

TREATMENT, VIOLENCE AND TORTURE OF PRISONERS IN BURRELI PRISON

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"Through prisons and camps they were among the rare nobles of the Albanian nation... Those nobles who gave meaning to Albania" --- At Zef Pllumi

The position of the convicts in Burreli prison was difficult. From their data and testimonies, also based on archival sources, which refer to treatment, living conditions, cases of illness, restriction of rights, use of violence and torture, etc., the cruelty inflicted on every individual considered an enemy stands out. In the absence of a complete treatment of this topic, I think it is important to summarize some of the aspects that create the profile of the communist state and the scheme of the strategy followed by it in the "hell" of Burreli.

1. Introduction

Prison sentence constituted one of the most severe forms of suffering in the communist regime (1944-1991). During this period, a large number of convicted persons, generally political convicts, became victims of a punitive policy in communist camps and prisons. This paper provides a brief historical framework on the Burreli prison, based on archival documents and eyewitness accounts. The aim of the paper is to shed light on the purpose and goals of the creation of the prison, its organization and general functioning, to analyze the treatment of prisoners, living conditions and torture practiced in this prison.

For most researchers, Albania in the period 1945-1990 is more experienced and commented on than studied in depth and complexity, especially that related to the crimes of the regime. The purpose of the paper is to bring source data about the violence, torture and barbaric crimes committed in the Burreli prison. The paper is a modest attempt to make a small contribution to the clarification of some of the crimes committed in this prison.

In function of this goal and the aim of better knowledge and scientific treatment of the infamous Burreli prison, this paper was prepared, one of the first to focus only on this prison. The paper brings something new for researchers, and this to differentiate it from other studies or contributions on political prisoners, on the treatment, torture, living conditions and eliminations of some prisoners by the regime in all Albanian prisons and camps. All the archival data together with the testimonies presented constitute the novelty of this paper.

The archival documentation of the State Archives, the literature published so far in Albania, the publications of the Institute for the Study of Crimes and Consequences of Communism and the Authority for Information on Documents of the Former State Security were used for the realization of the work. In addition, electronic publications obtained mainly from newspapers were also used.

2. Conditions in Burrel Prison

In the premises where Burrel Prison was established, torture, hunger, disease and difficult living conditions were among the greatest difficulties faced by the convicts. Because in the early years the regime sentenced a large number of political opponents, the number of prisoners in Burrel increased significantly. The capacity of the Burrel prison building was 228 people, however the number of convicts was twice as large. Former convict Daut Gumeni recounts that Sami Dangëllia (called the Albanian Mandela) had told him that in 1946 there were 600 prisoners so that the cells had no room and the prisoners slept in the prison corridors.¹ The problems were numerous, from the density of the prison cells, the lack of hygiene, food shortages, the inability to perform personal needs and isolation for a long time. In 1953, a group of senior Soviet K.G.B. officers visited Burrel prison. They were amazed by the terrible conditions in which the convicts were held.²

The large cells of Burrel could hold about 30 people, perhaps even more. The division into cells was done according to categories and the charges brought against them in court. Convicts with views Westerners were kept separately, revisionists and agents were also kept in rows. Prisoners with different sentences were not supposed to have contact with each other. To avoid the creation of small hostile groups, prisoners were changed to other cells, in cases where the guards suspected them. They were kept in the cell 22 hours a day. The space for one person was small, Tomorr Dosti said: "I have not reached 40 centimeters, but others have even tried 30 centimeters... it depended on the contingents that came to Burrel. When there were waves of arrests, the spaces narrowed, that is, the mattresses were brought closer."³ There were no mattresses for sleeping. There were cases where people slept on newspapers or mats. It was considered good luck if the mattress was brought from home, which had to be the width of the newspaper. Due to the conditions and limited space, the convicts slept only on their sides.⁴ In the single cells and dungeons that are often confused in the survivors' accounts, other convicts were kept. Other personal belongings such as food and water containers, clothing, etc. were kept in the same room.

The use of the bathrooms all the time is labeled as horror in many testimonies. There were specific schedules for the convicts to use the bathrooms, they could only go in the morning and afternoon. In the evening, according to the regulations, the doors were not opened by the police. To replace the lack of a basic human need, the use of cups and later military water bottles was considered. The difficulty accepted the condition and the cup had to be used. In addition, there was a queue to use the cup due to the high number in the cells and the old ages that occurred in the prison. Water supply was non-existent inside the cells.

Cleanliness and personal hygiene were very difficult with the lack of water and soap. The most common diseases that spread were tuberculosis, jaundice, scabies, ulcers, dysentery, scurvy, rheumatism, etc. Nowadays it is difficult to imagine how 600 convicts used the water of a well to meet the most basic needs required of a person. The prisoners were washed once every 2-3 weeks.⁵

The biggest evil in Burrel, according to Uran Kostreci, was going out for airing only 2 times a day. Airing was carried out 2 times a day, for 1 hour: from 9 to 10 in the morning and from 2 to 3 in the afternoon. This was the time when you could perform your personal needs and be ventilated. The presence of many people in the cell created an unbearable environment with

¹ Albanian Traces. (2022). The Albanian who served 43 years in prison until death. <https://youtu.be/3uQhear-USk?si=Jc-yQEOëE-PVYq4p>. Tirana

² Musta. A. (2000). State prisons, Tirana: Toena, p. 19

³ Tufa. A. Lleshanaku. L. (2014). Voices of Memory I. Tirana: ISKPK, p. 124

⁴ Kujto. al. (2018). Burrel, 30 people in a cell where we ate, we also performed personal needs...

<https://kujto.al/burrel-30-vete-ne-nje-qeli-aty-ku-hanim-kryenim-edhe-nevojat-personale/>. Tirana

⁵ AQSH. P. 492. V. 1952. D. 21. Fl. 8-9 Regulation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs "On the administration of prisons and camps"

heavy air from breathing, dust and personal hygiene of the body. But it happened that the schedule was reduced by orders from the command. If the leadership moved to other cities, these were interrupted for a month or two, without going out at all.⁶ The lack of ventilation was also suffered by the convicts in the dungeons who had not seen sunlight for more than 3 months. It is also evidenced by the cleaning of the cells by the convicts: "Even because we tried to keep the environment clean, there could not be cleanliness there. About half or three-quarters of the prisoners drank and smoked. The urine cup was there. During a period they allowed us to use some small stoves, the size of a box with two wires, which were used to make tea. Coal was also lit there, and it is known that carbon suffocates. Add the tobacco smoke..."⁷

3. Hunger and torture

Hunger reigned throughout communist Albania, but in Burrel it was applied massively and served as an instrument of torture. The food ration was determined by the Political Bureau of the Party of Labor and did not meet the minimum requirements for a person. The food that was served was prepared by the prison only for breakfast and lunch. From the data and testimonies of the prisoners we learn that until 1950 it was corn bread that should not exceed 0.8 kg per day. In the same year it was decided to also give soup with water and vegetables. Their food norm did not include meat, sugar or coffee. Over the years, changes have been made to the food ration of the prisoners in Burrel. In Tomorr Dosti's account it is said: "During the time of Koçi Xoxe, people died even for their bread, yet we constantly call it 'the time of Koçi Xoxe', because they blamed him for everything, as if Enver didn't know what was happening in Burrel."⁸ From the Burrel prison comes a testimony about the hunger crisis: "They brought us a very sick young Cham man to room no. 7. After 2 days he died, but we did not inform the guards about his death because we wanted to benefit from the bread ration. To deceive the guards, we put a cigarette in the dead man's mouth. We kept him like that for 4 days, until he began to decompose. We made him unmade, to benefit from 100 grams of bread more than the ration. That's what hunger took us."⁹

In the '60s, the amount of bread was increased to 600 grams. Ahmet Abdia, who went to Burrel in 1964, said: "There they gave us 600 grams of corn bread, which we measured with a wooden spoon. A young boy from Saranda did this service just to get the crumbs. The meal was only one soup a day. If it weren't for the family helping you, you would die."¹⁰ Many of the families were interned and did not visit their relatives. Some of the families were afraid that they might be persecuted if they met their people in prison. In desperation, they tried to justify themselves to the competent authorities that they had no connection with the convict.¹¹ The wives of the convicts were encouraged to separate from their husbands in order to gain some rights that were denied to them by the regime.

The situation was so dire that prison staff had made it a habit for prisoners to steal food prepared by the prison. Police officers stole food prepared by the prison. In Burrel prison, registered items were not in order, were not marked correctly, and were appropriated by the police. Around 46,000 lek were also stolen.¹² Sexual harassment of family members visiting relatives in prison was continuous. A specific case was the sadistic commander of Burrel, Vangjel Rëmbeci, who,

⁶ Lajme. Al. (2018). Confession of a prisoner in Burreli prison: I "owe" that regime another 15 years in prison. <https://www.lajme.al/rrefimi-i-te-burgosurit-ne-burgun-e-burrelit-i-kam-borxh-atij-regjimi-edhe-15-vjet-burg-video/>. Tirana

⁷ Kujto. al. (2018). Uran Kotreci: I witness the difficult life in the cells of Burreli. <https://kujto.al/uran-kostreci-deshmoj-jeten-e-veshtire-ne-qelite-e-burrelit/>. Tirana

⁸ Tufa. A. Lleshanaku. L. (2014). Voices of Memory I. Tirana: ISKPK, p. 125

⁹ Musta. A. (1995). Living Files. Tirana: Arbëria, p. 164

¹⁰ Tufa. A. Lleshanaku. L. (2014). Voices of Memory I. Tirana: ISKPK, p. 38

¹¹ ASHV Durrës, F. Kryesia. V. 1985. D.1. fl.1-4 Letter from a citizen sent to the Executive Committee of the People's Council of Durrës on the moral purity of his family after the arrest of a relative

¹² Dervishi. K. (2015). Prisons and camps of Communist Albania. Tirana: ISKPK, p. 94

in addition to stealing food from family members, sexually harassed the wives of prisoners. Morality was lacking in most of the prison staff. A feature of Burrel was the solidarity and desire of prisoners to help each other. There was a high number of prisoners without opportunities or assistance from their families. Tanush Kaso recounts: "At that time, the feeling of solidarity was strong. Someone gave me a piece of wool, which I added there; another gave me a blanket. That's how I dressed up. That's how everyone did it. Those who were released didn't take their clothes with them, they left them there. The command didn't take responsibility for anything."¹³ While it's impossible to mention them all, there are many testimonies from Bajram Dervishaj, Ahmet Abdias, Lavdosh Beqaj, Uran Kostreci, Tomorr Dosti, Saimir Maloku, etc., which prove the sense of humanity in the hell of Burrel. Despite the difficulties and suffering, these colossus of the Albanian people, or as Agim Musta calls them, the Mandels of Albania, were able to show that not even prison breaks the human spirit and humanity. Spiritual strength was more than necessary for them because communism knew no mercy.

In Burrel prison there was a special cell for female political opponents, considered the most dangerous for the regime, such as: Musine Kokalari, Drita Kosturi, Qefsere Bega, Merita Sokoli, Nurie Koculi, Eriqli Bezhani, Rita Koçi, etc. They were kept separate from the men and did not communicate with them. The living conditions for them were not good, the dirt, the strong smell and the parasites of the head and body constituted a separate torture for these women. Torture was also inflicted on the women of Burrel, where in addition to the "ordinary" tortures, they were seen by the police as objects of pleasure. They were kept in the cell as a single body and did not allow the police to separate them and then abuse their honor.¹⁴ The women's cell is thought to have functioned until the end of the 1960s. During this time, there are no reports of female victims in Burrel prison.

Living conditions in prison improved somewhat in the early 1970s. In an inspection of the General Prosecutor's Office in the Burrel prison, carried out after numerous complaints to central bodies, the problems expressed in the testimonies of the prisoners came to light, such as poor health care, lack of hygiene in the cells, dissatisfaction with the food, and numerous requests to be transferred to other prisons.¹⁵ According to this finding, the regime itself considers the Burrel prison to be a place with many shortcomings based on the regulations governing the functioning of the prisons of communist Albania. It should be mentioned that some improvements were made to the internal infrastructure of the prison. These changes had to do with laying the mattress boards, creating kitchens and a prison store. However, not all problems were resolved.

4. Use of physical violence and torture

For all communist regimes, violence and terror were considered a means to perpetuate their power. It was precisely these mechanisms that turned the societies in these countries into closed and subjugated ones. This mechanism in Albania was institutionalized with the system of prisons and camps spread throughout the country. However, in communist Albania, the exercise of violence and torture was prohibited by law.¹⁶ Physical violence and torture were exercised against the convicts in the Burrel prison to the point of losing their minds.¹⁷ We must say that this was also influenced by the aggravation of the political situation in the country or the relations with the countries of the Eastern Bloc. Violence against convicts for political reasons increased suddenly. They intensified when the power was threatened by developments in the

¹³ Tufa. A. Lleshanaku. L. (2018). *Voices of memory V*. Tirana: ISKPK, p. 299

¹⁴ Kaso. T. (1998). *The ordeal of communist prisons: communist genocide in Albania*. Tirana: Dandida, p. 95

¹⁵ AQSH. P.492. V. 1972. D. 42 .fl. Information on some issues related to Burrel Prison, sent to the Central Committee on the verification of complaints of some prisoners sent to comrade Enver

¹⁶ Musta. A. (2000). *State prisons*, Tirana: Toena, p. 24

¹⁷ Musta. A. (1993). *Albanian Mandels*. Tirana: Naim Frashëri, p. 74

international arena and the deterioration of the country's economy. When the situation stabilized somewhat and the government felt more secure, the repression somewhat reduced the cruel impulse, but without completely stopping the violence. This is characteristic of all communist regimes.

The prisoners in Burrel were treated based on the guidelines that came from the highest bodies of the communist regime.¹⁸ The attitude of the police personnel and the prisoners in Burrel also depended on them. During the Koçi Xoxa period, the situation was extremely difficult. After 1949, with the breakdown of relations with Yugoslavia, Koçi was denounced and convicted as the culprit, leaving all the blame on him. With his departure, the treatment began to be a little more lenient. Maneuvering in this form was followed throughout the entire period of the communist dictatorship in Albania. To get out of the difficult situation, Enver Hoxha punished and eliminated his closest people and collaborators. They were submissive and did not pose a real threat, but it was the system's need to antagonism, so that it could justify its existence.¹⁹ Former members of the communist party have served their sentences in Burrel prison such as: Halim Xhelo, Bashkim Shehu, Vladimir Balluku, etc.

Burrel's nightmare has been the use of physical and psychological torture, with very serious consequences. In the places of memory created in our country in recent years, the macabre tortures inflicted on prisoners in prisons are exposed. They were diverse and applied based on the conditions and opportunities offered by the place where they were inflicted. Hunger, cold and humidity constituted the main elements of the torture in Burrel. The dungeon was the place where the largest number of tortures were carried out, followed by the rest of the prison, which constituted a horror in itself. In Burrel prison, witnesses report some of the tortures:

1. Hitting with hands and kicks

It was the most primitive and widespread torture. It was carried out by police officers for disobeying orders, complaints and various reasons. The use of violence resulted in the convict Urim Elezi losing his sight.²⁰ Violence was used as pressure to recruit spies from among the prisoners. If someone discovered or argued with the recruited spies inside the cell, they were raped.

2. Hunger

In the first years of the regime, food was stopped for the prisoners in Burrel prison. No food was given by the staff and no food was accepted from their families. This torture, devised by Vangjel Rëmbeci, was undertaken to exterminate the prisoners en masse until they died of hunger.²¹ Combined with other types of torture, it led to numerous deaths.

3. Humiliation

Among the tortures that the convicts faced every day. Insults were directed not only at the individual but also at his family and relatives. It was a way to break the prisoners psychologically. Sometimes words kill more than wood. The humiliation continued with rape in front of the entire prison, the obligation to drink urine and eat their feces.

1. Exposure of the dead in the cell

When a prisoner died, they were left in the corner of the cell for several days until the body began to decompose. They were usually elderly people, who had been assigned a place where

¹⁸ Tufa, A. Lleshanaku, L. (2014). *Voices of Memory I*. Tirana: ISKPK, p. 121

¹⁹ Lleshanaku, L. (2020). *Voices of Memory VI*. Tirana: ISKPK, p. 77

²⁰ Kujto, al. (2019). Testimony/ Urim Elezi: I lost my eyesight from torture in Burreli prison. <https://kujto.al/deshmia-urim-elezi-humbadriten-e-syve-nga-torturat-ne-burgun-e-burrelit/>.

²¹ Kujto, al. (2020). Testimony: I will show you the criminal lieutenants who disappeared the convicts. <https://kujto.al/deshmia-ju-tregoj-togeret-kriminele-qe-vrisnin-ne-tortura-te-denuarit/>. Tirana

they would stay when they were on the verge of death. Exposure was also carried out in other prison facilities in order for the prisoners to see how they would end up.

2. Leaving without health care until death.

It was widely used. In cases of emergency, the service was not provided and the prisoner died. There are many victims of this torture. Among them: Ismail Qazim, Mehmet Myftiu, Estref Myftiu, Gjergj Kokoshi, Xhevat Korça, Akile Tasi, etc., have died in prison without receiving the proper service.²² The convicts were forbidden to wash and refresh their heads with soap.

3. Attempted recruitment as a security spy²³

It was torture in itself. If you accepted, you were forced to do the dirty work of the prison operative. If you resisted, punishment began with various methods such as the prohibition of meetings and communication by letters with family members, pressure, distortion of the truth with the creation of wrong impressions such as the death of family members. Recruitment was imposed by the operative. Re-use could also lead to death.

4. Leaving to sleep on cement

For a long time, there were no beds in the cells of Burreli. Prisoners were forced to sleep on newspapers or cement in low temperatures. This caused the appearance of many diseases of the bones and internal organs of the body. It was daily torture that the prisoners faced.

5. Creating noises at night

In the late hours, so that the prisoners would not sleep, the guards would open the cells and take the convicts, put them in the dungeons and create various noises. The actions created a state of anxiety and pressure. It is a psychological torture and is otherwise known as deafening torture.

6. Breaking bones

Ribs, bones of the hands, feet, fingers were broken. They were not treated until the bones were attached on their own in an irregular manner. It caused body deformation and difficulty in movement.

7. Preparing the grave

The prisoner was usually taken in the middle of the night and forced to open his grave in front of the armed platoon lined up ready for execution. It was psychological pressure because the victim was returned to his cell. This is testified by Engjëll Kokoshi in Burreli prison.

8. Chaining and putting him in a pipe with his feet

The entire body from head to toe was chained and the victim was put in the pipe only with his feet. This was done so that he would not lean on the wall while standing in the void. If the body were released, it would go outside and fall into the sewage, drowning in the dungeon's feces.

9. Locking up in a dungeon until death

This type of torture was carried out by Vangjel Rëmbeci. When 2 young men were isolated in the dungeons, they began to sing the national anthem. In retaliation, the door was closed with

²² Kujto. al. (2018). The hunger strike that took the life of Xhevat Korça in Burreli prison. <https://kujto.al/greva-e-urise-qe-mori-jeten-xhevat-korces-ne-burgun-e-burrelit/>. Tirana

²³ Some of the data on torture was taken from places of memory such as the National History Museum, the Bunk'Art 2 Museum and the House of the Leaf Museum

nails. When they spoke, their voices seemed to come out of the ground. The door was not opened until they died. This is testified by Demir Pojani.²⁴

10. Torture by dehydration

After being given food with a lot of salt, the prisoners were forbidden to drink water. This situation lasted for several days. There are cases during torture when salt was put in the victim's mouth.

11. Leaving in the rain

It was used to tire and exhaust the convicts. Usually the elderly and the sick were taken out into the yard and left to stand in the rain. It affected the health of the bones and the cooling of the body. It caused torture and was carried out to serve as an example to other convicts. Leaving in the rain was also used during airing, where despite the rain, the convicts were taken out.

12. Pouring salt into wounds

It was used to aggravate the condition of the convict, this type of torture was used when the wounds had progressed. In Burrel, it is reported to have been carried out against the intellectual from Shkodër, Kel Çoba,²⁵ whose ankles were pierced and salt was poured over him. Also against the former Prime Minister Koço Kota, who was beaten to death. The use of this torture had strong psychological effects that could even lead to damage to mental health.

13. Putting in dungeons filled with water and leaving naked

The convict was put naked and barefoot in wet cells where there was no lighting for 10-15-30 days. There were cases when 4-5 prisoners were also put in. It was filled with water so that the prisoner could not sit down. This type of torture caused serious illnesses in the victims to whom it was applied. Those who survived remained with consequences for life. Used by Captain Asllani.²⁶ Testimony of Muharrem Xhakoni. Many prisoners have died from the cold in the dungeon within 6 months or 1 year of returning to the cell.

14. Handcuffing for several days

The hands were tied behind the back and secured with a padlock or German handcuffs, so that there was no way to free them. You had to stay in handcuffs day and night, until you were released from the dungeon. It caused terrible pain throughout your body and numbness in your upper limbs. When the police removed the handcuffs, they would pull your hands back or shake them to cause pain.

15. Isolation

The prisoners were only allowed to air out twice a day, for less than 2 hours. There were cases where they were not allowed to air out for weeks or even months. Isolation caused breathing problems and other illnesses because a series of body hygiene services were performed during the airing. The damage from this torture included physical damage from lack of movement, loss of vision and the ability to speak. Going out to the dungeon was exhausting and violent because the prisoners would line up and run. Anyone who fell was put in the dungeon.

²⁴ Authority for Information on Former State Security Documents. (2022). Disappeared by the dictatorship. Family members testify. Tirana: Onufri, p. 192

²⁵ Kaso. T. (1998). The ordeal of communist prisons: communist genocide in Albania. Tirana: Dandida, p. 115

²⁶ Pamphlet. (2018). 1963. Deaths from torture in Burreli prison. <https://pamfleti.net/1963-vdekjet-nga-torturat-ne-burgun-e-burrelit>. Tirana

16. Locking up in a dungeon with a sick person

When the guards found a prisoner in serious health condition, close to death, they would put him in a dungeon with a healthy person to eat his food. After the sick person died, the guards would leave him locked up for 3 days in order to eat his food.²⁷ Prison staff used the food rations of the dead. The torture is reported to have been carried out in the first years of the opening of Burrel prison.

17. Use of smoke inside the cells

It is one of the tortures for which Burrel is known, unlike other prisons and camps. It has not been proven to have been practiced in other environments. For this reason, there are different opinions about its use. To clarify the confusion about smoke torture in cells, it should be noted that This form of torture was caused by the burning of various materials in the cells of Burrel prison. Based on numerous testimonies and archival documents²⁸, the smoke was caused by the prisoners themselves who used charcoal and charcoal to prepare various foods. So it was a torture influenced by the conditions more than caused by the prison police.

18. Food poisoning

Herbs and harmful substances were thrown into the cooking pot to poison the prisoners so that they would have stomach cramps. The prisoners took all their discomfort out into the cell because they were not allowed to go to the bathroom. The dirtiness of the rooms created a horrible and unbearable situation. It is proven to have been carried out by Vangjel Rëmbeci. It is said that medical medications were thrown into the food to stun the prisoners.

19. Beating and drowning in a barrel of water

Torture was carried out on prisoners who were destined to be killed. After being taken out of the dungeon, they were brutally beaten and taken outside the prison where they put their heads in a barrel of water with a temperature below zero. Screams and screams were heard constantly. They tied them with their heads in the water until they died. They let the other prisoners see them.

20. Prohibition of physical exercises

If the guards found out, the convict was taken and sentenced to the dungeon or raped.²⁹ Through exercises, the body was kept in shape, but this fact frightened the command. It was a way to keep the prisoners exhausted and tired, avoiding revolts from dissatisfaction. Lack of physical exercise causes degradation and a decline in physical strength in humans.

The victims were tortured without a reason, but with the aim of destroying them physically and mentally as well as terrorizing the rest of the prisoners who saw such events every day. Torture causes subsequent physical and psychological complications for the individual. As a result, hundreds have lost their lives during torture, dozens have committed suicide to escape and dozens more have lost their minds. It is said that several places have served as cemeteries for the prisoners of Burreli. The first is the “Burreli cherry”, which has become a legend because prisoners who lost their lives in the years 1946-1955 are buried nearby. Legend has it that this cherry tree grew from the blood of buried prisoners.

²⁷ Kujto. al. (2020). Testimony: I will show you the criminal lieutenants who disappeared the convicts. <https://kujto.al/deshmia-ju-tregoj-togeret-kriminele-qe-vrisnin-ne-tortura-te-denuarit/>. Tirana

²⁸ AQSH. P.492. V.1972. D.42 Fl.49 Information on some issues related to Burreli Prison, sent to the Central Committee on the verification of complaints of some prisoners sent to comrade Enver

²⁹ Observatori i Kujtesës. (2018). Muharrem Xhakoni, on the slow tortures in Burreli prison. <https://www.observatoriikujteses.al/1963-torturat-e-ngadalta-ne-burgun-e-burrelit/>. Tirana

Conclusions

Burrel Prison, for all those convicted by the communist regime, but especially the politically persecuted, will be remembered and remembered as the hell of the communist dictatorship in Albania. The difficult living conditions, hunger, prolonged isolation, violence and torture shape the profile of Burrel Prison in the 45 years of its existence. Created specifically for the most dangerous elements, the prison turned into a nightmare for political prisoners, in which more than a thousand Albanians suffered, including intellectuals, patriots, prominent religious figures, writers and scientists, among the most enlightened people of the nation. Convicted of crimes they never committed, hundreds of men lost their lives in Burrel, simply because they held different views and opinions from those who convicted them. Their freedom was dangerous for the regime because it raised its voice for rights.

In my opinion, the meaning of Burrel prison has changed over the years, based on the way it functioned and the importance it had for the regime. We can better understand this change by dividing it into phases. It is established that the difficult situation of the prisoners has never been of the same intensity. The first phase includes the first decade, and a little further, of the communist rule, where the repression was greatest. During this phase, torture and murder were committed against political prisoners through the most diverse forms mentioned and in the work, a stage in which the largest number of victims are counted in relation to time. Burrel prison in its first years was thought of and functioned as a prison for the extermination of political opponents. The cruel treatment of the prisoners and the difficult living conditions are testified by the survivors of those years (but also by later witnesses) as the culmination of a decade of increasingly harsh discriminatory measures.

The regime always thought about the fate of political opponents, most of whom were in Burrel, and this is evident in the prison platforms during wartime. In the event of aggression by enemy states, all of them would be executed immediately, so that they would not have the opportunity to experience the arrival of freedom. This period marks the moment when communist violence and terror had reached its peak from the efforts to ensure the establishment of strong foundations of the communist power of the dictator Hoxha. Quoting Uran Kalkulla, terror was the soul, blood, lymph on which this system was built, with which it could survive. Otherwise, it could not be called communist power.

The change came when the situation for the regime calmed down and the repression somewhat reduced its cruel thrust, of course without ever extinguishing the terror and mass intimidation of the population.

In the second phase, defined as 1973 and onwards, difficulties and cruel treatment were present, but not in the same form and to the same extent as in the first phase. The period in question marks the consolidation of the communist dictatorship in Albania, always followed by the fear of attacks and attempts to overthrow the regime. This phase marks the mixing of the political prison of Burrel with ordinary prisoners (small in number) and some "easing" changes in living conditions. From archival sources and eyewitness testimonies, complaints and difficulties from the prison are reported, some of which are also transmitted to the highest bodies of the communist party. Minor changes can be noted in this regard, but it can never be said that the prisoners of Burrel lived better than before. Hunger, cold, torture and isolation remained until the end as the cause of the suffering and deaths of the convicts. Burrel prison served as a means of the regime for the imprisonment of political opponents. Their punishment, in addition to aiming to keep them isolated, also served as a way to denigrate and eliminate them through harsh living conditions, cruel treatment and torture. Named with the term "enemies of the people", this category was used as an example for Albanian society of who was the evil that threatened the country, influencing the intimidation and control of the population. Through a non-existent danger, the conviction of perpetuating the regime's power was created as

protection from “possible dangers”. As a result, during 46 years, Albania and Albanians experienced the most brutal dictatorship in Eastern Europe.

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