

Albania Today



A Typical Albanian.

OUR COMIC SECTION

Events in the Lives of Little Men



(Prepared by the National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C.)

EUROPE'S newest king is building a new palace in one of Europe's newest capitals. The king is Zog I (formerly Zogu) of Albania, who stepped to his throne from the President's chair last September; and his million-dollar palace is rising in Tirana which became the seat of government after the World war, when it was decided that the former capital, Durazzo, on the coast, was too exposed.

Until this move was made Tirana was as little known as the rest of Albania is today. Boat loads of tourists drifted down the Albanian coast, stopping now and then at some picturesque island, or at a coastal village.

At Durazzo, they took one glance at the impassable roads to the interior and another glance at the springless ox-carts and donkeys which were then the only Albanian taxis. Then most of them decided to see Tirana when conditions were improved.

The capital has changed, however, since President Zogu established government headquarters there in 1925. Bus service on the new road from Tirana to Durazzo brings increasing numbers of travelers and the once quiet little Moslem city is making splendid progress.

The mosque, domes and minarets that once dominated the city's sky line are being encroached upon by modern government buildings and legations of foreign governments who recognize Albanian sovereignty. Hotels are also poking their upper stories above the red roofs of old Tirana's mud-walled structures, and new avenues, parks and public gardens have been laid out for the enjoyment of the city's inhabitants and guests.

Market Place of Tirana.

The Tirana market place is one of the few spots in the city that has not been disturbed by the newcomers and there, among the vegetables and fruits piled on the cobbles, roam folk of the surrounding mountains and valleys, apparently unmoved by the changes taking place in their capital.

Both the Ghegs of the north and the Tosks of the south crowd the aisles. Mingling with the lively throngs, one sees a bearded Moslem holy man whose somber robe sharply contrast with the flaming colors of the natives' garments. The Ghegs, three-fourths of whom are Moslems, can be singled out from the rest of the crowd by their gray half-size fezzes which resemble the aluminum lids which keep pancakes warm on American restaurant tables. They also wear loose-fitting, sleeveless, buttoned jackets, tight-fitting trousers and homemade sandals of ox-hide.

The Tosks are less conservative than their southern compatriots. They like ornamentation, and their costumes are colorful. There may be enough silver and gold in their regalia to pay a first-class passage from Durazzo to New York.

The Albanians are a rugged, primitive mountain people who, it has been said, "occasionally differ from ordinary disease, but more often from differences of opinion." They are classed along with the French, Portuguese and Walloons as members of the Greco-Latin branch of the Aryan race. Their mountain life has fostered a passionate love of independence and they cling to their language and their customs with a vigorous tenacity, even when groups are transplanted to other lands. The name of the Albanians, meaning "people of the snow-land," has been fastened upon them by their neighbors; they call themselves "Skipetari," or mountaineers. One important tribe, the Catholic Mirdites, bitterly oppose the settlement of any Mohammedans in their vicinity.

What Visitors Buy and See.

Tirana is in the west central part of Albania, 26 miles inland from Du-

razzo, the country's principal port. Until the outbreak of the World war the only well-paved highway in the country linked these two cities.

The visitor to Tirana can acquire as souvenirs specimens of locally-made brass work, distinctive and beautiful embroideries, done by the Tirana women and sold by them in the market places, and whether a smoker or not, he will wish to take along one of the oddly and intricately carved pipes. The city covers a larger area than its 15,000 or so inhabitants would seem to need, judged by our standards. Yet one would have a difficult time convincing a Tiranian, with his cottage and garden, that a more vertical mode of living, in crowded apartments, would be more civilized. Once one strolls beyond the bounds of Tirana, however, he will encounter mud houses, and the "simple life" to an extreme degree.

An Albanian family is sufficient unto itself. Except for the trading in a few cities—in Scutari, Koryza and Argyrocastro, besides those already mentioned—there is no semblance of an economic system.

A woman in a country district works hard, but she is not mere drudge. She makes bread of unize and cooks it over an open hearth fire. The remaining wood ashes she uses in place of soap. She weaves woolen cloth and plait black braid for the garments she makes of it.

Before the Christian era, the ancestors of the present Albanians occupied practically the whole of the peninsula north of Greece, to the Danube. They are, in fact, the remnants of the oldest race in eastern Europe. The conquest and policing of the region by Rome did not displace these early inhabitants; but when the Slavs burst southward into the peninsula in the Seventh century A. D., only those who lived in or fled to Albania kept their blood and customs unaltered by the newcomers.

Their History One of Struggles.

It has been the fate of the Albanians to struggle constantly against some powerful neighbor. First it was imperial Rome, next the Slavs, then Turkey. When Turkish power waned, Albania found Austria coveting her lands. Just before the World war, Austria had succeeded in placing a Germanic prince on the throne of the newly created Albanian state; but this arrangement did not last long. Since the World war Albania has found herself between two forces. On the east and north Yugo-Slavia has advanced her frontiers to Albania, and eyes her territory with interest; on the west, Italy, separated only by the narrowest part of the Adriatic, has shown a desire to control Albania.

The eastern frontier of Albania, where Italy has charged, the Yugo-Slavs have been making preparations of a supposedly military character, is much less isolated today than before the World war. Then the region had just been liberated from Turkey and had been little developed. Monastir, second among the cities of Turkish Macedonia, had rail connections only southeastward to Saloniki, the metropolis. Now a line also extends northward connecting with the trunk railway into old Serbia.

The region about the two large lakes, Ohrida and Prespa, midway of the present Albanian-Yugo-Slav line, was also isolated. Now a new rail way from Uskub and the heart of Yugo-Slavia beyond reaches down to the city of Ohrida on the lake. This lake country of the Yugo-Slavian borderland has both geographic and historic interest. The claim has been put forth for Ohrida that it is "the clearest lake in the world." Fish may be plainly seen swimming about at a depth of 60 feet or more. Dense chestnut forests cover the slopes of the hills surrounding the lake.

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Tut, Tut, Michael



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