



# BORSH

THE STORY OF A CASTLE & THE OLIVE GROVE





## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Borsh is a town but really refers more to a collection of settlements both historic and contemporary that exist along an alluvial plain that is the delta of a small river that flows into the sea from the inland mountains. The mountains provided a secure point upon which to build a castle; the plain provided flat ground with rich soil on which to cultivate olives; and in recent times, the wide beach created by the delta has provided the basis for a touristic economy. The families who live in Borsh have roots that go back many centuries, but none of them have lived in the same place throughout history. People have been displaced numerous times, making their way closer to the water for dwelling in the past twenty-five years than they had ever been before. Today, Borsh is known for its olive production and processing. Farmers from across the region haul their harvest to Borsh where it is pressed into oil and bottled for the domestic market or shipped abroad to Italy and Greece. Borsh brand olive oil can be found in every major grocery store in Tirana, and it is favored by locals for its light and sweet quality.









## THE PEOPLE - CULTURE, TRADITION, CULINARY

From an ethnographic point of view, the village of Borsh shares many features with the rest of the coast and Labëri. Men's traditional attire is the kilt, while the women's attire, although belonging to the Muslim religion, is the same as other women of the coast. A report of 1786 sent by an Austrian army colonel named Dedovic to the Emperor Franz Joseph II stated: "The usual household attire of the residents of Borsh, especially of women and children, is handmade weaved of wool; in Borsh there are also felt clothing, whereas the best clothing is made of the fabric purchased in the territories of Venice." The traditional song is polyphony, sung in the same way as in the other villages of Labëri, with very few changes. This song is often accompanied by the characteristic dance of Labëri—men or women linked hand in hand and follow the rhythm of the song.

Besides the usual dish of roasted meat, Borshi's menus may feature pies with different and special assortments, as well as characteristic desserts. Recently fish has made its way into the local cuisine as well, and during the summer months it is widely available in restaurants.









## THE ROOTS - THE HISTORY

The earliest settlement near today's village of Borsh is the Castle of Sopot (also referred to as Borsh Castle). It was established on a mountain ridge above the village. The earliest traces of life in this castle dates back to the late Bronze Age, the sixth century BCE. This settlement and its early inhabitants have been part of antique Chaonia and its castle had a great importance due to its geographical-strategic position because it controls the only possible and natural entrance of the coast of Himara to the remote areas in Labëri.

The first time that the Castle of Sopot is mentioned is the beginning of the thirteenth century by the name of "Arcontea Sopotu". In the second half of the same century the castle initially adopted Norman rule, followed later by Angevin state. The Kingdom of Albania (Albanian: Mbretëria e Arbërisë, Latin: Regnum Albaniae) was established by Charles of Anjou in the Albanian territory he conquered from the Despotate of Epirus in 1271. He took the title of "King of Albania" in February 1272. The kingdom extended from the region of Durrës (then known as Dyrrhachium) south along the coast, in Borsh-Riviera to Butrint.









## THE ROOTS - THE HISTORY

According to Ottoman Defter of 1431–1432, Sopot became the center of the village with the same name. At the same time, the village that was known as Borsh was actually deeper in the valley, near the village of Fterrë. Borsh only came to be located in its current location at the beginning of the twentieth century. Sopot itself had sixty houses and was given as a timar to Hizir Bey, a captain of the feudal cavalry and governor of a town—referred to as Subash. Sopot was again conquered by Alfonso V of Naples in 1456. And in 1470 it was under Venetian possession and depended on Corfu. In 1479, after the collapse of Shkodra, by an agreement, Venice delivered it to the Ottoman Empire. With the landing of Gjon Kastrioti on the coast of Albania on August 31, 1481, the province of Himarë was liberated and a day later the castle of Sopot as well, only to fall back to the Ottomans again in 1492.









During the 16th century, the castle of Sopot was besieged again by the Venetians. There are some drawings that depict the fortress of Sopot (in today's Borsh) besieged by the Venetian army and fleet during the second half of the 1550s.



The Venetian army at Qeparo, Albania, during the siege of Sopot.

Bibliographic Citation  
 [ROSACCIO, Giuseppe. Viaggio da Venetia, a Costantinopoli: per mare, e per terra & insieme quello di Terra Santa, da Giuseppe Rosaccio, con brevità descritto, nel quale, oltre à settantadui disegni, di geografia e corografia si discorre, quanto in esso viaggio si ritroua, cioè: città, castelli, porti, golfi, isole, monti, fiumi è mari: opera utile à mercanti, marinari & à studiosi di geografia, Venice, Giacomo Franco, 1598.]



The Castle of Sopoto (today Borshi) besieged by the Venetians in 1570

Bibliographic Citation  
 CAMOCIO, Giovanni Francesco. Isole famose porti, fortezze, e terre marittime sottoposte alla Ser.ma Sig. ria di Venetia, ad altri Principi Christiani, et al Sig.or Turco, novamente posti in luce, Venice, alla libreria del segno di S.Marco, [ca. 1574].





View of the fortress of Borsh, or Castle of Sopot, in Albania.

Bibliographic Citation  
 [ROSACCIO, Giuseppe. Viaggio da Venetia, a Costantinopoli: per mare, e per terra & insieme quello di Terra Santa, da Gioseppe Rosaccio, con brevit  descritto, nel quale, oltre   settantadui disegni, di geografia e corografia si discorre, quanto in esso viaggio si ritroua, cio  : citt , castelli, porti, golfi, isole, monti, fiumi   mari : opera utile   mercanti, marinari &   studiosi di geografia, Venice, Giacomo Franco, 1598.]



The fortress of Sopot (in today's Borsh, Albania) besieged by the Venetian army and fleet in 1570

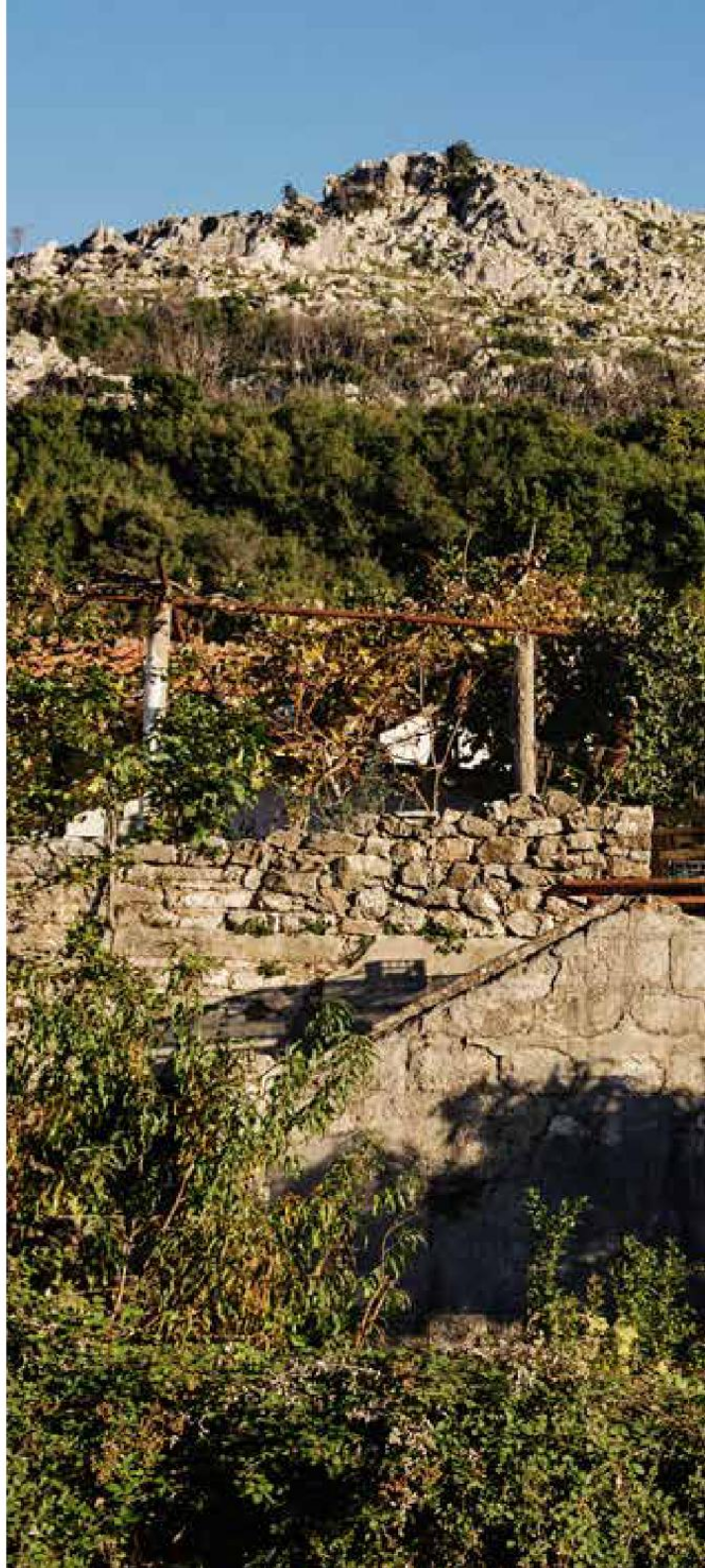
Bibliographic Citation  
 CORONELLI, Vincenzo. Repubblica di Venezia p. IV. Citta, Fortezze, ed altri Luoghi principali dell' Albania, Epiro e Livadia, e particolarmente i posseduti da Veneti descritti e delineati dal p. Coronelli, Venice, 1688.



## THE SETTING - URBAN FABRIC & ARCHITECTURE FEATURES

The ruins of the old village of Borsh, which once was situated near the village of Ftterrë, unlike today's village of the coast, represent a relatively broad range of low density of constructions. The ruins of dwellings outside the walls of Castle of Sopot in the southeast were related to Kokni village mentioned in the Ottoman records of 1431–1432, and had fourteen houses. The dwellings are built in a semi-floor volume, adapting to the steep rocky terrain. Their entry is either constructed with a stone or vaulted header / arch, while masonry is connected with lime mortar.

During Ali pasha's reign there were 700 houses in Borsh; he had the fortress renovated and a mosque built. Below the castle mount, the fragments of the mosque and madrese (a Muslim theological school) are still visible and present, though they were heavily damaged during 19th century.









## THE LANDSCAPE, THE STREAMS

The alluvial field of Borsh is another picturesque aspect, which is surrounded by a mountainous arch in the northeast and south, creating the image of an amphitheater. The visitor's attention is drawn toward the Sopot castle situated high on a hill above the new village. This same hill extends on the northern and western side and the river of Borsh runs through the hill's feet, flowing through the gorge that separates Borsh from Çorraj. The stream of Borsh flows by the village of Fterrë and Borsh, and ends up in Ionian Sea.









## BORSH OLIVE GROVE

Today, Borsh is known for its olive production and processing. During communism, the area was transformed into an efficient olive producing land. In addition to the hundreds of hectares of olive plantation that still exist in many states of usage, farmers from across the region haul their harvest to Borsh where it is pressed into oil and bottled for the domestic or international market.









## THE CASTLE OF SOPOT

The Castle of Sopot had several main construction phases with a duration period from prehistory to modern times. The earliest phase of the fortification dates back to the late Bronze Age, whereas in the early Hellenistic period of the fourth to third century BCE, coinciding with the second phase, is transformed into an important civic center. The fortification of this period occupies an area of 2.8 hectares and is divided into three spaces, where the central space is occupied by the acropolis. The entrance of the ancient fortification is located in the southeast. In the southwestern and northern slope of the hill are numerous ruins of ancient houses.





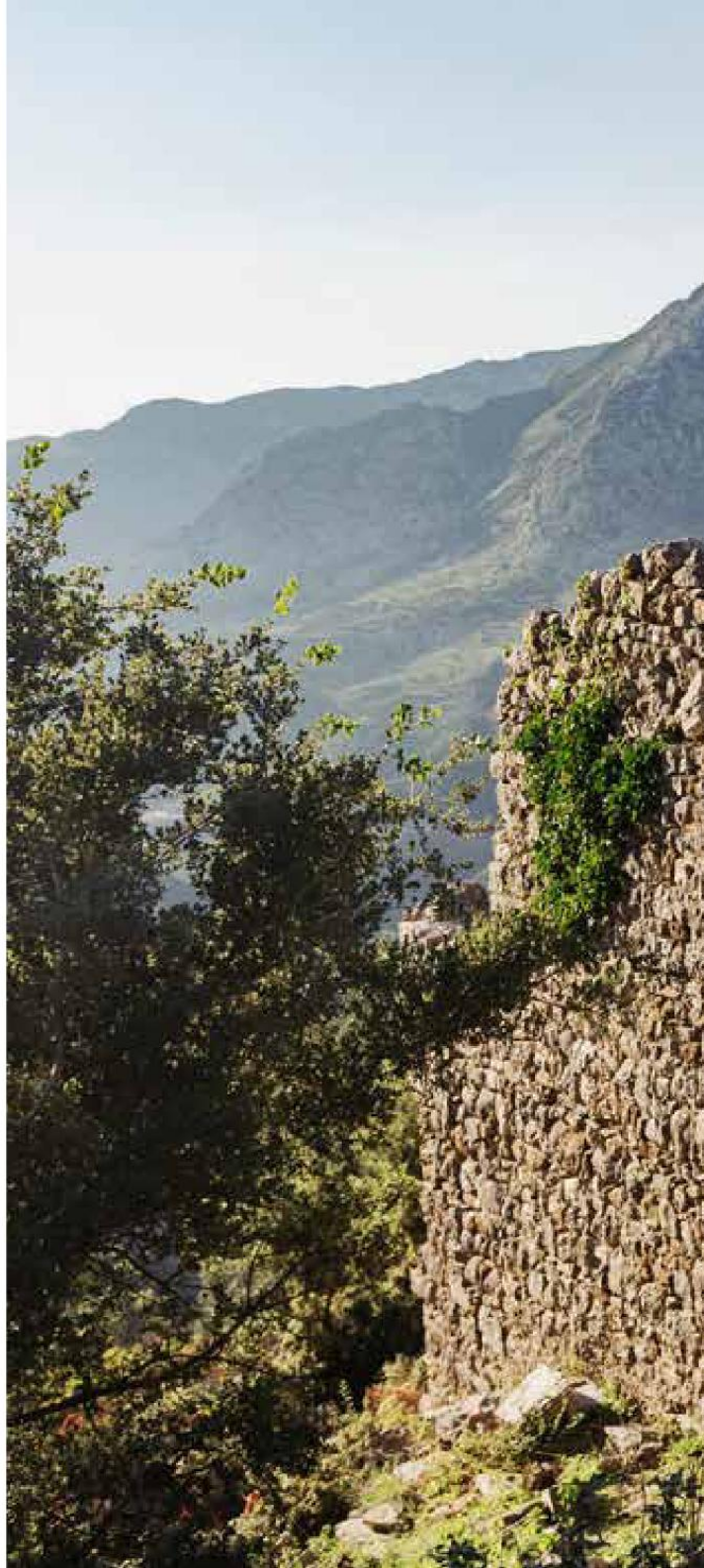




## THE NECROPOLIS OF THE ANCIENT CITY & THE TOMB

Outside the surrounding walls of the fortification of the Castle of Sopot, to the southwest, stands the necropolis of the ancient city. Precisely in this place, where the village of Borsh can be seen, there is a monumental tomb and three simple tombs made of stone slates.

The tomb has a rectangular layout and up to the time it has been discovered, in 1974, it was covered with vault that dates back to the fourth to third century BCE. The stones with which the tomb was built were taken from the surrounding terrain, and had very big dimensions. The tomb has an anteroom, which creates the image that it was the "real tomb" if discovered by robbers, and was an entrance into the premises of the tomb where the inventory of weapons of war, the crown, and other valuables would have been buried.









## THE MEDIEVAL CASTLE & THE CASTLE OF BADHRA

The medieval castle was established within the ancient fortification. The castle has an irregular plan shape in compliance with the contours of the terrain. It was divided into two parts by a dividing wall. The fortification has three towers: one in the north, one in the south, and one in the dividing wall of the castle. It had two entrances, one in the southeast and one in the southwest.

The Castle of Badhra belongs to the late Bronze Age. The fortification is situated beneath the road out of Borsh, on a hill at a height of about 250 meters above sea level. The prehistoric wall has a length of 180 meters. The only entrance is located on the south side of the fortification. Outside the surrounding walls in the north and west are traces of prehistoric dwellings.

Figure: Schematic Plan of Bardha Castle









## THE ANCIENT FORTIFIED VILLAS

From the archaeological ruins in the territory of Borsh, the ones perhaps most interesting are the ancient fortified villas. They are regarded as rural residences, which in antiquity belonged to wealthy individuals of the area.

The Fortified Villa of Muzge is located in a slope below today's village. It is situated on three terraces and is built with strong walls that come together to form a trapezoid. The higher terrace has rectangular layout and sits on a massive rock, the area of which was flattened to increase the base of the building. The villa dates back to the third century BCE and continued to be used during the Roman period.









## THE ANCIENT FORTIFIED VILLAS

The Fortified Dwelling in Gurrë of Borsh is situated on the southeastern road of Borsh. It is built on a sloping terrace on the west side, which locals call the Square of Muzhaq. The dwelling has rectangular layout 32 x 17 m, and has two towers—one inside the wall in the northwest corner and the other emerges from the northeast corner. The planimetric shape, the towers, and the construction techniques clearly show that the dwelling dates to antiquity or late antiquity.









## FACTS & FIGURES

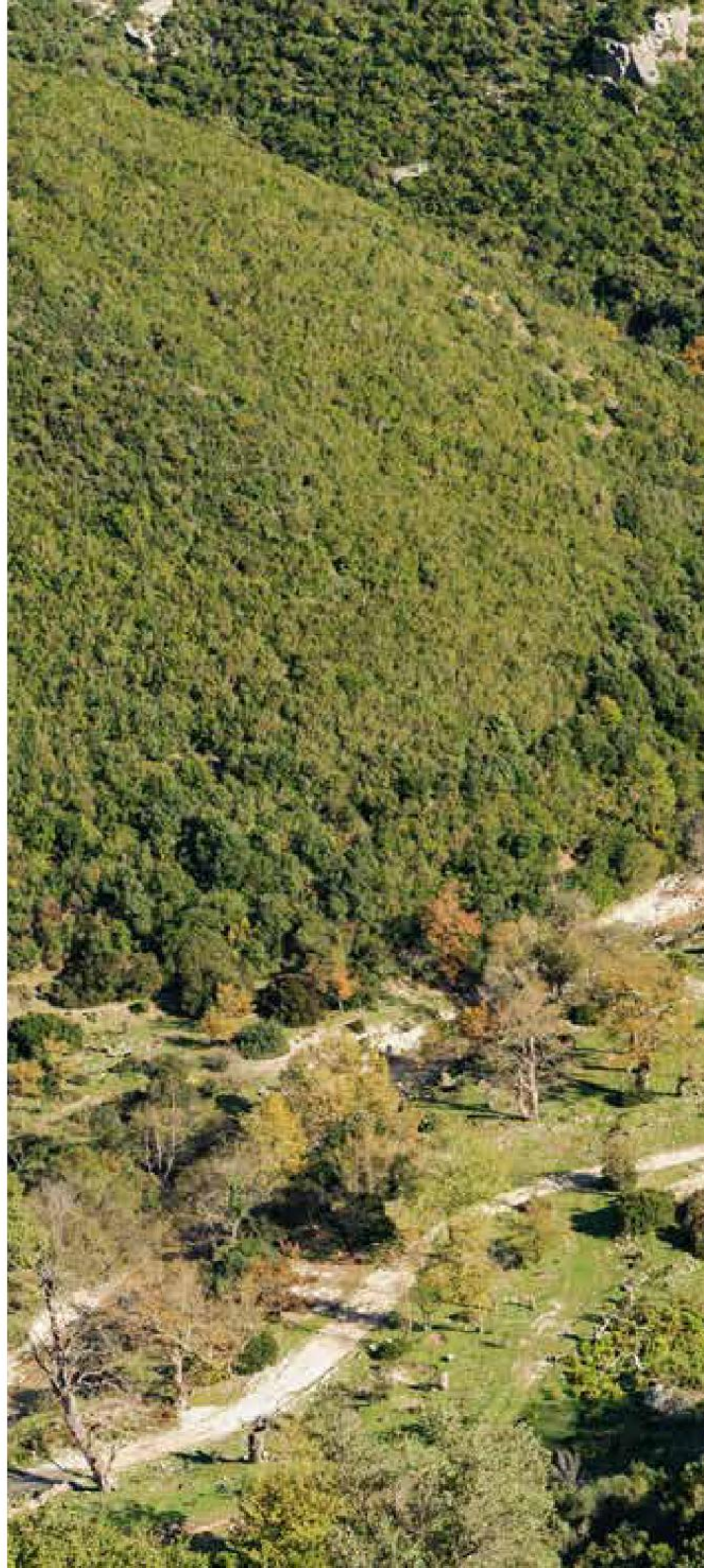
The village of Borsh is located a few hundred meters away from the shore and about 20 minutes from Himara. It is the largest beach of the Albanian Riviera that stretches along 6 km of the Ionian Coast.

Walking for half an hour from the national road up the limestone mount and reaching for the old village, you end up in the Castle of Sopot the greatest historical and cultural asset of Borsh.

There are two things that make Borsh a distinct and different village from the others in Himara municipality region: the presence of Sopot Castle, and its olive grove, which both have a story to tell. Last but not least, there is also a great asset: the sea....

The inhabitants of Borsh live mainly on seasonal tourism and agriculture products.

Borsh valley of the small river flowing into the sea from the inland mountains.









**Published by the**

Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

**Registered offices**

Bonn and Eschborn, Germany  
'Integrated Sustainable Development of the Southern  
Coastal Region'  
Rr. "Skenderbej" 21/1  
T +355 42 230 414  
[www.giz.de/en/worldwide/294.html](http://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/294.html)

**February 2016****Printed by**

Gent Grafik  
Address: L.Ali Demi, Rr. Idriz Dollaku., Tiranë – Albania  
[www.gentgrafik.al](http://www.gentgrafik.al)

**Design and layout**

PIK Creative  
Address: Rr. Pjetër Bogdani, nr. 37, Tiranë - Albania  
[www.pik.al](http://www.pik.al)

**Photo credits**

Armand Habazaj  
unless otherwise stated

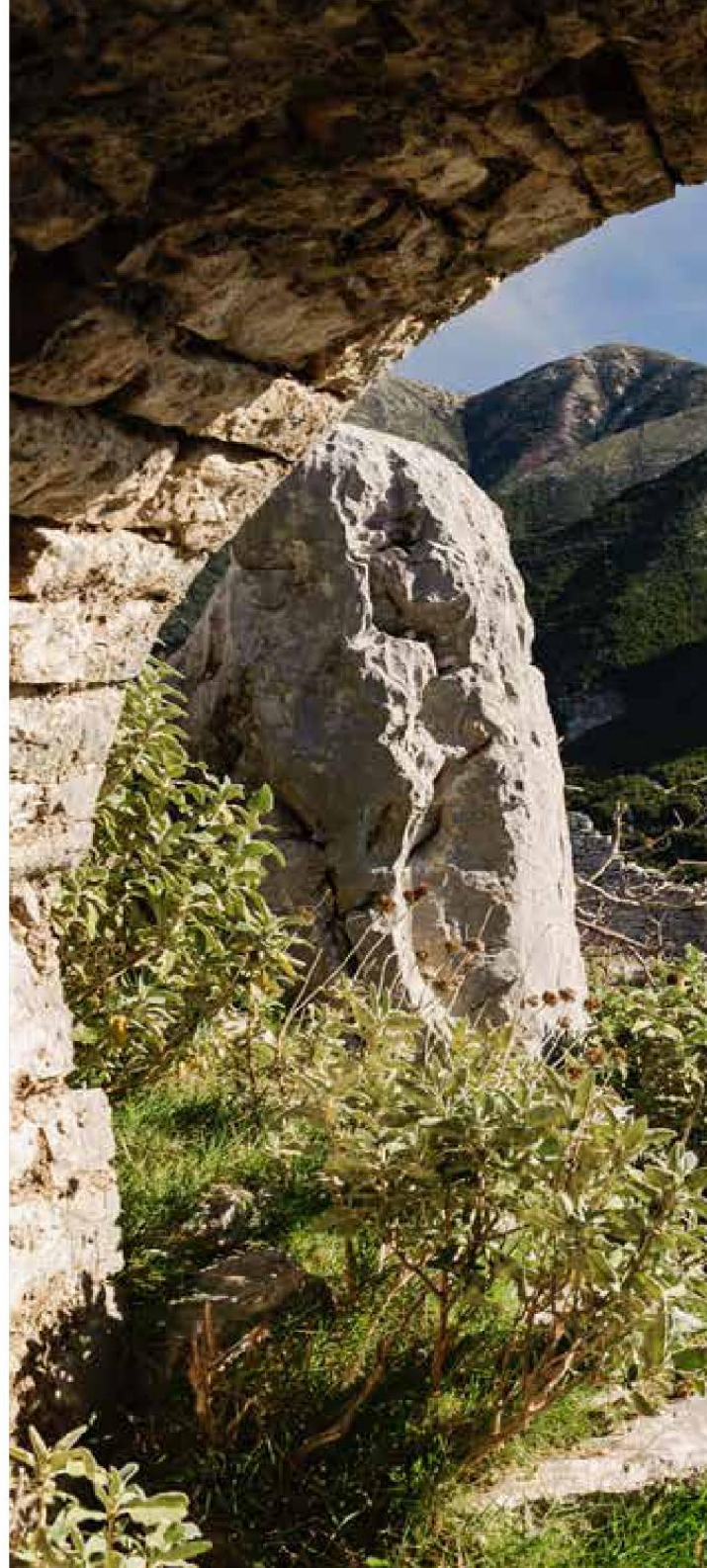
**Copyright with GIZ****Text**

Irakli Koçollari

**GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.****On behalf of the**

German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation  
and Development (BMZ)  
Alternatively: German Federal Foreign Office

To get more information about Albania  
please visit:  
[www.albania.al](http://www.albania.al)











Published by  
**giz** Deutsche Gesellschaft  
 für Internationale  
 Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

