

ALBANIAN THEATRE

by
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I) The rise of Albanian theatre to 1945; II) Professional theatre in Albania from 1945 to the present; III) The development of Albanian theatre in Kosovo; IV) Institutions of Albanian theatre.

I. The rise of Albanian theatre to 1945

Professional theatre has always been the prerogative of an urban society. In Albania, which has always had a strong rural population and lacked large urban centres, theatre never developed to the extent that literary poetry and prose did, nor did it ever capture the attention of the Albanian public to any substantial extent.

There is little in the way of Albanian theatre to report on before the second half of the nineteenth century and, in actual fact, little professional theatre at all before the second half of the twentieth century.

The first Albanian-language plays were written in the second half of the nineteenth century but we have little information as to whether they were actually performed, or even meant to be performed.

The earliest original Albanian drama is no doubt the melodramatic *Emira* by Albanian writer Francesco Antonio Santori (1819-1894) of the Arbëresh village Santa Caterina Albanese (Alb. Picilia) in the province of Cosenza. *Emira* was published rather erratically, some parts appearing in the Italo-Albanian monthly *Fiàmuri Arbërit* (The Albanian Flag) in November 1887 and others in Girolamo De Rada's Albanian anthology of 1896¹. Santori wrote a number of other melodramatic plays: both comedies and tragedies, not all of which were completed. These remained in manuscript form during his lifetime. Among them are the tragedy *Jeroboam* and the Scanderbegian melodrama *Alessio Dukagino*, written between 1855 and 1860²

Rilindja ieologist and scholar Sami Frashëri (1850-1904) was author of a 180-page play written in Turkish entitled *Besa yahud ahde vefa*, (*Besa* or the fulfilment of the pledge). It was premiered on 6 April 1874 at the Ottoman Theatre (*Osmanli Tiyatrosu*) in Istanbul and published there the following year³. In this, for modern tastes somewhat melodramatic work on a very Albanian theme, we observe the tragic dilemma of an Albanian father who prefers to kill his own son rather than break his *besa*, his word of honour.

The first Albanian-language drama to be written in Albania itself was a short nativity play entitled *Nata Këshnellavet*, Shkodra 1880 (Christmas night), by the Franciscan priest and poet

¹ Modern ed.: *Emira*. Ed. trans. F. Solano. Grottaferrata 1984.

² Modern ed.: *Alessio Ducagino. Melodramma*. Ed. transl. F. Solano. Grottaferrata 1983.

³ *Besa* was translated into Albanian by Abdyl Ypi Kolonja in 1901 and into English by Nelo Drizari (1902-1978) as: *Pledge of honor. An Albanian tragedy*. New York 1945. Modern ed.: Frashëri, S.: *Vepra* (Works). Vol. 1. Tirana 1988, pp. 19-95.

Leonardo De Martino (1830-1923) originally from the Arbëresh village of Greci (Alb. Greçi) in the province of Avellino. Another Scutarine Catholic author, Pashko Babi (1843-1905) wrote an early Albanian play entitled *I biri i çifutit* (The son of the Jew), which we know to have been performed at the Saverian college in Shkodra in February 1882.

One shining star on the otherwise rather vacant heaven of Albanian theatre at the dawn of the twentieth century was the Albanian actor Alexander Moissi (1879-1935)⁴. Moissi (Alb. Aleksandër Moisiu) was born in Trieste of an Albanian father from Kavajë and an Arbëresh mother. After a childhood in Trieste, Durrës und Graz, the twenty-year-old Alexander finally settled with his mother and two sisters in Vienna. It was there, with the encouragement and support of Austrian actor Josef Kainz (1858-1910), that Moissi's career as one of the great European stage actors of the early years of the twentieth century began. The following years took him to Prague and then to Berlin, where he became a protégé of Max Reinhardt (1873-1943). Moissi followed the Reinhardt Ensemble to Russia in 1911 and was acclaimed in St. Petersburg by critic and dramatist Anatoliy Lunacharsky (1875-1933) for his interpretation of Oedipus. Among other roles for which Alexander Moissi is remembered in particular are Hamlet, Faust, Fedya in Tolstoy's "The Living Body", and Dubedat in George Bernhard Shaw's "The Doctor's Dilemma". Though primarily a stage actor, Moissi also appeared in ten film productions (from 1910 to 1935, of which seven silent and three talking films. His own play "The Prisoner", about Napoleon's later years on St. Helena, proved a failure. Alexander Moissi died on 22 March 1935 and lies buried at the Morcote cemetery overlooking Lake Lugano in Switzerland.

In Albania itself, the early twentieth century saw a strong increase in the number of plays being written but little actual staging. A number of amateur theatre groups had formed in the country's two main cultural centres, Shkodra and Korça (Tirana was still a village in the early years after the First World War), and other groups arose sporadically in smaller communities: Durrës, Vlora, Pogradec, Elbasan, Berat, Gjirokastra and Boboshtica, but performances were rare and lacked any particular talent or skill. Much of this chapter of Albanian theatre is still undocumented. Professional theatre on the other hand remained a purely foreign institution.

II. Professional theatre in Albania from 1945 to the present

The post-war professional theatre of Socialist Realism is said to have its origins in the amateur theatre groups of the partisan movement in Albania from 1942 to 1944, but its roots obviously go back to the amateur ensembles of the twenties and thirties. The amateur groups of the partisan movement which travelled the country not only entertained the partisans but also endeavoured to instruct the peasantry about the ideals of and need for a Communist revolution in the country. It was a political theatre, a mixture of polemics, heroism, nationalism, sentimentality and satire. Among the early authors of partisan and socialist theatre were Zihni Sako (1912-1981)⁵, Gjike Kuqali (1921-1944), and Besim Levonja (1922-1968) of Elbasan, remembered for his three-act comedy *Prefekti* (The Prefect), Tirana 1948.

The unprecedented wave of persecution against Albanian intellectuals was of course

⁴ A biography in English: Moisi, V.: *Aleksander Moissi*. Paris 1979; and in German: Moisi, V.: *Alexander Moissi*, Tirana 1980.

⁵ Sako, Z.: *Vepra letrare* (Literary works), 3 vols. Tirana 1985.

unnerving for all surviving writers or would-be writers of the age. By the time Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) was securely in the saddle and had laid the foundations for a modicum of political stability, he had also, whether he had wanted to or not, created a virtual cultural vacuum in Albania which lasted well into the 1960s and the effects of which can still be felt throughout the country today⁶. Albanian theatre was, thus, very slow to develop in post-war writing despite its obvious utility as a means of education, propaganda and political persuasion. It was nonetheless the post-war years which first saw the founding of publicly subsidized state theatres and state ensembles in most major cities. This institutionalization of Albanian theatre went hand in hand with the conscious eradication of amateur groups, which might have been more likely to elude state and Party control. By the 1960s, amateur theatre in Albania had disappeared, one of the many cultural losses of the period.

From the Communist takeover in November 1944, Albanian theatre, like Albanian prose and poetry, was remoulded to conform to the doctrine of Socialist Realism, and in the fifties fell heavily under the influence of Soviet models (Konstantin A. Trenyov (1876-1945), Boris A. Lavrenyov (1894-1959), Nikolay F. Pogodin (1900-1962), Boris L. Gorbатов (1908-1954)). A feeble echo of the theatrical traditions of Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938) of the Moscow Art Theatre and of Erwin Piscator (1893-1966) of Berlin was to be felt on the Adriatic, but what Stalinist Albania adopted, in general, were the weakest elements of this tradition. While the effusions of sentimentality which had been characteristic of much pre-war theatre had now been toned down, the declamatory style and the heavy-handed use of political propaganda made most plays of the fifties and sixties quite intolerable.

A beginning in the theatre of Socialist Realism was made by Kolë Jakova (b. 1916)⁷, the son of a silversmith from Shkodra, with the heroic drama *Halili e Hajrija* (Halil and Hajrija), Tirana 1950. The dramatic techniques of this first substantial work of post-war Albanian theatre, a portrayal of Albanian resistance to the Turks in the sixteenth century, are questionable, though the structural weaknesses of the play are compensated for to a certain extent by the moving heroism and patriotic sentiment in the face of the death of the play's protagonist. Of greater quality and more widely admired is Jakova's drama *Toka jonë* (Our land)⁸, Tirana 1955. Lokja, a 43-year-old mother of two is forced to flee from her native village on the banks of the Mati River when a landowner, Tuç Maku, besmirches her reputation by spreading rumours in order to seize her land. Her return home and struggle to regain her rights in a hostile environment are facilitated by the initial agrarian reform in the autumn of 1946.

A noted playwright, satirical poet and humourist of the sixties was Spiro Çomora (1918-1973)⁹ born in Vuno on the Himaran coast, who is remembered for his comedy *Karnavalet e Korçës* (The carnivals of Korça), Tirana 1961. Action takes place in pre-war Korça and revolves around the indefatigable attempts by the wealthy but miserly merchant, Nikollaq Jorganxhi, to marry his daughter Afroviti off as cheaply as possible.

Sulejman Pitarka from the Dibra region began his career as a playwright with *Familja e*

⁶ See the chapter "Literature" by the same author.

⁷ Jakova, K.: *Vepra letrare* (Literary works). 7 vols. Tirana 1986.

⁸ German transl. *Unser Boden*, Halle 1961; Spanish transl. *Nuestra tierra*, Tirana 1978.

⁹ Çomora, S.: *Vepra letrare* (Literary works). 4 vols. Tirana 1950.

peshkatarit (The fisherman's family)¹⁰, Tirana 1955, a rather uninspiring drama about young Petrit, son of the fisherman Jonuz Bruga, who risks his life to save a wounded comrade in hiding from the Italian fascists during the Second World War. Of slightly more varied dramatic technique is Pitarka's classical tragedy *Trimi i mirë me shokë shumë* (The good hero with many friends), Tirana 1958, which centres, like countless other Albanian plays, on Scanderbeg and his struggle against the Turks.

Among other playwrights of these early years are: Ndrekë Luca (b. 1927) whose five-act historical drama *Shtatë Shaljanët* (The seven from Shala), Tirana 1958, focussed on the struggle for autonomy among the tribes of the northern Albanian mountains at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Andrea Skanjeti (1906-1992), remembered and subsequently persecuted for his three-act *Nora, heroina e bjeshkve* (Nora, heroine of the mountain pastures), Tirana 1961, set in the years 1632-1639; and Jonuz Dini (1925-1982) of Shkodra.

The second great blow to be dealt to Albanian theatre after the eradication of the amateur groups, was the banning of all foreign repertoires. The Albanian public had never had much opportunity to see contemporary European theatre at all, but a number of classics had been translated into Albanian and performed on stage. Molière, Shakespeare and Schiller, for instance, had been quite popular. Even such classics, however, fell out of favour in the seventies. In the years of the Sino-Albanian alliance, virtually all western culture was considered bourgeois and decadent. Revolutionary drama à la chinoise was to hold sway on Albanian stages and on television for quite a number of years.

The dramatist who best reflects the proclivities of this period is Loni Papa (b. 1932). His noted play *Cuca e maleve* (The mountain lass)¹¹, Tirana 1967, portrays a woman's fight for equality among the feudal mountain tribes of northern Albania. Its staging was all the more effective during the late sixties and early seventies when the Party's campaign for women's emancipation in Albania was in full swing. *Cuca e maleve* is perhaps the most obvious Albanian reflection of Chinese revolutionary theatre and opera under Mao Zedong (1893-1976), and like many of its Chinese counterparts, was made into a ballet, with the music of Nikolla Zoraqi.

Dramatist Fadil Paçrami was born in Shkodra on 25 May 1922 and, although of Moslem origin, was educated by the Franciscans who sent him to Bologna. There he studied medicine. In 1942, he interrupted his studies to join the partisan movement back in Albania. After the war, he worked in the RKSH, became deputy minister of education and culture under Sejfulla Malëshova, and editor in chief of the daily newspaper *Zëri i popullit* from 1948 to 1957. In 1965-1966 he served as Minister of Culture and Arts and from 1971 to 1973 as President of the People's Assembly. Paçrami's plays of the period are accordingly well within the confines set by Socialist Realism. Up to 1973, he had written thirteen plays, of which nine had been published. Among them are: *Çështja e inxhinier Saimirit* (The case of the engineer Saimir) which was performed on stage in Durrës; *E bardha dhe e zeza* (The white and the black); *Lagja e varfër* (The poor neighbourhood); *Ngjarje në fabrikë* (Incident in a factory); and *Shtëpia në bulevard* (The house on the boulevard). At the 4th Plenary Session of the Central Committee on 26-28 June 1973, Paçrami and Todi Lubonja were purged¹². Paçrami was arrested on 21 October 1975 and spent an

¹⁰ English transl. *The fisherman's family*. Tirana 1980.

¹¹ French transl. *La fille des montagnes*, Tirana 1978.

¹² See the chapter "Literature" by the same author, p. 661.

initial eighteen months in Tirana prison awaiting trial. In March 1977 he was socratically convicted of sabotage in the field of culture for having introduced foreign influences and corrupted the youth, and of the usual change of agitation and propaganda, and was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison. After fifteen years and five months, he was released on 17 March 1991. Paçrami was no means inactive in prison in Burrel and Kosova e Madhe. He finished a total of fifty-one plays, as yet unpublished, many of which reflect his country's painful struggle for democracy and freedom.

The Paçrami/Lubonja purge of 1973 led to the ousting of many a talented figures in the arts. Plays and staging were reviewed for their ideological purity and anything found modernistic, liberal or foreign was immediately banned. Even stage designers were thrown into labour camps for modernistic decorations. This period of "revolutionary art," as defined and interpreted by the Albanian Party of Labour or, more precisely, by Enver Hoxha personally, caused a major setback to the advancement of Albanian theatre in the seventies. Some progress was, however, made from 1982 onwards, though Albanian drama still remains a definitely neglected genre. There are now ten well-attended professional theatres in Albania and in addition about fifteen variety theatres and a puppet theatre. The quality of acting and staging has improved substantially in recent years although the subject matter has remained bland by Western standards.

Ruzhdi Pulaha (b. 1942)¹³ from Korça is perhaps the most successful contemporary dramatist. His comedy *Zonja nga qyteti* (The lady from the city), Tirana 1976, depicts with typically Albanian humour the confrontation of a sheltered young lady of good breeding with the down-to-earth realities of village life. Another comedy, *I harruari* (The forgotten one), was staged in Tirana in 1988 with some success. Other authors to have devoted much of their creative energy to the stage are Ibrahim Uruçi (1925-1989), Fadil Kraja (b. 1931) from Shkodra, Hamza Minarolli (b. 1931), Naum Prifti (b. 1932) of Korça, officially lauded for his partisan drama *Mulliri i Kostë Bardhit* (The mill of Kostë Bardhi), Tirana 1971, Dhimitër Xhuvani (b. 1934), Teodor Laço (b. 1936), Fahri Balliu (b. 1954), Xhemal Broja (1917-1986), Selman Vaqari (b. 1928), Maku Pone (b. 1939) and Artur Zheji (b. 1961). Of playwrights to have been released from prison recently are Minush Jero (b. 1932) of Durrës, who was imprisoned for five years for ideological shortcomings in his play *Njolla të murrrmë* (Grey stains), 1968, and Visar Zhiti (b. 1952) of Lushnja.

Among leading actors of the Albanian stage over the last forty years are: Mihal Popi (1909-1979), Besim Levonja (1922-1968), Loro Kovaçi (1903-1966), Zef Jubani (1910-1958), Pjeter Gjoka (1912-1982), Naim Servet Frashëri (1923-1975), Lazer Filipi, Marie Logoreci, Sandër Prosi, Kadri Roshi, Violeta Manushi, Skëndër Sallaku, Prokop Mima, Pandi Raidhi, Tinka Kurti, Tano Banushi, Sulejman Pitarka, Ndreka Luca, Roza Xhuxha, Margarita Xhepa, Nikolin Xhoja, Demir Hyskja, and Melpomeni Çobani. Noted Albanian theatre directors include: Sokrat Mio (b. 1902) of Korça, Pandi Stillu (1914-1970), Andrea Malo (1919-1966), Esat Oktrova of Shkodra, Nazmi Bonjaku of Vlora, Lec Shllaku of Elbasan, Kujtim Spahivogli of Tirana, Gjergj Vlashi of Durrës, Pirro Mani of Korça, Serafin Fanko of Shkodra, and Muharrem Shtylla of Tirana. Of periodicals relating to theatre in Albania mention may be made in particular of *Skena dhe ekrani* (Stage and screen), an illustrated quarterly devoted to theatre, cinema, television, stage, opera, ballet and circus. It was first issued in Tirana in February 1980.

Throughout the almost half a century of "people's power," theatre was always subject to much greater political control and censorship than prose or poetry, and thus never really had a

¹³ Pulaha, R.: *Drama* (Dramas), Tirana 1981.

chance to flourish on its own. If a volume of prose in the seventies and eighties had to go through the hands of ten to fifteen "revisors," a play had to be read by at least thirty such experts, and anything which might possibly be construed as critical or controversial was removed. The spirit of non-conformism, so ubiquitous to Western theatre and culture in general, was unthinkable, as was the individualist whose ideas could provoke and even outrage his or her audience. For obvious political reasons, Albanian playwrights were very reticent, or to do them justice, were not able to utilize the power of the stage to its fullest and to provoke their audiences into reflection with really controversial material and with the sort of scandalous stage productions which Western theatre goers have become quite addicted to. Instead they usually stuck to a bland mixture of edifying morality plays and historical dramas imbued with patriotic pathos and heavy-handed political messages. The result has been absolute sterility in Albanian theatre, such that even today, Albanian drama can vie neither in quality nor in quantity with poetry and prose. Modern theatre in Albania still remains to be created.

III. The development of Albanian theatre in Kosovo

As in Albania, theatre in Kosovo never enjoyed any solid tradition. The origins of Albanian drama in Yugoslavia lie strangely enough not in Kosovo itself but on the distant Dalmatian coast. Josip Relja (1895-1966) was born and raised in the village of Arbanas (Borgo Erizzo), now a southern suburb of Zadar, which was founded in 1726 by Albanian settlers from Brisk and Shestan west of Lake Shkodra. Relja, who worked as a teacher, theatre manager and school principal in Zadar, is the author of a number of melodramatic plays written in his archaic Gheg dialect which can be said to constitute the first serious attempts at Albanian-language drama in Yugoslavia. The best-known of his plays is *Nita* evoking the tragic fate of a young maiden from Brisk, caught up between her own desires and tribal law.

Murteza Peza (1919-1981) is an Albanian dramatist and prose writer from Macedonia. He was born in Elbasan and moved to Yugoslavia in 1941 where he took part in the partisan movement in Macedonia. Though some of his plays, of which *Parajsi i humbur* (Paradise lost) is the best, are superficial and overly didactic, his contribution to the advancement of Albanian drama cannot be denied. Other playwrights of note of this period are Hivzi Sulejmani (1912-1975), Xhemil Doda (1915-1976) of Prizren whose dramatization of the personal tragedy of the mountain peasant in *Halit Gashi* drew heavily on folklore material; Kristë Berisha (b. 1923) of Peja who with his burlesque *Kryet e hudhrës* (The heads of garlic) in the *commedia dell'arte* genre laid the foundations for comedy in Kosovo; journalist and politician Jusuf Kelmendi (b. 1927) with his dramatic *Hakmarrja* (Vengeance), a moving study of the institution of vendetta; and actor and film director Muharrem Qena (b. 1930) from Mitrovica noted in particular for his prize-winning drama *Bashkëshortët* (The spouses).

The first Albanian-language theatrical performance in Kosovo is said to have been organized by Mati Logoreci (1867-1941) of Shkodra who opened the first Albanian-language school in Prizren on 1 May 1889. The public use of Albanian was, however, forbidden both under the Turks in the Ottoman Empire and later under the Serbs when Kosovo was incorporated into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1918. This ban of course precluded the development of any Albanian theatre. During the Axis occupation from 1941 to 1944, Albanian schools were opened and amateur theatre groups performed throughout Kosovo for the first time, though under obviously difficult conditions. Immediately after the liberation in 1945, the People's Theatre

(*Teatri Popullor*) was established in Prizren. 1949 was a year of significance for Albanian culture in Kosovo, for it marked the foundation of the first Albanian-language literary review *Jeta e re* (New life), edited by poet Esad Mekuli (b. 1916). This periodical, for the first time, provided a forum not only for poets and prose writers, but also for playwrights and dramatists in southern Yugoslavia. The fifties also saw the establishment of the Theatre of the National Minorities (*Teatri i Kombësive*) in Skopje, the capital of Macedonia which has a large Albanian-speaking community. The Skopje theatre now vies with those of Prishtina and Gjakova as a centre of Albanian-language drama in Yugoslavia.

The last major impediments to the public use of the Albanian language and to the evolution of Albanian culture in Yugoslavia ceased with the historic Brioni meeting of the Central Committee in 1966. In 1968, a two-year drama course was set up at the People's Regional Theatre of Prishtina and was integrated into the curriculum of the College of Education there to improve the level of acting and staging in Kosovo. The improvement was indeed very soon felt. Up until the mid-sixties, the repertoires of Kosovo theatres consisted almost exclusively of Yugoslav and foreign works in Albanian translation. In 1967, the early 19th century Albanian verse tale *Erveheja* by Muhamet Kyçyku (1784-1844) was adapted for stage with some success by Muharrem Qena, director of the People's Regional Theatre, and by Ahmet Qirezi. *Erveheja* was subsequently staged in Tirana in 1972. In 1969, the age of Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre and Eugène Ionesco, Kosovo playwright and novelist Anton Pashku (b. 1938) of Grazhdanik introduced "theatre of the absurd" to the Albanian public with his controversial plays *Sinkopa* (Syncope), Prishtina 1969, and *Gof* (Explosion), Prishtina 1976. This drama was of course not staged in Tirana where such experiments were stubbornly decried as harmful to the youth and social progress.

In the early seventies, a liberalization of Yugoslav policies towards the Albanian minority and a temporary improvement of relations between Yugoslavia and Albania led to an increase in cultural contacts between Prishtina and Tirana, involving exchanges of ensembles, directors, actors, writers and university professors. Although these exchanges were fruitful for both sides, their effect was limited. The heavy-handed political dogmatism and Stalinist propaganda of the Albanian side was regarded with a good deal of suspicion by the Yugoslav authorities and the broader range and eclectic, experimental nature of much theatre in Kosovo was regarded with equal suspicion by the Tirana authorities. As such, the political barrier had once again impeded the development of a unified Albanian culture. After the 1981 uprising in Kosovo, virtually all cultural contacts with Albania were cut off.

Of other contemporary dramatists in Kosovo, mention may be made in particular of scholar Rexhep Qosja (b. 1936), author of *Mite të veshura* (Unclad myths), Prishtina 1978; poet Azem Shkreli (b. 1938) whose novel *Karvani i bardhë* (The white caravan), Prishtina 1960, was adapted for stage as *Fosilet* (The fossils) in 1969; Teki Dervishi (b. 1943); Beqir Musliu (b. 1945) of Gjiilan; the productive Ymer Shkreli (b. 1945); critic and poet Sabri Hamiti (b. 1950); and poet and archeologist Edi Shukriu (b. 1950) of Prizren whose first drama *Kthimi i Euridikës* (The return of Eurydice) was published in 1987.

IV. Institutions of Albanian Theatre

People's Theatre of Tirana (*Teatri Popullor*):

The People's Theatre was founded in Tirana on 25 May 1944 under the name "State Theatre" and

began functioning in 1946 under the direction of Sokrat Mio and Pandi Stillu.

Migjeni Theatre of Shkodra:

Shkodra in northern Albania has a comparatively rich theatrical tradition. The professional theatre there, which bears the name of the Albanian poet and short story writer Migjeni (1911-1938), was founded in 1949. In the first thirty years of its existence, the Migjeni Theatre performed 110 plays and provided a forum for some of Albania's greatest actors.

A. Z. Çajupi Theatre of Korça:

Ten professional actors and fifteen amateurs founded a professional theatre for the southeastern city of Korça on 22 June 1951 in what was then the Morava Cinema. It was named after Albanian poet and playwright Andon Zako Çajupi (1866-1930). The theatre's first director was Sokrat Mio (b. 1902) and its first stage designer was painter Vangjush Mio (1891-1957). From 1961 to 1967, the theatre was directed by Pirro Mani and from 1967 to 1973 by M. Luarasi who was ousted during the Paçrami/Lubonja purge. Luarasi's successor was Dhimitër Orgocka.

Aleksandër Moisiu Theatre of Durrës:

A professional theatre in Durrës, named after Alexandër Moissi (1879-1935) was founded on 11 January 1953. The first play to be performed there was *Vajza nga fshati* (The girl from the village) by Fatmir Gjata (1922-1989) which premiered on 12 April 1953. The Aleksandër Moisiu Theatre, which has had a new building at its disposal since 1965, has since produced an average of four new plays a year.

Professional Theatre of the City of Vlora:

Though a professional variety ensemble had been founded in the port city of Vlora in October 1955, the professional dramatic theatre was not created here until 1962.

Skampa Theatre of Elbasan:

The Skampa Theatre, given the ancient name of the central Albanian city of Elbasan, was founded on 16 July 1962. Its first performance was held on 5 September 1962 and in the first twenty years of its existence, it produced over fifty new plays.

Professional Theatre of Gjirokastra:

This theatre was founded on 28 November 1968 in a city which is comparatively lacking in theatrical traditions.

Professional Theatre of Fier:

The city of Fier already had some amateur theatre groups before the Second World War, and thus a certain theatrical tradition. The professional theatre in this town on the plain of Myzeqe was however founded relatively late, in April 1971. Its first production was *Hijet e natës* (The Shadows of the Night) by Vedat Kokona under the direction of Leka Bungo.

Professional Theatre of Berat:

The professional theatre of Berat, cultural centre in central Albania, was founded in 1984.

Professional Theatre of Peshkopia:

The professional theatre of Peshkopia, serving the Dibra region on the border with Macedonia, is, with that of Berat, the youngest of the regional theatres. It too was founded in 1984.

Puppet Theatre (*Teatri i Kukullave*):

Although there had never been much puppetry in Albania, a Puppet Theatre was founded in Tirana on 27 December 1950, modelled on the rich traditions of puppetry in the Soviet Union. Its first director was Llazar Vëria, appointed on 20 March 1951. Performances, primarily for children, were held at the Republic Cinema in the centre of Tirana.

Aleksandër Moisiu College of Drama (*Shkolla e Lartë Dramatike*):

The College of Drama in Tirana was founded in 1959. In 1966 it was merged with the colleges of music and figurative art to form the College of the Arts (*Instituti i Lartë i Arteve*) for the training of actors, musicians and artists. The first students in drama graduated from the college in 1963.

People's Theatre of Prizren (Kosovo) (*Teatri Popullor*):

The first professional theatre in Kosovo, the People's Theatre was formed in 1945 in Prizren, which was then the administrative capital of the region. It gave performances both in Albanian and in Serbo-Croatian, but survived only one season until the administrative capital was transferred to Prishtina.

People's Regional Theatre of Prishtina (Kosovo) (*Teatri Popullor Krahinor*):

The People's Regional Theatre of Prishtina was founded in September 1948. It gave its first performance in Albanian on 1 May 1949, a translation of a comedy by Serbian playwright Branislav Nusic (1864-1938).

Professional Theatre of Mitrovica (Kosovo):

The Professional Theatre of the Kosovo city of Mitrovica e Kosovës, formerly Mitrovica e Titos, was opened in 1953 and gave Albanian-language performances. It is not active at the present.

Theatre of the National Minorities of Skopje (Macedonia) (*Teatri i Kombësive*):

This theatre, designed to promote minority-language culture in Macedonia gives regular performances in Albanian for the large Albanian-speaking community there.

People's Theatre of Gjakova (Kosovo) (*Teatri Popullor*):

The People's Theatre of Gjakova (Djakovica) was formed in 1977 and gives performances both in Albanian and in Serbo-Croatian.

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