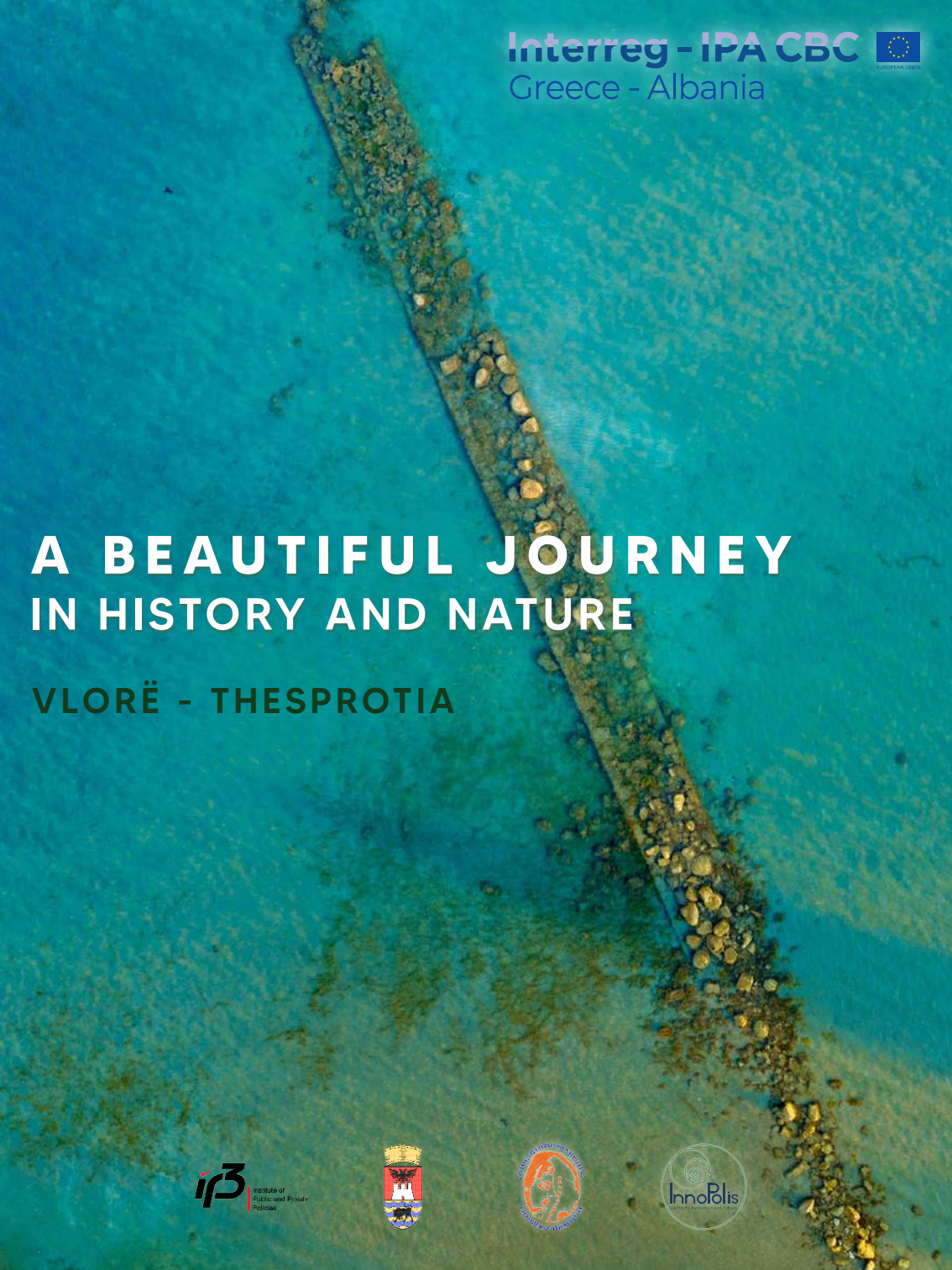

Interreg - IPA CBC
Greece - Albania
A BEAUTIFUL JOURNEY
IN HISTORY AND NATURE
VLORË - THESPROTIA
Institute of Public and Private Policies
InnoPolis

Interreg – IPA CBC
Greece - Albania

A beautiful journey in history and nature

Vlorë - Thesprotia Region

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A beautiful journey in history and nature

Vlorë - Thesprotia Region

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Foreword

Dear friends,

Vlora Region is located in the southwest of Albania, in a very convenient geostrategic position, with immediate access to the sea and the support of mountain ranges in the east. The whole region is accessible by a network of connecting and distribution corridors of the country, both by land and sea.

The region is among the areas with the highest tourist potential of the country, known for its numerous natural resources and rich biodiversity, with amazing coastline, hidden bays, caves and rich underwater world, archaeological, historical, cultural, human and economic wealth.

The Cultural Heritage Itinerary of GET, stimulates regional integration through joint initiatives by involved communities and municipalities while encouraging respect for cultural rights, cultural democracy and diversity, valuing common heritage and contributing to fundamental European principles for better understanding.
The cultural heritage itinerary you are about to discover, is an inspiration and testimony to the rich diversity of the landscape, people and heritage of Vlora Region, which presents intriguing potential for tourism throughout the country.

Along this itinerary, you can walk yourself through the region's heavenly beaches and natural wonders, the Orikum and Amantia archaeological parks, Llogara National Park, the gorgeous vistas of the Karaburun Peninsula and Sazan Island, charming and hospitable seaside villages built over the centuries, explore some of the most iconic beaches of Albania in the southern shores, visit thriving city of Saranda and the UNESCO's World Heritage site of Butrint.

All you have to do is enjoy it!

Ervis Moçka
Chairman of the Vlora Regional Council

GET_ Vlorë Region

Points of Interests

AULONA (VLORA)

_ Church of Zvërnec Monastery 12
_ The surrounding walls of Aulona 13
_ Muradie Mosque 13
_ Treport Castle 14
_ Mavrovo Castle (Olympe) 16
_ The Ilyrian city of Amantia 17
_ Kanina Castle 20

JERICHO (ORIKU)

_ The ruined village of old Tragjas 25
_ Gjonc Bocari Castle 26
_ Ancient City of Orik 27
_ Marmiroi Church 30
_ Inscriptions on the Gramata rock 31

DHËRMI VILLAGE

_ Church of the Monastery of Pangji 32
_ The ruins of St. Stephen's Church 32

VUNO VILLAGE

HIMARA TOWN

_ Himara Castle 38
_ Porto Palermo Castle 40

QEPARO VILLAGE

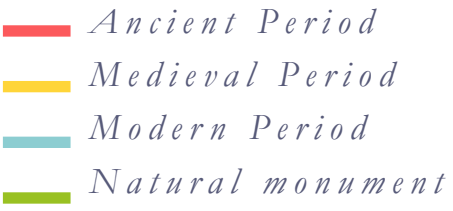
_ Sopoti Castle 43

ONCHESMOS (SARANDA)

_ Onchesmos Castle 48
_ Monastery of St. Mary, Kakome 50
_ The church of St. Friday 50
_ Synagoue and Basilica of Saranda 51

_ The Monastery of 40 Saints 52
_ Castle of Lëkursi 54
_ The Wall of Dema 55
_ Monastery of St. George 56
_ Butrint 58
Baptistery 60
The Great Basilica 61
The Theater 62
The Curative Stoa 64
The Roman Baths (thermal springs) 64
_ The triangular Castle of Ali Pasha 66
_ Castle of Ali Pasha at the Estuary of Vivar 67
FINIQ
_ Ancient City of Phoenicia 68
_ Monastery of St. Nicholas (Mesopotamia) 70
DELVINË
_ Ruins of Kamenica Village 72
_ Churches of Kamenica 72
_ Mosque of Gjin Aleks 72
_ Castle of Delvina 73

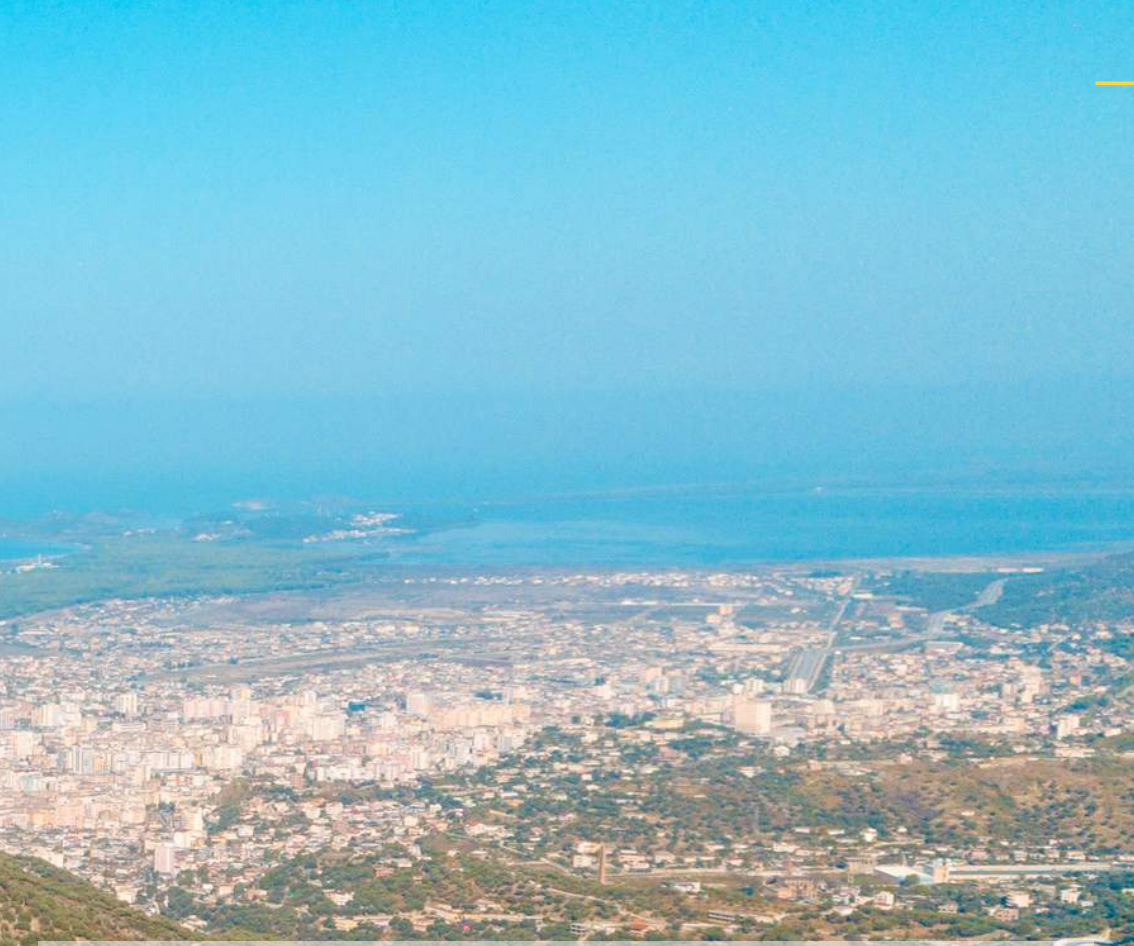
GET_ *Inside*


Ancient Period
Medieval Period
Modern Period
Natural monument

AULONA (VLORA)

Vlora is an old city founded in the century VI B.C., originally known by the name Aulona. The city offers visitors countless natural and cultural monuments. Vlora is a harbour city that has a special meaning for Albanians, as in 1912 the independence of Albania was declared here. A short visit to the historic square will teach you a lot about "The land of eagles"! If you follow the coastal road to the south, you reach the most beautiful and frequented beaches of Vlora.





Things to do in Vlorë...

_ *Take a walk around Flag Square*
_ *Don't miss monuments of the utmost significance for the country's history: the Independence Monument, the Flagpole Monument and the tomb of Ismail Qemali*
_ *Witness the harmony of Ottoman architecture by visiting Muradije Mosque, the only work remaining in Albania from the famous architect "Mimar Sinani"*
_ *Become familiar with the multicultural history of the city in the Jewish Street*
_ *Climb 240 stairs to see Vlora from above at the Sacred Place of Kuzum Baba*
_ *Be one with nature at Narta Lagoon, only 20 minutes from the city*
_ *Visit Zvernec Monastery, one of the most beautiful churches in the south of Albania*
_ *Explore the perfect harmony between mountains and sea at Llogara National Park*
_ *Take a day boat trip to Karaburun Peninsula and Sazan Island*
_ *Enjoy an afternoon walk along the Lungomare, the 5-km long promenade*

Church of Zvërnec Monastery

The church of the St. Mary monastery, a construction of the century XIII-XIV, is located on a small island in the village of Zvërnec. The church stands out for the proportions achieved and the careful work of the elements: the facades with arcades, the wings of the cross and the dome over the drum. The main space, the nave, in planimetry has the shape of an elongated cross. At the bottom of its eastern wing is the apse. The altar is separated from the nave by a wooden iconostasis, carved with floral and zoomorphic figures. On the floor of the nave there is a tombstone, where a skull is carved between two crossed bones, accompanied by the following inscription in Greek:

"Here rests Kondo Karanxha, a noble man,
from noble family roots".

The Karanxhas were a noble family with influence in the city of Vlora, which maintained their social and economic status even during the Ottoman regime. In 1563 a progeny of the Karanxha family paid the Ottoman Sanjak Bey of Vlora the money for the release of five Venetian citizens held captive by him. On St. Mary's Day, August 15, the island and the monastery of Zvërnec are frequented by numerous inhabitants of the surrounding villages, who participate in religious celebrations and rites. The island is reached by a wooden bridge that connects it with the village of Zvërnec.



The island of Zvernec

The surrounding walls of Aulona

The city *(Aulona)* is mentioned by Lucian of Samosata[1] and by Ptolemy[2], in the century II. Wall fragments of a castrum found in today's city center prove that the castle is of the century VI, but ancient authors and various archeological objects found during excavations prove that the birth of the city is earlier.

The city is dominated by a high hill, where for centuries there is a place of worship, a *Tekke*[3]. The Byzantine historian, Ana Komnena, shows that in 1108, from the top of this hill which she calls Jason, the Byzantines followed the movements of the fleet of Boemund, the Norman king of Sicily.

The coast of Vlora offers the closest point that separates Albania from the Italian coast. In the century XI-XIV, historians of the Crusades argued that the shortest and safest way to transport large armies to the East, was to sail by sea from Brindisi Port to Vlora. The important role of Vlora is underlined by the fact that since 458 it is mentioned as an episcopal residence. There are no traces of old Christian cult monuments in the city, although they are mentioned in historical sources.

1) Lucian of Samosata, was an ancient Greek satirist, rhetorician and pamphleteer
2) Claudius Ptolemy wrote in ancient Greek about a dozen scientific treatises, three of which were of importance to later Byzantine, Islamic, and Western European science
3) A monastery of dervishes, especially in Ottoman Turkey.

Muradie Mosque or Lead Mosque

In 1436, the Italian humanist and epigraphist, Ciriaco d'Ancona, stopped in Vlora, where he was impressed by the church of St. George. Most likely, in the century XVI this church was transformed into a mosque by the Turks.

In fact, the Muradie Mosque, with its stone walls interspersed with rows of red bricks, with the drum and the dome, is reminiscent of the construction technique of Byzantine cult objects. On the occasion of the Vlora invasion in 1690, the Venetians turned this mosque into a Catholic church, but only for a short time, because in 1691 Vlora was taken back by the Turks and the church-mosque was finally restored to its role as a place of Islamic worship .

The mosque was built in 1537 by the most prominent architect of the Ottoman Empire, Mimar Sinani.

The mosque consists of a cubic prayer hall (10x 11m), covered with a dome and a minaret 18m high. In the southern part of the hall is the *mihrab*[1]. The entrance to the mosque is on the north side, while the minaret is located on the northwest. The walls are built of "mixed masonry", rows of stones mixed with rows of bricks, a characteristic of the constructions in Istanbul of Mimar Sinan. The mosque is built with a simple structure, but there are no flaws in it, starting from details such as the combination of two colors bricks, the arches and the proportions.

1) Mihrab is a semicircular niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the qibla, that is, the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca and hence the direction that Muslims should face when praying.

Treport Castle

Treport Castle was one of the 4 civic centers of Vlora Bay. The first fortification of Treport belongs to the century VI BC. The walls of that time surrounded an area of about 0.6 ha. The ruins of some houses with brick walls were also found there.

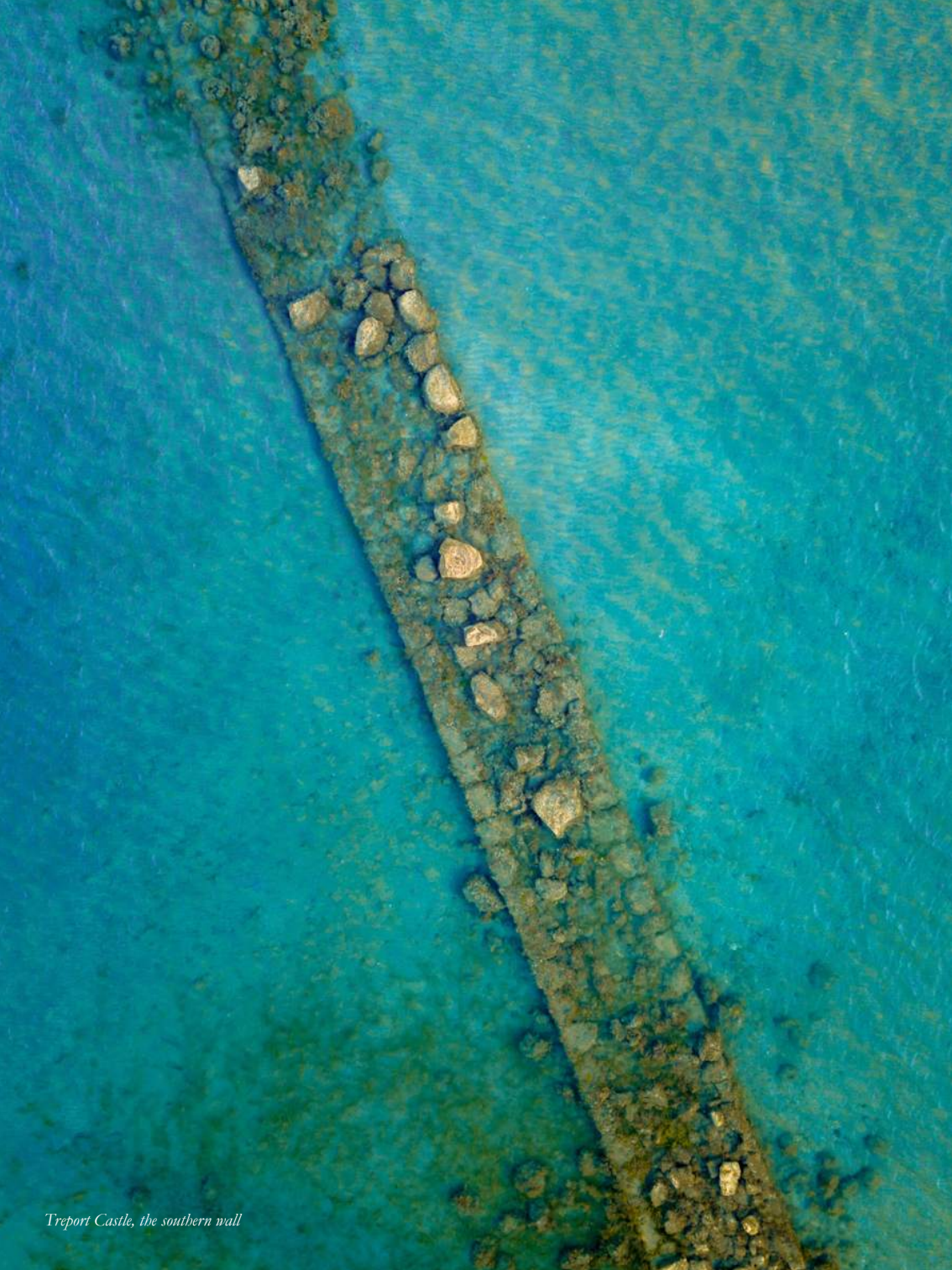
In the century V BC, the inhabited area was expanded by 2 ha. The walls of this period were built with larger and more regular stone blocks. At the end of the century IV BC, the hill was surrounded by new walls, creating the acropolis of the city. A part of the wall descended to the foot of the hill, right on the sea shore, circling an area of 30 ha, which ranks Treport among the great cities of Illyria.

Treport belongs to the type of fortified cities on a flat terrain, with an acropolis at the top. On the west side of the hill the ruins of a monumental building, probably a temple, have been discovered. Numerous pottery finds prove the intensity of the exchanges that took place in this city. Treport is considered the location of the ancient Vlora.

After the century I BC, Treport begins the decadence as a result of the swamping of Lake Narta. The port, where the economic life of the city was concentrated, went out of order. However, in 1081, the fleet of Norman King Robert Guiscard was forced to land in Treport. The Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi, who visited it in 1670, wrote:

"...to the west of the village of Zvërnec, there is the castle of Jekgjeç by the sea. An abandoned ruin with a large harbor. During the reign of Sultan Suleiman, the castle of Vlora was built with his stones. At all four ends of the harbor are fishing feathers..."

The reused ancient blocks in the Castle of Vlora, identical to those of Treport, confirm the statement of Çelebi. During ebb, the southern wall, 850 m long, comes to the surface.



Treport Castle, the southern wall

Ancient City of Olympe (Mavrovo Castle)

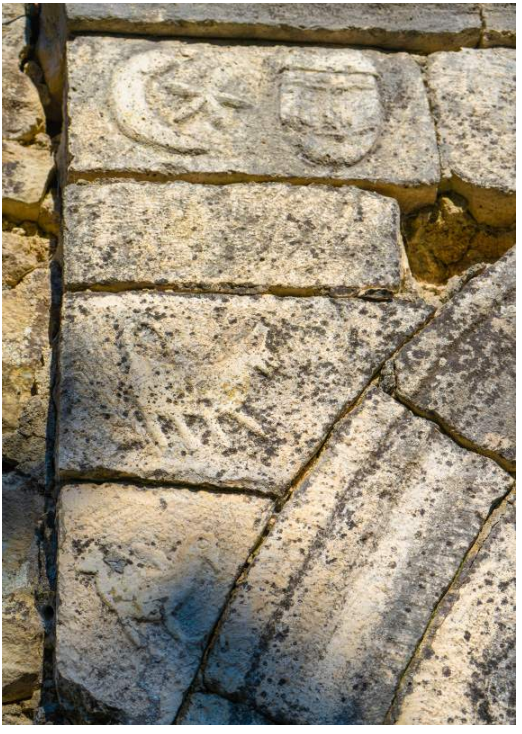
Remains of an ancient city have been discovered on the top of a hill in the village of Mavrovo. The place is identified as the city of Olympe, whose name appears stamped on the coins and on a brick found there. The city is mentioned by Stephan of Byzantium[1]:

"Olympe, city of Illyria.
Ethnic name Olympaios or Olympeus ".

36 bronze coins were found on the city land. 13 of these coins were of the Epirote League and 8 of Olympus itself. Olympus coins were of 3 types: Zeus-lightning, Apollo-Obelisk and Athens / snake wrapped in the rod of Hermes.

The only inscription found at Olympe, is a late 3rd century BC dedication to Zeus Megistos that mentions a *politarches, a grammateus* and *the synarchontes*. Excavations made so far have uncovered very old artifacts, mostly in locally produced pottery, associated with a proto-urban phase of Olympia. Other objects, such as terracotta, bronze tools and coins, belong to the later period (century V-IV BC). The necropolis of Olympes is located 2 km to the South East. The tombs are with stone crates, with rich inventory of the century IV-II BC. After that, the life fades out, probably as a result of Roman Paul-Émile's devastating campaign in 167 BC.

1) Stephanus or Stephan of Byzantium, the author of an important geographical dictionary entitled Ethnica





Ruins of Mavrovo Castle

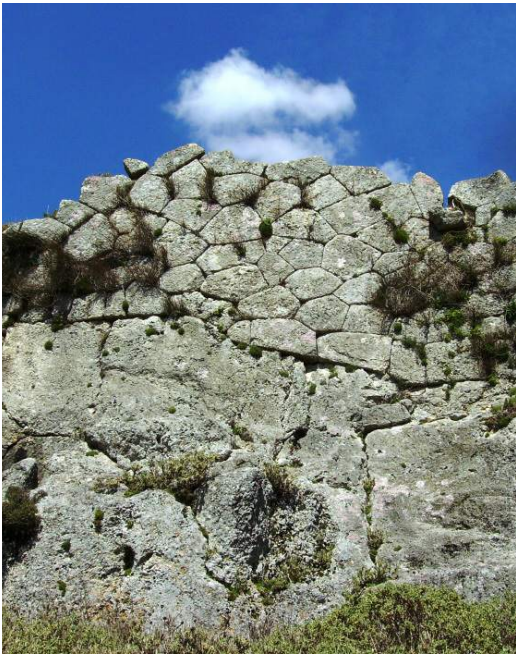
The Ilyrian city of Amantia

Amantia is the only Illyrian city mentioned by sources since the century VI BC. At the beginning of the century III BC, it was included in the Epirote League of King Pyrrhus of Epirus. The 500 coins found in Amantia testify the intensity of the city's economic life. Among them, the coins of Epirus predominate, and after them come about 100 coins of Amantia itself, all made of bronze, for internal circulation.

Amantia is presented as a typical Illyrian settlement, completely surrounded by walls with a perimeter of 2200m. The first phase of construction with stone blocks polygonal shapes, reinforcing tower and an arched gate on the southwest side, belongs to the century V BC. In the second phase, on century IV BC, large quadrangular stone blocks were used and new gates were opened.

From the inscriptions found on site, it turns out that Amantia had a social organization similar to that of Bylis, being the center of the Amantis *koinon,* with a *Council* (boulè), *councilors* (bouleutès) and .

The size and importance of Amantia is underlined by the necropolis of the city, on the western side of the city, by the road coming from the Bay of Vlora. Here are discovered monumental tombs covered with arches, belonging to the centuries IV-II BC. Their inventory is represented by vases with red paintings produced in southern Italy (Magna Graecia), as well as bronze utensils of Corinthian production.



Perimeter wall of the city

There have also been found silver ornaments of local production of the century IV-III BC, which follow local models of the century VI BC. In the century III-II BC, the production of pottery is done entirely in local ateliers.

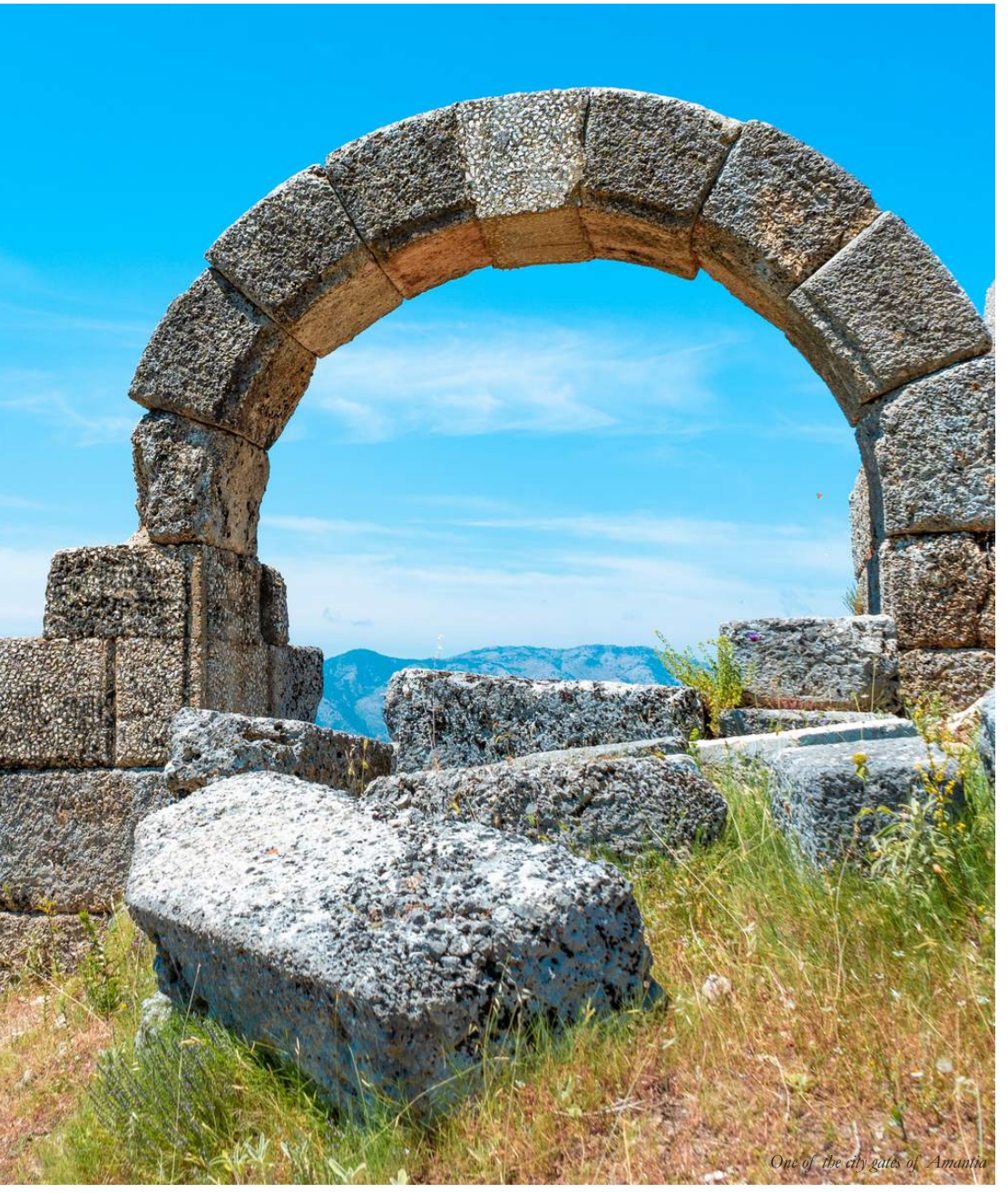
The first centuries of our era also find Amantia as a city that had embraced Christianity. This is evidenced by the ruins of a Paleo-Christian basilica, which stood next to the ruins of the Doric temple. The basilica belongs to the beginning of the century VI, but in the years 343 and 347 historical sources speak about the bishop of Amantia, a fact that proves that at that time the Christian community of Amantia was well-organized and well-structured.

The temple of Aphrodite, century III BC, is located 150 m southwest of the walls. The temple was further looted for the construction of a Paleo-Christian church. The temple is Doric, with 4 columns 0.80 m in diameter on both sides and a flat wall on the long sides. From the alto-relief of the forehead, is preserved the sculpture of a young woman breastfeeding a baby. Although her head is missing, it manages to reproduce the elasticity of a young, beautiful and energetic woman's body. The name of the goddess that was dedicated this sculpture is shown by the inscription of the century II BC.

"In the time of Menem, the reconstruction of the temple of Aphrodite was carried out. The temple of Amantia is very similar with the quite unusual temple of Athena Lindias in Rhodes, of the century IV."

The best preserved monument is **the Stadium** built in the century III BC, about 150m away from the walls, on a natural terrace to the east of the city. There are 17 steps on one side and only 8 on the other. Names of people are engraved here and there on the stone seats.





One of the city gates of Amantia

Kanina Castle



Kanina is surrounded by a complete circle of irregularly shaped walls. These walls were built in the middle age, but there are also wall segments belonging to the ancient period. The area inside the walls is 3.6 ha. The antique wall has a gate at the eastern end. Next to it are found the remains of a tower in a polygonal shape, which were built in the Middle Ages. Reconstructions of the century XIII-XIV have enriched the castle with several gates and towers of rectangular, polygonal, semicircular shapes. There were found nine gates. Inside the perimeter of the castle there were residential blocks. Three water wells have been discovered. One of them is mentioned in a chrysobule of Emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus, in 1307, with the name of the French family, who had financed its construction.

Near the walls, in their eastern sector, 15 graves were found. There have been found ceramic remains of the century IV BC, painted with bright black varnish. Whereas, the ceramics of the century III BC were produced with a characteristic mud of Amantia. There have been found ancient coins produced in Apollonia with the name of that city and the head of Apollon. Medieval coins belong to the Byzantine emperors by Joan Tsimitzes (969-976), Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180), Isaac II Angel Komnenos (1185-1196), coins of Manfred Hohenstaufen, king of Sicily, Anjouan, Venetian and Ottoman coins.

After the riots that characterized the early Middle Ages, for many centuries, until the Ottoman occupation, the ecclesiastical, military and administrative center of Vlora was moved to the castle of Kanina, about 3 km southeast of Vlora. Ptolemy, in the century II, along with Amantia behind the Bay of Vlora, also talks aboutKanina as an Amantia by the sea.

Kanina from the century IV BC served as the sea exit of the capital of the Illyrian tribe of Amantia. In the century VI, Procopius of Caesarea included Kanina in the list of castles first built by Emperor Justinian (Kion). In the Middle Ages, Kanina is constantly mentioned in Western or Byzantine historical sources. From its dominant position, this castle controlled every movement of troops and ships within the entire arch of the Bay of Vlora.

Cen. X-XIII Kanina became the headquarter of the local governors of the Byzantine Empire and the Despotate of Epirus.

1258 Manfred Hohenstaufen, son of Frederick II, king of Sicily and southern Italy, conquered Vlora, the Spinarica hills, Berat and Durres with a surprise attack. As governor of the Albanian possessions, King Manfred appointed the commander of his fleet, Admiral Philip Chinardi, who established his headquarters at the Castle of Kanina. In his time, Vlora became an important trading center for the trade of spices, which Chinardi brought to Vlora from the Maghreb and then forwarded to the large market of Venice. Historical sources say that Admiral Chinardi acclimatized quite well in Albania, he even married the daughter of the first noble family of the Vlora region, Maria Frank.

1266 King Manfred was killed at the Battle of Benevento by the Frenchman Charles I Anjou. The cities and castles that had been in Manfred's possession were inherited by the new sovereign of Sicily, Charles I Anjou, who appointed his general, Jakob Balsiniani, as governor of Kanina.

1284 Anjouan rule ended in the Vlora region and Byzantine rule was restored.

1345 Vlora passed into the possession of the Serb Stefan Dusan, who appointed as his governor his brother-in-law, the Bulgarian prince Johan Komneni, based in Kanina. His name is found engraved on a stone block that today is located in the Archaeological Museum of Tirana.

1360 In Kanina ruled for many years the despot Andrea Muzaka, then his son-in-law, Balsha II of Shkodra.

1385 After the fall of Balsha II in the Battle of Savra, Kanina was ruled by his wife Komnena and finally his daughter, Rugina Balsha.

1417 Rugina Balsha was forced to leave in order to leave the possession of the entire territory of Vlora to the Ottoman invaders.

Kanina Castle in Vlorë

JERICHO
(ORIKU)

15 km from Vlora, at the foot of Mount Karaburun, you reach Orikum which is home to Albania's only Marina. From 2018 the Marina of Orikum is officially recognized as an International Port. There are extensive archaeological remains of an ancient city just outside of town but the biggest attraction is the Karaburun Peninsula at the far end of the bay. This is home to some of the most stunning scenery in Albania including numerous beautiful hidden coves such as the Bay of Gramata. Today the city has become an important tourist center.

The beach, the mountains that surrounds it and the magnificent pine forest in Llogara nearby, make the landscape of Orik quite special compared to other seaside centers of Albania. About 1 km before entering the town of Orikum, a secondary road leads to the village of Tragjas. The Old Tragjas at the top of the hill, is a village with many histories, which you shouldn't miss.



Old city of Orik, view from the Pasha Liman Lagoon

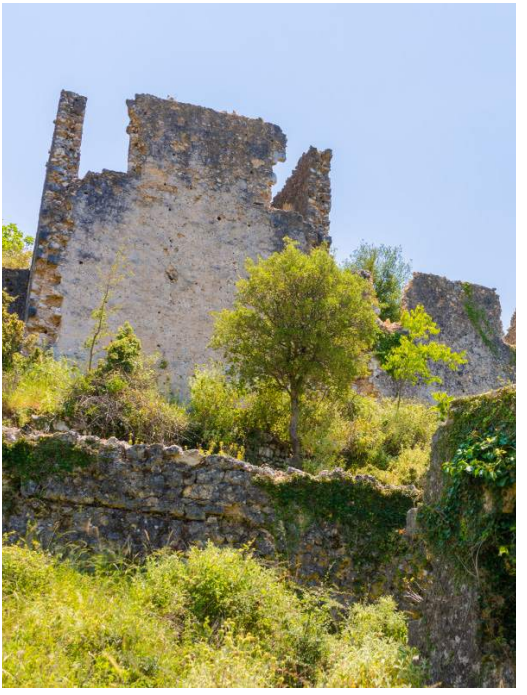
The ruined village of Old Tragjas

The Old Tragjas at the top of the hill, a village with many histories, surprises with its sad appearance. The village was burned three times during the years of World War II, by Italian and German invaders.

All 300 houses are abandoned. They lack the roof and burn marks still appear on the rubble of the walls. They are all built of well-carved heavy stones and are generally two-storey, resembling the mountain towers of northern Albania. The houses are similar and the village streets are paved with stone slabs.

The center of Tragjas contains the typical elements of a village in that area: a large fountain that supplies the village with mountain water and a magnificent plane tree.

At the top of Tragjas, in a dominant location, is a highly curated monumental tomb. The tomb is topped by a star with a typical turban and an Ottoman inscription. On all four sides of the tomb, on the sides of the marble, is engraved the star of David. The tomb probably belongs to some Ottoman dignitary, probably a converted Jew. Historical sources show that representatives of the Jewish community of Vlora, who after converting to Islam, had won important positions in the local administration. One of them, named Davidoglou, at the end of the century XVII managed to be the sanjak-bey[1] of Vlora.





Ruins of Old Tragjas

1 Sanjak-bey, sanjaq-bey or -beg, (Ottoman Turkish) was the title given in the Ottoman Empire to a Bey (a high-ranking officer, but usually not a Pasha) appointed to the military and administrative command of a district (sanjak).

Gjonc Boçari Castle

The locals call it "Gjon Bocari Castle", it is located near Tragjas, and has a quadrangular shape, with dimensions 30x18m. The walls are up to 4m high and 1.80m wide. At the bottom of them there are turrets for firearms. In the corners of the north and east side of the castle are two polygonal towers. The first news about the existence of that castle is given by an Ottoman register of the end of century XVII. It is about a city called *Gjoniqestra*, i.e. *"John's Castle"*.

According to the register, other 61 Jewish families were housed in that castle. Their placement in that protected place must be related to the insecurity created in Vlora in the years 1683-1715 as a result of the wars between the Porte on one hand, and the Republic of Venice, Spain and the Habsburgs, on the other hand, during which many cities on the Adriatic-Ionian coast were affected.

Thus, this might be a second exodus of Jews from Vlora, after that of the century XV from Spain, in search of the most protected countries. Gjon Bocari's castle was probably only a temporary shelter for that community.



View from Gjonc Boçari Castle

Qyteti antik Orik

The old town of Orik, lies on a hill only 32 m high, which faces the Ionian Sea on one side and the Dukat lagoon on the other.

During the century XIX, two French travelers conducted an expedition at the request of Napoleon III. Archaeologist Léon Heuzey and architect Honoré Daumet, discovered one of the most mentioned sites at the time of Caesar's wars. Léon Heuzey, stated in his late publication:

"It was there we discovered in 1861, the traces of the ancient city and recorded various topographic data, which explains its famous name, also as a shipyard… The houses there formed a continuum of concentric stairs, with streets in each of them and with numerous stairs on all sides that climbed up to the heights of the acropolis. It is surrounded by a defensive wall, and at the top was a ruined chapel, where the saint himself was forgotten, which marked the central square of the city temple ..."

Orikos enters the great history of the Adriatic-Ionian basin in 49 BC, when it was conquered by Julius Caesar during his wars with Pompey. According to Pseudo-Scymnus, an anonymous Greek author and geographer, *"The Hellenic Orikos, a city by the sea, was built by the Euboeans, who were blown off course by strong winds on their return voyage from the battle of Troy, in the 12th -14th centuries BC"*. But, several years of archeological excavations, unearthed numerous pottery of the middle century VI BC, among which there was no Euboeas ceramic fragment.

From the excavations carried out by the Albanian-Swiss mission, a part of the surrounding wall has been discovered, in extremely good condition, which is believed to be of the end of century IV - beginning of century III BC. This defensive wall, 1100 m long, surrounds an area of 7.8 ha.

The most representative monument of Orik was excavated during the 1950s by an Albanian-Russian team and was initially supposed to be an ancient theater. During the recent excavations by the Albanian-Swiss mission, the scientists realized that the theater's acoustics did not work. Another theory was that it could have been a public square with a statue in the center, but further discoveries instead of the base of a statue, revealed a staircase descending into a canal 2m deep and 7m long. This part of the monument was Greco-Roman, in other words, it was built shortly before the arrival of Julius Caesar. Since the ancient city of Orik had no natural source of clean water, and on the steps leading to the hill were found side canals to collect rainwater, the scientists concluded that the so-called theater could have served as a reservoir or nymph (Nymphaeum). The shape of the monument corresponds exactly to monuments in ancient Greece and Rome, consecrated to the local nymphs or sometimes arranged as to furnish a supply of water.



Nymphaeum of the ancient city of Orik

Other excavations have also unearthed the foundations of a square building, with large stone blocks and its four sides are exactly 640m each. The high quality of the construction is confirmed also by the signs found engraved on the foundation stones that show the positioning of 12 columns with a 45cm diameter. This building must have been 3m high, open on all four sides, and covered with terracotta tiles roof. A number of terracotta weights were found on the ground, which in antiquity were used to keep the threads tied in the loop. The building could have been a place where clothe were made, or more likely where sales were made for the boats that transported the stones from the quarry in Karaburun, which confirms the theory that Orik lived with the extraction and processing of stone and mainly with the shipbuilding industry.

In addition to this, and the large amount of luxury pottery that has been found and also the 3 types of coin that the Orik issued from the beginning of the 3rd century, the Orik lived prosperously, known as an important city.



According to historical records, Orik had the outer harbor, probably where the submarine range was located and the depth is greater, and the inner one in the lagoon. Julius Caesar mentions it several times in his records: *"he anchored his ships in the inner harbor, behind the city."*

Caesar talks also about the city gates, among which 2 were found, one Hellenistic and the other Byzantine. While unearthing elements of the north-east gate, it is even clearer that Orik was a very strategic city port and its people had well designed the defense system. From the structures of this Hellenistic gate, a metallic plate has been discovered used for the vertical pivot of a wooden door. In ancient times, such a zigzag entrance was used for better protection. According to ancient records, the city of Orikos was the site of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey. But after these historic events, excavations have demonstrated a degradation of urban life in Orikos.

Orik was used during the Ottoman occupation for the construction of ships and as a naval base which coincides with the title of the port "Pasha Liman" (Port of Pasha). Unlike the World War II period until the 1990s, when Orik was identified with its naval base, today the city has become an important tourist center.

Marmiroi Church

About 3 kilometers away from Orikum, on the top of a hill is the small church dedicated to St. Mary.

It is mentioned in a chrysobulle of Andronicus II Palaeologus[1] of 1307 and it belongs to the type of free cross churches. The interior space consists of the nave and the narthex, already ruined. The inside of the church has the shape of a cross with unequal wings. The west and east wings are longer than the other two.

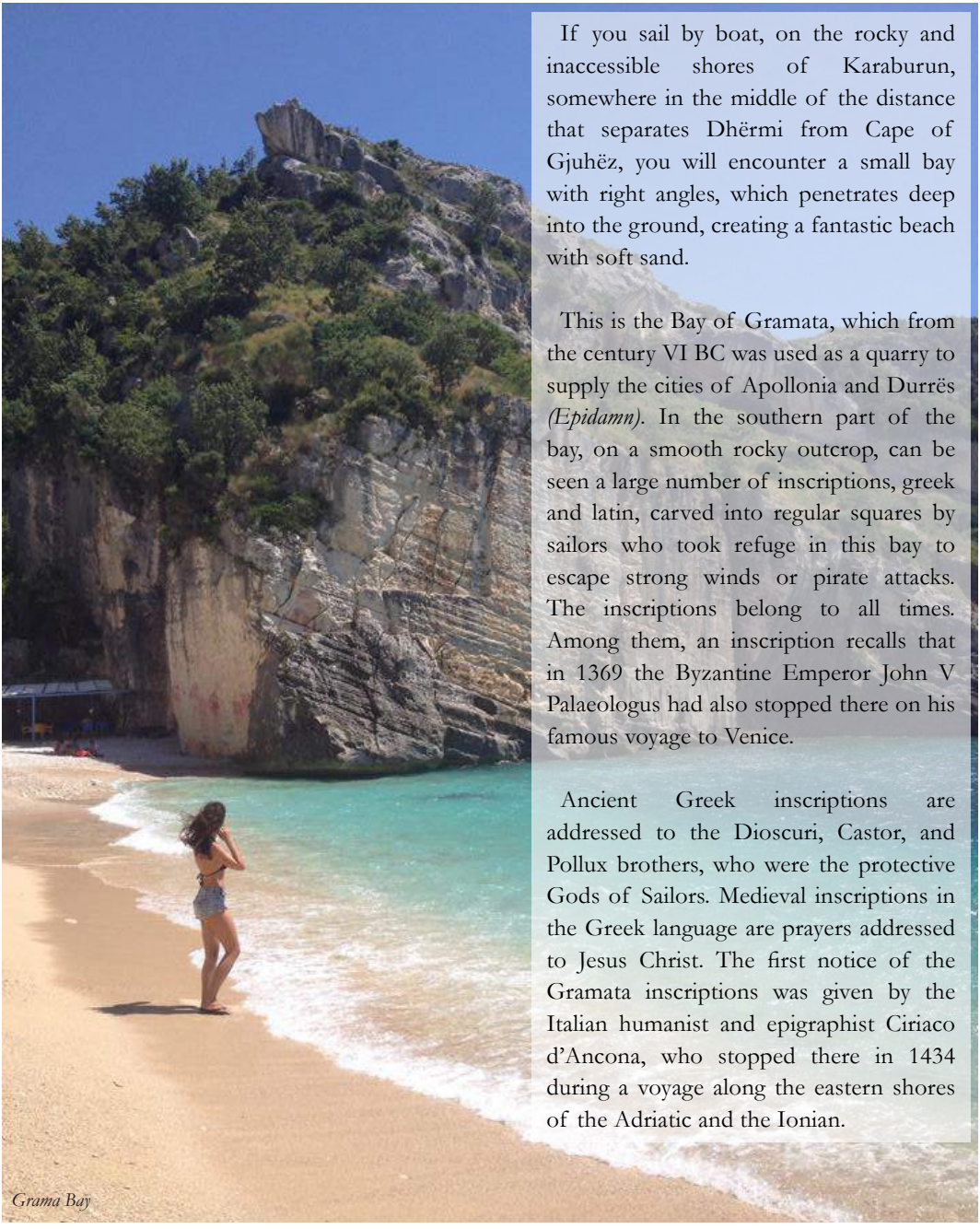
Even the outside of the object has the shape of a free cross, with different wings. On the east wall is the semicircular apse, illuminated by a small window. Several strips of bricks can be seen in the apse, used for aesthetic effect. Four pilasters in the middle of the church hold the vaults, the drum and the dome. Stripped of decoration and murals, the church of Marmiroi lacks the elegance and luxury of churches built in the era of the "Palaeologian Renaissance" (XIII-XIV centuries). This has prompted scholars to date it to the century XII-XIII.

1) Reigned as Byzantine Emperor from 1282 to 1328



View from the lagoon of Marmiroi Church

Inscriptions on the Gramata rock



If you sail by boat, on the rocky and inaccessible shores of Karaburun, somewhere in the middle of the distance that separates Dhërmi from Cape of Gjuhëz, you will encounter a small bay with right angles, which penetrates deep into the ground, creating a fantastic beach with soft sand.

This is the Bay of Gramata, which from the century VI BC was used as a quarry to supply the cities of Apollonia and Durrës *(Epidamn)*. In the southern part of the bay, on a smooth rocky outcrop, can be seen a large number of inscriptions, greek and latin, carved into regular squares by sailors who took refuge in this bay to escape strong winds or pirate attacks. The inscriptions belong to all times. Among them, an inscription recalls that in 1369 the Byzantine Emperor John V Palaeologus had also stopped there on his famous voyage to Venice.

Ancient Greek inscriptions are addressed to the Dioscuri, Castor, and Pollux brothers, who were the protective Gods of Sailors. Medieval inscriptions in the Greek language are prayers addressed to Jesus Christ. The first notice of the Gramata inscriptions was given by the Italian humanist and epigraphist Ciriaco d'Ancona, who stopped there in 1434 during a voyage along the eastern shores of the Adriatic and the Ionian.

Grama Bay

DHËRMI VILLAGE

Descending from Llogara Pass, by the sea lies one of the most frequented places, especially by young people, Dhërmi. The old village, mentioned since Julius Caesar in 49 BC, attracts the visitor's interest with the characteristic 2 storey dwellings built of stone. Dhërmi is considered as the village with the most churches in the world, which are definitely worth exploring. At the top of the village is the Church of the Monastery of Panaia, also known as Our Lady Monastery or St. Mary's Monastery Church, one of the earliest examples of Byzantine art architecture.

One of Albania's most renowned writer, Petro Marko, was born in this village, and his house is a cultural monument you can visit. Dhërmi never disappoints with its countless shades of blue and spectacular bays. The cliffs surrounding the beaches are natural labyrinths, just like the 30m long Pirate Cave on the hill of St. Tod'hr, about which Petro Marko wrote one of the most interesting novels.

Church of the Monastery of Pangji (Manastiri i Pangjisë)

At the top of the village sits the Monastery of Pangji, one of the earliest examples of Byzantine architecture and art. The monastery church consists of two parts, which are distinguished from each other. On the west side is a rectangular setting, which is a late addition and which today serves as the church hall. On the east side, there is a chapel that serves as the altar alcove and belongs to the original construction. The roof has a square shape and has a spherical dome over the four-window drum. The altar dates from the century X.

The ruins of St. Stephen's Church

Down in the village you can visit the church of St. Stephen, which dates back to the century XII-XIII. This church together with the St. Demetrius' church, are of special architectural and iconographic importance. The frescoes of the church, which represent St. Stephen and St. Demetrius, are the oldest in the country.



VUNO
VILLAGE

A small village with an important history, is the village where Lord Byron and British traveler Edward Lear stopped for a while to enjoy the architecture and church murals. The village is typical medieval full of hewn stone houses, lined on the side of the mountain like an amphitheater that represent the purity and prosperity of the Vunjots. The most famous churches among the centuries-old olive groves are: the Church of St. Spiridhon, the Church of St. Mehill, the Church of St. Mary of Mesodhia, the Church of St. Sotira.

Things to do in Vuno:

_ *The Cyprus Tree of the Church of Vunoi. (Qiparisi i Kambonares së kishës së Vunoit). It is a natural monument and is said to have been planted in a vase in 1939. Although no one has taken care of it, the tree continues to be alive and green despite never growing taller.*

_ *Hike the Canyon of Gjipe. An 800m long narrow canyon with attractive natural landscape that sends you to the beach of Gjipe. The name "Gjipe" is said to come by combining the two words "Gulf of God", and you will will understand why the very first moment you arrive there.*



Village of Vuno

HIMARA
TOWN

You will reach Himara after a journey between the blue seas and the characteristic Mediterranean greenery. This place has it all: wonderful seafood and mediterranean cuisine; delicious locally-produced products; monumental ancient history, and a rich cultural heritage; exciting outdoor adventure opportunities like hiking, scuba diving, kayaking, and paragliding; as well as unspoiled beauty and brisk blue waters of the exclusive beaches.

Below the castle lies Livadhi Beach, whereas the town of Himara is located slightly to its south. It has traditionally been one of the most frequented coastal towns. Recently, the tourist infrastructure has significantly improved by offering tourists a diversity of facilities. Towards south, around 2km away from Himara, you could stop in Potami and Llaman beach.

Things to do in Himara:

_ Explore Himara Old Town, just above the main beach, where you'll find old buildings, winding lanes, small shops, and coffee houses, as well as the beautiful Castle of Himare with its stunning view over the sea.

_ Take a boat trip, in order to visit some of the smaller coves such as Spile Cave and Pigeon's Cave.

_ Go for a coastal hike over the cliffs and even head down to some slightly further afield beaches, including Livadhi Beach, which really does have a tropical vibe about it.

_ A day trip to Porto Palermo, a stunning bay that will absolutely take your breath away, with several smaller beaches that invite you to chill out for an hour or two. Do not miss Porto Palermo Castle, which has some stunning views and plenty of history to explore.

_ Go on a kayaking adventure to Gjiri I Filikurit. This is a secret beach that during the summer months isn't quite the secret! However, it is a stunning spot, and it's never too crowded as it takes some effort to get there. You can take a boat and reach this phenomenal beach, or you can hire a kayak and go at your own leisurely pace.



Himara Old Town

Himara Castle

The castle is located 3 km away from the city, at an altitude of about 140 m above sea level and is mentioned by Pliny[1] in the century I. According to Procopius of Caesarea[2] (century VI), Himara was among the castles built by Emperor Justinian of Illyrian origin.

The castle space, of 1 ha, is surrounded by walls, the earliest fragments of which belong to the century VIII BC. The walls, constantly rebuilt until modern times, faithfully follow the same alignment of the original walls. Corinthian[3] coins and inscriptions were found inside the city. The irregular style of the walls and the architectural forms date around the beginning of the century IV BC. The mention of Himara alongside Phoenicia and Amantia in the lists of the sports games of Delphi in 168 BC, shows that Himara, despite its limited area, was a genuine city. In 1020, a sigil of the Byzantine Emperor Basil II proves that Himara was then an episcopate.

In 1480, the Castle of Himara became the epicenter of the great uprising that included the entire territory of Himara and Labëria. Gjergj Kastriot-Skënderbeu's son, Gjoni who came from Naples was put in charge of it. Even in the century XVI-XVII Himara continued to be the center of anti-Ottoman uprisings, as evidenced by the numerous letters that the leaders of those regions gathered in the church of St. Sergius, sent to the Popes of Rome and the sovereigns of Naples and Spain.

1 Gaius Plinius Secundus, called Pliny the Elder, a Roman author, naturalist and natural philosopher, and naval and army commander of the early Roman Empire
2 A prominent late antique Greek scholar
3 Corinthia is one of the regional units of Greece

The rebels, who in those letters declared themselves "Sons of King Skanderbeg", continued to maintain close ties with the descendants of the Kastriots in the kingdom of Naples. The heraldic emblem of these, the double-headed eagle with the royal crown, can still be seen carved on the architrave at the entrance of the church of St. Sergius. Thanks to these connections, many Himariots took refuge in the kingdom of Naples.

The cathedral church of Himara was dedicated to St. Sergius. From it Himara sometimes appears in sources also under the name Sergiopolis (the city of Sergius). To the north of the castle is the church of St. Michael and to the east, outside the walls, the church of St. Mary of the century XVIII. At the entrance of the castle, on the left, is the church of All Saints, of the century XVIII.



Church of St.Sergius and St.Bacchu



The Tower Bell of All Saints Church

Porto Palermo Castle

The castle built by Ali Pasha Tepelena at the end of the century XVIII, has the shape of an equilateral triangle with sides 60m long and an area of 0.18ha. The height of its walls reaches 17m. Three powerful towers are built in its corners. On the west side by the sea, the wall is fitted with turrets.

Oral history says that the architect of this castle was Petro Permetari, the military architect of Ali Pasha. It is also said that at the entrance of the castle there was an inscription, nowadays missing, which read: *"I, the Great Pasha, Ali, built this castle."*

The castle was built to protect the port and keep the insurgent populations of Himara under control. In 1803 Ali Pasha offered the castle and port to the English Royal Navy. Although the legend says that Ali Pasha built the fortification for his girlfriend Vasiliqina, this remains a legend, as the strictly military fortification has nothing idyllic.

In the Cold War years, Porto Palermo became a secret naval base. Because of this, the national road in that segment was diverted following another route, at the foot of the mountains. In the northern corner of the bay, a deep tunnel was opened in the rock, as a shelter in case of war for the submarines of the Albanian military fleet. Opposite, on the bare sides of the mountain, there are still clusters of *valanidhi* (valonia) trees, the fruits of which were used during the Middle Ages in the leather and textile industries of Venice.





The Porto Palermo Castle

QEPARO VILLAGE

A few kilometers away from Porto Palermo, leaning on a high peak, is the old village of Qeparo. On the other three sides it is surrounded by the abyss, which make Qeparo an elusive fortress. The village dwellings themselves, high and built of stone, resemble battle towers. The locals say that Qeparo's name comes from the cypress tree, which are so common in this area. Unlike the many rocky beaches of the south, Qeparo Beach has fine sand, and the sea is shallow for the first few metres, making it different from the immediate depths of Dhërmi and Jali.



Qeparo Village



Sopoti Castle

Among the 13 villages of Himara, Borshi is the only Muslim village. Like most of the neighboring villages of the Labëria area, its inhabitants converted to Islam in the century XVII. Borshi is a big and beautiful village extended between olive and citrus plantations.

Sopoti Castle is located in the village of Borsh, 2 km from the sea shore, on a high rocky hill. Sopoti Castle gained an important strategic role in Byzantine period. From 1204 the Castle of Sopoti became the possession of the Despotate of Epirus for almost half a century. But in 1258, the despot Michael Angel II was forced to hand it over to Manfred, King of Sicily.

In 1371, Sopoti passed under the Albanian prince Balsha II, who that year became the lord of the whole region of Vlora and Berat. Sopot retained its importance even after the Ottoman conquest, in 1417. Sopot, together with the castles of Nivica and Kardhiq, secured the control of Labëria and Himara. The Spanish of Naples and the Venetians, with the help of local rebels, tried several times to take the castle from Turks. The attempt succeeded during the Battle of Lepanto, but the Turks recaptured Sopot in the summer of 1571, when a large fleet of them crossed the entire Ionian and Adriatic coast, reconquering castles newly taken by the Venetians, as well as other Venetian possessions, as was the case of Ulcinj and Bar in north. Sopot then returned to its role as a bastion of the Ottoman invaders to keep the populations of Labëria and Himara subdued.

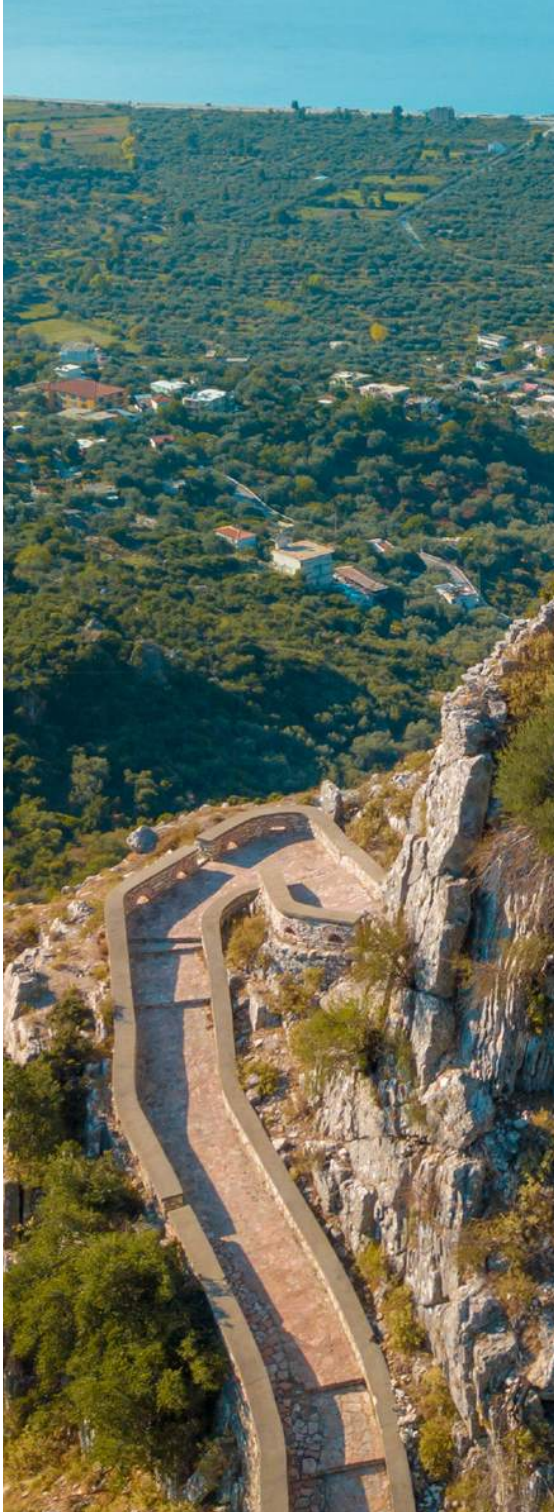
Fortification

In the center of the fortification is the acropolis, while in the north-east the walls create a tower. The walls fit the terrain with straight lines, creating an irregular polygonal plan with an area of 2.5 ha, which categorizes ancient Sopot among small towns. Ancient tracts over 3 m wide, consist of two sides with quadrangular hewn blocks, connected transversely to each other. The entrance is located in the middle of the east side and here is the entrance of the medieval city, a gallery 3 m wide.

A monumental tomb belongs to the ancient period, not far from the entrance. The tomb of the middle of the 4th century BC, is built of rectangular blocks. At the entrance is the mosque of Haxhi Bedo, of the dome-type hall, built by the son of Ali Pasha orthodox vassal, Vasil Bedo.

A series of triangular towers, several water cisterns and apartment ruins belong to the Middle Ages. In VL, outside the enclosure, a series of dwellings with dry stones can be seen. One-room-wide flats fit the sloping terrain with an environment on the first floor, two on the second and three on the third, but the lack of excavations does not make it clear to whom they belong.

Archaeological findings and the architecture of the fortification show the authentic city was born from the beginning of the 4th century p.e.s. and that life in it continued uninterrupted in late antiquity, until v. 1822 when Ali Pasha dies.





The Castle of Sopoti

ONCHESMOS (SARANDA)

The city has many of its own wonderful beaches but can serve as a great spot from where to go off exploring the rest of the beautiful Albanian Riviera. Most popular beaches around Saranda are Monastery's Beach, The Beach of Mirrors (Plazhi i Pasqyrave), Seagull's Beach (Plazhi i Pulëbardhës), clear and brisk waters of the famous islands of Ksamil. The Village of Ksamil is listed it as one of the European Southern Destinations you should not miss, and you can reach it by boat trip as well as by public transport from Saranda.

Only a few kilometers away from Ksamil, stands the ancient city of Butrint, one of the most well-preserved in the Balkans and one of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites. While Albania's own tropical paradise, the Blue Eye, rests halfway between Saranda and Gjirokastra. With great restaurants and a vibrant nightlife, Saranda's spirit instills a joie de vivre in each visitor.

Saranda is the only city in the world surrounded and named after numbers: the 6th Pass (Qafë e Gjashtës) at the entrance, the Ksamil peninsula at the exit (Hexamilia, 6 miles), and Saranda itself meaning 40 in Greek language.



City of Saranda

Onchesmos Castle

Onchesmos, or present-day Saranda, is mentioned by Hierocles[1] among the 12 cities of Ancient Epirus and has long functioned as the natural port of the ancient Phoenician city, which had early connections to Corfu and southern Italy. Later, Onchesmos is mentioned as an episcopal residence in 415. During these years was also constructed the castle, the walls of which, along with defensive towers, can still be seen today in the center of the present-day city of Saranda. Nowadays only a small fragment remains near the seashore.

Onchesmos Castle was located in the center of the city and had the shape of a half-ellipse lined with straight sides. Traces of the walls on the sea shore, show that the walls also surrounded the shore.

The perimeter of the surrounding walls was 850 m, while the fenced area was 5 ha. The walls built of stone connected with strong lime mortar, were 2.5m wide and 6.5m high, while in the path of the guards the height reached 8.5m. Life ends at the end of the century VI, probably stopped by Slavic invasions. The towers were preserved intact, up to the level of the terrace, as well as a series of three-storey dwellings of the centuries V - VI.

The bad luck of Onchesmos, is that the only fully preserved century VI Byzantine dwellings were flattened to build Saranda of the 1920s. Various archeological objects of late antiquity, found during excavations in Onchesmos as well as in the city of Phoenicia, are preserved in the Archaeological Museum in Saranda.

1 An important Stoic figure of the 2nd century, even though unfortunately nothing is known of his life, he is most famous for his Elements of Ethics.



The ancient city gate of Onchesmos

Monastery of St. Mary, Kakome

Monastery of Kakome, built in the century XVIII, is located about 10 km from Saranda, on the Coast Road, 1 km from Kakome beach on the Ionian coast, away from inhabited centers. The monastery includes the church, the tower and a two-storey building with service facilities. In the center of the complex is located the church of St. Mary, built in the century XVI-XVII, with porches on the west side and a mural inside.

Inside the church, over 4 columns, a square core is created on which rises the dome with the 8-sided drum.

The nave measuring 6.8m × 6m has the shape of a cross with three apses. It is illuminated by 4 windows in the side apses, while the altar area is illuminated by 3 small windows. The monastery has many architectural elements such as arches, columns, frames, made of carved stones. The whole complex is surrounded by high stone walls, where the entrance gate is located and well protected.

The church of St. Friday

Lukova (Lukovë) is another coastal village on the Albanian Riviera between Saranda and Himara, with around 3,000 inhabitants. From Saranda it's a 25 minute car drive north to Lukova, into the direction of Himara, Dhërmi or Vlora. The village is located on higher grounds, providing spectacular views of the Ionian Sea. From the village you can follow down the road for 4 kilometers and you will reach Lukova Beach in 10 minutes.

Hidden on the hill in the forest, there is also an old orthodox church. This church, of the basilica type with a dome, dates from the century XVII. The church has 2 entrances, one on the south side and the other on the west side. The interior space, measuring 12.6 x 6.3m, has six columns, on which the arches rest. The church bell tower is also an important architectural and historical element. According to historical records, the bell was donated by the king of Naples in 1695, but disappeared in 1967, with the destruction of many churches and mosques during the dictatorship period.

Synagoue and Basilica of Saranda

The synagogue of Saranda is located in the center of the city, inside the castle of the century IV. 5 consecutive phases are highlighted in it, since the century II-III until the end of the century VI when it was destroyed by a powerful fire from 595 during the Slavic invasions. The first two phases, belong to a rich Roman villa, with mosaic floors of geometric and floral motifs. In the third and fourth phase during the centuries IV-VI, the villa becomes a synagogue, one of the rarest in the Balkans and the only one in Albania. A mosaic fragment, which highlights the symbol of the menorah (7-winged candlestick), speaks of the Jewish prehistory of the basilica. At the center of the museum motifs is the menorah, which the holy book describes as the seven-branched golden candlestick that Moses inserted into the temple in Jerusalem. As such it has been the symbol of Judaism since ancient times and today is the emblem of the state of Israel. Other mosaics also feature motifs from the holy book, including the facade of the temple in Jerusalem.

In the centuries V-VI a large basilica prayer hall with an apse inscribed as in Christian churches, an environment with a menorah on the floor and a water tank used during religious services were added to the synagogue. These additions, especially the high quality of the mosaics, show that in the century VI the Jewish community was growing economically. By the end of the century VI the synagogue was converted into an early Paleo-Christian church, whose mosaics are similar to those of the Butrint baptistery. Saranda Synagogue was discovered during excavations of a joint Albanian-Israeli archeological mission.



Saranda synagogue

The Monastery of 40 Saints

The Monastery of 40 Saints is located on a hill 211m above sea level, near the castle of Lëkursi. The monastery, which renamed the city from *Onhesm* to *Saranda* (current city name), was a mass pilgrimage site for pilgrims from the Balkans and the Adriatic and is dedicated to the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste.

According to St. Basil[1], forty Roman soldiers, who had openly confessed themselves Christians were condemned by the prefect to be exposed naked upon a frozen pond on a bitterly cold night, in Sebaste, in Lesser Armenia *(present-day Sivas in Turkey).*

Among the confessors, one yielded and, leaving his companions, sought the warm baths near the lake which had been prepared for any who might prove inconstant. As soon as he entered he fell dead and the guard soldier who saw a divine light upon him, threw off his garments, and joined the remaining thirty-nine. At dawn, the stiffened bodies of the confessors, which still showed signs of life, were burned and the ashes cast into a river. Christians, however, collected the precious remains, and the relics were distributed throughout many cities; in this way, veneration of the Forty Martyrs became widespread, and numerous churches were established in their honour.

The monastery church is a seven-apse basilica, 43m long and 23m wide, one of the largest early Christian churches in the Balkans, comparable in size to the churches of the dioceses[2] in Nikopolis[3] and the churches of late antiquity in Egypt.

The resemblance to the Palace of Lausus[4], also dates the Monastery of 40 Saints in this time frame. Given the size, the complicated structure above and below the ground as well as the decor, it is thought that the monastery was built by order of the central government of Constantinople.

The crypt contains 10 environments, in some of which are preserved mural paintings of the century VI and IX. In one of them, as nowhere else, saints with halos pulled from their beard are depicted, presumably as an allusion of their torment.

The first destruction of the monastery occurred in 551 during the Ostrogothic invasion, but it was rebuilt in the century IX. The monks continued to live in it until 1878 when the ammunition warehouse of the Greek soldiers exploded. The ruins were destroyed again during the Second World War by allied bombing.

1 Basil of Caesarea, also called Saint Basil the Great, was an East Roman bishop of Caesarea Mazaca in Cappadocia, Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

2 In church governance, a diocese or bishopric is the ecclesiastical district under the jurisdiction of a bishop.

3 Nicopolis or Actia Nicopolis was the capital city of the Roman province of Epirus Vetus. It was located in the western part of the modern state of Greece.

4 The Palace of Lausus or Lausos, also known as the Lauseion, was a 5th-century building located in Constantinople that was acquired and owned by the eunuch Lausus.



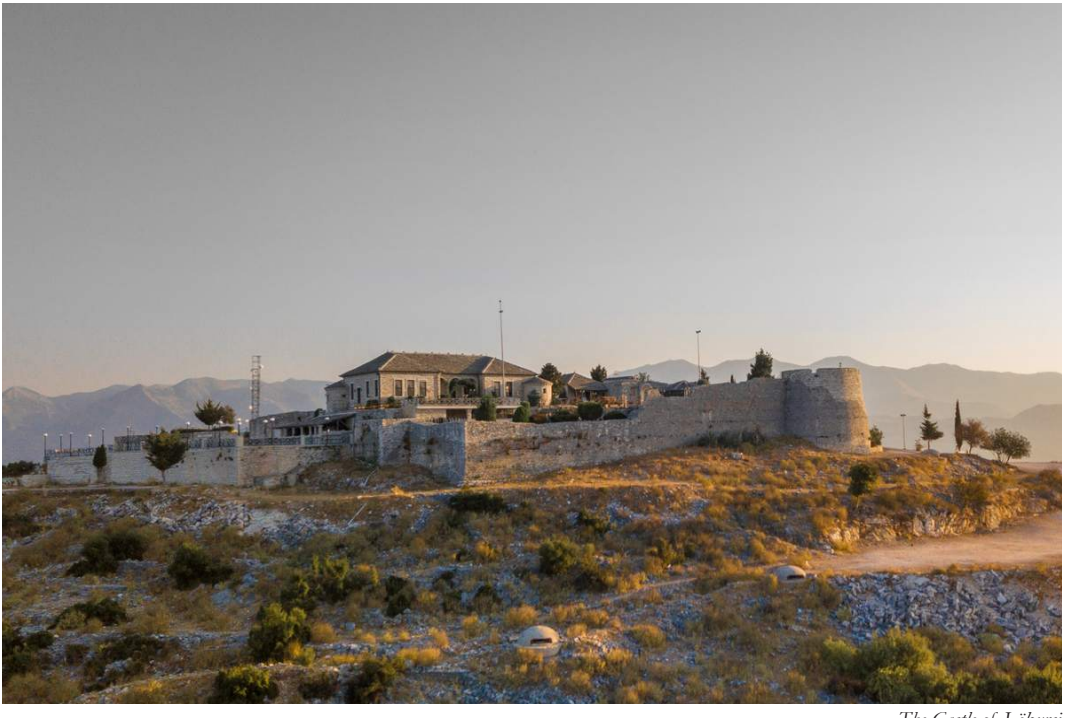
The ruins of the 40 Saints Monastery

The Castle of Lëkursi

The castle of Lëkursi, is located near the ruins of the village of Lëkurës, abandoned after the raids of Ali Pasha at the end of the century XVIII. The castle was built by Sultan Sulejmani in 1537 as a necessity to control the city of Saranda.

The castle has an almost square plan, 42 x 44 m, with two circular towers in the northwest and southeast and a rectangular one in the west. The walls are 2m wide - 7m high and are crossed by numerous rifle turrets. The artillery lay mainly in the towers. On its left side it is a small post-Byzantine church of the century XVI, which shows that the castle garrison consisted mainly of Orthodox Albanians. In 1878 the castle of Lëkursi, like the Monastery of the 40 Saints, suffered severe damage during the fighting between its garrison and Greek forces landed from Corfu.

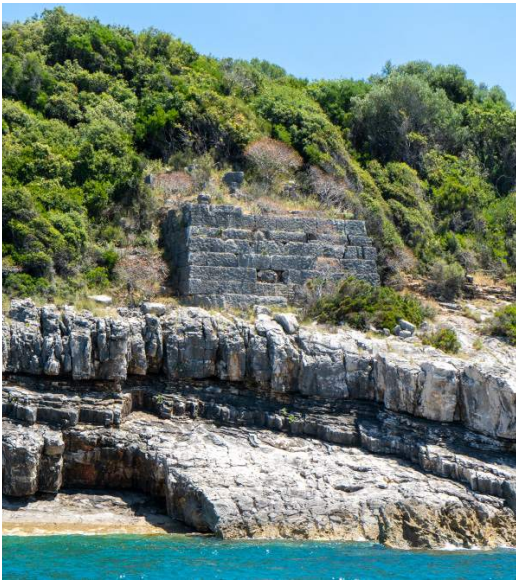
Nowadays Lëkursi has become an interesting place that attracts many visitors since it is reconstructed and adapted as a touristic spot, with restaurant services and with extraordinary view.



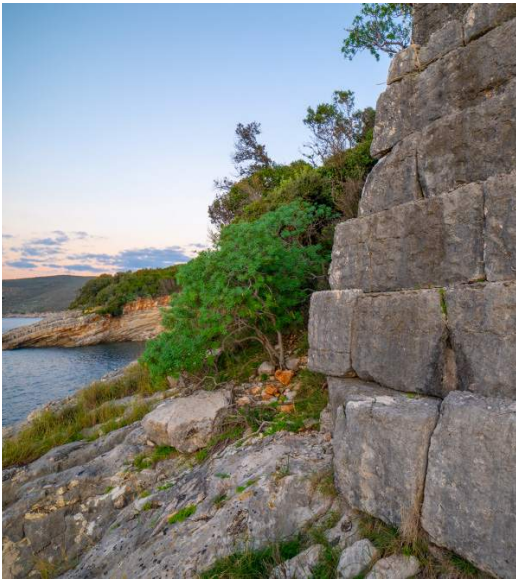
The Castle of Lëkursi

The Wall of Dema

The Wall of Dema is located on the road Saranda-Ksamil and is thought to have been built in the century V BC. The wall intended to prevent the enemy attacks against Butrint. Traces of the wall can be found at the east of the Monastery of St. George, a post-Byzantine construction of the century XVII. As a rare ancient shield by the nature of construction, it started in the sea and ended at the Lake of Butrint. In medieval sources the wall is referred to as the "wall of Examil", a name given in the Byzantine period for the same function it performed related to the famous Hexamilion, the "6-mile wall" built in the Isthmus of Corinth. When the Venetians took Butrint in 1386, the first work they did to secure possession of the city was to rebuild and fortify this wall.



The Wall of Dema, 650m long and 7-9.6m wide, consists of two separate walls, 2.8m wide, placed 4 m apart. The extremely large width of the wall is not simply explained by the desire to create an invulnerable barrier. It served for the placement of heavy weapons and the creation of roads for the rapid movement of troops and war machines. In this respect it is the most powerful example of antiquity.

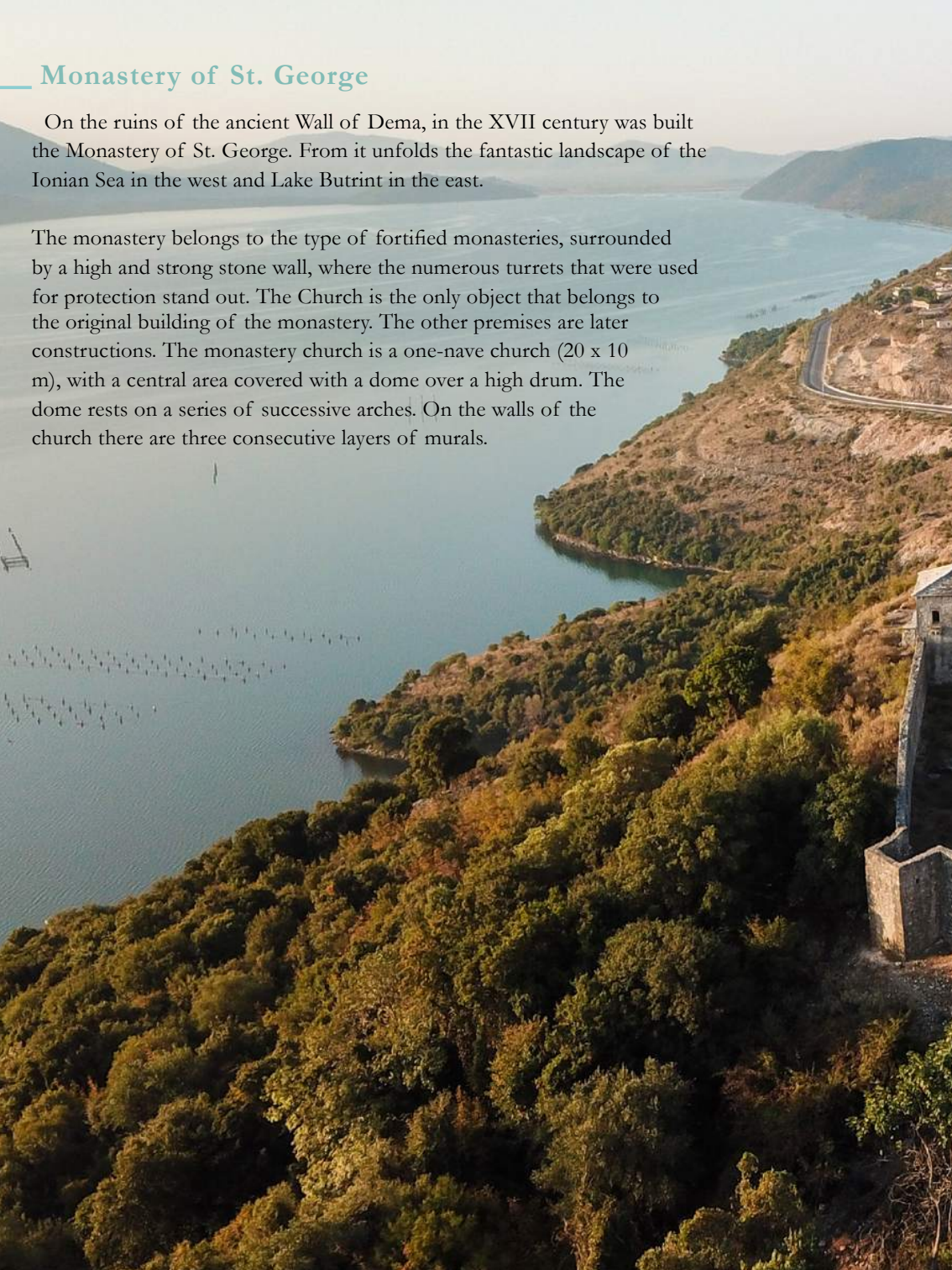


The Wall of Dema

Monastery of St. George

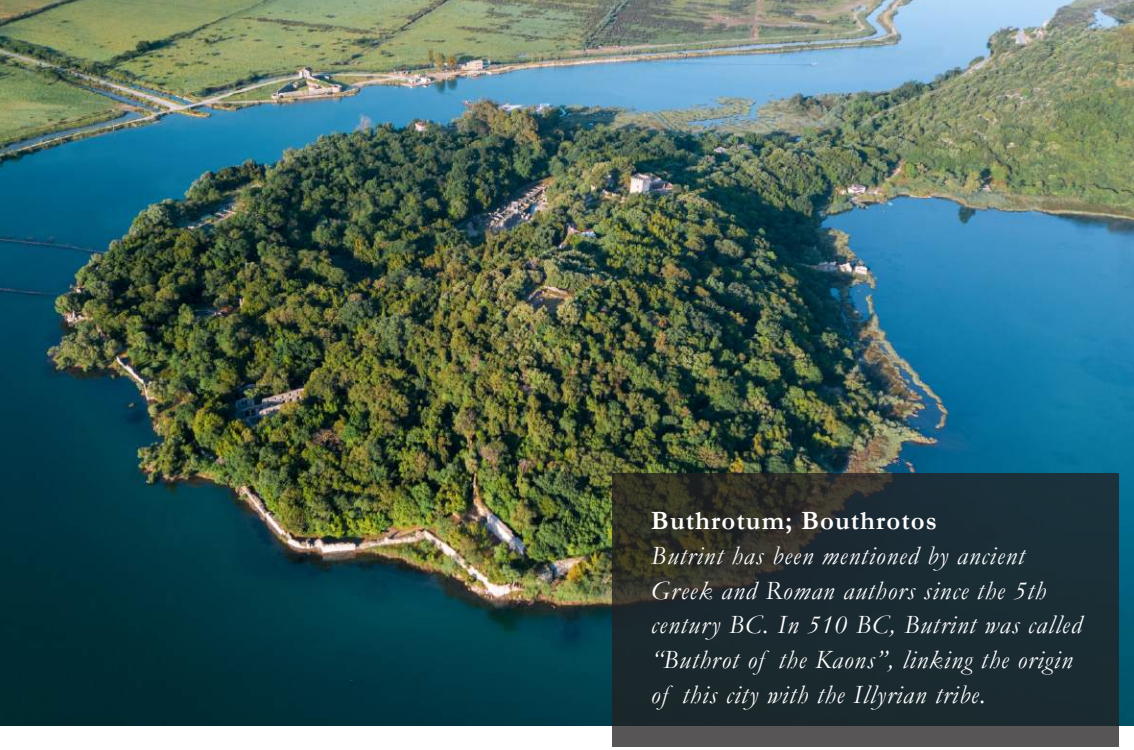
On the ruins of the ancient Wall of Dema, in the XVII century was built the Monastery of St. George. From it unfolds the fantastic landscape of the Ionian Sea in the west and Lake Butrint in the east.

The monastery belongs to the type of fortified monasteries, surrounded by a high and strong stone wall, where the numerous turrets that were used for protection stand out. The Church is the only object that belongs to the original building of the monastery. The other premises are later constructions. The monastery church is a one-nave church (20 x 10 m), with a central area covered with a dome over a high drum. The dome rests on a series of successive arches. On the walls of the church there are three consecutive layers of murals.





The Monastery of St. George



Buthrotum; Bouthrotos

Butrint has been mentioned by ancient Greek and Roman authors since the 5th century BC. In 510 BC, Butrint was called "Buthrot of the Kaons", linking the origin of this city with the Illyrian tribe.

Butrint

The favourable geographical position of Butrint near the most important routes of commercial traffic towards Greece and the Adriatic and Ionian seas, influenced the economic and social development of the city. Fortified walls, monuments of the city and archaeological data are a testimony about the historical period and city development from Antiquity, Middle Ages and until century XIX.

The city was built as a fortified center in the century XV BC. After the century V BC, life shifted from the acropolis to the lakeside and Vivari Canal. The expanded walls had several gates, such as *"Porta Scaea"*, according to the name which Virgil[1] gives to one of the gates of Troy in his epic work *"The Aeneid"*. There is also the impressive *"Lion Gate"* in the northern side of the walls, so called because of the figure of the lion tearing the bull, engraved on the lintel. This gate dates back to the century IV BC, but was reconstructed and used until the Middle Ages. Through this gate, you could enter the city, on the west side of which was a well which still has water to this day. The well has a fresco that shows the figure of the peacock and a female bust, probably of a nymph. The inscription in Greek says:

"Junia Rufina, friend of the nymphs"

1) Publius Vergilius Maro, usually called Virgil or Vergil, an ancient Roman poet of the Augustan period.

There are two other gates, the *"Gate with towers"* near the Great Basilica which dates back to the century III BC and the *"Western Gate"* which was built during the Hellenistic period and was fortified with walls during the Middle Ages in order to provide a more secure entrance to the acropolis.

Ancient Greek period

Starting from the century IV BC, Butrint passed under the control of the Kaons, and later on, during the rule of King Pyrrhus of Epirus was included in the Epirote League[2]. During the Hellenistic period, in the century III BC, the *Temple of Asclepius*, the *Theater*, an *Agora* and other public buildings were built.

Ancient Roman period

One of the city's greatest periods of prosperity occurred under the Roman Empire. In the century I BC, Butrint fell under Roman rule which brought a radical change in the political and social life of Butrint. Butrint became the most typical Roman city in southern Albania. New buildings were built including an *Aqueduct*[3], *Roman baths*, several houses, a *Forum*[4] and a *Nymph*[5]. In fact the *Forum* was built on the former *Agora.*

Between Venice and the Ottoman Empire

During the middle age, in the western part of the acropolis, was built a fortress with an irregular pentagonal plan. It consists of a tower, low buildings and a surrounding wall. The fortress was rebuilt at the beginning of the century XX by an Italian expedition. Nowadays, the Butrint Museum is located here, where parts of the archeological findings of this site are exhibited.

At the entrance to the city stands a magnificent tower with a square plan, built in 1560 by the Venetians. During the period 1651-1663 Butrint passed into the hands of both Turks and the Venetians, due to the main battles that took place. Butrint remained under Venetian control until the collapse of the Republic of Venice in 1797, and after that it passed into the possession of Ali Pasha Tepelena.

Due to its high historical and cultural values, the ancient city of Butrint was initially selected as a Cultural Monument in 1948. Whereas, in 1992 Butrint was recognized as the first archaeological site of the Republic of Albania in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Modern Albania

Today, Butrint presents a mosaic of monuments that testify over a 2000 years period from the Hellenic and Roman temples to the Ottoman castles. Many sculptures, such as *"Dea e Butrintit"*, the *Statue of Augustus*, *Agrippa* and others, were found during excavations in the theater and today they are exhibited in the National Historical Museum as well as the National Archaeological Museum.

2)An ancient Greek coalition, or koinon, of Epirote tribes.
3) Conduit built to convey water
4) A rectangular forum (plaza) surrounded by the ruins of several important ancient government buildings, constructed in the Augustan period (27 BC-AD 14)
5) A monument consecrated to the nymphs

+ Baptistery

The Baptistery is the main monument of the early Christian period in Butrint and is included among the most important constructions of this type throughout the Roman Empire. The baptistery has a circular plan with a diameter of 13.5m and is the largest circular baptistery in the Mediterranean. At the same time it is considered the most accomplished and complicated structure of Mediterranean baptisteries. The baptistery dates back to the century V, while the central scene and mosaic were added in the century VI. At its center is the baptismal font. On the east wall of the baptistery is a small niche with a water fountain supplied by the aqueduct built during Roman period. The supporting structure of the baptistery consisted of two rings, each of 8 concentric columns of Egyptian granite. The columns were crowned by capitals with Paleochristian symbols, on which the stone architraves rested, following then by the drum with the dome. The whole structure was outlined by a circular wall, of 24 half-columns. Around this wall, was placed a bench for the members of the ceremony. The floor of the was paved with multicolored mosaics, with icons showing a connection to Christianity and aristocratic life. The mosaic is outlined by seven rings with geometric motifs, animals and birds inside medallions, which are representatives of the Garden of Eden.

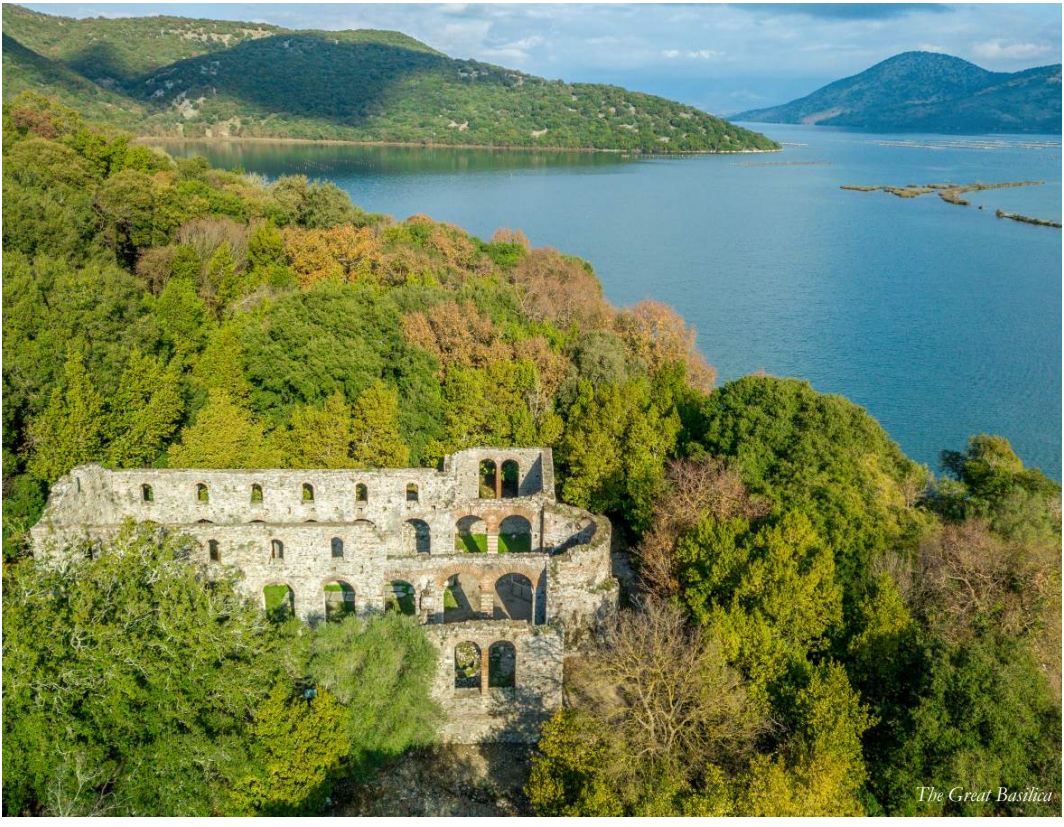


Aerial view of The Baptistery

+ The Great Basilica

The main Late Antique church of Butrint dates back to the century VI and it is considered one of the most representative objects of this type throughout the Byzantine period. The walls of this monument retain their original height even today.

The basilica has a T-shaped plan, 24m wide and 32m long. It has been covered with a wooden roof, with the central nave that has the height of two floors. The altar was separated from the nave by a stone altar, of which has remained only a column. The central nave, 7m wide, ends with the altar area. The latter was illuminated by three windows on the ground floor and a large one above them. The floor has been paved with rectangular limestone plates, excluding the altar alcove which has been paved with small stone mosaics forming geometric motifs. The basilica is similar in style to the basilicas of the capital of ancient Epirus, of which Butrint was part.



The Great Basilica

+ The Theater

The Theater is one of the most important monuments in the ancient city of Butrint. It was discovered by Italian archaeologist Luigi Maria Ugolini in the years 1928-1930. The Theater was built in the 3rd century BC, during the Hellenistic period and is located on the south side of the Acropolis. The size and structure show that it had a capacity around 1700-2000 spectators. The Theater of Butrint consists of three major parts: the *cavea*, stage and the orchestra.

The *cavea* part where the spectators sat, has a semi-circular shape, following the natural line of the hill. It was built with massive stone blocks, around the orchestra. It was divided in two *Diazoma*, the upper part with 13 rows and the lower one with 15 rows. The stairs are divided in five sections. The front seats called the *proedria* or places of honor, are carved and decorated with panther paws, the accompanying animal of the god of theatrical performances, Dionysus.

The orchestra is the almost circular place, situated in front of the stage facing the audience. It was paved with stones and considered as the central part of the theater. Nowadays, this part is under water and covered by the modern scene. The stage consisted of two parts: the front stage and backstage, with narrow corridors that served for the entrance and movement of the actors.

In the century II, during the Roman period, the Theater was massively expanded and the stage was completely reconstructed as a large two-story Roman-style building with marble cladding.



Aerial view of the Theater

+ The Curative Stoa

The Stoa of Butrint was built around the middle of century V BC as a long rectangular structure, which was used as a curative place near the temple of Asclepius, where the supplicants wishing to be cured slept. During the hypnotic sleep of the patients appeared the god who gave them the right advice for treatment or performed surgical intervention. Based on the inscriptions on Epidaurus (ancient Greek city), this sleep was not natural, but narcotic one from specific substances for full anesthesia in order to do surgical interventions.

In these types of stoa, the treatment of patients was based on the skills of the priest-doctors and the divine power of the gods, in this case of Asclepius. The discovery of a box for coins and the inscription in the theater "it was built with the income of Asklep god", shows that the treatment of patients was performed against payment and the medicine was the main economic source of Butrint in that time.

The stoa was a simple two-storey building measuring 29.70 x 5.70 m, consisting of a front wall divided by four passages, a side wall and a roof. Its structure indicates two sleeping areas: separate for men and women, the same as in other stoas of this type. Historical records for Stoa show that Butrint was one of the major pre-Hippocratic hospital centers, ranking it in the category of major curative centers such as Kos and Epidaurus. Today there are four piers in rusticated ashlar still visible, originally connected by arches and characterized by internal and external buttresses.

+ The Roman Baths (thermal springs)

The Roman Baths are one of the first monuments excavated in Butrint. They were built during the Roman period and went under major works for renovation during the century II. Its southern and eastern sides are unexcavated. The Roman Baths consist of several rooms linked with the heated room (caldarium). The room featured a hypocaust for steam-heated floors and walls. The heating of the water and the premises was carried out by means of a kiln and a suspended floor, supported by brick columns. The other rooms were the dressing room (apodyterium), warm area (tepidarium), and cold water area (frigidarium).

Excavations have confirmed that the building was all clad in marble and the floor features a mosaic with an intricate black and white geometric design framed within rectangular borders of white and red.





The triangular Castle of Ali Pasha

on the south side of the Vivari canal, near Lundra, in Butrint

The triangular castle is located on the left bank of the Vivari canal, in front of the city of Butrint. The castle has a triangular plan, with a length of 50m and an area of 0.12ha. In all three corners it has three round towers and two entrances along the 5.50m high walls. The main entrance is in the middle of the south wall and the other in the north wall.

At the end of century XIII, the castle was a regular triangle, surrounded by a 2.3m wide wall, traversed by two turret belts. In the century XV, at the southwestern edge of the castle, the Venetians built a cylindrical tower equipped with cannon turrets and its second floor was equipped with windows, chimney and small turrets. In the century XVIII, two more towers were built at the edges of the triangle. The first floors were equipped with four cannon turrets, while the second floors, the garrison area, had chimneys and small turrets.

The castle has been the apple of discord between the French armies of Napoleon and Ali Pasha. According to the records of a French officer on October 25, 1797, in order to make the fortress unusable by Ali Pasha, the French set fire to two of its towers, while blowing up the other one.



Castle of Ali Pasha at the Estuary of Vivar

The castle is located near the estuary of the Vivari canal at the Ionian Sea. It was built in 1807-1808 by Ali Pasha Tepelena, to stop the French army of Corfu, which asked Ali to surrender Butrint.

It has a quadrangular shape, measuring 28m x 36m (including the walls), with four towers located in its corners and with a residential area on its north side. The two towers facing the sea have a circular plan, while the other two, on the opposite side, are quadrangular. Among the latter is the main arched gate facing east. The peculiarity of this Castle is that in addition to the towers that protected it from the outside, it has an internal fortification system. When entering the castle, up to the courtyard there are four alcoves equipped with rifle turrets: one for the protection of the gate, the other three in the eastern wall served to annihilate the enemy, after he had exploded the gate. The protection from the sea was made possible by two strong towers with walls 2.8m thick and 5m high, which were equipped with large cannon turrets. The towers opposite the hill were protected by rifle butts, which are 1-1.2m thick. The castle has two gates: one is located in the middle of the eastern wall, while the other is in the middle of the northern one. The latter communicates directly with the Vivari canal, as the wall of the Castle on that side is located 1m away from the latter.



FINIQ

Ancient City of Phoenicia

(Finiq Archaeological Park)

The ancient city of Phoinike is located on a hill of the today town called Finiq. During its golden age, century IV BC, Phoinike was the capital of the Illyrian tribe of Chaons and during the King Pyrrhus reign (297-272 BC), it became one of the main centers of the Epirote League.

The archeologic site was discovered by Luigi Maria Ugolini in 1926 that led the Italian Archaeological Mission. It has testified to life since prehistoric times, but the most visible ruins today belong to the Hellenistic-Roman city, known for its fortifications. The Roman historian Polybius called Phoinike "the largest and richest city of Epirus". Also, other ancient sources recognize the role of this city especially in the Hellenistic period. In the year 205 BC, in Phoinike was signed the peace between the king of Macedonia, Philip V, and the envoys of Rome.

The main known parts of the archeological site are the walls surrounding the entire hill, the eastern area where are the oldest urban settlement, the Hellenistic agora, the so-called "House of the Two Peristyles", organized in two courtyards, the acropolis, the theater area, and the necropolis.

The fortification walls of the city that are best preserved from the city heritage were built at the beginning of century IV BC. They have a length of 4700m and are built of quadrangular stone blocks, some of them of gigantic proportions.

The ancient city had several gates and a long narrow acropolis about 50m located at the top of the hill. It was built from the second half of the 5th century BC and hosted a number of public buildings. Inside the acropolis are the remains of Greek and Roman walls. In the village, there are few remains of Greek walls, but the Roman remains are numerous, incorporated for the most part into modern buildings.

At the acropolis, Ugolini discovered the place that served for the preservation of the city's treasury, as well as a large basilica near it.

To the east of the acropolis was located a theater dated from century IV BC. Its diameter was 135 m and the capacity 20.000 – 22.500 spectators, so it ranks the third in size in all ancient theaters. It consists of the cavea part (the seating of spectators), the orchestra with the choir that had an active role in ancient dramas.



On the western side of the hill was found the necropolis with tombs from the Hellenistic period. In the tombs found during the second half of the century IV BC, is applied the burial with urns or amphora, placed in chambers built with brick. In the first half of the century III BC, predominate tombs dug into the ground and isolated with stone slabs. In the second half of the century III, the tombs were mostly insolated with solid bricks. In the Roman period predominate roof-covered brick tombs, as well as burial in urns.

The ancient city of Phoinike is of great historical and archaeological value, an integral part of the Albanian cultural heritage. The ancient city of Phoinike received the status of national archeological park in 2005. The marble sculptures, found in Phoenicia, are preserved in the museums of Butrint, Saranda and Tirana.

Monastery of St. Nicholas (Mesopotamia)

To the south of the village of Mesopotamia rises the monastery of St. Nicholas, which depended directly on the patriarch of Constantinople. Apart the church, only the ruins of the dafensive walls have remained from the original construction of the monastery, which include a territory 100m long and 80m wide and a defensive tower. Also, it is preserved a tower on the west side (one side of it) with a height of 10m. The defensive walls date earlier than the existing church. The monastery rooms that no longer exist were built later.

In fact, the monastery was fortified. Its church presents an original architecture and specialists find no resemblance to the well-known types of Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture. This church is a unique type and the largest among the Byzantine churches preserved in Albania in the century XI-XIV. It is also among the oldest architectural monuments. Its external appearance has the form of a cube measuring 17.20m x 11.04m, with the central part more elevated than both sides and covered with 4 domes.

The church took its present form in the second half of the century XIII, while the apse frescoes (apsis), belong to the period after 1793, when it was reconstructed after the damage suffered by the earthquake of that year.



DELVINË

Ruins of Kamenica Village

The ruins of Kamenica are located at the southwestern slope of the "Mali i Gjerë", about 2 km at the north of the City of Delvina. The surrounding area was quite favorable for economic development with fertile lands and good pastures for livestock. The village was once abandoned by the inhabitants in the century XVII, probably due to the plague epidemic. Now it is a place of ruins on both slopes of the hills, numerous buildings around the village center, cult buildings, narrow and winding streets and courtyards. These are a reflection of an architectural heritage of the past and this is another value that characterizes this village that seems to belong to another century. The village of Kamenica, from the point of view of urban planning, has clear features of a medieval-Byzantine city.

Churches of Kamenica

In addition to the numerous, more or less preserved dwellings, Kamenica also has two churches, which belong to the century XIV-XV. The first is set up on the southwest side of the village. The second church is located in the highest part of the village. From the west the terrain drops sharply, while on the other sides it is surrounded by ruined dwellings of the village. The walls of this church are preserved up to their original height. The plan is rectangular with a naos (area around the altar) measuring 3.9m x 8.1m. On the east side the building ends with a five-sided apse. This church was built of stone and the bricks were used as a decorative element, especially on the outside of the five-sided apse. On the middle side of the apse a double window was opened, separated in the middle by a limestone pillar.

Mosque of Gjin Aleks

In the first Ottoman Census of 1431, Delvina is listed as a village with a total of 60 houses. At the beginning of the century XVI, Delvina became the center of the sanjak, which brought its rapid development. Delvina was also the episcopal residence depending on the metropolis of Ioannina. At that time, several neighborhoods were established, such as Gjinaleksi, Kalopodat, Papuçi, Mukërsi, Vllahati, Lagja Kala. The population of the city was mostly Christian, and each neighborhood had its own church, when the Ottomans in 1583 made the detailed census. Over time, after the conversion of the majority of the population to Islam, part of these churches collapsed. Some of them were transformed into Islamic sanctuary.

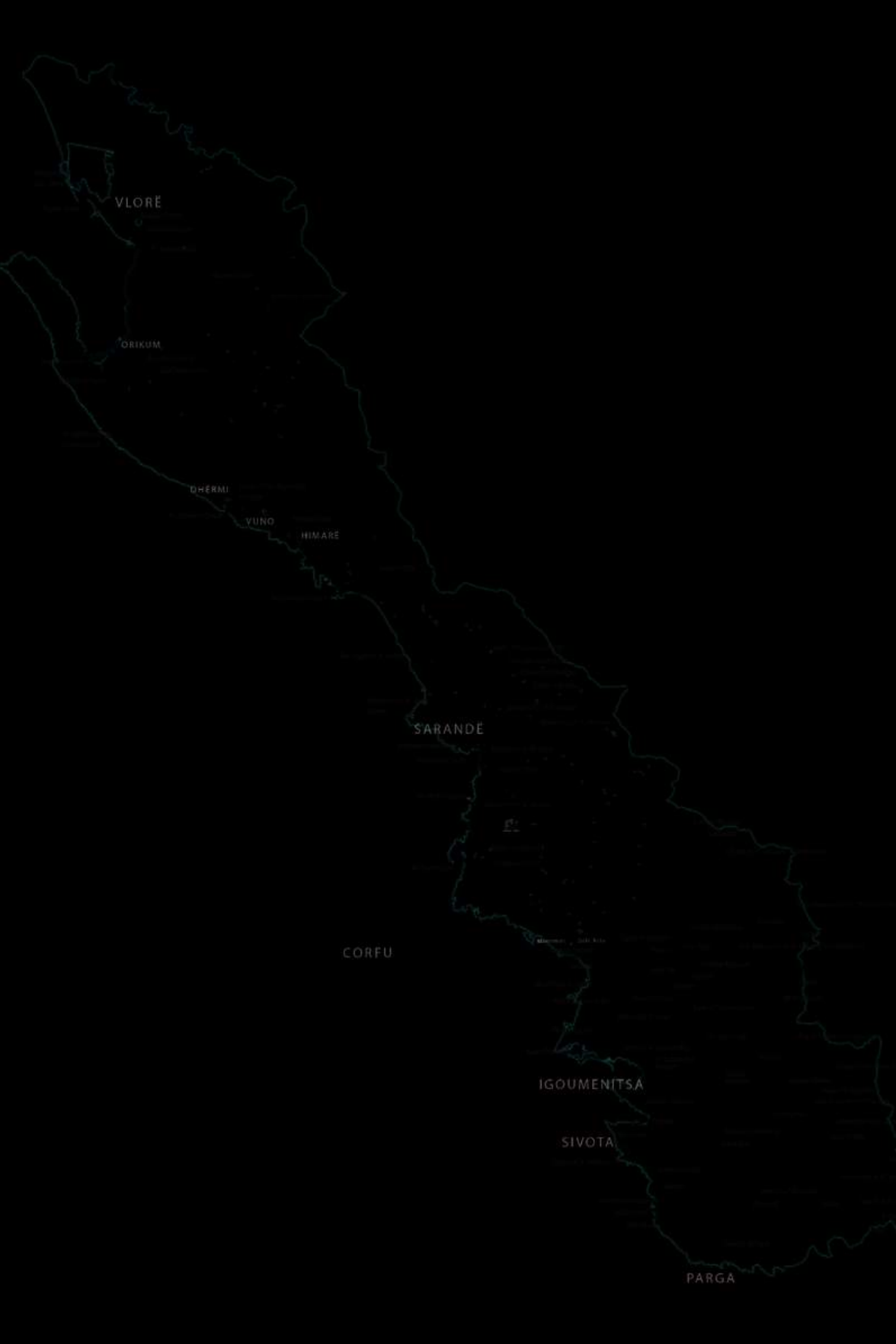
The Church of St. Prodrom was transformed into the Mosque of Gjin Aleks in 1592, at a time when the majority of the population was converted to Islam. The Mosque of Gjin Aleksi is located in the main neighborhood of Gjinaleks, at the west of Delvina, which is now called Rusan. The Mosque of Gjin Aleks is in very good condition.

Castle of Delvina

The Castle of Delvina is a cultural heritage monument, built on a rocky ridge that falls into two small streams. The castle has three construction phases, the most important of which is the establishment phase, of the century XI. In each phase three towers are distinguished. The first tower is preserved at the base, has a semi-elliptical shape, measuring 6.50m x 3.50m. The second tower has the shape of an irregular circle measuring 6.70m x 5.40m. The third tower has the shape of an irregular hexagon with 2m – 4m long edges and 0.9m wide walls.

The famous traveler Ibn Dhil Mehmet Dervis, known as Evliya Çelebi, who visited Delvina in 1670 writes, "there is nothing similiar to the beauty of the castle of Delvina". But the continuation is startling: "Inside the castle there are three small houses, a food warehouse and a water cistern. There is nothing beyond them, no market or bath, no inn or mosque because it is a very small castle."




VLORË
ORIKUM
DHËRMI
VUNO
HIMARË
SARANDË
CORFU
IGOUMENITSA
SIVOTA
PARGA