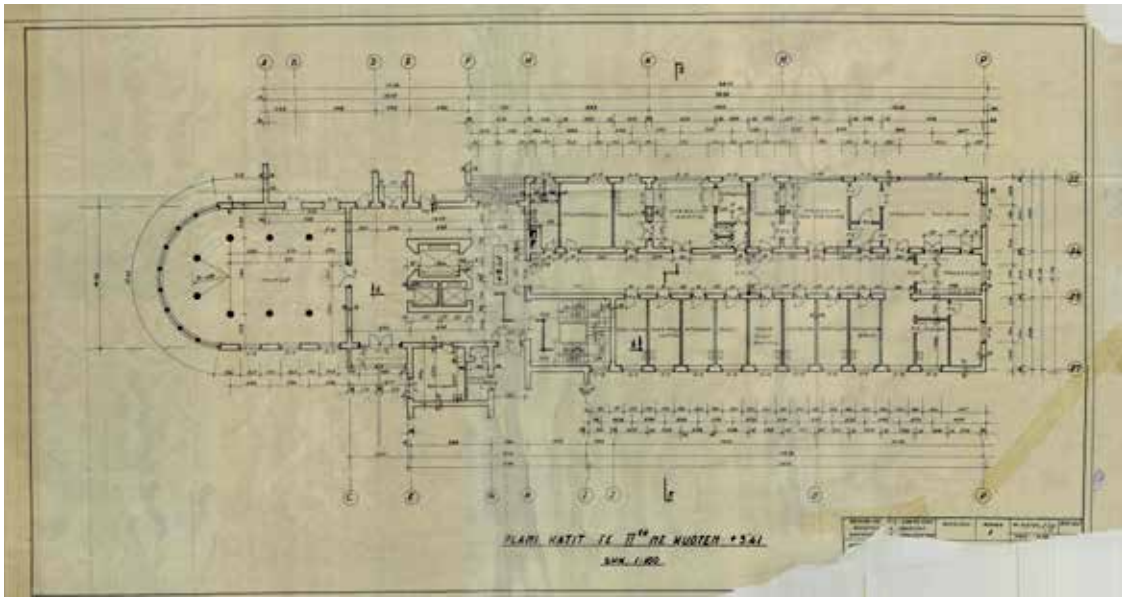


Figure 3.2.4

Skënder Luarasi, Sanatorium, Tirana, 1959, construction document, roof plan (TCAC)

Figure 3.2.5

Skënder Luarasi, Sanatorium, Tirana, 1959, construction document, floor plan for Block C (TCAC)



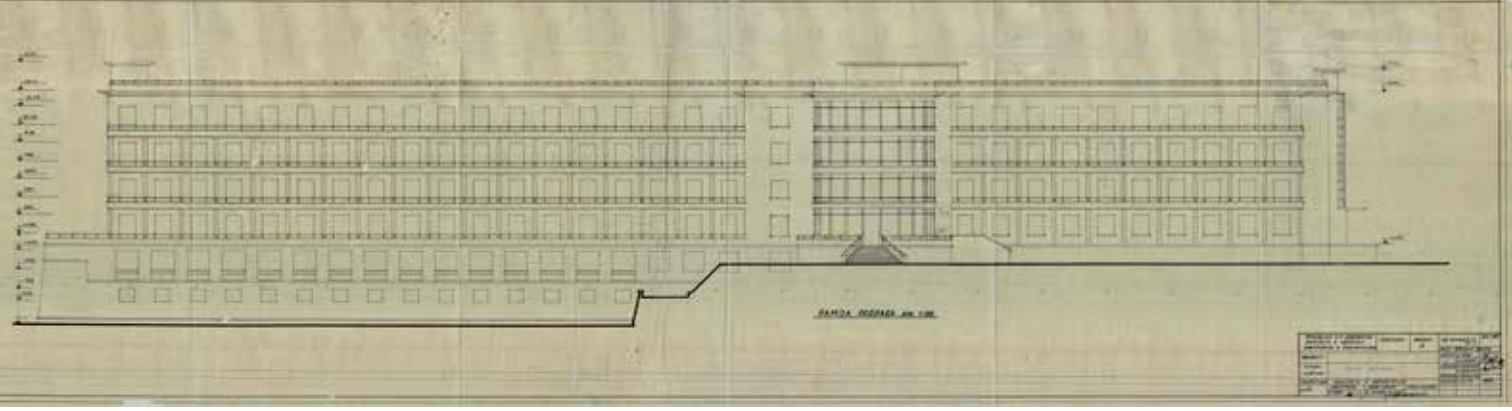


Figure 3.2.6

Skënder Luarasi, Sanatorium, Tirana, 1959, construction document, west elevation (TCAC)

Figure 3.2.7
Skënder Luarasi, Sanatorium, Tirana, 1959, period photo (SLPA)

Figure 3.2.8

Luarasi (in the middle), Eqerem Dobi (left), and Petraq Kolevica (right) looking at a model of the Sanatorium, period photo (SLPA)

These compositional themes recur in other hospitals as well, though each of them has its own compositional specificity and innovations. A good example is the Pathology Hospital, erected in 1969–71 at the University Hospital Center of Tirana—a beautiful modernist building about which there are, unfortunately, currently rumors that it will be demolished (figs. 3.2.9–3.2.12). It is a long and shallow seven-story building with a depth of only 12 meters. It belongs to the centralized hospital typology and was originally planned as an L-shape—with the main corpus, the one built as it stands today, oriented north-south and containing the patient rooms and medical services, and the pedagogical corpus, which was not built, containing classrooms, additional medical services, administration spaces, and an auditorium. Its main feature is a subtle fenestration and articulation of the façade in relation to the scale and proportions of the block. The main, western façade consists of a planar array of horizontally proportioned windows, and a cantilevered projection that frames and wraps the balconies into a rectangular frame 'hanging' from the top to the third floor. The base of the building is thus articulated as an architectural element primarily through absence, that is, through the void that the cantilevered rectangular frame creates with the ground, rather than through the presence of base-like elements distinct from the main body of the building. The door openings in the balconies—within the rectangular frame—are larger than but equally proportioned with the other windows in the façade. Such proportions emphasize the cantilevered rectangular frame and animate the building. The fenestration of the western façade stops shortly before the corners and turns into series of horizontal windows. The entrance to the building is situated on the first floor at the northern corner, thus contrasting with the symmetrical axes of the building as a whole and the rectangular frame.

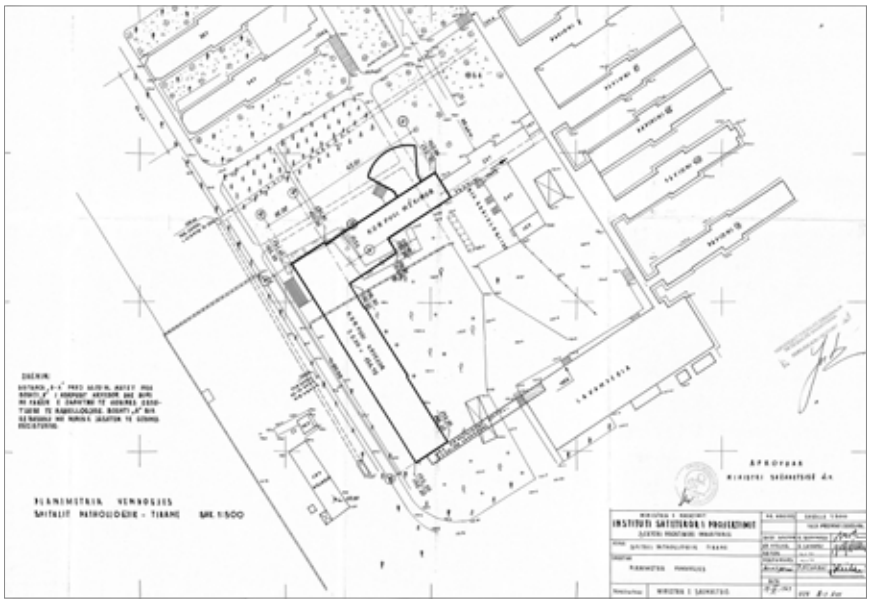


Figure 3.2.9

Skënder Luarasi, Pathology Hospital, Tirana, site plan, 1971 (TCAC)

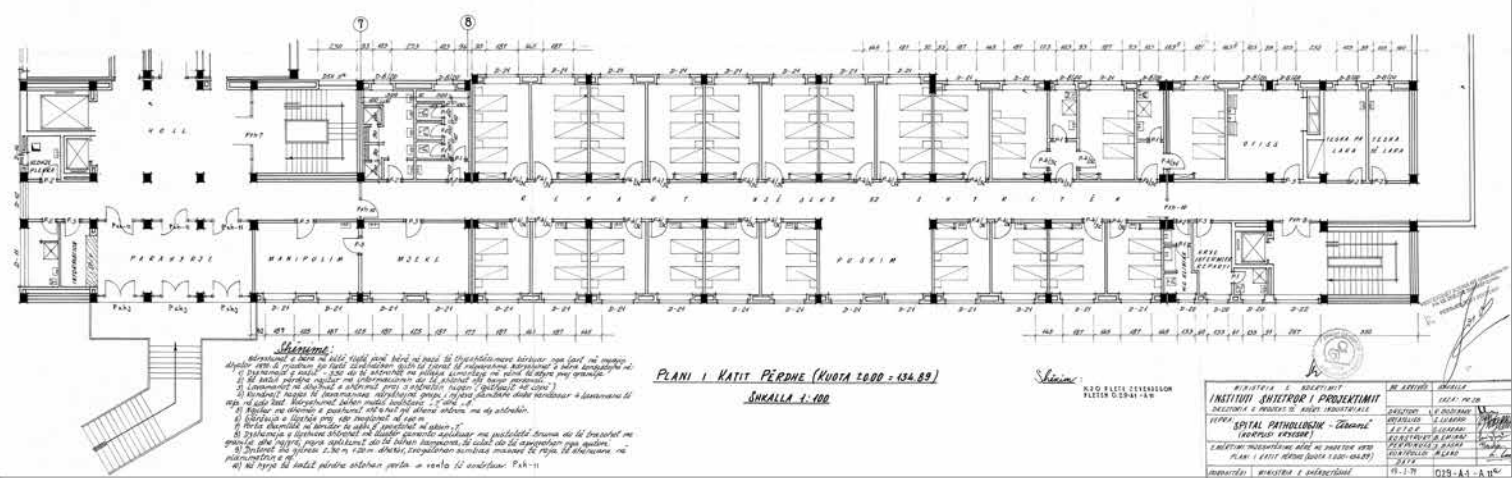


Figure 3.2.10

Skënder Luarasi,
Pathology Hospital, Tirana,
1971, first floor plan (TCAC)

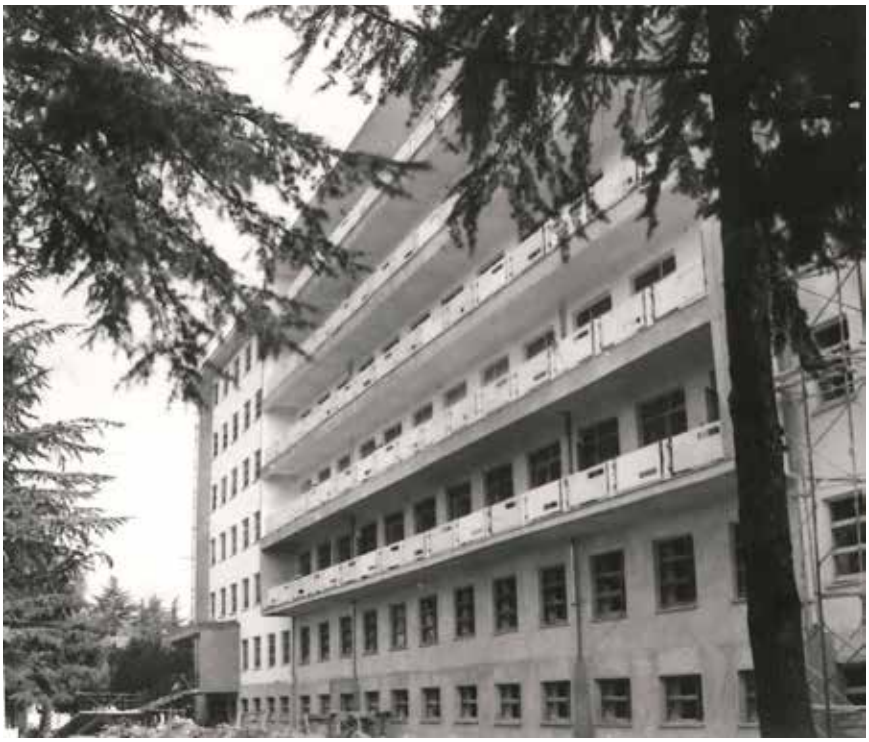


Figure 3.2.11

Skënder Luarasi,
Pathology Hospital, Tirana,
1971, period photo (SLPA)

Figure 3.2.12

Skënder Luarasi,
Pathology Hospital, Tirana,
1971, period photo (SLPA)

Other hospitals have other features. The Hospital for Infectious Diseases, also located at the University Hospital Center of Tirana, consists of a single bar that contains both the patient rooms and medical services (figs. 3.2.13–3.2.15). A frontal projection is centrally positioned in relation to the main block and projects further as a two-story volume in the front to accommodate the patients' entrance on the first floor vis-à-vis a spacious balcony or veranda and two symmetrically positioned staircases with open steps. The symmetrical duplication of the stairs facilitates a circulation that enables people to maintain a social distance and not cross paths with individuals who may potentially be infected. The building is wrapped with balconies that are physically isolated but visually connected with the rooms, thus facilitating communication between the patients and their families. On the western façade, the balconies end at a frontal façade projection. The building is characterized by the simplicity and purity of its form; there is an almost a Miesian quality about it. The windows contrast with the horizontal balconies, whose horizontality is further emphasized by revealing the slab and the guardrail as separate elements. The eastern façade has a combination and alternation of various versions of fenestration, while the western façade is rigorously articulated with evenly spaced vertical windows, which are in turn divided into horizontal components. The fenestration wraps around both the central frontal projection and the two-story volume in front. This array of windows is punctuated with larger horizontal windows consisting of three vertical components at the staircases. At the Pediatric Hospital in Durrës, built one year later, in 1967, there is a combination of two vertical windows with three horizontal divisions and the balcony door, whose transom aligns with the upper division of the side windows, thus forming a large glass opening. Novel compositions of windows, loggias, and volumes also characterize the General Hospitals in Lezhë, Çorovodë, and Kukës (fig. 3.2.16). The latter, for instance, has a pinwheel volumetric composition that extends into the landscape, with an emphasis on a horizontal articulation of loggias and roof cornices. The General Hospital in Saranda is similar to the above-described Hospital for Infectious Diseases, but has a main volume that curves along the contour lines, and a two-story volume in front that is stepped down the hill, while the latter's frontal projection is replaced with a screen of closely spaced windows (fig. 3.2.17).

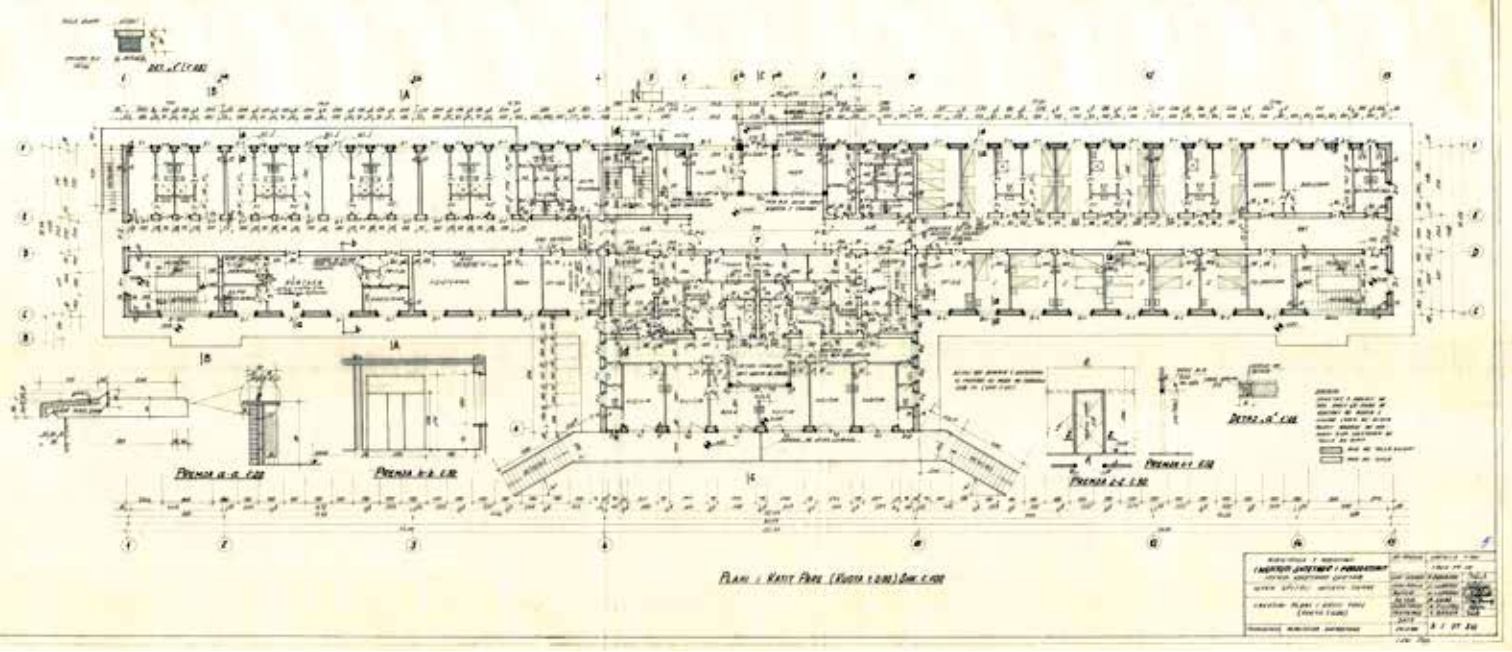


Figure 3.2.13 Skënder Luarasi, Hospital for Infectious Diseases, Tirana, first floor plan, 1966 (TCAC)

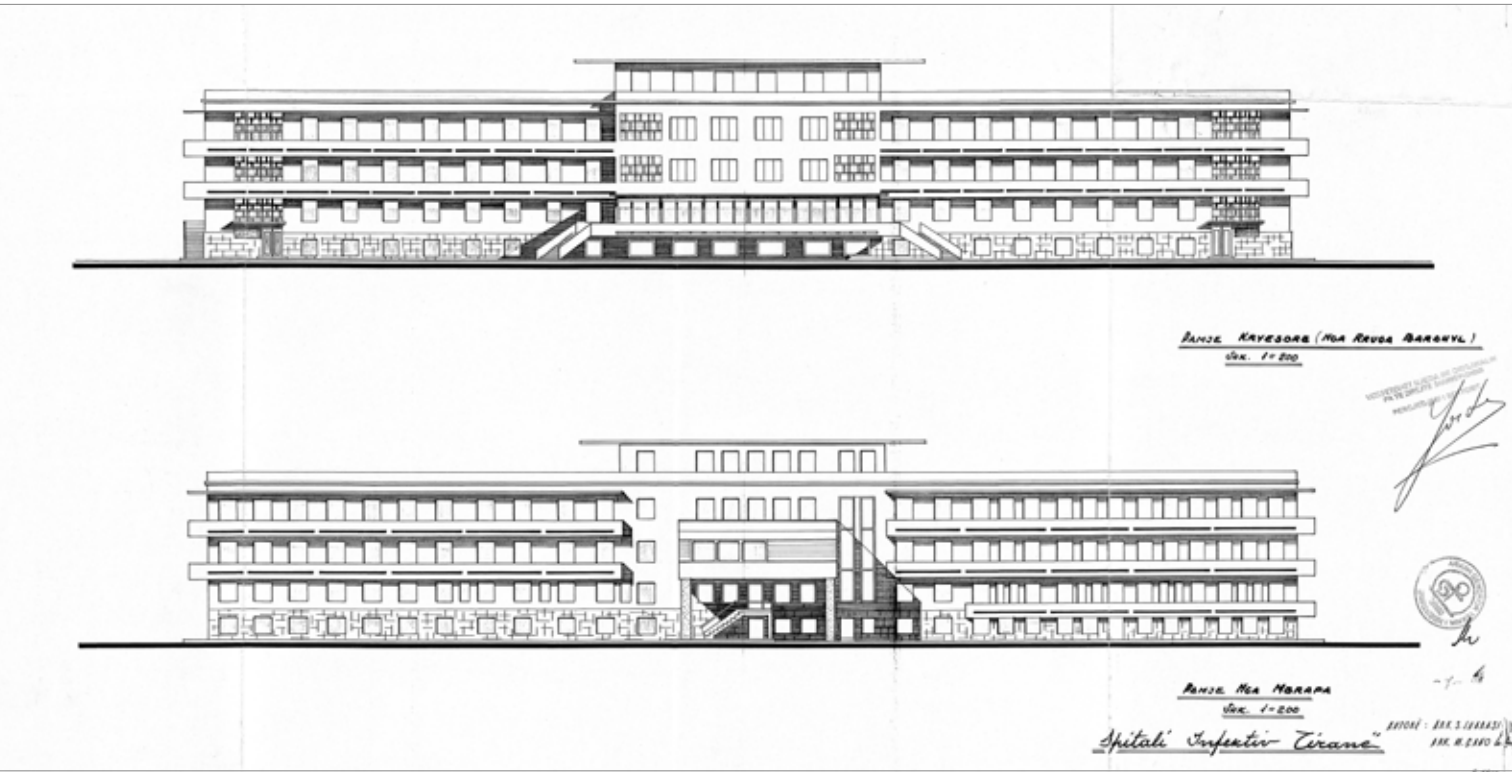


Figure 3.2.14 Skënder Luarasi, Hospital for Infectious Diseases, Tirana, 1966, elevations (TCAC)

Figure 3.2.15

Skënder Luarasi, Hospital for Infectious Diseases, Tirana, 1966, period photo (SLPA)

Figure 3.2.16

Skënder Luarasi, Kukës Hospital, 1968, period photo (SLPA)

Figure 3.2.17

Skënder Luarasi, Saranda Hospital, 1966, period photos (SLPA)

3.3 Other Buildings and Projects

The previous two chapters trace two trajectories in Luarasi's oeuvre, both of which are thematic and chronological: First, the development of the modern house starting in the 1930s, before the Second World War, and spanning throughout Luarasi's career. Second, the theme of urbanism in terms of the large urban building embodied in social housing, convalescence structures, and hospitals—a theme that began directly after the war and continued until the end of Luarasi's oeuvre. Many of the themes inherent in these two trajectories are synthesized in his works in Gjirokastër, which form a project of their own and will be the subject of the final chapter. Another group of buildings and projects that do not necessarily fall under a single theme or typology are industrial and administrative buildings—mostly as additions, adaptive reuse, or renovation projects—urban plans, and landscape designs. One notable example is the Agricultural School in Lushnjë, an addition and renovation project realized in 1937 (fig. 3.3.1). What bears compositional relevance in this project, one of Luarasi's earliest and most modern projects, is the interplay between the central axiality of the protruding volume and its displacement away from the center of the building, as well as the crossing of the central axiality with horizontal bands of windows, which are also interrupted by two loggia-like recesses on both sides of the protruding volume. Other projects include the renovation of the Prefecture of Elbasan in 1936; the renovation of and addition to the Asim Zeneli Gymnasium in Gjirokastër in 1939, about

which more will be said in the next chapter; the renovation of and addition to the 17 Nëntori Cinema, formerly the Nasional, in 1940, which was already mentioned in the first chapter; the stage addition in 1955–56 to the auditorium of the former Theatre of Opera and Ballet, a building originally designed by Gherardo Bosio, and today the Art Academy; the addition to the former Soviet Embassy, today the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, in 1962; and the renovation of and addition to the Popular Assembly Building, in 1958–73, about which more details will be provided below. As adaptive reuse projects they are characterized by a sensitive and subtle interpretation and transformation of the existing building. As such, these projects form a precedent for the present in Albania, where the existing and the new are often seen as either/or alternatives. There were also new buildings like the Party Central Committee Building, designed and erected in collaboration with Anton Lufi in the late 1950s, and the Kombinat neighborhood, planned and built between 1955 and 1961, among others.

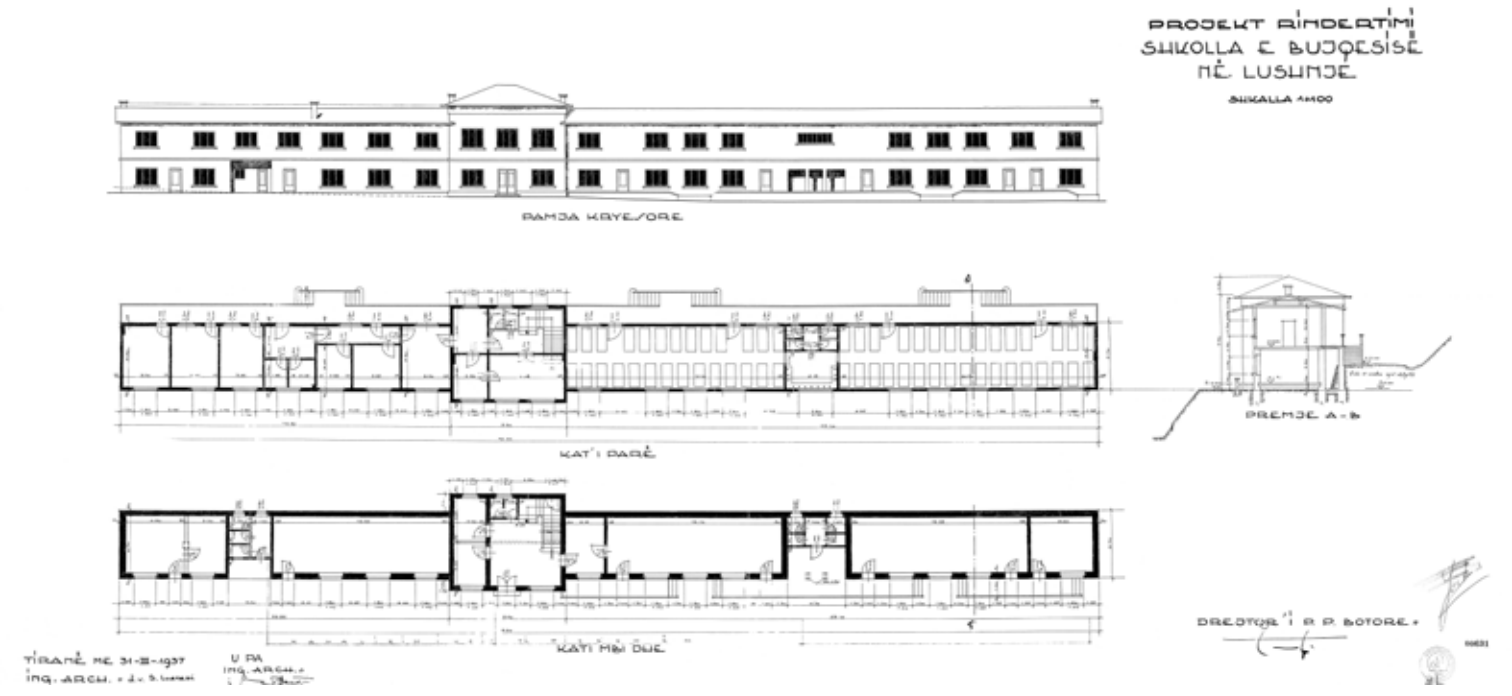


Figure 3.3.1 Skënder Luarasi, Agricultural School, Lushnjë, 1937, permit and construction documents (TCAC)

One of Luarasi's most notable projects is the renovation of and addition to the Popular Assembly Building—today the President's office, which took place in multiple phases from 1958 to 1973. While the renovation of the existing volume and the elegant canopy at the front of the building, on the side of Dëshmorët e Kombit Boulevard, was completed, the assembly hall was not built. Had it been built, it would have formed an entire urban block (figs. 3.3.2–3.3.4). The scheme is basically a drum circumscribed within a rectangular box, which is differentiated into an ambulatory horizontal circulation space and an outer layer of vertical circulation elements and social and support functions that open up to the exterior by means of a screen of piers. The drum itself is differentiated into the main auditorium space and an ambulatory circulation space on the lower level. In section, the drum is differentiated into the main level and two balconies positioned directly above the ambulatory space spatially differentiated from the main space by a circular screen of columns. Adapted from a neo-classical typology, the assembly is as simple as it is complex, structured, and differentiated by a series of layers. Had this assembly been built, Albania would have a had a dignified parliament that could have also been renovated and updated to respond to today's technological and environmental performance standards.

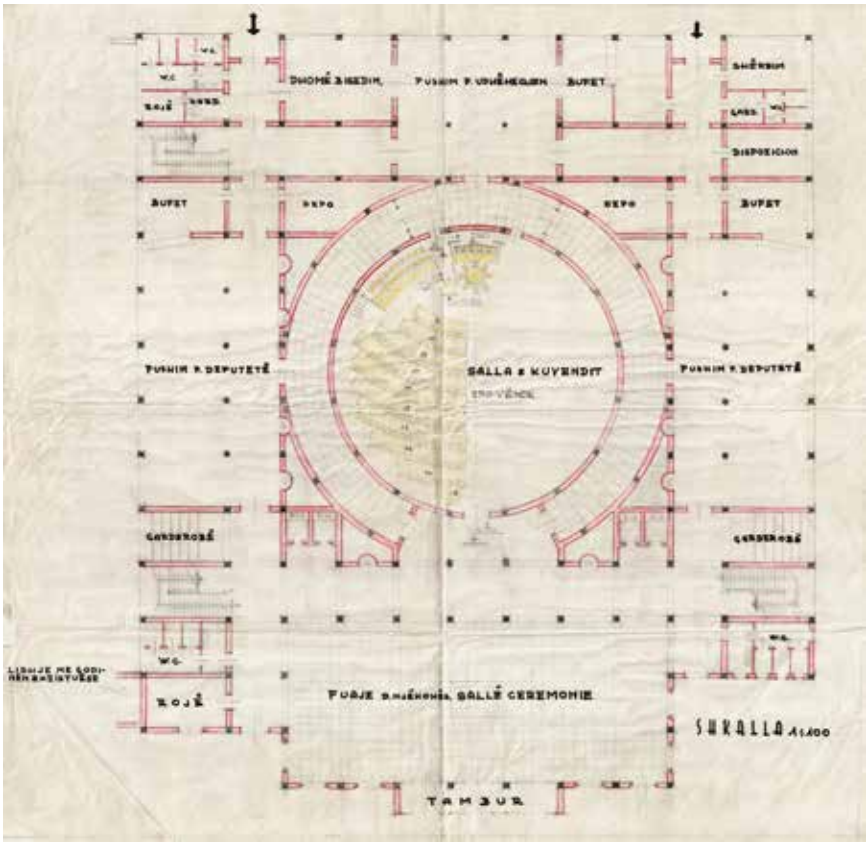


Figure 3.3.2

Skënder Luarasi, Popular Assembly Building, Tirana, ca. 1965, ground floor plan (SLPA)

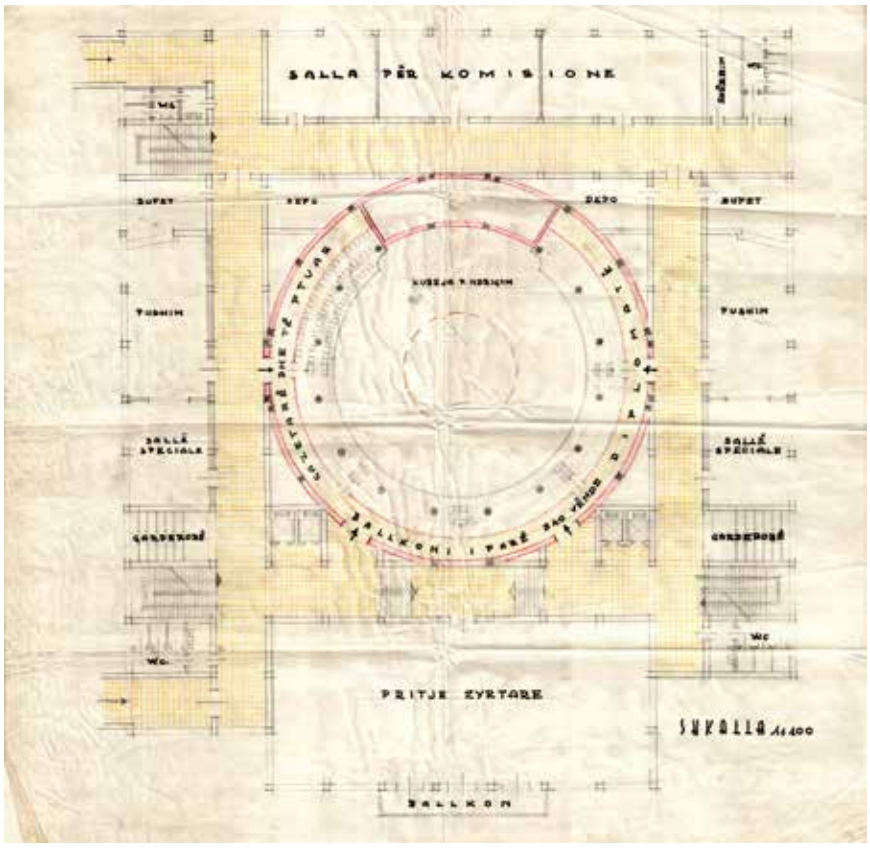
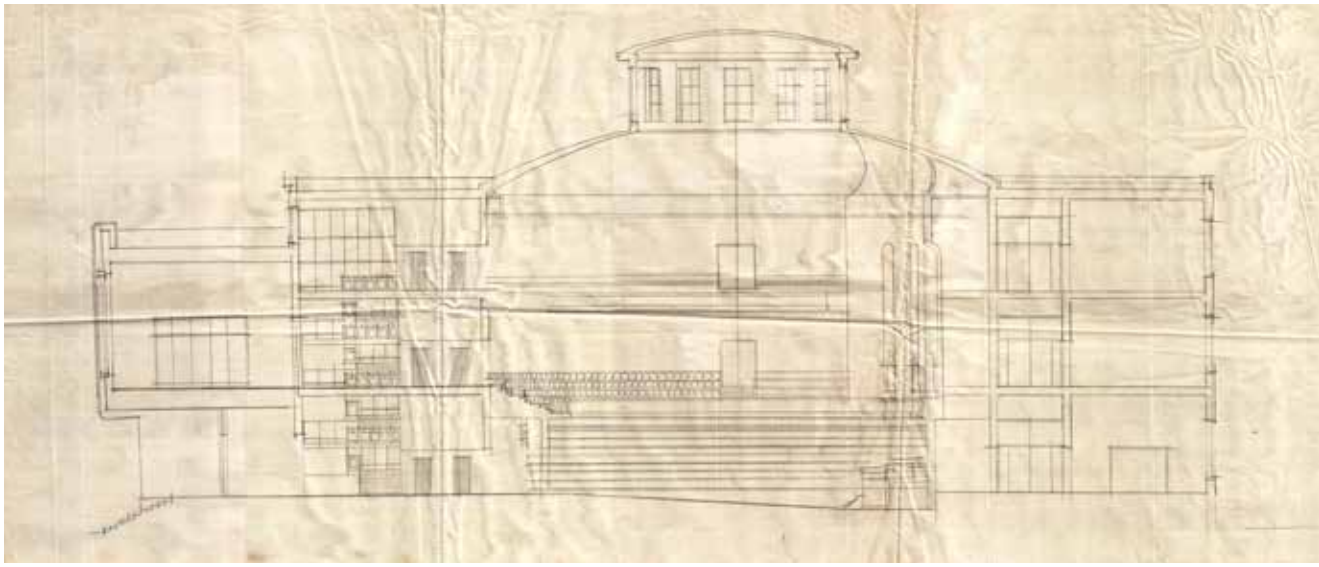


Figure 3.3.3

Skënder Luarasi,
Popular Assembly Building,
Tirana, ca. 1965,
mezzanine plan (SLPA)

Figure 3.3.4

Skënder Luarasi,
Popular Assembly
Building, Tirana,
ca. 1965, section (SLPA)



Two hundred meters to the north of the Popular Assembly Building, along the boulevard, is the Party Central Committee Building, today the Parliament Offices, erected in the late 1950s (figs. 3.3.5 and 3.3.6). This project is based on a schematic design sketch produced by Italian architects in the early 1940s, which, in line with Gherardo Bosio's style, consisted of a cubic and a horizontal volume, both articulated with heavy rusticated stones and a rationalist neo-classical fenestration. The current building, however, differs significantly from the original sketches by the Italian architects with respect to both its formal articulation and its atmosphere. Anton Lufi provided the schematic design, while Luarasi was involved in the design development, construction documents, and management of the project. The building was built by Albanian contractors with local materials. Hence, challenging all prejudices, it is truly 'Made in Albania.' Lufi retained the ashlar stone on the ground floor, but presented his characteristic, elegant three-story orders of pilasters above it, just as in the Theater in Shkodra. The details—the rusticated stone, the capitals of the pilasters, the window and door cornices, and all the exterior and interior finishings—are immaculate and exquisite, and unparalleled in Albania. It is one of the most sophisticated administration buildings in Albania. The main entrance with rusticated stone is located at the corner and turns the corner, thus giving rise to a wonderful contrast between the transparency of the arches and the spacious entrance loggia on the one hand and the heavy rusticated stone arches on the other. The heaviness and solidity of the rusticated arches also contrast with the street level entrance, an elegant and bold solution for a building of such a stature, since it provides ease of access and dims the political and ideological magnanimity for which such building was supposed to stand. Contrary to what is commonly believed, the building is not designed in a Soviet style, but in a classical vernacular. It behooves and amazes us to see how this generation of architects were versed in various stylistic idioms, and how they could shift effortlessly and creatively among them.

Figure 3.3.5

Anton Lufi and Skënder Luarasi, Party Central Committee Building, Tirana, 1959, photo by the author

Figure 3.3.6

Anton Lufi and Skënder Luarasi, Party Central Committee Building, Tirana, 1959 interior, period photo (SLPA)

4. An Untimely Critical Regionalism: Luarasi in Gjirokastër

4.1 Critical Regionalism

Luarasi's work in Gjirokastër spans a period of thirty years, from 1939 to the late 1960s. This work includes the Asim Zeneli Gymnasium, the Hospital, the Hotel, the Party Committee Headquarters, the Courthouse, and a series of apartment tower buildings, as well as the regulatory plan for the city of Gjirokastër (fig. 4.1.1). This body of work can be regarded from the perspective of critical regionalism, a concept that should, however, be understood in a broader sense than that articulated by Kenneth Frampton in "Toward a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," of 1983. In this seminal essay, Frampton's strategy is to mediate between "world culture" and "universal civilization," without speaking the "dialect(s)" of the former, while "imposing limits" on the normative and sterile language of the latter.[57] While Frampton's position seems to be opposed to orthodox modernism and to assume an *arrière-garde* position, methodologically speaking, it is no less puritanical or pontifical than that of orthodox modernist historians like Giedion, who ideologized a single, unified language—for Frampton, a "tectonic"[58] one —devoid of and detached from any (past or present) dialects or vernaculars. This language is, however, far from immune from the "scenographic"[59] and unpredictable play of "communicative" and "instrumental sign(s)."[60] For example, the undulating concrete roof of Jørn Utzon's Bagsvaerd Church near Copenhagen of 1976, which Frampton mentions as an instance of "irrationality"[61] and "cross-cultural references,"[62] could very well be read as the opposite: a sign of an even more advanced technological rationality, or abstraction that anticipates the computational architecture of the 1990s. Rather than opposing the abstract with the vernacular, or the "tectonic" with the "scenographic," one should instead distinguish between them as different modalities of signification. In Luarasi's buildings in Gjirokastër, the 'regional' is achieved through both abstract and communicative or scenographic means. The former are proportional or geometrical while the latter comprise architectural elements like stone arches or fenestration details that refer directly to the vernacular context of the particular location. What is critical in such regionalism is not its synthesis into a higher language that is both non-normative and beyond any vernacular, but specifically the juxtaposition and combination of its modes of signifying. Before tracing such a juxtaposition in Luarasi's projects in the city of Gjirokastër, it must be emphasized that the city is more than just a UNESCO World Heritage Site, but also a modern city evolving over time (fig. 4.1.2).

[57] Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism, Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), pp. 16–31, 21.
[58] Ibid., p. 27.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., p. 21.
[61] Ibid., p. 22.
[62] Ibid., p. 23.

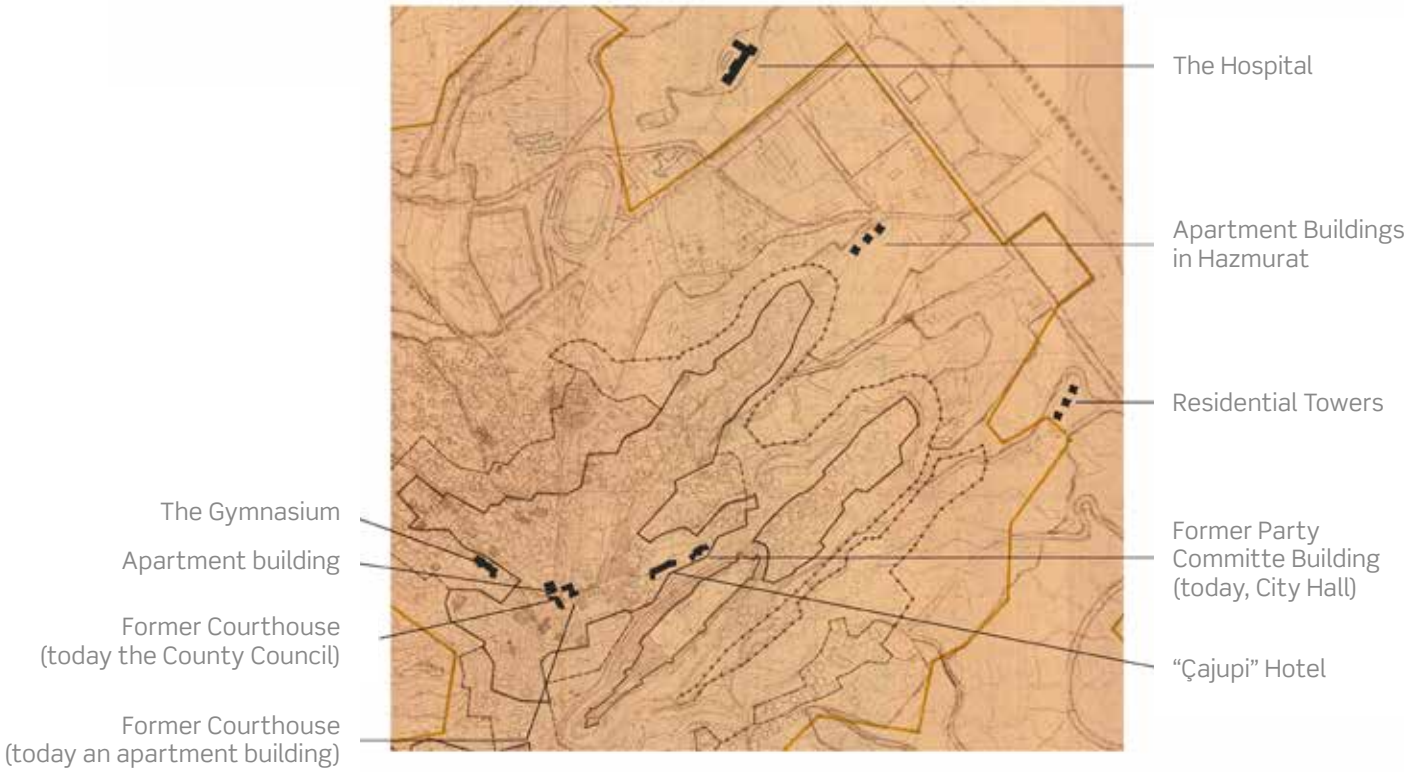


Figure 4.1.1

Skënder Luarasi, Regulatory Urban Plan for Gjirokastër, approved in 1976, with Luarasi's buildings shown in black

Figure 4.1.2

The city of Gjirokastër as seen from the peak of the Obelisk. The long building on the left is the Asim Zeneli Gymnasium, designed by Luarasi in 1940. Below it is the Varosh neighborhood. Photo by Roland Tasho

4.2 Context: The Historic and Modern City of Gjirokastër

In one of the most poetic passages in Ismail Kadare's *Kronikë në Gur* (Chronicle in Stone), the youngster who is the main character in the novel sends a handful of sky to the house's water cistern through a mirror, only to receive a pale, fleeting reflection. Or he sends a sound—"AUU"— only to receive a muffled echo, or at times nothing, when the cistern is full of water. The interaction with the cistern is a metonymic figure that stands for the way the youngster communicates with his home, his domestic environment, his town, which he knows very well: a hilly town that looked like a "prehistoric creature stuck to the face the mountain," a town, where, if a drunkard "were to fall on the side street, he would fall on the roof of a tall house, instead of into a ditch."[63] The youngster's communication with his home takes place in a familiar way, by means of gestures, looks, and feelings, rather than with words, not unlike those signals exchanged with the dark cistern. His home in an expanded sense—the old city, the castle with its real or imagined, labyrinthian tunnels, the houses with stone "scales," the steep streets, the supercilious neighbors, the old women who never sleep, drinking coffee and looking at other people's houses with binoculars—often feels rather strange and opaque, not unlike the dark void of the cistern under the house. This is not simply that feeling of the uncanny that is bound to arise as a result of the proximity with the too familiar. It is also triggered by the youngster's—and through him, our—encounter with an irresistible wave: that of modernity.

The book is shaped by the resonance between the youngster's coming of age and the arrival of modernity. A certain structural proportionality can be discerned: the youngster's home is to his coming of age what the old town is to modern times. The youngster is the link between the old and the modern world. Modernity, however, revealed its cruelest face: war; specifically, the Second World War. The airport, planes, bombing, foreign soldiers entering and leaving town, and, of course, the brothel to support the war effort—they all trouble the youngster's imagination. An exceptional town in a state of exception: on the one hand, the old, impenetrable stone city; on the other, the sweeping and transforming wave of modernity, without boundary or form. Such a rupture is reenacted in peacetime: while the old city is frozen in place as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the rest of the city has been left to the unbridled urban sprawl. If urbanization were the "instrument in which life is to be spent"[64]—that sprawling life that clings to the earth like a "disease"[65]—then the historic city would be a shell drained of life.

[63] Ismail Kadare, *Kronikë në Gur* (Tirana, 1978).

[64] Arturo Soria Y Puig, ed., *Cerdà: The Five Bases of the General Theory of Urbanization*, trans. Bernard Miller and Mary Fons I Fleming (Madrid: Electa, 1999), p. 86.

[65] "The Earth (he said) has a skin; and this skin has diseases. One of these diseases, for example, is called 'Man'." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (London: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 153.

One of the things that Gjirokastër challenges, however, is specifically the myth of being an old, traditional town, a monument to a past that is destined to remain frozen in time, and reminiscent of a time, before modernity, that no longer exists. Walking in the very heart of the historical old town of Gjirokastër, one finds a distinct and varied modern texture, which consists of modern buildings from different periods from the mid- and late-nineteenth century to the late 1960s and 1970s. What makes Gjirokastër unique is its proximity to and juxtaposition of a vernacular, about which much has been written in the official historiography, with a disavowed modernism, about which nothing has yet been written, though it has been the subject of a few documentaries.[66] While generally well known and researched with respect to its vernacular,[67] almost nothing has been written about its *modern* vernacular, identified as such.[68] The two vernaculars coexist and are found below the same castle, in the same neighborhoods, across the same slopes, at times adjacent or intertwined, yet always distinct from one another. The Varosh neighborhood, particularly Doktor Vasil Laboviti Street, is an open-air museum of various modern houses. Their style ranges from a late-nineteenth century historical eclecticism to a more rationalist modernism like that of the former Radio Station (figs. 4.2.1–4.2.6).

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[66] See "Ndikimi italian te ndërtimet në Qendrën Historike të Gjirokastrës" (Italian Influence in the Historic Center of Gjirokastër), *Argjiro* (September 11, 2018): https://argjirolajm.net/ndikimi-italian-te-ndertimet-ne-qendren-historike-te-gjirokastres/; "Çatitë e kuqe të Gjirokastrës (Ndërtesat Italiane)," (The Red Roofs of Gjirokastër [the Italian Buildings]), *News 24*, Brikena Metaj: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYTkorCHZPI; "Gjirokastër, zbulohen projektet e Posellit, ndërtoi edhe shtëpinë e Kokalarit" (Gjirokastër, Poseelli's Projects are Discovered, He also Built the Kokalari House), *Report TV*, 2017: https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5ovlh9.

[67] There are several accounts on the traditional vernacular of Gjirokastër, the most well-known of which is Emin Riza's *Qyteti-Muze I Gjirokastrës.* Others include Emin Riza, *Qyteti dhe banesa qytetare Shqiptare Shek. XV-XIX* (The City and the Albanian Urban House in the 15th–19th Century) (Tirana: Botimet 'Dita,' 2000, 2009); A. Meksi, A. Baçe, E. Riza, Gj. Karaiskaj, and P. Thomo, *Historia e Arkitekturës në Shqipëri: Nga fillimet deri në vitin 1912*, botim i dytë i përpunuar (The History of Architecture in Albania: From the Beginnings to 1912), second revised edition (Tirana: Kristalina-KH, 2016); Agron Doraci, *Gjirokastra, qyteti magjik*, (Gjirokastër: Edlora, 2020)

[68] While the architecture of Gjirokastër has been analyzed extensively, it has not been identified with or framed in terms of modernity, but in terms of folk architecture. As already argued in the first chapter, the so-called folk or Balkan vernacular is already a structural effect of modernity as a political, economic, and cultural forcefield.

Figure 4.2.1

House on Doktor Vasil Laboviti Street, architect unknown, with the year 1888 carved in the façade, photo by the author

Figure 4.2.2

The old Radio Station building on Doktor Vasil Laboviti Street, architect unknown, photo by the author

Figure 4.2.3

Papavangjeli House on Doktor Vasil Laboviti Street, architect unknown, photo by the author

Figure 4.2.4

House on Doktor Vasil Laboviti Street, architect unknown, photo by the author

Figure 4.2.5

Vasil Laboviti House on Doktor Vasil Laboviti Street, architect unknown, photo by the author

These early modern buildings are cubic and contained. They often have shallow cantilevered balconies built of reinforced concrete instead of the Ottoman çardak. They also generally have clay tile rather than stone slate roofs, do not project to the same extent as Ottoman houses, and do not have the traditional payandas. The volumes and façades of the modern structures are either distinctly articulated with pilasters, or are simply left as plain surfaces, finished with stucco. The Kokalari House, allegedly designed and built by the Italian architect Vitaliano Poselli around the early 1930s, evinces such modern characteristics (fig. 4.2.6). The modulation of the pilasters and their alternation with deep, recessed windows give rise to a remarkable sculptural quality. Another interesting feature is the loggia, subtracted from the roof, in the northeast corner. Several other modern houses in the Varosh neighborhood are also attributed to Poselli, even though no documentation or proof of this is available.[69] As is often the case in Albania, modernism is regarded as an Italian import; suddenly, all modernism in Gjirokastër is attributed to the Italians, including the 1940s renovation of the Asim Zeneli Gymnasium, even though Skender Kristo Luarasi designed it and managed its construction, and it was built by Albanian master builders.[70] A stroll along Laboviti Street indicates that the houses there may have been designed by various architects.

Figure 4.2.6

Vitaliano Poselli, Kokalari House, in the Varosh neighborhood, ca. 1930, photo by the author

[69] The Sopoti Hotel and the Banca di Napoli are also attributed to Poselli.

[70] See, for instance, "Ndikimi italian te ndërtimet në Qendrën Historike të Gjirokastrës," https://argjirolajm.net/ndikimi-italian-te-ndertimet-ne-qendren-historike-te-gjirokastres/, Argjiro (November 9, 2018); and "Gjirokastër, zbulohen projektet e Posellit,ndërtoi shtëpinë e Kokalarit," *Shqiptarja.com* (February 13, 2017), https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/gjirokaster-zbulohen-projektet-e-br-posellit-ndertoi-shtepine-e-kokalarit, 2017.

The Laboviti House, for instance, which was built in 1928,[71] shows a different stylistic articulation than the Kokalari House: while the latter is articulated with pilasters, the former's massing consists of a wall with punched openings and a cantilevered balcony on the upper story (fig. 4.2.5). The Papavangjeli House, on the other hand, has bigger windows, which are not found in either the Kokalari or the Laboviti House (fig. 4.2.3). Along Laboviti Street we also encounter several examples of an even earlier modern vernacular constructed in the late nineteenth century, such as the house at the intersection with Ropi Jani Street, erected in 1888 (fig. 4.2.1), or another one next to the Papavangjeli House, built in 1885. These houses are of a neo-Renaissance vernacular and, based on the Greek inscriptions in the façade, it can be deduced that they may have been constructed by builders from Ioannina. Another interesting example that was already mentioned above is the Fico House, which combines different vernaculars that may have been adopted as much from neighboring regions as from Istanbul, which by the end of the nineteenth century was a site of an exuberant eclecticism and various historical revivals.

One of the most notable modern houses in Gjirokastër is the Zigai House, right behind Çajupi Square, which was designed and built in the mid-1930s, allegedly by Poselli (figs. 4.2.7–4.2.8). While this hypothesis is supported by the motif of the pilasters like those of the Kokalari House, no documentation or proof of this has yet been provided. The house has a strange shape: a stepped tower that culminates with a sort of roof gazebo at the top. It is quite unlike any other house or structure in Gjirokastër. It is like a lighthouse from another place and another time, which, from particular viewpoints, seems to communicate, cryptically, solely with the tower of the castle. The entire structure is built of reinforced concrete. This fact alone is sufficient for the house to be qualified and classified as a first-class monument to be restored and preserved. One should keep in mind that at the time this house was built it was very hard to find houses constructed entirely with a reinforced-concrete columnar system, even in developed European countries. The structure is emphasized and articulated formally in both the interior and the exterior by means of a series of pillars and pilasters stripped of any ornament. The windows of the first floor span between the pillars, while on the upper floor the windows are narrower and alternate with plain wall surfaces, while pillars alternate with pilasters. The first floor is a space with a double height, which is reflected in the façade by taller openings below and a sort of clear story

[71] This is according to The Albanian House platform: https://thealbanian.house/.

above. Over the whole width of the façade, the floors are clearly marked and demarcated by shallow cantilevered balconies. The façade is reminiscent of the modern architecture of the 1920s and 1930s and particularly the work of Auguste Perret in both its structural and formal sensibility.[72] Research on Gjirokastër's modern vernacular is still in its nascent stages and thus requires further archival scrutiny.[73] The genealogy of different structures, their form, style, ornamentation, and building history, need to be traced and examined. Finding microhistories that might shed light on them would not be unlike catching a glimpse of the dark cistern.

Figure 4.2.7

Zigai House, view from Peço Qirka Street, photo by the author

[72] I expand on this topic in Skender Luarasi, "Punctuating Gjirokastër's Modernism," in *Rethinking Gjirokastër*, Observatory of the Mediterranean Basin (OMB) Series, 7, published in 2021.

[73] It should be noted that this research is impeded by the fact that access to the archives is highly restricted and at times impossible.

4.3 Punctuating Gjirokastër

Luarasi's buildings in Gjirokastër punctuate the city's rich architectural crust and its topography. But they also feel like they are embedded as an integral part in the city. These two different readings are made possible, or perhaps facilitated by Gjirokastër's unpredictable topography and the variety and multiplicity of viewpoints and détournements it offers. While from an elevated location one reads different historical layers, when walking in its streets, such chronological ordering collapses into impossible configurations. As if in a city of dreams, one can imperceptibly ascend or descend: both near and far from a building, from one time into another, forwards and backwards, and from an architecture without architects to one with architects. Luarasi's buildings in Gjirokastër contribute to such a play with new forms, scales, and urban relationships. A series of carefully framed photos of the so-called Bazaar's Neck show Luarasi's sensibility to Gjirokastër's urban specificities (fig. 4.3.1). These photos are indeed a site analysis that registers and interprets the site's morphological attributes. One of these attributes is the groundlessness of Gjirokastër, manifested either as lack or a multiplicity of the ground plane or datum. It is common in Gjirokastër to find the ground datum of a building on the same level of the roof of another building, as emphasized by the orange line in figure 4.3.1.

Figure 4.3.1

Skënder Luarasi, photo of the Bazaar's Neck, 1958 (SLPA)

4.3.1 Çajupi Hotel

This condition is embodied in all of Luarasi's projects in Gjirokastër, particularly in the Çajupi Hotel (figs. 4.3.1.1–4.3.1.6).[74] What immediately catches the eye, whether seen from the top of the hill at the end of the Zejtar Street, or from the ground along Çerçiz Topulli Square, is a strong horizontal cornice at the top, which stops or preempts any competition with the castle. This cornice forms a horizontal datum—or, on a more abstract level, a point of inflection—that both separates and marks the transition between the space of the castle and that of the city. The cornice is a sort of non-directional ground zero where different orderings can either commence or end; it can be read either as the last edge or cap of the city before the castle or as the point at which the castle begins. The hotel is a long building that extends along the bottom of the hill on which the castle is located. It is both a marker in the city and an articulated urban edge that shapes and belongs to Çerçiz Topulli Square. By resting not on a plinth, but instead on small stepped platforms that imperceptibly provide access to multiple points of entrance to the ground floor, the building engages directly with the sloping ground plane of the square. The main entrance, however, is clearly announced by a vertical volume that projects beyond the vertical datum of the façade to outline a tower-like figure with a two-story stone arch on the ground floor. Upon entering the building, one finds a spacious, double-height lobby with a fireplace in the corner. On the left of the lobby, one accesses the restaurant; on the right there is an elegant, open staircase that takes one to the first floor with its various social functions, and to the upper floors, where the rooms are accessed through a double-loaded corridor. The entrance volume and the lobby form the architectural center of the building. By being at the side rather than in the middle of the building, this center balances the volume and the sloping ground and anchors the building on the square.

The building is articulated by means of subtle recesses and projections that echo those of the castle above. While the castle rests on the rock, the hotel hangs from a horizontal datum indexed by the cornice, which, at key moments, points up to the castle, as shown in figure 4.3.1.1. The building can also be read as a composition consisting of three parts: one middle and two side ones.[75] The side parts are articulated as solid masses and refer to the tower-

[74] Part of what follows is based on my previous article for *Forum A+P*: Skender Luarasi, "Empathizing Sisyphus: A Moment from the Oeuvre of Skënder Kristo Luarasit," *Forum A+P* 13 (Tirana: Polis Press, 2013), pp. 174–88.

[75] In the original project, these side parts are smaller, and the building has a purer linear shape with only two façades, the one facing the square in the front and the one facing the hill in the back. In the realized building, the eastern part extends at an angle into another vertical modulation that almost touches the rock, while the western part turns the corner to provide a short but distinct western façade.

like elements of many houses in Gjirokastër. This reference is achieved abstractly based on a vertical compositional grain, as well as figuratively through signifying elements such as punched openings and arches. The middle part consists of an underlying grid, which is, however, figured differently on each floor: with a set of stone pilasters or piers with glass between them on the ground floor, with a columnar structure with glass in between and a cantilevered balcony on the first floor, and with recessed loggias on the second floor and open loggias on the top floor. The two-side parts frame and contrast with the middle part, which feels more alien to the city's vernacular due to its markedly gridded and horizontal compositional grain. It is as if the modern, cantilevered bands of balconies and loggias push and elbow out the 'more traditional' vertical part. There is thus a compositional discontinuity between the middle and the side parts. This message is, however, not shouted out and does not preempt other possible readings, for example reading the middle part as continuous with the side parts. This continuity is achieved in several ways, one of them being what might be termed a transitive compositional method: while the middle part is continuous with the eastern side by virtue of the parapet of the upper loggias being nearly on the same plane with the wall of the side part, and while the very same middle part is continuous with the entrance volume owing to the parapet of the first floor balcony nearly aligning with the frontal plane of the entrance volume, the side parts are then continuous with one another via the middle part, and the continuity of the façade thus remains unbroken. This continuity is also sustained by proportional reciprocities between the loggias and window groupings on the side parts, the stone dressing on the ground floor, and the continuous cornice in the roof, which caps the play of the façade below. The building would also still work if the middle part were extended further.

Figure 4.3.1.1

Skënder Luarasi, Çajupi Hotel, Gjirokastër, 1961, period photo (SLPA)

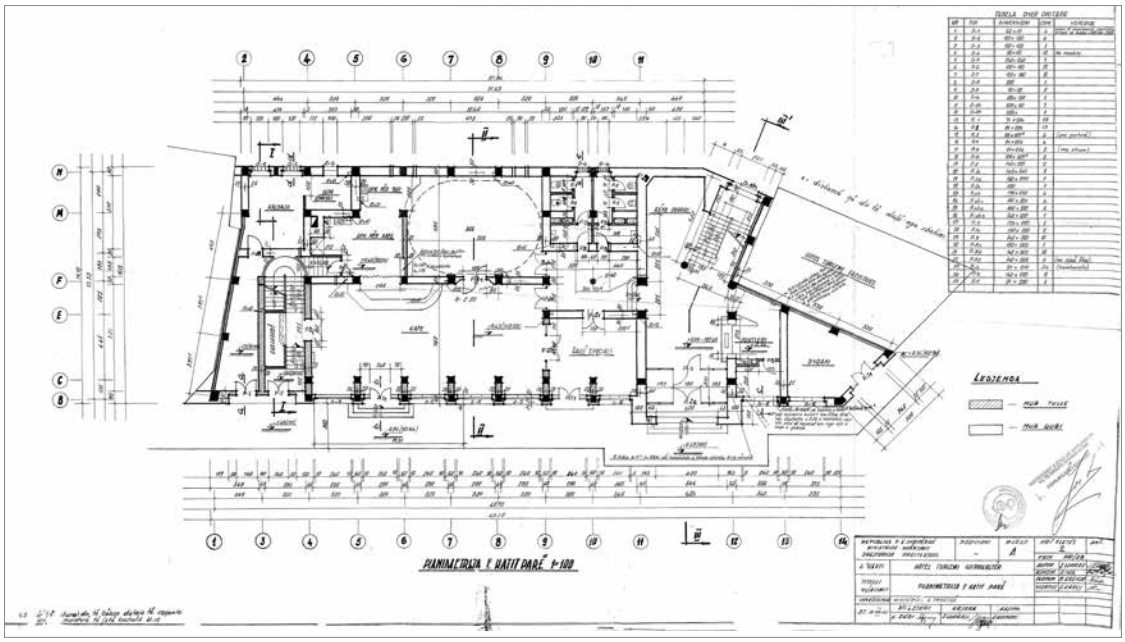


Figure 4.3.1.2 Skënder Luarasi, Çajupi Hotel, Gjirokastër, 1961, ground floor plan (TCAC)

Figure 4.3.1.3 Skënder Luarasi, Çajupi Hotel, Gjirokastër, 1961, front elevation (TCAC)

Figure 4.3.1.4

Skënder Luarasi, Çajupi Hotel, Gjirokastër, 1961, period photo with Luarasi in the foreground (SLPA)

Figure 4.3.1.5

Skënder Luarasi, Çajupi Hotel, Gjirokastër, 1961, period photo (SLPA)

Figure 4.3.1.6

Skënder Luarasi, Çajupi Hotel, Gjirokastër, 1961, period photo (SLPA)

Directly after the hotel but at a higher elevation and accessible via a series of public staircases is the former Party Central Committee Building, today the City Hall of Gjirokastër (figs. 4.3.1.7–4.3.1.8). It has a simple rectangular shape with a central volumetric projection. Like the hotel, it has a stone base and a pronounced cornice that visually separates it from the view of the castle above. The simplicity of its shape contrasts with a subtle articulation of the central projection in relation to that of the two wings. The former is differentiated into two zones, one in the center with a tripartite composition of windows that emphasizes the central axis, and one with a single window on the periphery, which reciprocates those of the center with respect to its dimensions and those of the side wings with respect to its spacing vis-à-vis the other side windows.

Figure 4.3.1.7

Skënder Luarasi, Party Central Committee Building, Gjirokastër, 1961, period photo (SLPA)

Figure 4.3.1.8

Skënder Luarasi, Party Central Committee Building, Gjirokastër, 1961, front elevation (SLPA)

On Gjin Zenebisi Street, there are three four-story residential towers that were built in 1962–64 (figs. 4.3.1.9–4.3.1.14). They represent an ingenious solution and novel interpretation of the tower typology in relation to both the sloped topography and the tower-like vernacular in Gjirokastër. The towers have a pinwheel planimetric organization of four apartments situated around a central staircase that enables a split-level organization in section, in which each landing provides access to two apartments. The tower thus accommodates and responds to the slope by breaking each floor into two levels. This split is reflected in the façade by an alternation of smooth and coarse bands of stucco. While constructed with simple and economic materials, the building exhibits a wealth of subtle and elegant details. The planimetric organization and the alternating splits and shifts in section and elevation animate the entire building to become a pinwheel formation sitting gracefully in the sloped topography. The alternating stucco bands that wrap the building contrast with the stone base and make it seem as if the building is levitating. This effect of weightlessness is also emphasized by the checkered pattern and

shallow reveal of the bathroom windows. The windowsills and edges are articulated with subtle moldings and frames, which make the eye shift toward the periphery of the massing, a disposition that is balanced by the sectional split and the planimetric pinwheel shifts in the middle. The central staircase is remarkably spacious, flooded with light from a skylight elegantly detailed with glass blocks. The flooring of the staircase consists of terrazzo tiles designed with abstract geometric patterns. The handrail and guardrails are detailed with simple materials but are nevertheless elegant in appearance. The space of the stairwell goes beyond the functional necessity of its vertical circulation; it is an interior or rather a void around which the whole building turns in a pinwheel fashion. The Hazmurat Apartments have a similar stairwell and overall volumetric mass. Unlike the towers, however, the Hazmurat apartments do not have a split-level section, since they were erected on a more level topography. Though they still evince a pinwheel organization, they are less torqued and more cubic in the articulation of their massing.

Figure 4.3.1.9

Skënder Luarasi, Tower Apartments, Gjirokastër, 1962–64, photo by the author

Figure 4.3.1.10

Skënder Luarasi, Tower Apartments, Gjirokastër, 1962–64, window detail, photo by the author

Figure 4.3.1.11

Skënder Luarasi, Hazmurat Apartments, Gjirokastër, 1962–64, view of the stairwell, photo by the author

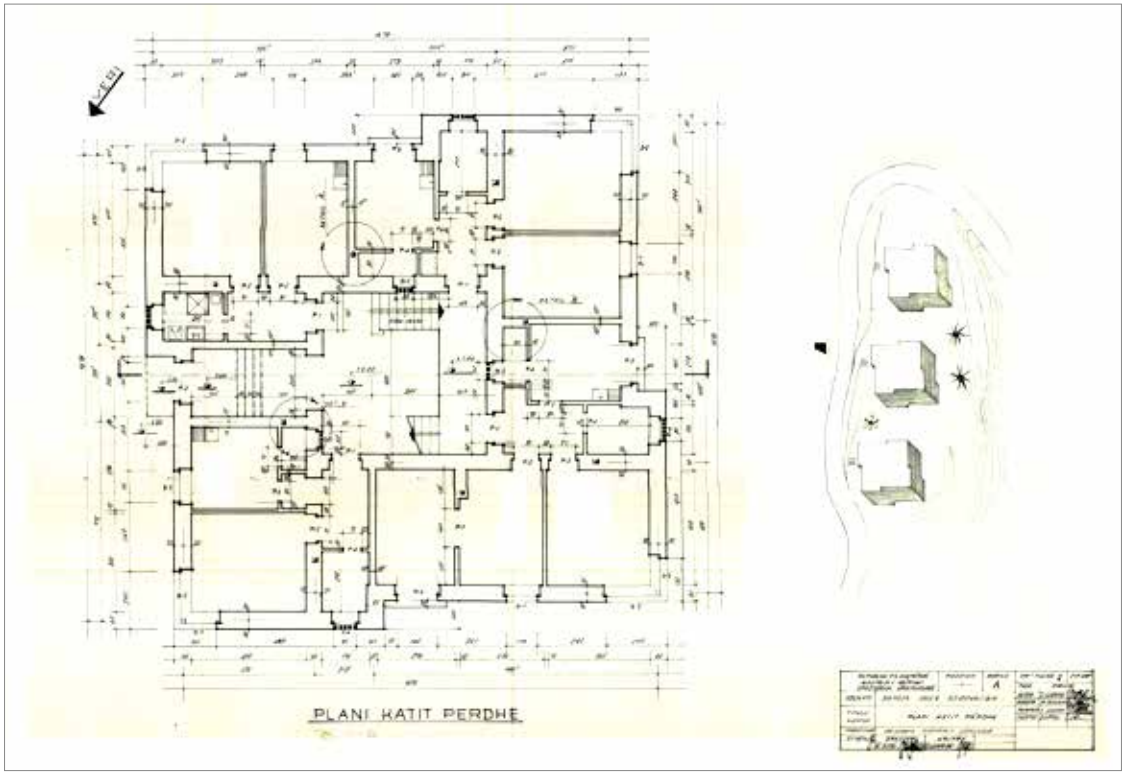


Figure 4.3.1.12 Skënder Luarasi, Tower Apartments, Gjirokastër, 1962–64, typical floor plan (TCAC)

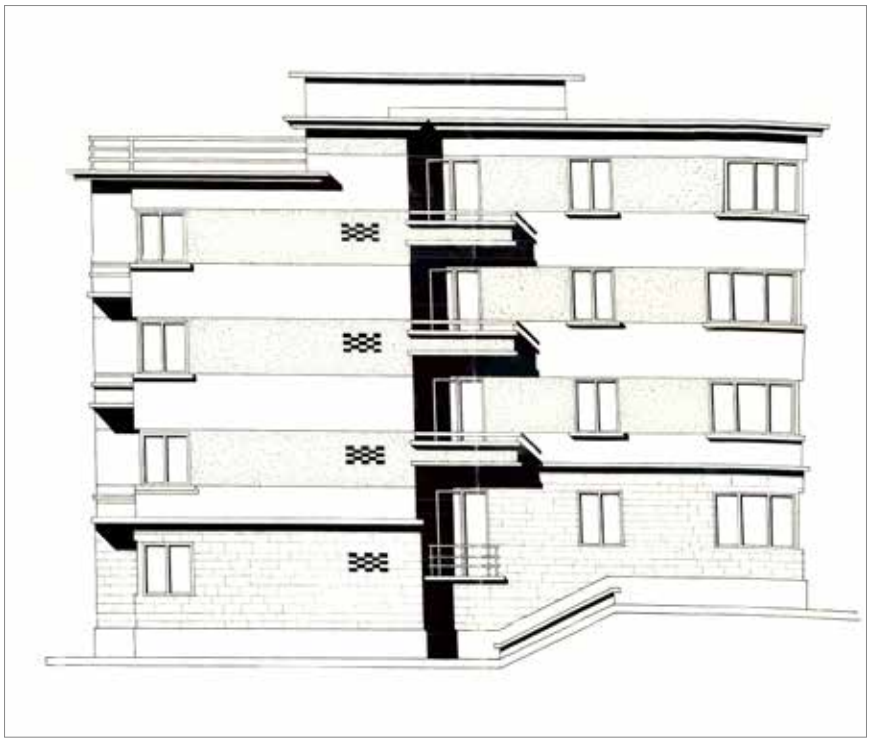
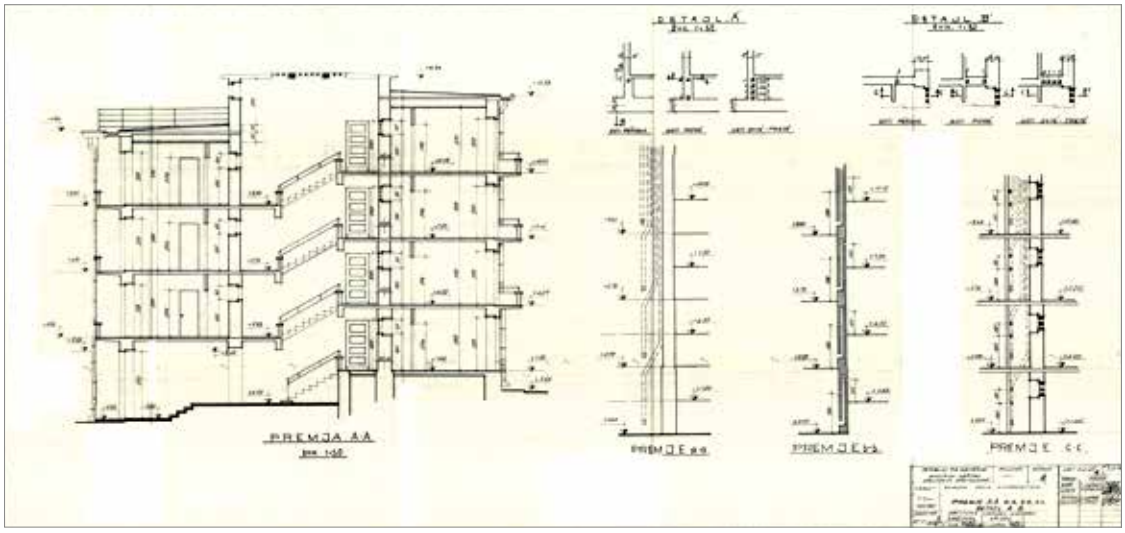


Figure 4.3.1.13

Skënder Luarasi,
Tower Apartments,
Gjirokastër, 1962–64,
street elevation (TCAC)

Figure 4.3.1.14

Skënder Luarasi,
Tower Apartments,
Gjirokastër, 1962–64,
section and details (TCAC)



4.3.2 The Courthouse

When walking along Gjin Zenebisi Street past the Zigai House and the Qafa e Pazarit (Bazaar's Neck) one encounters the Courthouse at the end of the street. It was built in 1959 and consisted of two buildings: one that curves and turns the corner of Ismail Kadare Street—today the Regional Administrative Center—and an L-shaped building positioned diagonally from it—today converted into apartments. The curved building is a rather massive four-story building that fits with difficulty yet elegantly into a very tight urban situation (figs. 4.3.2.1–4.3.2.4). The entrance is positioned on an axis with Gjin Zenebisi Street and is articulated with three rusticated arches on the ground floor and a three-story order of stone pilasters. In the original design only these pilasters and the lower floor were specified as built with stone, the rest with stucco. When it was finally constructed, however, stone was substituted for the stucco, which was probably an economic solution due to the abundance of stone in Gjirokastër. As in the case of the hotel, the entrance refers to the city's vernacular, while the rest of the building has a plain façade with discreet punched openings in the upper three floors and a rusticated stone base with windows that are somewhat larger than those on the floors above. The southern wing—the one on an axis with Gjin Zenebisi Street—is deeper than the northern wing so as to accommodate the entrance lobby and the staircase, a decision that results in an L-shaped composition in the back. The curvature, however, is maintained both physically and compositionally by the corridor wall of the northern wing, which is an offset of the curved street wall. The corridor wall passes tangentially along the staircase, through the lobby and toward the exterior, to define a volumetric articulation that frames the entrance on the southern side. This folded compositional line in combination with an axial and then spiral movement—from the entrance to the lobby and up the stairs on the right—generates a subtle, pinwheel disposition that animates the bulky volume, in both the interior and the exterior.

Figure 4.3.2.1

Skënder Luarasi, Former Courthouse (curved building), Gjirokastër, 1959, photo by the author

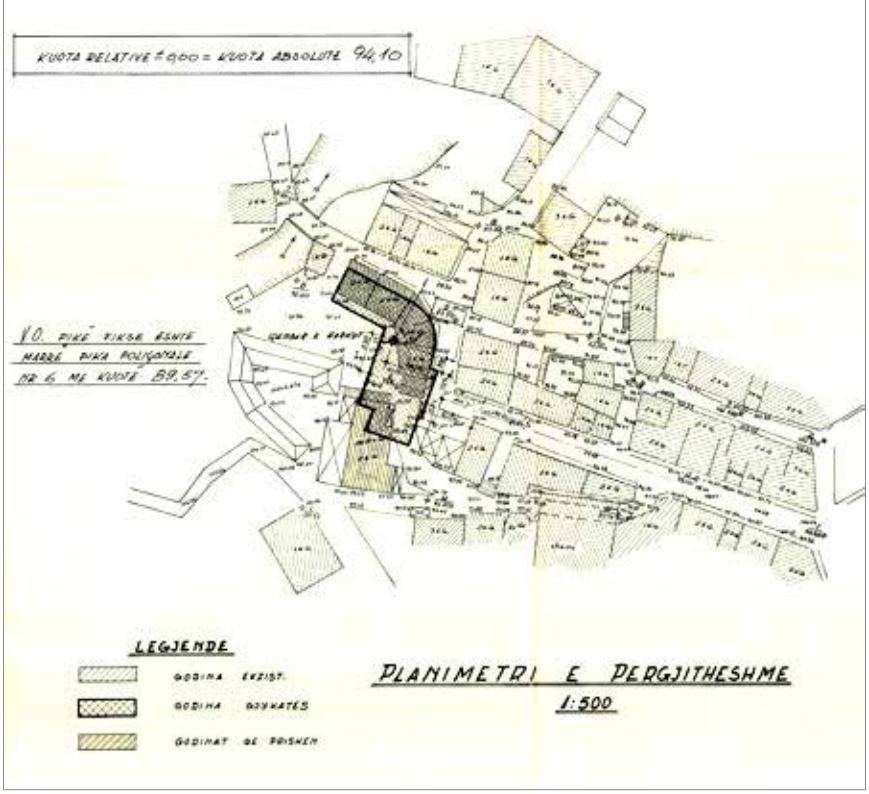


Figure 4.3.2.2

Skënder Luarasi, Former Courthouse (curved building), Gjirokastër, 1959, site plan (TCAC)

Figure 4.3.2.3

Skënder Luarasi, Former Courthouse (curved building), Gjirokastër, 1959, ground floor plan (TCAC)

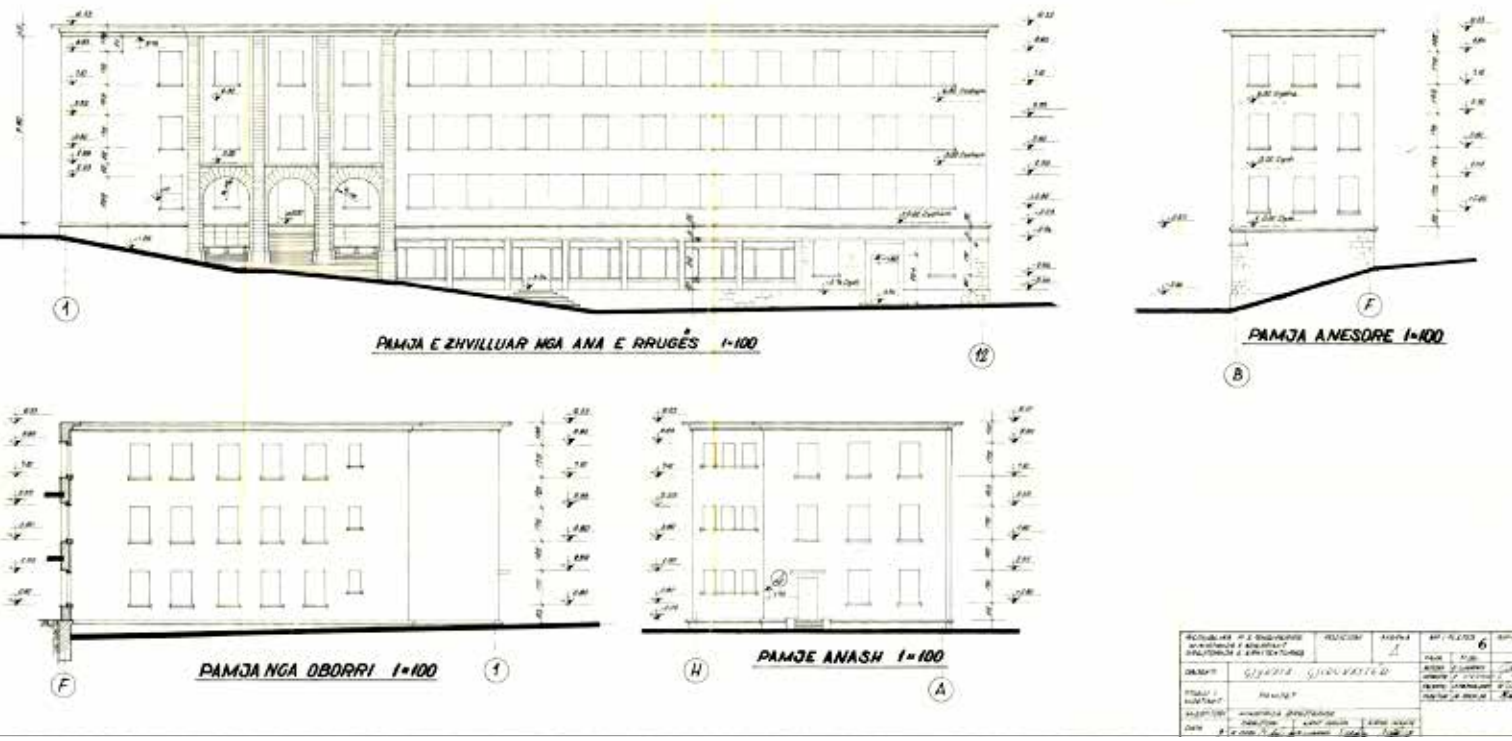


Figure 4.3.2.4

Skënder Luarasi, Former Courthouse (curved building), Gjirokastër, 1959, elevation (TCAC)

While this building is convex because it curves toward the street, the other courthouse building, positioned diagonally in front of it, is concave due to being set back to create an L-shaped urban infill and a pocket garden (fig. 4.3.2.5). The former thus shapes the street as a solid, and the latter provides space between itself and the street. The base of this second building is articulated with one- to three-story stone arches that echo the flying arches of houses in Gjirokastër. The upper two stories are finished with stucco. The stone base, which starts as a one-story structure on Gjin Zenebisi Street and ends as three-story structure on Doktor Vasil Laboviti Street, reciprocates and is almost on the same level as the arched portico entrance of the curved building. Diagonally opposite both buildings across the street, at the intersection of Doktor Vasil Laboviti and Ismail Kadare Street, there is another apartment building also designed by Luarasi (fig. 4.3.2.6), which shares a similar geometry with the L-shaped building, but faces and is coupled with the straight segment of the curved building from an urbanistic perspective. This apartment building mediates and grounds the interplay between the curved and L-shaped buildings. Together, the three buildings thus give rise to an urban space with multiple grounds and articulate the fork-like termination of three key streets in the old city.

Figure 4.3.2.5

Skënder Luarasi, apartment building facing the northern façade of the curved building and the western façade of the L-shaped building, Gjirokastër, 1959, photo by the author

Figure 4.3.2.6

Skënder Luarasi, Former Courthouse, L-shaped building, Gjirokastër, 1959, photo by the author

4.3.3 The Asim Zeneli Gymnasium

Further down Ismail Kadare Street is the high school called the Asim Zeneli Gymnasium, a long building that is visible from various peaks in the city (figs. 4.3.3.1–4.3.3.8). This building was designed by Italian architects in the mid-1920s. After being damaged in a fire, it was redesigned and restored by Skënder Kristo Luarasi in 1939–40. While it was rebuilt on the old foundations and with more or less the same perimetric walls, there are key differences in the restored building: it retains the neo-classical vernacular of the former building, but tweaks and plays with its canons. The side projections of the façade of the former building had three windows, in line with the classical canon of having an opening in the middle of a volume. The new building has only two openings in the side projections, thus emphasizing the peripheral elements of the façade. In the former building, the central projection ran through the entire height of the building, culminating with a hip roof, which along with the hip roofs of the side projections of the façade formed a distinctly classical tripartite motif. In the current building, the hip roof is retained in the side projections, but eliminated in the central structure. The entrance portico only extends up to the second floor and concludes, in a quite unorthodox way, with a flat architrave. This design choice dims and voids any centralizing effect of the central structure, while further emphasizing the horizontality of the volume and the peripheral pull created by the reconfigured side projections. In the original rendering, the central window on the third floor, just above the entrance portico, was the same as the rest of the windows, while in other drawings as well as the current building, it has a slightly higher cornice, thus somehow diminishing the distinctly modern, voided figural character of the center and the marked horizontality of the façade. As in the case of Luarasi's Hotel and Courthouse, the side projections point to the tower-like character of Gjirokastër's houses. They also anchor the building and frame the horizontal push of the center part. To balance out this peripheral push, centrality is restored with a monolithic and abstract portico consisting of two layers: a plain cubic projection and a tripartite pier-order on top of the projection. It also has a small and shallow but compositionally punctuating canopy. The central portico is constructed of a dark granulated concrete that contrasts with the stucco of the upper façade and thus further contributes to the effect of centrality. The latter, however, surrenders to the horizontal and peripheral pull once again through the rendering of the entire base or ground floor with the same monolithic-like, granulated concrete, and as a result of a band of arched windows that contrast with those in the upper stories. The contrast between the granulated concrete and the stucco evokes the vernacular architecture of the old town, which often has

stone walls on the lower floors and stucco on the upper floor(s). The granulated concrete makes direct reference to the dark stone walls of the castle, a reciprocity that is further enhanced by the overall scale and orientation of the building and the way that it frames the castle from the ground floor yard. The cornice is articulated with a scaled-up dentil, which creates a dialogue with the battlements of the castle. Like Luarasi's other buildings, the Asim Zeneli Gymnasium is characterized by a compositional density that gives rise to multiple readings and results in an interplay between centrality and periphery, reference and abstraction, adjacency and extension, the scenographic and the tectonic, and the vernacular and the modern. The ultimate purpose of this interplay is, however, best imagined and experienced when one walks along Ismail Kadare Street below the Gymnasium and hears children and young people playing in its spacious yard, a veritable stage from which the city unfolds as a shell for life within a greater, inexorable play that is always recognized too late, that of the passing of time and history.

Figure 4.3.3.1

View of the Asim Zeneli Gymnasium and part of the Varosh neighborhood from the Obelisk, photo by Roland Tasho

Figure 4.3.3.2

Period photo showing the former Asim Zeneli Gymnasium before the fire, with the middle bay concluding with a hip roof instead of ending on the second floor, and the side bays with three windows instead of two, as after the restoration in 1940. Photo provided to the author by Pirro Thomo

Figure 4.3.3.3

Skënder Luarasi, Asim Zeneli Gymnasium, Gjirokastër, frontal view of the entrance portico, photo by the author, October 2021

Figure 4.3.3.4

Skënder Luarasi,
Asim Zeneli Gymnasium,
Gjirokastër, frontal view
from Ismail Kadare Street,
photo by the author,
October 2021

Figure 4.3.3.5

Skënder Luarasi,
Asim Zeneli Gymnasium,
Gjirokastër, after the
restoration of 1940,
view toward the castle,
photo by the author

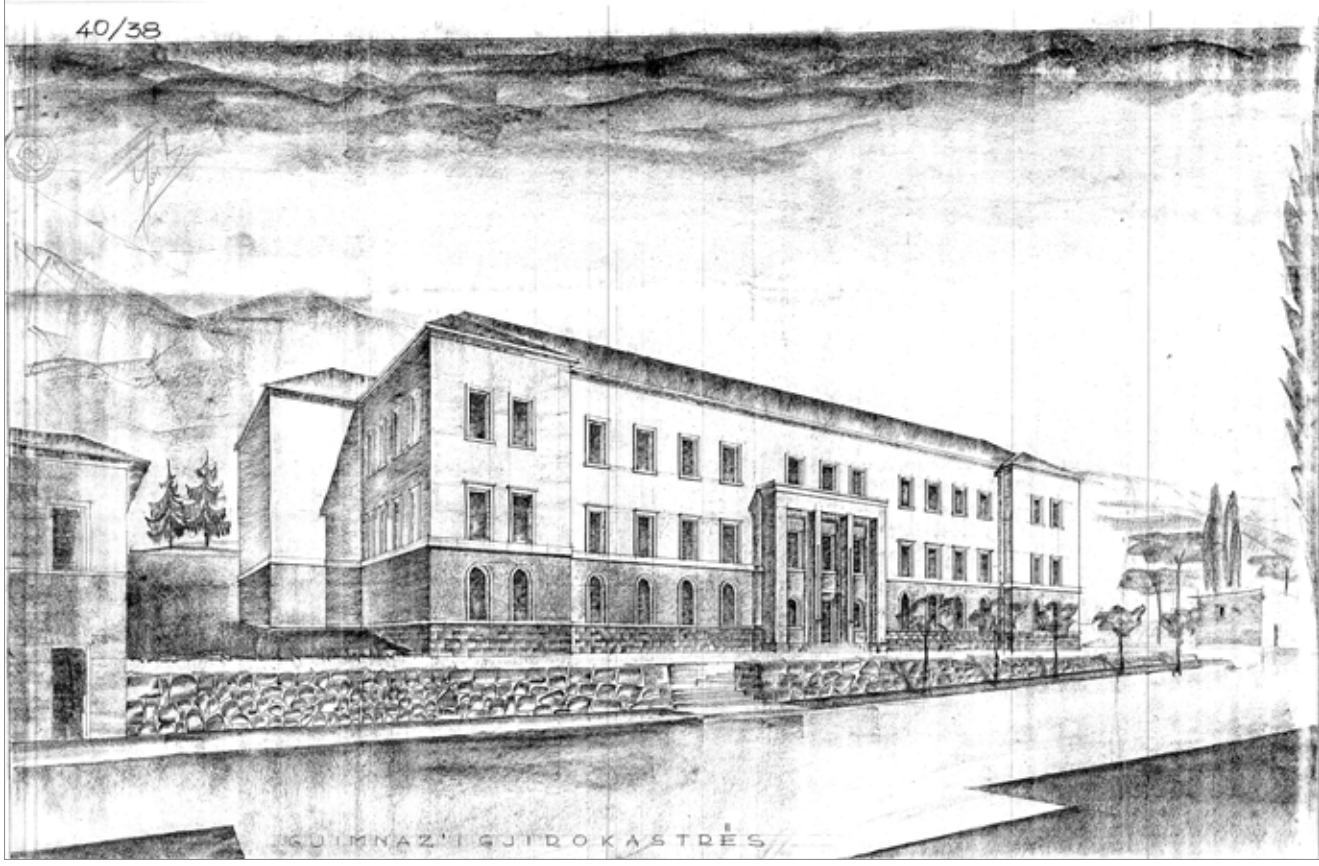


Figure 4.3.3.6 Skënder Luarasi, Asim Zeneli Gymnasium, Gjirokastër, restoration of 1940, perspective (TCAC)

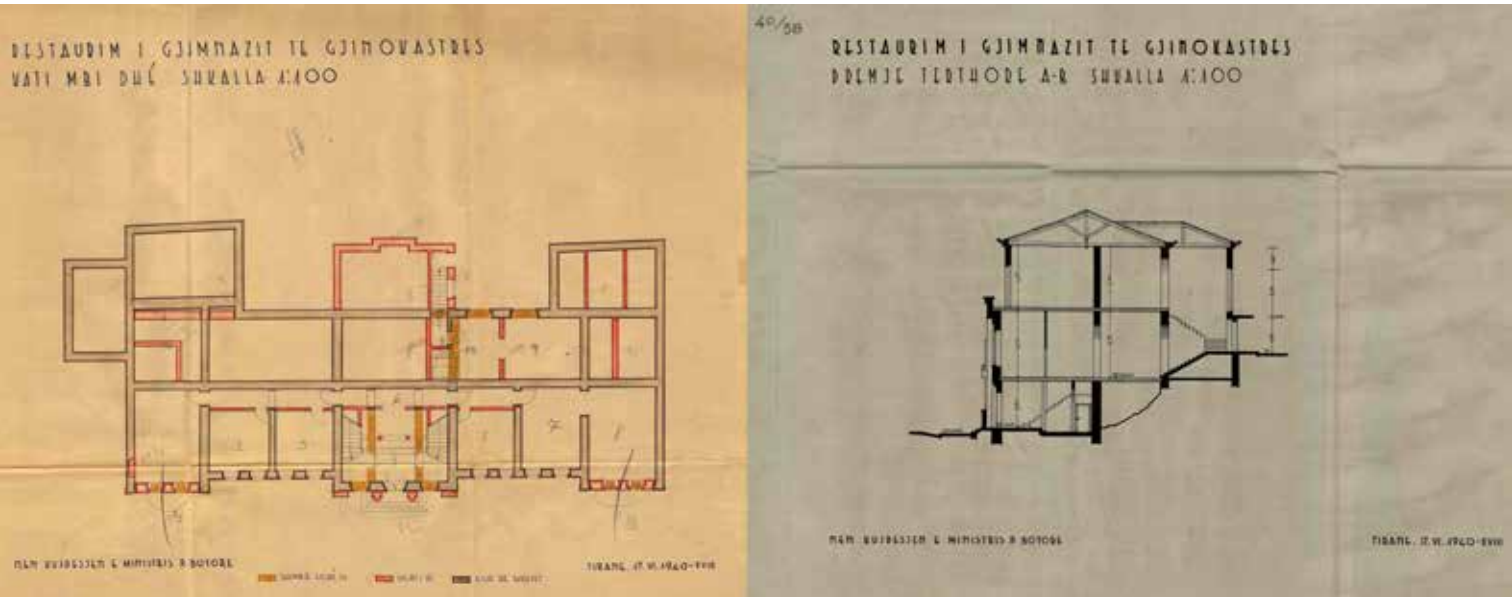


Figure 4.3.3.7 Skënder Luarasi, Asim Zeneli Gymnasium, Gjirokastër, restoration of 1940, plan and section showing the existing and new alterations and interventions (TCAC)

Figure 4.3.3.8

Skënder Luarasi,
Asim Zeneli Gymnasium,
Gjirokastër, restoration
of 1940, elevation (TCAC)

4.3.4 The Hospital

Built right after the war, in 1946–49, and subsequently expanded with an additional floor in the late 1960s, the Hospital of Gjirokastër is one of the most important buildings in Luarasi's oeuvre and of postwar architecture in Albania in general (figs. 4.3.4.1–4.3.4.8). It is probably one of the earliest examples in Albania of a distinctly modern idiom used in a large-scale and programmatically complex building. The hospital stands on what used to be the edge of the city. While the site did not have the urban and topographical constraints of the hotel, the Hospital building has a dynamic L-shaped composition at an angle with 18 Shtatori (18 September) Boulevard. While its positioning was conditioned by the solar orientation, the building also points directly to the historic old town, up the hill. The first version planned is more expressionistic than the built version due to a pinwheel disposition of three wings, the longest of which is slightly curved and articulated with a long, horizontal band of loggias resting on a stone base. The articulation of the inner layer of the loggias is marked by a rhythmic alternation of windows and doors. The built version retains the qualities of the first version but is more contained volumetrically: what is lacking in expressionism in comparison with the first version is compensated for with a more plastic articulation. The façade of the long wing is differentiated into two parts shifted in depth: one with punched

openings and a balcony on the first floor, and one with loggias recessed from the façade plane of the first part. The fenestration and door openings, on the other hand, continue with the same module across the shifting planes of the façade, both emphasizing the planar shift of the façade and making it more ambiguous. This shift is also reflected in the layout, in which it corresponds with a lobby and a vertical circulation—a stopping point along a corridor that becomes either one-sided or two-sided. The patient rooms are situated on the southern side of the south wing, with the servicing spaces on the northern side, while medical services are grouped in the north wing. At the corners, the wings are 'stopped' by vertical volumes. Where the two wings meet, this volume is articulated with both loggias and a plain wall that turns the corner, thus indexing both parts of the façade of the long wing. The windows in the corner volumes are framed by a cornice and horizontal stucco band, while the window cornices in the central corner volume turn the corner. Except for the end corner volumes, which are clad with stucco, the rest of the building is clad with tiles with a vertical grain. The first floor of this corner volume projects forward with stone arches that look as if they have descended from the city—an arcade reminiscent of paintings by de Chirico. This arcade then shifts back to the plane of the façade and continues along the entire length of the building as a plinth. The building is thus both dynamic and serene, both abstract and figural, and both modern and deferential to its context.

Figure 4.3.4.1

Skënder Luarasi, Gjirokastër Hospital, 1946–49, period photo (SLPA)

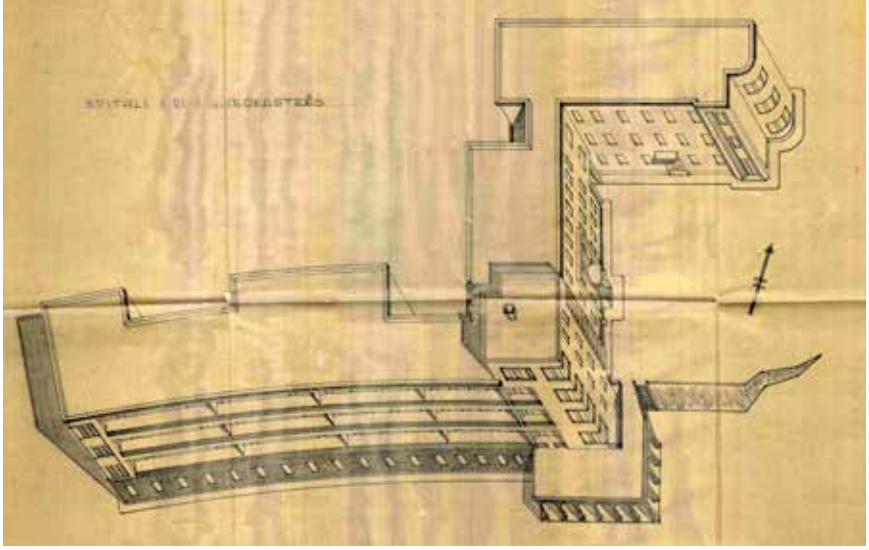


Figure 4.3.4.2

Skënder Luarasi, Gjirokastër Hospital, 1946, first version, axonometry (TCAC)

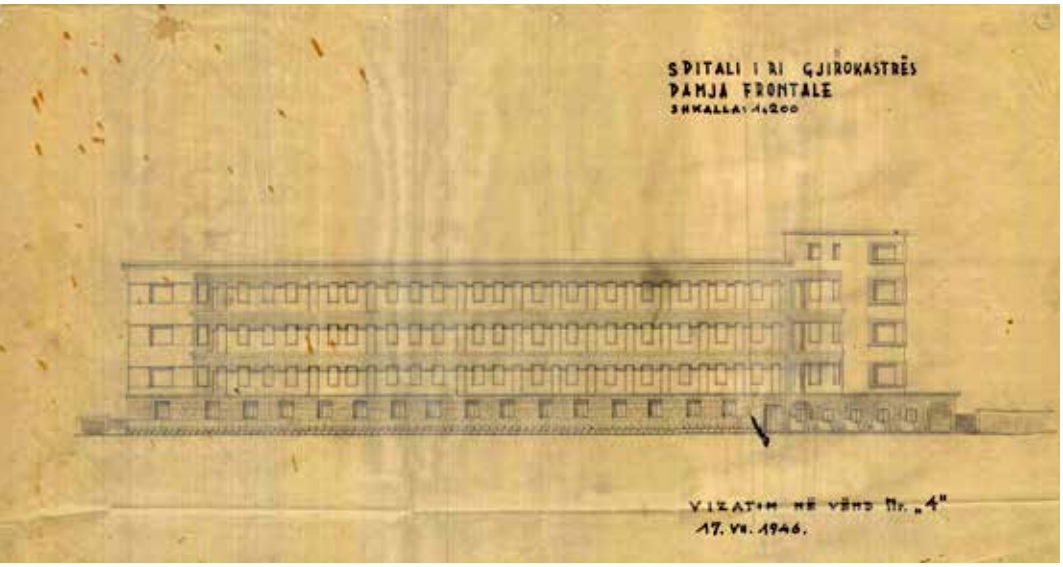


Figure 4.3.4.3

Skënder Luarasi, Gjirokastër Hospital, first version, 1946, façade drawing (TCAC)

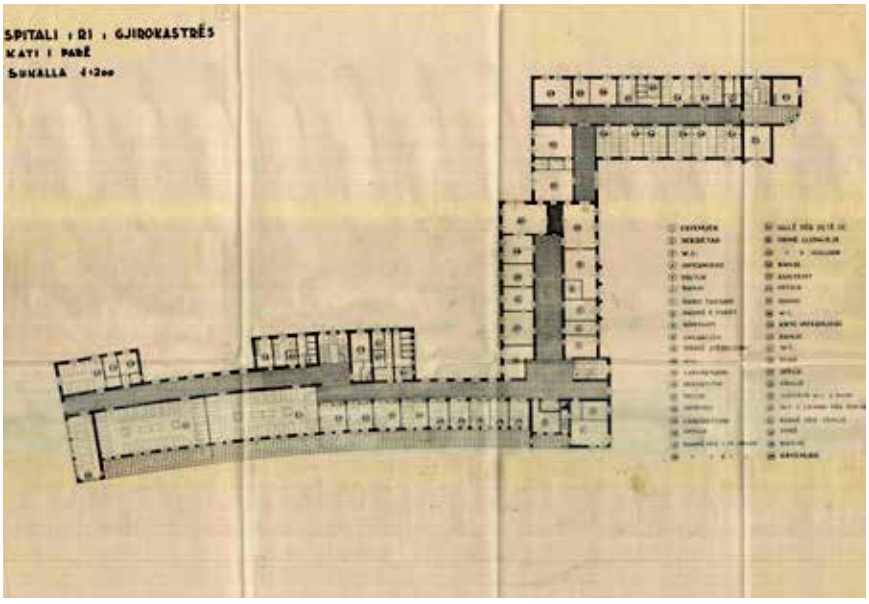


Figure 4.3.4.4

Skënder Luarasi, Gjirokastër Hospital, first version, 1946, first floor plan (TCAC)

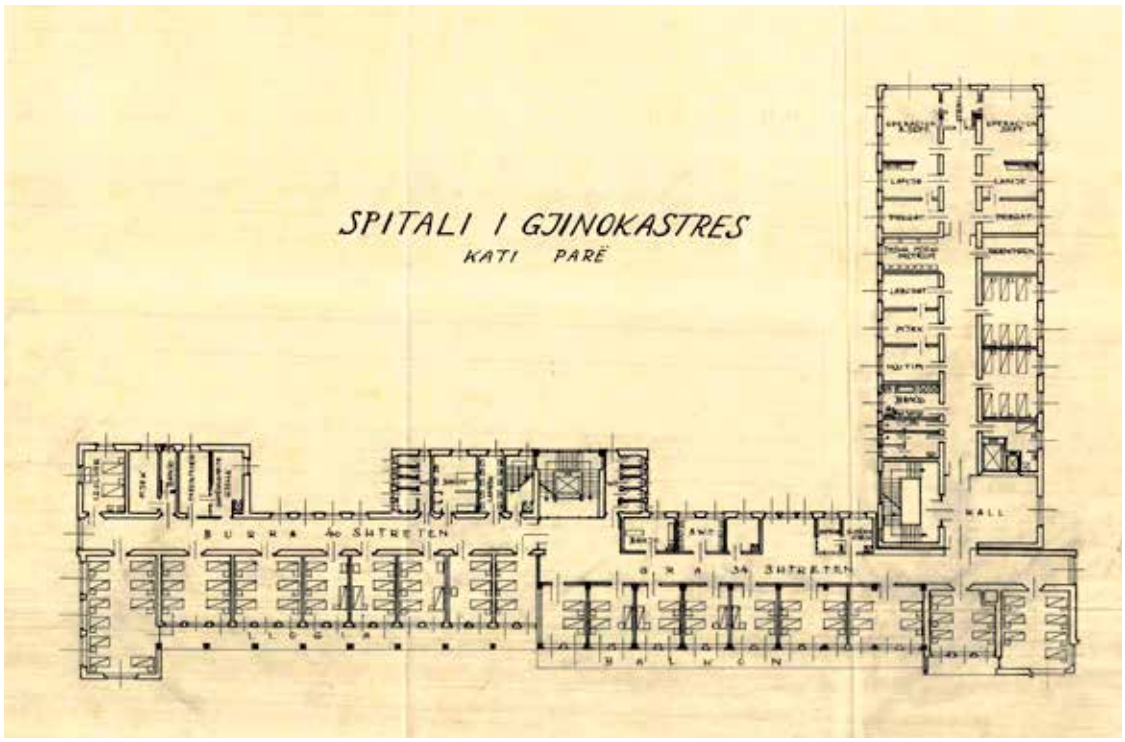


Figure 4.3.4.5 Skënder Luarasi, Gjirokastër Hospital, 1946–49, floor plan of the final version (TCAC)

Figure 4.3.4.6 Skënder Luarasi, Gjirokastër Hospital, 1946–49, elevation drawing showing the fourth-floor addition of 1969 (TCAC)

Figure 4.3.4.7

Skënder Luarasi,
Gjirokastër Hospital,
1946–49, view of
the southern façade,
photo by the author, 2009

Figure 4.3.4.8

Skënder Luarasi,
Gjirokastër Hospital,
1946–49, view above
the ground floor terrace,
photo by the author, 2009

5. Conclusion

Conclusion

Skënder Kristo Luarasi died on April 20, 1976. Three days later, a 300-word obituary written by his colleagues Spiro Koleka, Rahman Hanku, Shenasi Dragoti, Sali Angoni, Neço Konomi, Eqrem Dobi, Anton Lufi, Gallata Hobdari, Bujar Basha, Trajçe Mazniku, and Fiqiri Alimemeti was published in the *Bashkimi* (Unity) newspaper. The obituary praises "our comrade" for "his patriotism" and for "responding to the Party's call" to rebuild the country after the war, and for working with "great conscientiousness, and offering the people and the Party all his energy and remarkable professional knowledge."[76] It further adds that "guided by his knowledge and the orientation of the Party," Luarasi contributed to "our new architecture" by relying on "our tradition," as it is evinced in his buildings in Gjirokastër and elsewhere. For his contribution, the obituary concludes, the Presidium of the Popular Assembly awarded Luarasi the "Republic Prize." There was, however, not a single word about the modernity of his architecture. While lauding his professional career, the obituary ignores Luarasi's prewar career, thus conforming to the communist mythology of a history without a past, one that started only after the war, with communism. The same sort of ideological violence against the whole communist period and what was achieved during it—above all else, the *inhumane* human investment—is exerted today in democracy by resetting the clock and starting the counting of history as of 1992, when communism officially ended. This ideological erasure prepares both a mnemonic ground-zero to be filled with new mythologies and an urban ground-zero to be bought cheaply and filled in with expensive real estate.

In his paper "The Capital and Power," Elidor Mëhilli points out that, "the communist regime did not like those few architects and engineers who had studied outside the country before the war, especially those that had studied in the West. But since it needed them, it kept them busy until a new class of specialists educated in the Soviet Union or popular democracies was created."[77] It is worth pointing out that the situation is similar today: local architects are sidelined from important commissions, which are awarded either to foreign architects or to a very narrow circle of insider architects. Mëhilli also points out that, "the local architects of the old generation [Anton Lufi, Vasil Noçka, Skënder Luarasi] either worked in silence or were avoided."[78] This claim is nonetheless belied by the fact that these architects continued to

[76] *Bashkimi* newspaper (April 23, 1976).

[77] Elidor Mëhilli, "The Capital and Power," in *Përpjekja* (The Effort), pp. 34–35, 83–108, 89 (translated by the author).

[78] Ibid.

work until the very end of their career and received important commissions, even after a new generation of architects had emerged. What was not acknowledged by the regime, however, was specifically the discursive value of their architecture, its modernity. The regime divested their architecture of its context in order to reinvest it for its own ideological context. This was achieved through omission and silence, by simply not talking about their architecture. Such a seemingly nonviolent act nevertheless caused much more damage in the long run than any persecution or censorship: it cemented an indifference toward modern heritage and its histories. While the regime awarded this generation of architects honors and prizes for their contributions, it never involved them in academia in any full-time teaching capacity. This thus meant that their influence could not sustain and inspire a younger generation of architects and that their expertise died along with them.

On the other hand, such silencing and ideological discrimination forced this generation of architects to develop a refined style, one that would be the opposite of, say, the brutalist style defined by Rayner Banham in the following terms: "1: memorability as an image; 2: a clear exhibition of structure; and, 3: a valuation of materials as found."[79] While their style was memorable, it was also smooth, quiet, and ambiguous, and certainly not brutal. The image of their architecture is not quick and direct, but slow and camouflaged under a compositional density that reveals itself only if one is willing to read it closely; a compositional density that while fulfilling the criteria of a "new architecture for the people" as demanded by the Party, also said something more (or less), beyond or below the ideological and mythological waves of the time—a discursive dimension that could not be reduced to the ideological imperatives of the context. Retrospectively, it can thus be argued that this ideological silencing of their modernity was also a blessing in disguise, precisely insofar as, quite paradoxically, it insulated them from this very ideology, hence allowing them to develop a style that could not be detected by the ideological radar. This subtle invisibility nevertheless worked against this architecture after communism, when it fell prey to eyes that could not see—blinded as they were by economic and ideological greed—let alone be read closely and between the lines of their nuanced compositions. The time has therefore now come to excavate and write the histories of modernism in Albania, and how such modernism adds to and is part of the larger international modernism.

[79] Reyner Banham, "The New Brutalism," *Architectural Review* (1955), pp. 355–59, 359.

6. A Catalogue of Selected Projects in Chronological Order

6.1 Partial List of Projects

1. House of Alek Lubonja (*Shtëpi e Alek Lubonjës*), Tirana, 1936
2. House of Kel Ben (*Shtëpi e Kel Benit*), Tirana, 1936
3. Restoration of and addition to the Nasional Cinema (called the Rex prior to 1944 and the 17 Nëntori after 1944) (*Restaurimi dhe shtesa e Kinema Nasional [para 1944 e quajtur "Rex" e më pas "17 Nëntori"]),* Tirana, 1936–39
4. Agricultural School (*Shkolla Bujqësore*), Lushnjë, 1937
5. House of Dr. H. Harxhi (*Shtëpi e Dr. H. Harxhit*), Tirana, 1937
6. House of Anton Sopi (*Shtëpi e Anton Sopit*), Tirana, 1937
7. Bus station (unbuilt) (*Stacion autobuzësh [i pandërtuar]*), Tirana, 1937
8. House of Harilla Theodhosi (*Shtëpi e Harilla Theodhosit*), Tirana, 1937
9. House of Petraq Korça (*Shtëpi e Petraq Korçës*), Tirana, 1937
10. House of Sokrat Dodbiba (*Shtëpi e Sokrat Dodbibës*), Tirana, 1937
11. House of Hasan Toptani (*Shtëpi e Hasan Toptanit*), ca. 1937
12. House of Andrea Saatçi (*Shtëpi e Andrea Saatçiut*), 1939
13. House of Fadil Hidi (*Shtëpi e Fadil Hidit*), Tirana, 1939
14. Gymnasium of Gjirokastër (*Gjimnazi i Gjirokastrës*), Gjirokastër, 1939–40
15. Saint Procopius Church (*Kisha e Shën Prokopit*), Tirana, 1939–40
16. House of Izet Dibra (*Shtëpi e Izet Dibrës*), Tirana, 1940
17. Villa of Thodhor Luarasi (*Vilë e Thodhor Luarasit*), Tirana, 1940

18. House of Skënder Luarasi (*Shtëpi e Skënder Luarasit*), Tirana, 1941

19. Villa Sheko (*Vila Sheko*), Tirana, 1941

20. Villa of Gaqo Turtulli and Skënder Luarasi (*Vilë e Gaqo Turtullit dhe Skënder Luarasit*), Tirana, 1941

21. House of Palok Koka (*Shtëpi e z. Palok Koka*), Tirana, 1943

22. House of the Çoka Brothers (*Banesë e Vëllezërve Çoka*), Tirana, 1943

23. House of Dum Doku (*Shtëpi e Dum Dokut*), Tirana, 1944

24. House of Agop Aleksanian and Diran Çakmakxhian (*Shtëpi e Agop Aleksanian dhe Diran Çakmakxhian*), Tirana, 1944

25. The Hospital of Gjirokastër (*Spitali i Gjirokastrës*), 1946–69

26. Anastisiadhi brick factory (*Fabrika e Tullave 'Anastisiadhi'*), Durrës, 1946

27. Family apartments (*Apartamente Familjare*), Peshkopi, 1947

28. Housing with shops on Elbasani Street (*Banesë me dyqane në Rrugën e Elbasanit*), 1947

29. Addition to the former Popular Assembly (today the Academy of Arts) (*Shtesë e Ish Kuvendit Popullor [sot Akademia e Arteve]*), Tirana, 1950

30. Tourism Hotel (*Hotel Turizmi*), Tirana, 1950

31. Convalescence housing (*Shtëpi Pushimi*), Pogradec, 1950

32. Pioneers' camp (*Kampi i Pionierëve*), Tirana, 1950

33. Corn depot prototype 900 m^2 (*Depo Drithi tip 900m^2*), 1950

34. Family apartments Block D1 (*Apartamente familjare Blloku D1*), Tirana, 1950

35. Family apartments Block III (*Apartamente familjare Blloku III*), 1950

36. Library in the Party Building (*Biblioteka në Shtëpinë e Partisë*), Tirana, 1950

37. Pedagogical School with dormitory (schematic design) (*Shkolla Pedagogjike me konvikt në Elbasan [projekt ide]*), Elbasan, 1950

38. Convalescence camp (*Kampi i Kovaleshencës*), Durrës, 1950

39. State Archive (*Arkiva e Shtetit*), Tirana, 1951

40. Dormitory adaptation (*Adaptim Konvikti*), Shkodër, 1951–58

41. Prototypes for apartments for eight families (*Variante Apartamentesh për 8 familje*), 1951

42. Housing for fifty individuals (*Banesë për 50 persona*), Tirana, 1951

43. Building of Cultural Activity (*Godina e Aktivitetit Kulturor*), Pogradec, 1951

44. Schematic design of the cinema in Vlora (*Skema e Kinemasë së Vlorës*), Vlora, 1951

45. Pioneers' camp (*Kampi i Pionierëve*), Pogradec, 1950–51

46. Pioneers' camp (*Kampi i Pionierëve*), Durrës, 1950–51

47. Enlargement of the forge at the Enver plant (schematic design) *(Zmadhimi i Kovaçanës në Uzinën "Enver" [p. ide])*, Tirana, 1951

48. Building of the State Archive (*Godinë për Arkivën e Shtetit*), 1951

49. State shops with five vendors (*Dyqane Shteti me 5 Shitës*), 1951

50. Shoe factory (*Fabrika e Këpucëve*), Tirana, 1951

51. Dormitory for seventy workers (*Fjetore për 70 Sulmuesa*), Durrës, 1951

52. Garage for seven cars (*Garazh për 7 Makina*), 1951

53. Club in Shëngjin (*Klubi Shëngjin*), 1951

54. Military complex (*Kompleks Ushtarak*), 1951

55. Eatery for 120 individuals (*Mencë për 120 persona*), Razëm, 1951

56. Eatery for 130 individuals (*Mencë për 130 persona*), Qyteti Stalin (today Kuçova), 1951

57. Eatery prototype for 200 individuals (*Mencë Tip për 200 persona*), 1951

58. Market prototype (*Merkato Tip*), 1951

59. Fitness facility prototype (*Palestra Tip*), 1951

60. Disinfection Center (*Qendër Disinfektimi*), 1951

61. Commercial School (*Shkollë Tregtare*), Tirana, 1951

62. Reading room prototype (*Salle Leximi tip*), 1951

63. Thermal station prototype (*Stacion Termal Tip*), Peshkopi, 1951

64. Dormitory addition (*Shtesë Konvikti*), Peshkopi, 1951

65. Demountable tribune, small and large prototype (*Tribunë e çmontueshme tip i madh dhe i vogël*), 1951

66. Economic Technical School (Teknikumi Ekonomik), Tirana, 1951

67. Office of the Party Committee (*Zyra e Komitetit të Partisë*), Patos, 1951

68. Cine-theater (*Kino-teatër*), Patos, 1951

69. City Hall (*Komiteti Egzekutiv*), Ersekë, 1951

70. Office prototype with three rooms (*Zyra tip, 3-Dhoma*), Priskë, 1951

71. Housing prototype A+B, with bricks and stone (*Banesa tip A+B me tullë e gurë*), 1952

72. Shower-baths (*Dushe*), Peshkopi, 1952

73. Fuel depot (*Depo Karburanti*), Shëngjin, 1952

74. Shop depot (*Dyqan-Depo*), Tropojë, 1952

75. Shop (*Dyqan*), Priskë, 1952

76. Seasoning depot (*Depo stazhionimi*), Fushë-Arrëz, 1952

77. Unit depots (*Depo Repartesh*), Memaliaj, 1952

78. Simple dormitories for sixty individuals, with stone and reeds (*Fjetore të thjeshta për 60 persona me gurë dhe kallama*), 1952

79. Dormitory for twenty-eight individuals (*Fjetore për 28 persona*), Vlorë, 1952

80. Dormitory and eatery for twenty individuals (*Fjetore dhe mencë për 20 persona*), 1952

81. Hangar for agricultural machines (*Hangar për makina bujqësore*), 1952

82. Hotel (*Hotel*), Tepelenë, 1952

83. Anatomical Institute (*Instituti Anatomik*), 1952

84. Red Corner (*Këndi i Kuq*), Priskë, 1952

85. Club (*Klub*), Rubik, 1952

86. Dormitory for 100 individuals (*Konvikt për 100 persona*), 1952

87. Housing (adaptation) (*Ndërtesa banimi [adaptim]*), 1952

88. Housing prototype (*Ndërtesa banimi tip, Memaliaj*), 1952

89. Food warehouse (*Magazinë ushqimore mapo*), 1952

90. Orthopedic machine shop (*Ofiçinë ortopedike, Tirana*), 1952

91. Radiological machine shop (*Ofiçina Radiologjike*), 1952

92. Machine shop for wool workers (*Ofiçina e leshpunuesve, Tirana*), 1952

93. Fertilizer facility prototype (*Plehërishte tip*), 1952

94. Pioneers' Park (*Park Pionierësh tip*), 1952

95. Finess facility (*Palestër*), Vlorë, 1952

96. Addition of Public Offices (*Shtesë zyrash publike*), 1952

97. Stable for 100 horses (*Stallë për 100 kuaj*), Tirana, 1952

98. Technical School (*Teknikumi*), Rubik, 1952

99. Office prototypes with five rooms (*Zyra tip—5 Dhoma*), Priskë, 1952

100. Vacation House (*Shtëpi pushimi*), Voskopojë, 1952

101. Definitive and temporary construction facility in the Enver hydropower plant (*Kantjer definitiv dhe provizor në Hidroçentralin "Enver"*), 1953

102. Adaptation of a barracks into a school (*Adaptim gazermash për shkollë*), 1953

103. Buildings for the Stalin textile plant (*Godina për Kombinatin e Tekstilit "Stalin"*), 1953

104. Cine-club for the Stalin textile plant (*Kino-klub për Kombinatin e Tekstilit "Stalin"*), 1953

105. Cooling pools at the Stalin plant, (*Pishina për ftohje uji ne Kombinatin "Stalin"*), 1953

106. Food warehouses (*Magazina Ushqimore*), 1953

107. School addition (*Shtesë shkolle*), Gramsh, 1953

108. Textile complex (*Kompleks Tekstili*), Tirana, 1953

109. Adaptation of Çerçiz Topulli Square (*Sistemimi i Sheshit "Çerçiz Topulli"*), Gjirokastër, 1953

110. Rural hospital prototype (*Spital Rural tip*), 1953

111. Facility for drying bricks (*Tetojë për tharje tullash*), 1953

112. Facility for drying clothes (*Vend tharje rrobash*), 1953

113. Toilet, wood prototype (*WC tip druri*), 1953

114. Hospital expansion (*Zgjerimi i Spitalit*), Gramsh, 1953

115. Baths (*Banjo*), Krrabë, 1954

116. F1 Block and additions (*Blloku F1 dhe shtesa*), 1954

117. School for Chief Ground Probe Technicians in Old Patos (Shkollë Kryesondatorësh në Patosin e Vjetër), Patos, 1954

118. Tobacco depot (*Depo Duhani*), Elbasan, 1954–58

119. Pumping station (*Stacion Pompimi*), Pojan, 1954–55

120. Enver plant—technical unit (*Uzina "Enver"—Reparti Teknik*), 1954–55

121. Addition to the former Popular Theater (today the Academy of Arts) (*Shtesë e ish Teatrit Popullor [sot Akademia e Arteve]*), Tirana, 1955

122. Addition to the former Opera and Ballet Theater (today the Academy of Arts) (*Shtesë e ish Teatrit të Operës dhe Baletit [sot Akademia e Arteve]*), Tirana, 1955–56

123. Enver plant forge (*Uzina "Enver"—kovaçana*), 1955–56

124. Block No. 1, Elbasani Street (unbuilt) (*Blloku N.1, Rr. Elbasanit [i pazbatuar]*), Tirana, 1955

125. Glass factory (*Fabrika e qelqit*), Korçë, 1955

126. Thermal baths (*Banja termale*), Llixha, Elbasan, 1955–56

127. Hospital for Infectious Diseases (today the Pediatric Hospital) (*Spitali Infektiv [Pediatria sot]*), Tirana, 1957

128. Tobacco fermentation plant (*Uzina e Fermentimit të duhanit*), Durrës, 1957

129. Building for German Embassy personnel (*Godinë për personelin e Ambasadës Gjermane*), 1957

130. Instructions for waterproofing flat roofs (*Udhëzime mbi izolimin e tarracave*), 1958

131. Rinas Airport (*Aeroporti i Rinasit*), Rinas, 1958

132. Building No. 3 of the Prime Ministry (*Objekti Nr.3 i Kryeministrisë*), 1958

133. Tourism hotel (*Hotel Turizmi*), Durrës, 1958

134. Adaptations to the Presidium of the Popular Assembly (*Adaptime në Presidiumin e Kuvendit Populllor*), 1958–73

135. Courthouse (*Gjykata*), Gjirokastër, 1959

136. Reception house No. 1 (*Shtëpi e Pritjes Nr.1*), Tirana, 1959

137. T.B.C. sanatorium (*Sanatoriumi T.B.C.*), Tirana, 1959

138. Film atelier in the Kinostudio (*Atelje Filmi në Kinostudio*), Tirana, 1960

139. Residential building No. 2 (Godinë banimi Nr. 2), Sarandë, 1960

140. Industrial building (Godinë industrial), Sarandë, 1960

141. Dormitory of the Pedagogical School (*Konvikt i Shkollës Pedagogjike*), Elbasan, 1960

142. Building complex (Kompleks godinash), Gjirokastër, 1960

143. Reception house No. 3 (*Shtëpia e Pritjes Nr.3*), Vlorë, 1960

144. Fabrication nomenclatures (*Nomenklatura për fabrikim*), 1960

145. House of Sami Baholli (*Shtëpia e sh. Sami Baholli*), Tirana, 1960

146. Villa prototype (*Vilë tip*), 1960

147. Residential building in Block (*Godinë banimi në Bllok*), Tirana, 1961

148. Restoration of the 17 Nentori Cinema (*Rikonstruksioni I Kinemasë "17 Nentori"*), Tirana, 1961

149. Tourism hotel (*Hotel Turizmi*), Gjirokastër, 1961

150. Party Committee Building (*Komiteti i Partisë*), Gjirokastër, 1961

151. Dormitory (*Konvikt*), Laç, 1961

152. Addition to the tobacco fermentation plant (*Shtesë e Uzinës së Fermentimit*), Durrës, 1961

153. Villa in Dajt (*Vila në Dajt*), Dajt, 1961

154. Four-story residential tower with stone (*Banesë Kullë me gurë 4-katëshe*), Gjirokastër, 1962

155. Building "Y" at Durrës Beach (*Godinë "Y" në Plazhin e Durrësit*), 1962–65

156. Residential buildings (*Ndërtesa banimi*), Kukës, 1962

157. Residential buildings (*Godina banimi*), Sarandë, 1962

158. Villa in Dhërmi (*Vila në Dhërmi*), Dhërmi, 1962

159. Addition to the tourism hotel (*Shtesë e Hotelit të Turizmit*), Gjirokastër, 1962

160. Villa in Pogradec (*Vila në Pogradec*), Pogradec, 1963

161. Adaptation of a building in Block (*Adaptim godine në Bllok*), 1963

162. The Fallen Cemetery (*Varrezat e Dëshmoreve*), Dhërmi, 1963

163. Bar-buffet (*Bar-bufe*), Kamëz, 1963

164. Residential building (*Godinë banimi*), Kamëz, 1963

165. Orthodox Church (*Kisha Orthodokse*), Tirana, 1963

166. Officers' Club (*Klubi i Oficerëve*), Gjirokastër, 1963

167. Two-story villa (*Vilë dykatëshe*), Vlorë, 1964

168. Villa No. 3 (*Vila Nr. 3)*, Pogradec, 1964

169. Adjustments at the Cold Springs (*Sistemime në Ujin e Ftohtë*), Vlorë, 1964

170. Fountain in Kuz-Baba (*Shatërvan në Kuz-Baba*), Vlorë, 1964

171. Residential buildings prototype for NBSH (*Godina banimi tip për NBSH*), 1964

172. Residential buildings in Hazmurat (*Godina banimi në Hazmurat*), Gjirokastër, 1964

173. Residential building "J" at Durrës Beach (*Godina e banimit "J" në Plazhin e Durrësit*), 1964

174. Residential building No. 15 (the former Soviet Embassy) in New Tirana (*Godinë banimi Nr. 15 [ish Ambasada Sovjetike] në Tiranën e Re*), Tirana, 1964

175. Kuz-Baba Park (*Parku Kuz-Baba*), Vlorë, 1964

176. Villa "A" at Durrës Beach (*Vila "A" në Plazhin e Durrësit*), 1965

177. Villa No. 1 of the President (*Vila Nr.1 e Presidentit*), 1965

178. Alteration of the façade of the Cine-theater (*Ndryshimi i pamjes së Kinoteatrit*), *Fier*, 1965

179. Instructions for roller window shades (*Udhëzime mbi dritaret me roleta*), 1965

180. Experimental metal windows (*Dritare metalike eksperimentale*), 1966

181. Government residential building in New Tirana (*Godinë banimi për udhëheqësa në Tiranën e Re*), Tirana, 1966

182. Saranda Hospital (*Spitali i Sarandës*), 1966

183. Residential buildings with a single-loaded corridor prototype (*Godina banimi tip ballator*), Laç, 1966

184. Erseka Hospital (*Spitali i Ersekës*), 1967

185. Residential buildings (*Godina banimi*), Sarandë, 1967

186. Puka Hospital (in collaboration with V. Perolli) (*Spitali i Pukës [në bashkëpunim me V. Perolli]*), Puka, 1966

187. Hospital for Infectious Diseases (in collaboration with M. Çano) (*Spitali Infektiv [në bashkëpunim me M. Çano]*),Tirana, 1966

188. Residential building in S.M.T (*Godinë banimi në S.M.T.*), Delvinë, 1966

189. Pediatric Hospital (in collaboration with M. Çano, V. Perolli, and F. Alimehmeti) (*Spitali i Pediatrisë [në bashkëpunim me M. Çano, V. Perolli, dhe F. Alimehmeti]*), Durrës, 1967

190. Peshkopia Hospital (*Spitali i Peshkopisë*), Peshkopia, 1967

191. Pogradec Hospital (*Spitali i Pogradecit*), Pogradec, 1968

192. Polyclinic Hospital (*Spitali Poliklinik*), Kukës, 1968

193. Party Committee Building (*Komiteti i Partisë*), Tepelenë, 1968

194. Çorovoda Hospital (*Spitali i Çorovodës*), 1969

195. Pathology Hospital (*Spitali Patologjik*), Tirana, 1969

196. Prefabricated pressed wood panels (*Panele prej pupuliti të parapërgatitura*), 1968

197. Two-story residential building with prefabricated pressed wood panels (*Banesë dykatëshe të parafabrikuara prej panele pupuliti*), 1969–70

198. Thermal baths (*Banja termale*), Peshkopi, 1970

199. Kruja Hospital (*Spitali i Krujës*), Kruja, 1973

200. Control tower (*Kulla e Vrojtimit*), Rinas, 1973

201. Thermal station (Stacion termal), Bilaj-Fushëkrujë, 1974

202. Powerful Radiology Center (in collaboration with M. Çano) (*Q.F.R.—Qendra e Fuqishme Radiologjike [në bashkëpunim me M. Çano]*), Tirana, 1974

7. Appendix

SKËNDER KRISTO LUARASI MEDICAL INSTITUTIONS[80]

I. HOSPITALS

1. Origin and Development of Hospitals during Different Ages

The origin of the hospital in its true sense, as a complex of facilities designated for the accommodation, treatment, and care of the sick, cannot be determined precisely.

Its development over the ages can, however, be traced by studying numerous works and quotations by historians as well as archaeological discoveries dating back to ancient times.

According to studies, in ancient Egypt, medicines were usually made in small buildings, next to religious saints such as SERAPIDE, ESMOS, etc. Sick travelers were received and treated here. The treatment was based on magical formulas and practices with a superstitious character.

In Greece, medicine was practiced in the so-called XENODOCHIUM; poor foreigners were treated here, while sick poor local residents were treated at the Saint ESCULAPIO[81] using magic formulas. Such centers, called ASCLEPEIONS, gained their therapeutic importance starting in the sixth century (BCE). At these treatment centers (IATREIA), medicine broke free of superstitious influence through incorporating a scientific basis.

Based on the data, it is likely that something similar happened in Albania at the same time. Here we thus have a similar case, where, based on the cult, the sick were taken for healing in the temple of ASCLEPIUS. Archaeological discoveries made in Albania, particularly after liberation (1944), in old sewers, aqueducts, public baths, and thermal baths testify to the high level of hygiene and culture of our people at that time.

[80] "Medical Institutions" is an unpublished manuscript by Skënder Kristo Luarasi. The manuscript is not dated, but judging by the references used, it may have been written in the early 1970s. The manuscript was translated into English by the author of this book and is reprinted here, adhering as much as possible to the formatting of the original document. While it makes reference to figures, they are lacking in the original manuscript. Its translation and reproduction here, however, provides figures according the references of the original manuscript. Only the reference numbers change.

[81] Esculapio is the Latin name for the Greek god of medicine, Asclepius. The latter term is used in the next paragraph.

It is known that the Romans took care of their soldiers, both in the immediate vicinity during battles, and at military hospitals near fortified centers. The Roman military hospital near the German city of Düsseldorf (100 BCE), which was discovered by historians and is shown here in figure A.1, is worth mentioning as one example. As can be seen in the picture, the rooms with beds were arranged in the form of a horseshoe, separated by corridors between them. Service rooms were arranged between the two rooms with bed. In the center toward the porch was the canteen.

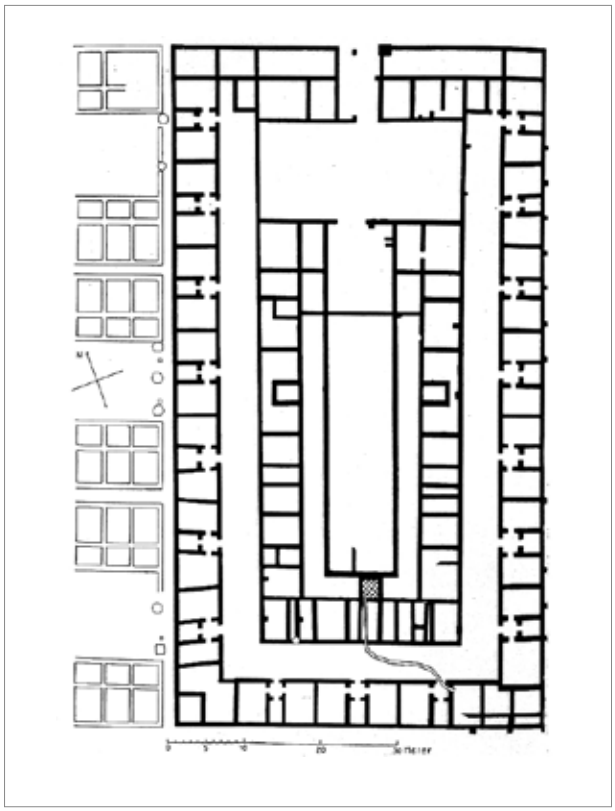


Figure A.1

Roman Military Hospital-Valetudinarium, late first century CE (CC BY 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commons)

The constant wars with enslaved peoples and the subsequent fall of the Roman Empire, led to the emergence and spread of various epidemics. Unable to cope with these epidemics, medicine began losing prestige for people at that time; the Christian religion, which had then begun to exert a strong influence on people, benefited from this. The sick found refuge in churches and monasteries, where priests practiced their empirical healing. The data show that something similar happened in Albania.

The word ‘hospital’ has its origins in the sixth century with the meaning of hosting or housing the sick in buildings for medical purposes. Churches and monasteries began being used for this purpose. The first monastery-hospital was opened in Monte Cassino, Italy. This form of shelter-treatment and care for the sick in religious institutions spread quickly throughout Europe, including the Balkans.

Later, with the Ottoman occupation, tekkes for the shelter-treatment and care for the sick were added, and continued to be found in our country until the beginning of the twentieth century. In the rest of Europe, however, the religious influence on the accommodation and treatment of the ill lasted until the eighteenth century. The reasons for the departure from this practice will be explained later.

Health centers located near dioceses, churches, monasteries, or, as in many cases, within them, had a primitive composition and lack of hygiene. The sick were placed in large, high rooms, with little light or ventilation and constant humidity. Straw beds positioned next to each other served up to four sick individuals, regardless of the type of ailment they had.

According to data from that time, it turns out that the planimetric form of monastery hospitals was that of the cross; presumably, in honor of the religious concept of Christianity. But, in fact, it seems that this form resulted from functional considerations and due to the more rational control provided by the arms. This cross-shaped layout continued to be used until the end of the eighteenth century. Figure A.2 provides an example of a monastery hospital in the shape of a cross that was built in Italy in medieval times. Another architectural and functional element often found in the hospitals of that time was the portico. It is likely that this element originated in monasteries. Later on, in the Renaissance period, this motif began forming one of the main features of the structures for hospitals that were developed in various creative forms by the masters of that period.

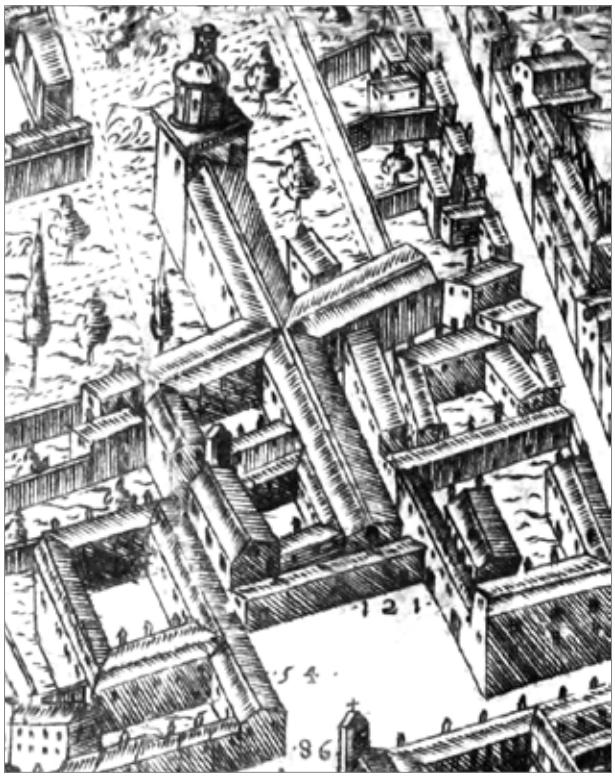


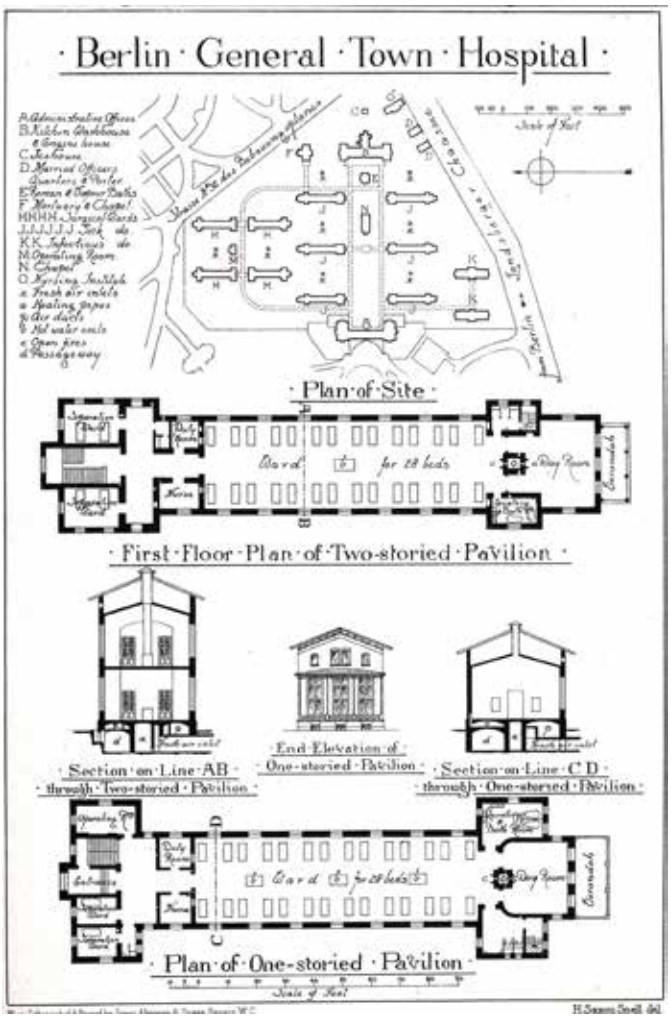
Figure A.2

Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, Florence, 1288, *Pianta del buonsignori, dettaglio 121 Santa Maria Nuova* (I, Sailko, CC BY-SA 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>, via Wikimedia Commons)

Based on what has been said thus far, it appears that hospital assistance developed in various forms after its inception. It has also been mentioned that hospital centers were run for the most part by religious institutions from the sixth to the eighteenth century. It also seems that religion was given central importance in such institutions; the priests offered prayers to reduce or alleviate the ailments of the sick. Due to the numerous epidemics during the medieval period, these hospitals, as mentioned above, contained large halls with a capacity for 300 to 500 patients, but had a significant lack of hygiene. Faced with this difficult situation, there was an urgent need to take measures in connection with hygiene and sanitation. The impetus for this important shift was provided by the Englishman John Howard, who created a new approach to the design of hospitals. This took place at the end of the eighteenth century and the new approach consisted of dividing the wards up according to particular illnesses, with rooms with air and abundant lighting, along with sufficient spaces for services. This shift in the field of hospital construction gave rise to the ward system. Figure A.3 shows the general plan of a hospital with wards in Charlottenburg, Germany, with a capacity of 800 beds, constructed in 1903.

Figure A.3

General Town Hospital, Berlin: two floor plans and a plan of the site, with a key. Photolithograph after H. Saxon Snell (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0)



All these changes and advances in the field of construction as well as medical equipment, caused the existence of health institutions to become a state enterprise. As a result, this led to the conclusion of the influence and administration of hospitals by religious entities by the end of the eighteenth century.

2. Development of Hospital Assistance in Albania until 1944

As mentioned above, hospital assistance in Albania during the medieval period and later on during the Ottoman occupation was provided mainly in churches, monasteries, and tekkes. Medical services there were provided in a primitive and, in many cases, superstitious manner.

It was only around the end of the nineteenth century that a military hospital was built in Shkodër, with space for 150 patients. The building had two stories, with the rooms for the patients on the top floor and the treatment and administration rooms below. A short time later, a small hospital run by Catholic religious institutions was opened in the city of Shkodër. Around 1903, a small hospital with space for ten to twelve patients and an outpatient clinic was opened in Durrës.

There was no hospital or outpatient clinic in Tirana until the first hospital opened in there in 1919 with twenty beds in a building converted for this purpose. In 1920, an old two-story building next to the clock tower was converted into a hospital, and subsequently into the Hotel Elbasan. Constructed at the time of the Ottoman Empire, this building did not fulfill even the simplest hygienic or medical requirements.

It was only in 1932 that the first true hospital was completed in Tirana, on the site where Civil Hospital No. 1 is located today. This hospital had a capacity of 200 beds and was designed in the form of wards.

In other Albanian cities, with a few exceptions such as Korçë and Vlorë, hospitals were housed in buildings adapted for this purpose. Most of them, as in Gjirokastër, Durrës, Fier, etc., were old buildings and offered almost no comfort. The anti-popular regimes of the time showed little interest in the health sector, and the few hospitals that were set up both before and during the Italian occupation compared poorly with those in other civilized countries.

In 1944, with the liberation of the homeland, a new era finally began for healthcare as well as for other sectors, as will be seen later.

3. General Characteristics of today's Hospitals

Hospitals are used for the treatment of inpatients. These are divided into:

a) General hospitals

b) Hospitals with specialized profiles

c) Long-term hospitals or sanatoriums

a) General hospitals are those that include various departments, including pathology, surgery, pediatrics, infectious diseases, obstetrics and gynecology, neurology, etc. After the Second World War, the polyclinic for the treatment of outpatients was added as an integral ward of the general hospital. This system, which has begun being used in our country in recent years, has the following positive aspects:

- The simultaneous use of diagnostic-therapeutic devices for the needs of both the hospital and the polyclinic
- Diagnostic examinations of patients by the doctor of the polyclinic ward
- The immediate hospitalization of patients in emergencies
- Economic benefits resulting from the concentration of administrative and technical aspects

Hospitals with polyclinics and modern technologies began to be designed and built in Albania starting in 1966, such as the one in Sarandë with a capacity of 150 beds, in Pogradec with a capacity of 105 beds, in Kukës with a capacity of 230 beds, and in Çorovodë with a capacity of 102 beds. Figure A.4 shows the plan for the Çorovodë Hospital, designed in 1969.

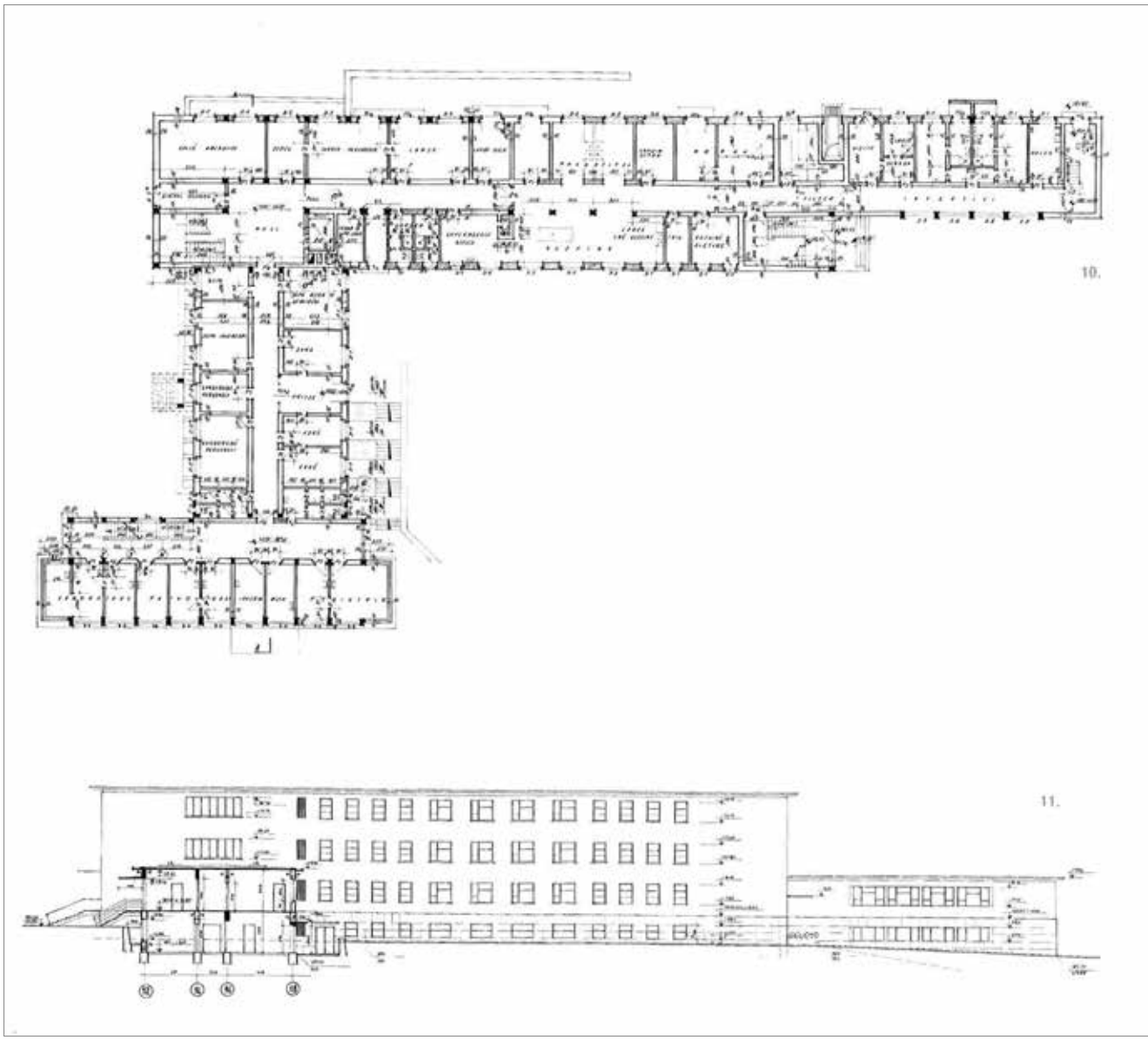


Figure A.4 Skënder Luarasi, Çorovodë Hospital, 1969, construction documents, facade and first floor plan (TCAC).

The plan for this hospital includes the polyclinic ward in the front (northern orientation), the admission ward, the laboratories and pharmacy in the middle, the ward for hospitalizations with southern orientation, and the infectious diseases ward at the bottom right. The figure shows the arrangement of departments based on technology; right in front is the polyclinic, admission in the middle, and finally the ward for hospitalizations. The infectious diseases ward has a separate entrance. The wards are separate, but simultaneously connected by the corridors.

b) Hospitals with specialized profiles are those that deal with the treatment of specific illnesses, including infectious diseases, oncology, pediatrics, etc. One example is the new Hospital for Infectious Diseases in Tirana with a capacity of 200 beds, designed in 1966 (figs. 3.2.13–3.2.15).

c) Long-term hospitals or sanatoriums are those that deal with the treatment of the chronically ill. These hospitals are divided into two categories, the rural and the urban. While based on their capacity, they are divided into small (up to 100 beds), medium (100–400 beds), and large (more than 400 beds).

Hospitals in the city where research and demonstrations are conducted for teaching purposes are called polyclinics.

The capacity of hospitals is determined on the basis of a certain index of beds per 1000 inhabitants. The determination of the index depends on several factors, including the climate, transport network aspects, etc. The optimal index usually used in developed countries ranges between 10 to 15 beds per 1000 inhabitants. In our country, according to the data, there are currently roughly 8 beds per 1000 inhabitants, and according to the five-year plan, in 1975 we will have over 11 beds per 1000 inhabitants. But it should not be forgotten that today the index correlates to health institutions of which over 80% are in cities, so there is a need for strengthened design and construction in villages and cooperatives to balance the unified ratio for the entire Republic.

4. Functional Division of Hospitals

The hospital of today is a complex building due to the numerous relations it has. As capacity and profiles increase, so do the design complexities. Based on the functional schemes, there is the following division of hospitals:

a) Pavilion system

b) Centralized system

c) Mixed system

a) The decentralized pavilion system, as previously mentioned, was introduced in the late eighteenth century, spread during the nineteenth century, and is used in part until today. The characteristic of this system consists of the composition of separate volumes with few floors and connected by a corridor. This system prolongs and complicates the provision of services to patients, results in a duplication of service facilities, and consequently raises the cost of construction and operation.

   Today, the pavilion system is used in rare cases, as, for example, when an infectious disease ward is part of a general hospital, or in cases where construction takes place in areas with seismic activity.

b) The centralized system means bringing sectors—hospitalization, treatment, and diagnostics—together in a single building. This system makes construction economical, rationalizes the spatial layout, and is conducive to providing services to patients.

c) The mixed system involves positioning the patient rooms, diagnostics, and service corpus on the same plot of land, but separately in the case of the infectious diseases and obstetrics and gynecology wards, or one of them.

The use of a centralized system reduces the amount of land required for the hospital, the length of roads and underground communications, the size of the building, and overall, as mentioned above, the cost of construction. These circumstances explain the widespread use of this system. The spread of the centralized system began before the Second World War, continued after it, and is still being perfected today.

It is worth mentioning that the Gjirokastër hospital was erected in the first years after liberation. This four-story building with a capacity of 249 beds is designed according to the centralized system (figs. 4.3.4.1–4.3.4.8).

Hospitals that were designed and built later, like those in Durrës, Berat, Peshkopi, Lushnjë, etc., are of the mixed system with wards. As such, we can say that these hospitals do not provide an optimal solution in terms of either cost or functionality. The hospitals designed and built during the fourth five-year plan and onwards have the most advantageous economic index and the most advanced functional layout.

5. General Plan of Hospitals

The land area required for hospitals depends on their capacity and type. The minimum land area for general hospitals (in foreign countries) is taken as follows: 2 hectares are required for a 100-bed hospital, 3 hectares for a hospital with 200 beds, 4 hectares for one with 400 beds, and 5 hectares for a hospital with 600 beds.

Hospitals should be located on separate and fenced-in plots of land. In planning hospital systems, the division into zones is the first thing to be considered. The main areas of the hospital plot are the park area for the treatment corpus, the polyclinic area, and the economic-service corpus area. The treatment corpus should cover the highest percentage of the parcel of land.

The hospital park should optimally be located to the south of the medical treatment corpus, and all entrances to this treatment corpus, apart from the entrance for patients to access the park, should preferably be positioned on the north side.

When planning the economic-service corpus, the dominant direction of winds should be taken into account to prevent smoke from entering the medical treatment corpus. For the connection of the medical treatment corpus with the economic-service corpus, the construction of tunnels is recommended. The anatomy-pathology corpus should be positioned in isolation, so that it is not visible from the treatment corpus or the park.

It is recommended that the entrances to the medical treatment corpus and the economic-service corpus be separate. It is also desirable that the anatomy-pathology corpus have a separate entrance.

The general layout of hospitals and the construction of the fence should be done in such a way that it excludes the possibility of outpatients passing from the area of the polyclinic to that of the park designated for hospitalized patients. Greenery should cover no less than 60% of the hospital grounds. The hospital grounds should be isolated from the street by means of a protective green belt of 20 to 30 meters in width. The hospitalization (treatment) corpus should be positioned no less than 30 meters away from the boundary of the plot of land.

6. Main Hospital Departments and Facilities

In order to have the most rational and convenient organization in a hospital with a centralized system, the following conditions must be provided by the design: The isolation of hospital wards; particularly necessary is the isolation of the obstetrics ward, children's ward, and the polyclinic, when they are located in the main building. Convenient connections between wards to ensure the good organization of treatment of patients and work by service personnel. Optimal orientation of spaces with respect to light. Most of the patient rooms (90%) should be oriented to the south or southeast, while surgery and first aid should face north. The view from patient rooms should not be obscured by protruding buildings, which means that the planimetric plan of the hospital on the southern or south-eastern side should be straight and not broken.

When designing hospitals with a centralized system, it is necessary to take into account the best possible organization of the main movements as follows: the movement of patients from the entrance to the admission ward and from there to the inpatient wards, with separate entrances for the pediatric and obstetrics wards; the movement of patients from inpatient wards to surgery, physiotherapy, and x-ray departments; the movement of visitors to patients and the route for patients to leave the hospital; the routes for the removal of garbage, laundry, and cadavers; the routes for food transport and food supply delivery, in-house food storage, and food preparation; the transport to wards and from there to dining rooms or patient rooms; the route from the polyclinic to the x-ray and physiotherapy departments, and the laboratory. All these routes should be well isolated from each other and preferably as short as possible.

It should be borne in mind that the organization of the circulation diagram begins with determining the placement of entrances to the hospital building. For instance, the entrance to the polyclinic should be located near the road, while the entrance to the admissions ward should be located away from the visitors' entrance.

In hospitals with a height of more than two floors, it is necessary to install elevators, including ones for transporting beds, with dimensions of 195 x 270 cm. The width of the corridor and the staircase landings should be sufficient for the movement of beds and food carts. The height of the rooms varies according to the climate conditions. In cold places, rooms should have a height of 2.80 meters, while in hot places they should be 3.00 meters or more in height. In our country, the floor-to-floor height of 3.30 is used on the seacoast, while that of 3.00 is used in colder areas.

General hospitals with polyclinics should consist of three main corpuses: the inpatient corpus, the diagnostic-therapeutic corpus, and the polyclinic corpus. The diagnostic-therapeutic corpus, which accommodates the x-ray department, physiotherapy department, and laboratories, should be set up in such a way as to serve both inpatients and the polyclinic. Moreover, when this corpus provides services for the polyclinic, the entrances to the inpatient block should be closed, and, vice versa, when the diagnostic-therapeutic corpus provides services for the inpatient block, access to the polyclinic should be closed off. These closure measures are necessary in order to prevent uncontrolled intrusions by outpatients in the inpatient building, or or vice versa.

Inpatients access the visiting area through the vestibule of the reception area. The emergency rooms should be located next to the visiting area in case first aid is required. In relatively large hospitals, the admission area is also equipped with x-ray and other diagnostic spaces. After the visit the patient undergoes sanitary processing, i.e. washes him/herself, hands over personal clothing, puts on hospital clothing, and heads to the ward.

In the reception ward there are rooms with beds for temporary stays. These are used until the patients' diagnoses are determined.

In planning the reception area, care must be taken in determining a convenient route for patients to take from the main entrance to the elevator. In admission wards for children or patients with infectious diseases, cubicles

with external entrances and separate entrances for the isolation of the sick should be provided (fig. 3.2.5).

Inpatient wards are located in the main part of the hospital and make up roughly 50 to 60% of the entire complex. This composition includes all the necessary rooms with beds for long-term patients, rooms for providing daily treatment and services, and rooms for short-term hospitalizations. Usually, an entire floor, called a station, consists of 50 to 60 beds, divided up into two substations with 25 to 30 beds each.

The main facilities of the area where patients are located are the patient rooms. Rooms are designed with 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 beds. For the seriously ill and for patients in isolation, some rooms with one bed are provided (about 3 to 8%). In foreign countries, the space for one bed in a shared room is 7 m² and for rooms with a single bed 9 m². In our country, an area of 5-6 m² is provided in the first case, while the area for rooms with one bed is 9 m². Rooms with 2 and 4 beds are common. But, recently, rooms with 3 and 6 beds have also been introduced, since this is a more economical and practical solution.

Patient rooms should be oriented so that sunlight penetrates the entire depth of the room up to the last bed. The lighting of the room in relation to the surface is taken as 1:5 to 1:6. The windows of the rooms should be wide. This allows the rays of the sun to penetrate deep into the rooms during the winter season, while rooms are protected from heat during the summer due to the high position of the sun. The doors of the rooms are single doors with a width of 110 to 115 cm; this is, however, a foreign norm, while a width of 100 cm is commonly found in our country.

The auxiliary facilities for inpatients are divided into two groups: Those that serve the entire ward such as the dining room, perhaps a kitchen, the doctor's room for monitoring patients, the ward manager's room, and the head nurse's room. Facilities that serve each station, or substation, include a bathroom with bathtub, shower, bidet, and toilet for the sick, the infirmary, the toilet for the staff, space for the shift nurse, and a common room for patients.

Usually, roughly 50% of inpatients in general hospitals are considered bedridden; therefore, the area of the common rooms and dining rooms should comprise 50% of the total amount of space. The common room area should include 1 m² for each patient, while this is 1.30 m² for the dining room. These

premises should be comfortable, well-lit, and equipped with comfortable furniture. In the dining room, meals are served from the kitchen area, while they are transported to patient rooms with special, heated carts.

In each station or substation, it is recommended that glazed verandas be built to provide patients access to the open air. Modern medicine attaches special importance to the benefits of fresh air for the healing process. Verandas are built based on a calculation of 3 m² per bed and should provide space for 30% of the patients. Verandas in substations can also serve as shared verandas. In children's wards verandas are a must.

The corridors in stations and hospitalization wards may be one-sided or two-sided. In the first case the service areas are positioned at the end of the station or ward or in special niches; in the second case, all the service and treatment rooms are located opposite the bedrooms. In this case, to provide more adequate lighting in the corridor, pockets of light are constructed and also serve as rest or relaxation areas for the sick. A comparison of one-sided and two-sided corridor construction has shown that the latter provides better hospital utilization conditions and costs about 11% less than one-sided corridor construction. In addition, two-sided corridor construction facilitates more rational structural solutions. In this case, there is usually a plan with two spans and a longitudinal retaining wall in the middle. Figure 4.3.4.5 on page 176 shows the plan of a ward or station with substations.

The figure shows the placement of patient rooms on one side, opposite those for treatment or services. Usually, the treatment and nursing rooms are situated in the middle of the station or substation. Service rooms and toilets are usually positioned on the side. Pockets of light should be positioned in the middle of the corridor so that the lighting is the same over the entire length. The width of the toilets for the sick should be convenient located and no less than 1.00 meters in width.

SURGERY BLOCK

This is a complex in which the main premises are those used for operations. The area of an operating room with an operating bed should be no less than 30 m² (a foreign norm), with a width of no less than 4.20 meters and a depth

of no less than 4.60 meters. The rotating operating bed with dimensions of 2 x 0.5 meters is positioned in the center of the room.

The windows of operating rooms should be oriented to the north or northwest. Natural light is 1:4 to 1:5 of the floor surface. In the operating room, protruding walls are not allowed and the wall surfaces are covered from floor to ceiling with light green majolica tiles.

In the immediate vicinity of the operating room are the preparation and sterilization rooms. In the preparation room, the surgeon and the assistant prepare for surgery, wash, and disinfect their hands, put on sterilized clothing, etc. From here the surgeon can observe the preparations for the operation in the operating room through the glass (fig. A.5).

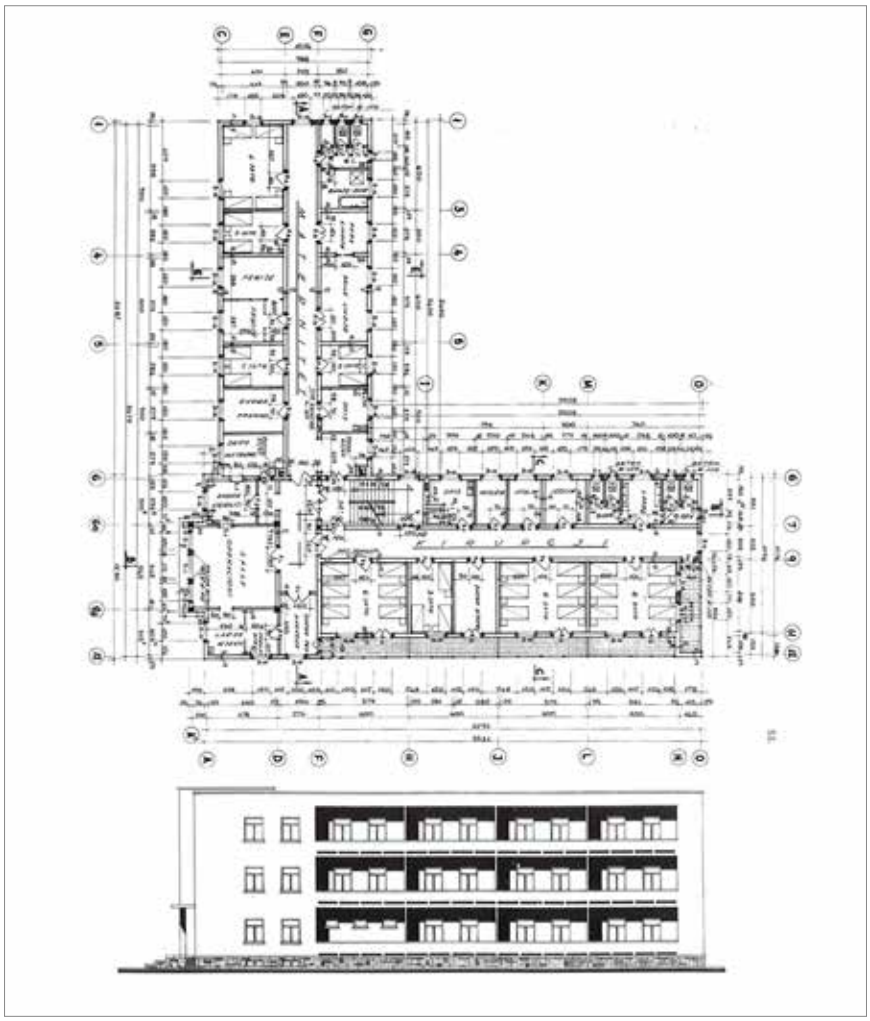


Figure A.5

Skënder Luarasi,
Lezha Hospital, 1965,
construction documents:
facade and first floor plan
(TCAC).

The sterilization chamber is designated for the sterilization of instruments, bandaging materials, and the preparation of sterilized water and solutions. The delivery of sterilized instruments and materials to the operating room takes place via a delivery counter. One sterilization room can be used by two operating rooms.

The composition and total area of the surgery block depend on the capacity of the specific hospital. One operating room can serve 30 to 50 surgical beds. In larger hospitals, the construction of a special septic surgery room is recommended.

In the surgery block, the following service premises should be provided: various apparatuses and devices, materials, and statistics, and rooms for contaminated clothes and used materials. Rooms designed for anesthesia and for preparing patients for surgery are also recommended.

X-RAY DEPARTMENT

This department has gained particular importance for diagnostics and therapy in today's hospitals. The x-ray device is placed in a cabinet with an area of 24 to 37 m², depending on the type of device. Next to it is the photo lab with an area of no less than 6 m². The area of the radiotherapy cabinet is 24 m² (6 x 4 meters). The observation cabin, from which the medical staff observes the patient and the steers the device through the glass, is built next to the cabinet. Patients enter the x-ray room through the observation cabin. The layout of the x-ray department also includes a waiting room for patients and the doctor's office.

The x-ray department is compactly positioned in a block. The wall and ceiling surfaces of the x-ray cabinet should not allow radiological rays to pass through them. All the walls and ceilings, apart from the exterior walls, should therefore be plastered with a mortar composition that includes barite.

PHYSIOTHERAPY DEPARTMENT

This department provides hydrotherapy, electrotherapy, and various types of physiotherapy procedures. Due to its humid environment, the hydrotherapy area is usually located on the lower floors. Individual cabins are built for electrotherapy treatment. The depth of the cabins should be 200 centimeters and the width 130 to 180 centimeters, depending on the type of equipment. The physiotherapy area should have facilities for patients to wait and rest. The doctor's office is located in the middle of the area.

It should be noted that the importance of this department has only begun to be considered in our country in recent years. Outside of major cities, physiotherapy is provided to a very limited extent.

PHARMACY

The pharmacy should be located in such a way that it remains isolated, but is still conveniently connected to all the wards of the hospital as well as to the storage spaces in the basement. The pharmacy's main production facility is the laboratory, where the solutions are prepared and further processed into medicines. A tank with special sterile conditions is built for the preparation of medicines. The layout of the pharmacy also includes glass-washing, sterilization, and storage areas.

CLINICAL DIAGNOSTICS LABORATORY

The clinical diagnostics laboratory is an important part of the hospital. Analyses are performed here with laboratory methods to provide an objective diagnosis of illnesses.

Depending on the capacity of the hospital, laboratories may have several areas, including a general clinic as well as biochemical, bacteriological, and serum and hematological (blood) tests.

The coordinated positioning of facilities in laboratories is determined by the technological research processes involved. The laboratory should be isolated from other parts of the hospital. The bacteriological laboratory should also be isolated from the rest of the laboratory areas.

KITCHEN

If the kitchen is located on one of the upper floors, the main storage spaces for food and other goods are positioned in the basement. Foodstuffs are then transported from the basement to the kitchen via special elevators.

When the whole kitchen unit is located in the basement, the food is then transported to the other floors in elevators designated for this purpose. There are also cases when the kitchen unit is located in a separate building, usually situated centrally and close to the other hospital buildings. Such an approach is convenient for the staff and seems to be more convenient in general.

When designing the kitchen, it should be taken into account that transport routes and the distance to patients are as short as possible so that patients can be served well.

The orientation of kitchen should preferably be to the north.

THE POLYCLINIC

As is known, the polyclinic is one of the three main corpuses of a general hospital. Its size and composition are determined by the capacity of the hospital. Separate polyclinics are planned on the basis of population and the annual check-ups per resident.

The main facilities of the polyclinic are the waiting rooms, with an area of 10 to 15 m², from which patients enter the examination rooms. Waiting rooms should communicate with the facilities that serve as reception for the patients.

In large polyclinics, doctors' offices are grouped according to speciality: surgery, therapy, dentistry, maternity, etc. The examination rooms for tuberculosis, dermatology, and psycho-neurology should preferably be located separately.

The polyclinic should include a room for storing files and receiving laboratory tests.

Admission to the children's department of the polyclinic must be separate. To protect other patients against infection, to which children are quite predisposed, children should only be able to enter the vestibule through a disinfection area, where the initial check-up also takes place. Adjacent to this area is the examination room, which is connected to an isolation room for sick children. These premises have separate exits.

PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

It is necessary to provide special rooms with individual lockers for storing clothes and showers for bathing for the medical staff of the hospital. Changing rooms and showers are usually located in the basement or on the ground floor.

The offices of the chief physician and his deputy, the accountant and cash desk, the medical office, the Party premises, and people's organizations are found in the main building if the hospital has only one single block.

In large hospitals it is also necessary to provide a conference room, as well as a dining hall specifically for the staff.

ANATOMY-PATHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

This department must be planned for every hospital. This is where autopsies and related laboratory tests are performed and cadavers are temporarily stored until they are handed over to family members. This department is usually located in a separate building, which is sometimes part of the service corpus. In hospitals with a single-block system with basements, the anatomy-pathology department can easily be positioned in the basement, but also requires its own separate exit.

AUXILIARY DEPARTMENTS

Today's hospitals have complex installations and offer numerous services. For this reason, many facilities with technical-service functions are foreseen here.

In the main building, these premises include ventilation rooms, machinery compartments for elevators, refrigeration rooms, spaces for storing various goods, and a telephone substation. The main technical and service facilities are usually located in the service building, which is either a separate building or connected to the main building.

ARCHITECTURAL COMPOSITION OF HOSPITALS

The architectural composition of hospitals and their layouts is diverse. It depends on the composition of the wards, capacity, number of floors, construction system, and many other factors.

The layout of a centralized hospital is influenced by the number of inpatient stations located on each floor and their arrangement in relation to the service and treatment areas (figs. 3.2.10–3.2.15).

There is usually one station per floor in small-capacity hospitals, and two stations in medium-capacity ones. The arrangement of the stations on one floor assists with isolation, since the connection between the stations takes place via a so-called neutral zone. The plan of such a hospital is often T-shaped; the treatment ward is located in the building adjacent to the central area.

This approach is also widely used when all service departments are located on the ground floor in the two-station layout.

In large-capacity hospitals, 4 to 6 inpatient substations are located on one floor. In such hospitals it is difficult to achieve favorable connections between patient rooms and diagnostic areas. One of the most suitable solutions for the layout in this case is widening the plan or, in other words, positioning treatment wards and service areas parallel to the hospitalization corpus and connected with it via corridors.

The layout of the hospital building depends particularly on the location of the surgery block. There are examples of positioning the surgery block both on the upper floors or in a building adjacent to the hospitalization block and facing north.

From an architectural perspective, hospitals are designed with respect to the volume and particularly the shape and size of the windows, the colors, the construction structure, and the exterior cladding materials. Large glass surfaces on verandas, operating rooms, inpatient rooms, etc. also have an architectural impact.

The construction volume and architectural details of hospitals must also fulfill hygienic requirements. Particular care should be paid to suppressing noise by installing soft floors with acoustic insulation material, and, when possible, a similar measure should be implemented in the ceilings.

II. SANATORIUMS

1. Functional Description

In sanatoriums, the medical-prophylactic treatment of patients is provided through a special regime based on the extensive use of healthy natural factors: air, water, and sun, and mineral springs and mud. While patients receive treatment in hospitals through the use of medicines and physiotherapeutic procedures, in sanatoriums these are secondary to treatment by means of strengthening, training, and tempering activities. Surgical interventions seldom take place here. It should be noted that tempering is done in an organized and agile way through relaxation and curated activities.

The specific treatment methods in sanatoriums also lead to changes in the layout patterns of these facilities. It should, however, be noted that there has recently been a convergence of approaches to treatment utilizing natural factors in both sanatoriums and hospitals. This has led to the inclusion of verandas and solariums in hospitals. Examples of this type include the general hospital in Gjirokastër, and the pediatric hospitals in Tirana, Durrës, etc.

It should also be noted that sanatoriums resemble holiday accommodations with respect to their organization, with the difference that special treatments are performed in the former. Since sanatoriums and holiday accommodations share similarities, they are designed based on a similar program, with the exception of the special treatment facilities that are found at sanatoriums.

2. General Design Rules for Sanatoriums

Sanatoriums are usually located in mountainous or coastal climates. The locations should be protected from strong winds, have a water source monitored by suitable laboratories, and be far away from areas at risk of infection. The sites where they are constructed must be connected to the road network and have access to the electrical grid.

Sanatoriums are designed with an open distribution and divided into parts for hospitality, services, and cultural-social activities. They are generally designed as a concentrated block. This is considered more economically advantageous since it does away with the need for some departments that would need to be situated in each building in the case of an open distribution plan.

Today, specialized sanatoriums are designed according to a unified program, with the exception of tuberculosis and pediatric clinics, which are distinguished by a specific layout and arrangement of the premises.

In tuberculosis sanatoriums, special attention is paid to the organization of air treatment procedures, based mainly on the organized treatment of patients. In this case, more spacious verandas are thus provided than in other types of sanatoriums.

There is open and concentrated distribution in both hospitals and sanatoriums. For economic and functional reasons, centralized construction has recently become more common. Figure 3.2.3 shows a view of the tuberculosis sanatorium in Tirana with a 550-bed capacity.

The floor height is usually 3.30 meters from floor to floor. A greater height is recommended for social areas such as dining rooms, gathering places, etc.

The sanatorium building is equipped with central heating, a water supply, a sewage system, electricity, and service annex buildings.

For large volume constructions, industrialized construction has recently become common, both in foreign countries and in our country. This means that unified dimensions should be used in the design, which thus facilitates the prefabrication of structural elements.

3. General Plan for Sanatoriums

The construction site must fulfill all the sanitary and hygienic requirements with respect to soil cleanliness, vegetation, insulation and ventilation, groundwater flow, etc. Sanatoriums are usually positioned in beautiful landscapes along the coast, lakes, or rivers, or panoramic locations.

In other countries, the land area per patient is roughly 200 to 250 m². In our country, 30 to 40% of this area is allotted per patient.

The sanatorium site should be no less than 500 meters away from residential and commercial areas. The site should also not be exposed to polluted air caused by factories etc. The area between the sanatorium and residential or commercial areas should be green. The green area of the sanatorium should be no less than 50% of the sanatorium site as a whole. The park is an integral part of the sanatorium complex, since it is essential for the medical treatment and recreation of patients. The park should therefore be designed with special care, and be enriched with picturesque qualities and a variety of atmospheres, etc. Quiet places for treatment, as well as spaces for sports activities and cultural recreation should be provided.

So that climate-therapeutic procedures can also take place in the park, solariums and shelters for patients in the open air are provided. The construction of these shelters should not impede the free circulation of air.

When sanatoriums are situated near the coast or rivers, air-solariums are built near the water in order to combine procedures that make use of sun, air, and water. There are separate areas for men and women, with the medical treatment pavilion, in which showers are usually located, positioned in between them.

In the park on the sanatorium grounds, various decorative sculptures of stone, wood, or other local materials are recommended.

The drafting of the general layout should be organically related to the admission area of the complex. In the centralized system, the sanatorium park is located around the main building. The sports and leisure areas are situated at a distance from the main building and located on the outskirts of the plot of land.

In the case of the block system, the main part of the park is usually organized in front of the dining hall and/or club. There are various planimetric examples connected with the pavilion system, but the main part of the layout must predominate over all the other parts of the grounds connected with it.

The service departments should be located at a distance from the main sanatorium buildings, so they can be organized independently, along with a separate entrance. The service buildings are separated from rest of the sanatorium buildings by the green area.

MAIN TYPES OF ENVIRONMENTS AND THEIR FUNCTIONAL ORGANIZATION

To better organize the treatment of and comprehensive service for patients in sanatoriums, the following groups of facilities should be defined: accommodations, medication-diagnostics areas, general services, food, reception, administration, and services.

The sizes of the main types of premises vary according to the capacity of the sanatorium, as well as whether they are situated in or outside the main building.

The main part of the sanatorium, which comprises up to 50% of the total volume, consists of spaces for patients, including bedrooms, treatment and service rooms, recreation areas, and open verandas.

The layout of the sanatorium is determined first and foremost by orienting the bedrooms toward the light. A good orientation for these rooms is toward the south or southeast, where sunlight does not penetrate into the depth of the room during the summer season and light protection is achieved by simple means; while rooms are well lit in their entire depth during the winter.

With an eastern or western orientation, on the contrary, sunlight penetrates the rooms during the summer and creates heat, particularly with western orientation, and it is also difficult to heat the whole environment during the winter.

Design norms for sanatoriums allow for a western or northern orientation for up to 25% of the beds. North-facing rooms are designated for patients who cannot tolerate heat. The southern orientation of the bedrooms takes place along the greater length of the corpus.

The main nucleus is the bedroom. The dimensions of this room determine the structure and construction of the space for beds. Rooms with two beds with an area of 12 m² are common. There are up to three rooms per ward with single beds, with an area of 9 m^2, but this depends on the capacity of the sanatorium.

Each bedroom of the sanatorium should have a wall-mounted sink and shelf. The wall that they are mounted on usually borders the corridor. In rooms with an area of 12 m², the dimensions between the axes are 4.80 meters. The width of the room is thus 2.80 meters from the axes of the partitioning walls. The bedside table for each patient is placed at the head of the bed.

A room width of 3.2 or 3.6 meters improves the proportions of the room, although this increases the length of the building, and, respectively, reduces the economic index.

Installing sanitary facilities with a bathtub and toilet in each room increases the cost and volume of construction. That is why only sinks are installed today, while baths or showers and toilets are built separately on each floor.

In front of the bedrooms, especially those facing south, building balconies or loggias for patients to relax in the open air is recommended.

In sanatoriums, just as in hospitals, the corridor in patient wards can be constructed with a one-sided or two-sided construction with pockets of light. The most economical solution is two-sided construction, which can provide ample lighting for the corridor if it is carried out with a good planimetric solution. The doctor's office and the nurses' room are located on the north side of the corridor in each patient ward. Doctors and nurses constantly monitor the patients' health and implement any procedures requiring special installations in the treatment ward.

TREATMENT DEPARTMENT

This department consists of diagnostic cabinets, physical therapy cabinets, laboratories, and the pharmacy.

The layout of the treatment cabinets depends on the profile of the sanatorium. The physiotherapy wards can be divided into two parts: one with water for a bathroom and shower room, and one for procedures, for instance, with ultraviolet light, that require electricity. Spaces for procedures that make use of water and clay are usually positioned on the ground floor. Other cabinets can be located upstairs. It should be borne in mind that all these should be laid out in a block in order to facilitate the patients' use of various procedures as well as supervision by medical staff during treatment.

The types of treatment also include outdoor pavilions, sunbathing, winter baths, and various air-related installations, which are located in the park, on the seafront, or by the lake or river.

FOOD DEPARTMENT

The food department consists of one or several dining rooms and production facilities, including a kitchen and spaces for preparation and storage. The kitchen is positioned between the dining room and the preparation room. It should be oriented toward the north and have good natural light. Adjacent to the kitchen is the food dispensing area. The area per person in the dining room is derived from the number of meals and by calculating 1.5 m² per person in foreign countries, while this rate is reduced to 1 to 1.15 m² per person in our country.

The number of seats is usually determined by the capacity of the sanatorium. For economic reasons, in our country the shift system is sometimes used, depending on the capacity of the sanatorium.

The height of the dining hall, in the case of foreign norms, is 3.9 meters. Orienting the dining room in such a way that beautiful panoramic views unfold from it is recommended. The Tirana Sanatorium is one example in which the dining halls have a panoramic view of the city. Building terraces or verandas where it is possible to eat in the open air in front of the dining room during the summer is recommended.

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS

A sanatorium's social environments should include a hall for variety shows, cinema screenings, and ancillary facilities, as well as spaces for games and relaxation, a buffet, billiard room, library-reading room, and photo lab. The capacity of the spaces is calculated based on 0.75 m² per person for the entire contingent of patients. All the social facilities should be located in one complex. The types of social environments mentioned above are common in foreign countries. In our country, such facilities have been reduced to the most necessary ones for economic reasons.

The hall is often located above the dining room, with which it forms a block of its own. This explains the homogeneity of hall structures with spatial volumes adapted to constructive use. Merging the hall and dining room in one volume forms a central complex.

The placement of the hall in one corpus along with treatment facilities makes it mandatory that this does not deprive the patients of tranquility.

When several sanatoriums are grouped together in one complex, it is then convenient to build one common hall for the entire complex.

ADMINISTRATIVE FACILITIES

These include the chief physician's office, the director's office, the office for accountants, offices for people's organizations, and so on. It should be borne in mind that these premises are often visited by outsiders, so that it is necessary to provide separate entry to this area.

Centralized heating technology and a laundry are also part of a sanatorium, along with workshops and storage spaces. All these premises should preferably be located in one building, separate from the main sanatorium building.

ARCHITECTURAL LAYOUT OF SANATORIUM BUILDINGS

In practice, there are three main approaches to the design and construction of sanatoriums:

1. Centralized sanatoriums, where all the types of facilities, apart from services, are located in one building.

2. Block-type sanatoriums, where the main types of facilities are located in buildings connected by corridors. These corridors are usually heated in the winter so that patients can move from building to building at any time of the year.

3. Pavilion-type sanatoriums, where the main types of facilities are situated in separate buildings that are not connected with each other.

In buildings of the centralized type, the connection between one type of facility and the others takes place inside the building. Favorable economic indicators are achieved with this example. The disadvantage of a centralized sanatorium, however, is the insufficient isolation of types of facilities, and, in particular cases, the unfavorable link to the surrounding nature. These shortcomings can nevertheless be resolved in most cases by an appropriate layout.

Block-type sanatoriums are quite common, which is easily explained: in these favorable conditions, connections between different types of facilities as well as favorable connections with nature and the surroundings are achieved.

Construction practice has shown that a good layout for sanatoriums is achieved by creating organic connections with the specific conditions of the site.

In complicated ridged or terraced situations with a difficult configuration, block- or pavilion-type sanatoriums are usually erected. It should be borne in mind that in the case of the pavilion type, communication routes are lengthened, many facilities such as vestibules, wardrobes, etc. are duplicated, and providing services and food to patients is more complex. In this case, there are thus unfavorable economic indicators. Based on these circumstances, it may be considered appropriate to use the example of facilities for exceptional cases, summer-season sanatoriums, and sanatoriums where various patients must be isolated, especially in cases when the site has a complex topography.

In addition to the three main examples in construction practice, there are also cases in which the layout of the sanatorium complex does not correspond to any of these three examples. We thus speak in this case about mixed layouts, which include a range of approaches to building layouts.

When designing sanatoriums, it should also be borne in mind that unlike other types of buildings, they are not located in built-up neighborhoods of cities, but instead in secluded, green places such as parks, forests, or along the coast. The sanatorium is thus less expensive in terms of construction, yet richer with respect to the panoramic view. It is therefore imperative to carefully study the configuration of the terrain and to utilize the natural beauty and the site's afforestation.

As mentioned above, the main trend in sanatorium architecture is achieving an organic connection with the surrounding nature, and hence creating conditions for actively making use of natural factors for the benefit of health and wellbeing.

This is achieved by positioning the buildings well and rationally, connecting them with the park from a planimetric perspective, constructing galleries, loggias, and verandas that can be accessed conveniently from the bedrooms, and convenient access to the park, etc.

Another specific feature of sanatoriums is their combining of the functions of social buildings and individual comfort of the highest possible quality. In sanatoriums, special attention should thus be given to the design of the interior. The comfort and beauty of the environment, furnishings, colors, and the type and quality of the materials used are all necessary to create the conditions for complete relaxation.

Simplicity, clarity, rationality, and convenience in the architectural layout, well-proportioned facilities, a good use of colors and materials, and a simple and beautiful realization of the premises are all ways and means that the architect should make use of to achieve a valuable architecture for sanatorium buildings.

This book provides a historiographical account and formal analysis of the architectural work of Skënder Kristo Luarasi (1908–1976). Luarasi studied architecture at Graz University of Technology (TU Graz). For forty years, until he died in 1976, Skënder Kristo Luarasi designed and supervised the construction of more than 250 buildings throughout Albania. Based on original drawings and archival material, this book punctuates key moments of Luarasi's oeuvre by staging it as an integral part of modern architecture in Albania. Modernism in Albania is often perceived as an *imported* affair, without a history of its own, as something 'dropped' into a so-called 'Balkan', 'folkloric' context. Contrary to such colonialist methodology, this book argues that there was already a modernism in Albania that was part of *international modernism*. It is in this context that this book reads the architectural work of Skënder Kristo Luarasi.

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