

## Amphitheatre of Durres

Country or territory:

ALBANIA

Name of organisation

compiling the information:

Institute of Monuments of Culture

Contact name:

Prof. Dr. Gjerak Karaiskaj

Email address:

imk@albmail.com



Name and address of building(s) or site:

AMPHITHEATRE OF DURRES  
Main Boulevard, Durres

Inventory reference number(s):

263

Building type(s):

Archaeological monument, amphitheatre

Main date(s):

2<sup>nd</sup> century AD

Current use(s):

archaeological monument accessible to the public

Significance:

The Amphitheatre of Durres, built in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, figures amongst the largest monuments of the Antiquity. It is the only monument of this type on Albanian territory. The amphitheatre is situated in the center of the city of Durres, the main port of Albania, at 35 km distance from the Capital. The founding of Durres, a city mentioned by writers and historians, dates back to 627 BC.

The monument has the shape of an ellipse with the 132.4 m x 113.2 m dimensions. The size of the arena is 61.4 m x 42.2 m, and it is 20 m high. Only one third of the amphitheatre was excavated during the archaeological research in the 1960s. The major part of the monument is built upon a footstep in the hill. Another part, excavated in the 1960s, is supported by annular and radial galleries on various levels.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, the amphitheatre ceased to be used in accordance with its main function (that is, gladiators' combats). In the 6<sup>th</sup> century a mortuary chapel, dedicated to Saint Asti, the first Bishop and martyr of Durres, was built on top of the amphitheatre. The chapel, famous for its mosaics, is significant as a testimony to the origins of Christianity in the city of Durres.

The amphitheatre suffered from looting. Today, a part of the arena is occupied by contemporary houses. However, restoration and rehabilitation projects have been prepared in order to integrate this significant landmark in the overall city development. Being surrounded by other important archaeological sites of the city, situated near the Archaeological Museum which displays a large number of valuable archaeological findings, the amphitheatre will play a major role in the future of cultural tourism in Albania.

---

Categories of significance:

Of international importance

The amphitheatre is significant because of its historic and archaeological values.

Categories of ownership or interest:

Documentation and bibliographic references:

Documentation

Relevant documentation is available at the Institute of Archaeology and at the Institute of Monuments of Culture. Surveys have been prepared but there is a lack of recent quality photographs. The only photographs available are in black and white, taken many years ago.

Bibliography

Koco Miho; *The amphitheatre of Durres.*

Condition:

Very poor: structural failure

Risk:

There is risk of deterioration of the mosaics and paintings. Risk is also linked to the illegal constructions.

Condition risk:

Slow decay, solution agreed but not implemented.

Technical assessments and costing:

An agreement between the University of Parma, Italy, and the Institute of Monuments of Culture, facilitated the process of evaluating the costs for the consolidation works and the cadastral survey in the amphitheatre. The results will be published by the end of 2005.

The restoration project, which will be implemented this year, includes excavation works in the arena, expropriation of the inhabitants and consolidation works in the sector of the staircase. The project foresees also the construction of a wooden staircase allowing use of the amphitheatre as a stage for shows. The Municipality of Durres and the Institute of Monuments of Culture have invested the amount of 40 million leks (35 000 USD) for the above mentioned operations.

The Municipality of Durres will also improve the infrastructure around the amphitheatre (streets leading to the monument, lightening) and establish the signposting in English and Albanian.

Ownership:

The amphitheatre is owned by the Institute of Monuments of Culture. The amphitheatre is public property, under the jurisdiction of the Institute of Monuments of Culture. The houses built in the vicinity of the amphitheatre will be demolished and the owners compensated according to the existing laws.

Occupation:

Archaeological monument accessible to the public.

Management:

The Institute of Monuments of Culture is responsible for managing the ensemble and for supervising the funds.

Summary:

The Amphitheatre of Durres, built in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, figures amongst the largest monuments of the Antiquity. It is the only monument of this type on Albanian territory. The amphitheatre is situated in the center of the city of Durres, the main port of Albania, at 35 km distance from the Capital.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, the amphitheatre ceased to be used in accordance with its main function. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century a mortuary chapel, dedicated to Saint Asti, the first Bishop and martyr of Durres, was built on top of the amphitheatre. The chapel, famous for its mosaics, is significant as a testimony to the origins of Christianity in the city of Durres.

Restoration and rehabilitation projects have been prepared in order to integrate this significant landmark in the overall city development. Being surrounded by other important archaeological sites of the city, situated near the Archaeological Museum which displays a large number of valuable archaeological findings, the amphitheatre will play a major role in the future of cultural tourism in Albania.

The state of conservation of this antique structure is very poor. For these reasons, the priority level of the ensemble is *high*.

Sign. and date:

Prof. Dr. Gjerak Karaiskaj  
10.03.2004.