



VUNO
THE MOUNTAIN RIDGE ACROPOLIS



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Two of the northernmost sea-facing villages in the Himarë Province are Dhërmi and Vuno. These villages are of a unique type compared to the villages farther south. First of all, they are roughly in the middle of the hillside, cut through by the national road. They were built against steep hills, and are broad, with roads that cut back and weave in between almost vertical stacks of houses. Vuno is quite steep. From the national road it looks like a wall of houses in a gentle semicircle, facing southwest. That steep slope translates to stunning views once inside the village. There is no bad seat, so to speak, in Vuno. The village can feel at times like classic Greek or Italian villages in their steepness and cutback roads. In it, too, are many fine examples of the regional architecture from the eighteenth century, both in houses and churches. Vuno has been home to many notable scholars as well. Like Kudhës and Qeparo, Vuno is quite stunning in juxtaposition to classic south Albanian ruggedness, and a certain kind of cosmopolitanism: shepherds and professors have coexisted in centuries-old stone houses perched above the sea.





THE PEOPLE

Residents of *Vuno*, or *Vunjotsit*, are mainly indigenous, but through the centuries many of them have been forced to emigrate and work. A large number of men from Vuno worked in southern France in the Saint-Étienne mines, as well as in Italy. Because of its position, Vuno has long attracted the attention of foreigners—who admire it for its hospitality and well-maintained nature.



Traditional Dresses in the Southern Region of Albania and Cameria

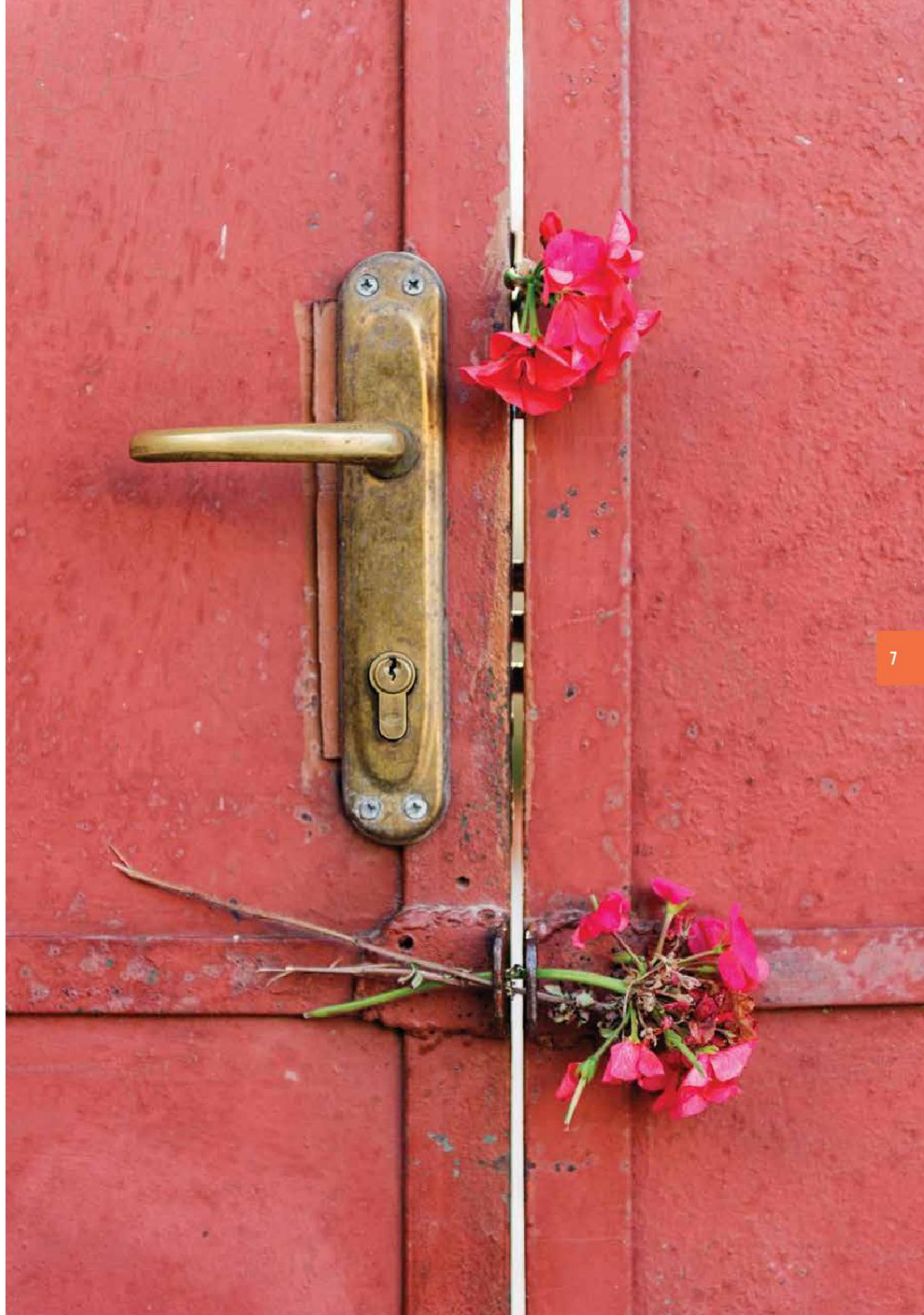




THE PEOPLE AND THE CULTURE

Women from Vuno are known for their beautiful dresses that feature a wide variety of colors. According to tradition, as the women age, the colors of the dress darken until black becomes the total wardrobe. Elderly women mostly wear white or black headscarves. Knee-length socks crafted from fine wool yarn, with colors and traditional motifs, are worn as well. Their characteristic shoes are traditional leather shoes with red tassels on the top called caruqe. A special element that accompanied the dressing and presentation of women was their hairstyle—the “bell tie,” a very special form inherited from the distant past, is found only in certain remote areas of Mirdita.

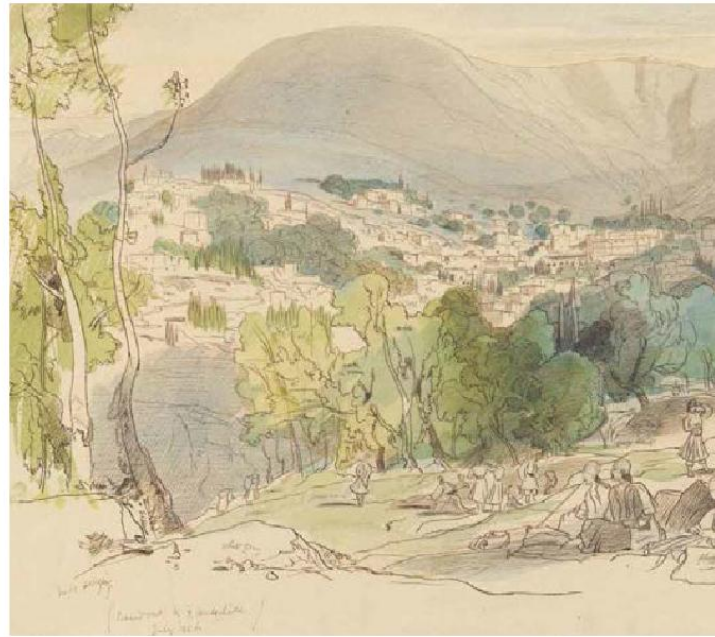




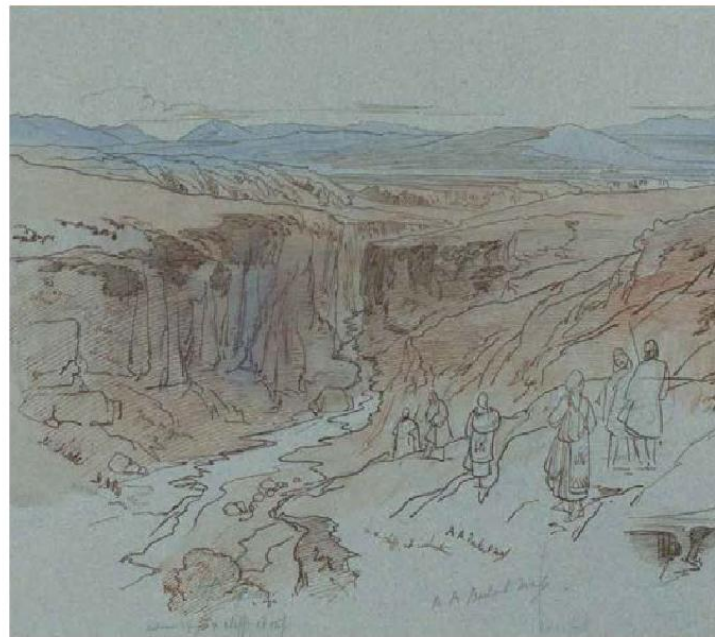


British traveler of the mid-nineteenth century, Edward Lear, stayed in this village in the house of the Kasneci family; other than talking about the great hospitality of the inhabitants of Vuno, he left us a number of watercolor tableaux that are now stored at Harvard University.

"I was very surprised by the buildings in Vuno, such as the Kasneci one. They give you the feeling of Venetian "Palazzi", as well as other constructions around rural area in Italy. The people of Himara use the Italian language more than anyone in Albania. In every village of this region I went, I noticed that despite the fact that they are Greek orthodox by religion, they are all Albanians, with some small exceptions" has written Edward Lear.



Edward Lear landscape drawings, Vuno, 1848. Source: Harvard University online Library (www.oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/-hou01475, accessed in Feb.2016)





THE SETTING - URBAN FABRIC

Some claim that because of the village's location on the hills, ascending to approximately 300 metres, the village's name derives from the Greek word Vouno (Greek: Bounō), meaning "mountain".

Vuno, like Dhermi, is an extremely steep village. It is built across the side of a gently concave hill, and the majority of the historic fabric sits above the national road. The built environment is compact and produces particularly interesting typologies of open and close spaces, routes and connections; including the arched passages typical of Vuno.

There are a number of characteristic dwellings in the village of Vuno, which, through their architecture and traditional ways of working, preserve the cultural heritage of the area. Some of the most notable among them are the House with the Tower of Shane Koka and the Dwelling of Odise Kasneci.





The Dwelling of Odise Kasneci (Banesa e Odise Kasnecit) was built in three construction phases. The first phase included a multilevel building, and one side of the building is composed of a mezzanine level. The second construction was more typical—the ground floor has two side-by-side vaults. At the same time, a cistern was included. The third construction, in line with the second, is scaled in height (varying levels), due to the steep land.

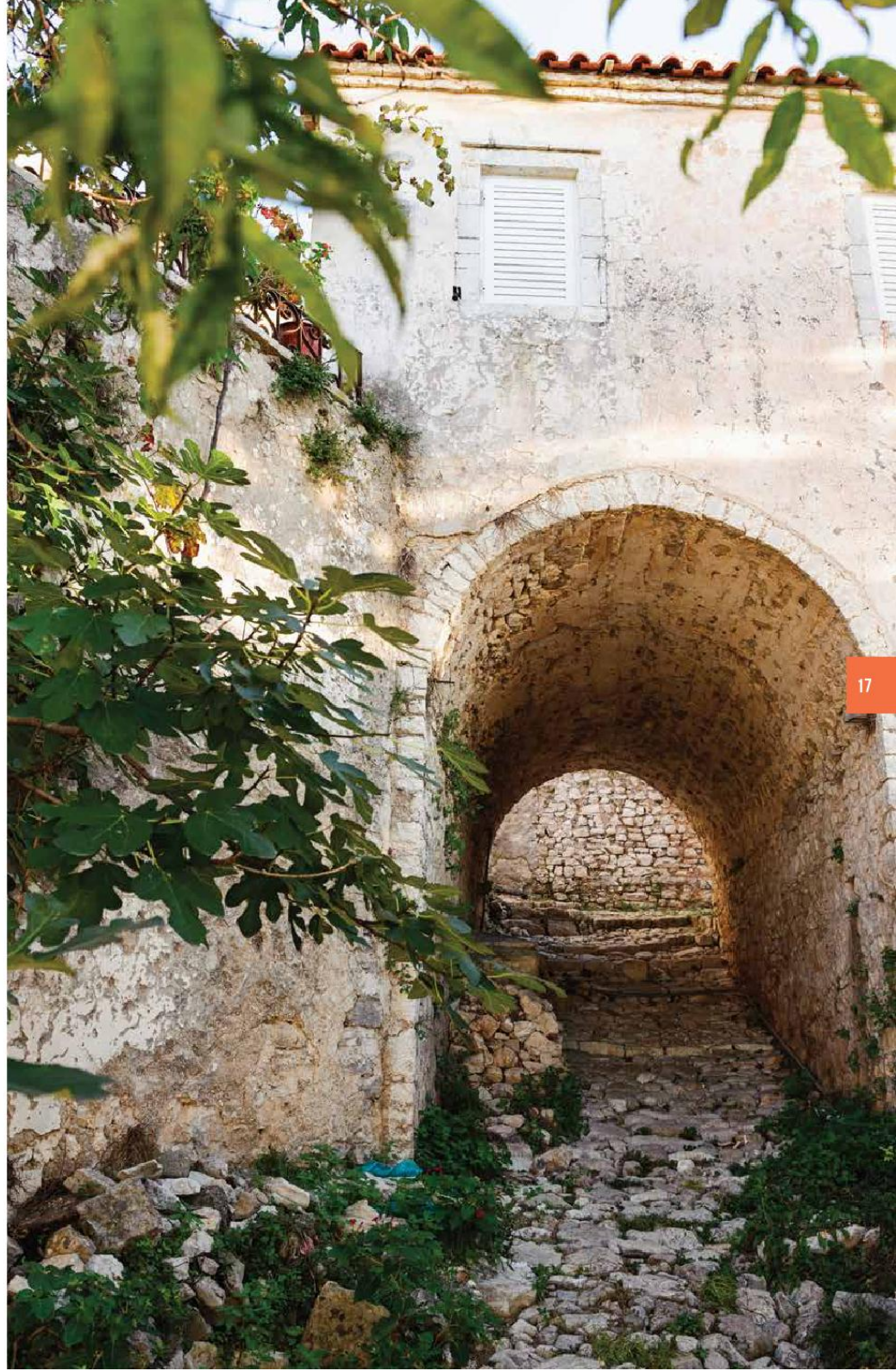
Edward Lear described the interior in 1848: "Paneled walls surrounded by Ottoman couches.... The central part of the ceiling tastefully decorated with dried grape bunches, hanging with some regular motifs.... The windows were very small and had a string of frëngjishë in walls." The construction is distinguished by the corners and the window frames, which are made of hewn stone.



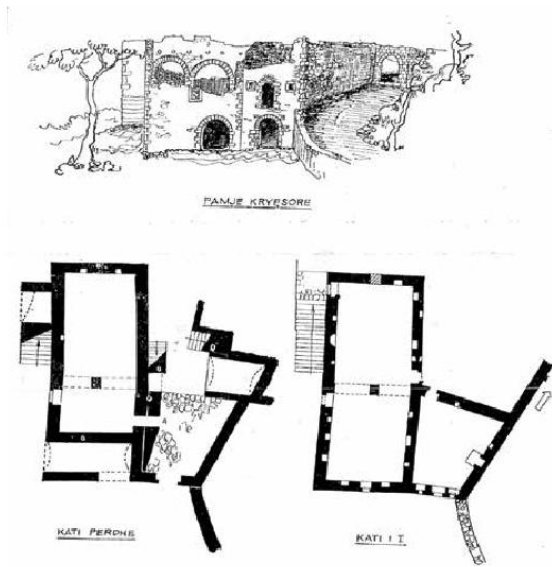


VILLAGE IMPRESSIONS





The House with the Tower of Shane Koka (Banesa me Kulla e Shane Kokës) was constructed in two phases, which date back respectively to 1785 and 1787. The first phase, which is a classic example of the house with tower, lies on the road, in a part of the volume of the road, rising with two vaults above to enable the passage. The crib or katua of the dwelling is also covered with a barrel vault. The exterior stone staircase leads to the two entrances of the premises of the first floor only, which includes one volume and the space. The addition of 1787 is very well connected with the first construction. The entrance from the street leads to a kind of porch, under which is a big cistern. Two residential facilities are stacked above the porch. The arches of vaults and underpasses are featured throughout the dwelling. The stones used for the construction are of average size for vaults and corners, while the walls feature small stones. The windows feature stone lintels above consoles.



drawing of the House with the Tower of Shane Koka

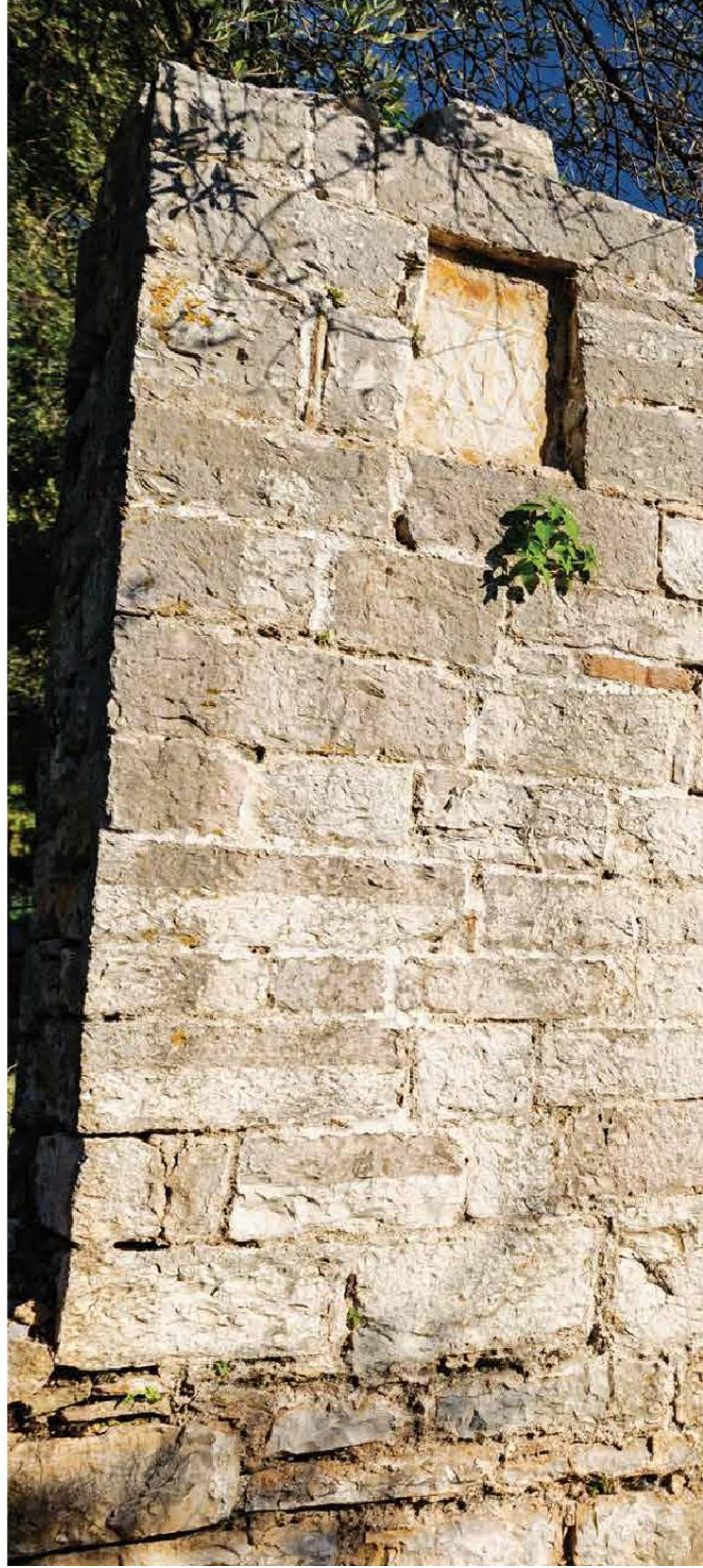




THE CHURCH OF SAINT SPIRIDON

The Church of Saint Spiridon (Kisha e Shën Spiridhonit) was built in 1778. It is separated by two arcades on stone pillars in three vertical naves; a brace arcade in the western part separates the two-story endo -narthex*. The side naves of the naos are narrow, giving more space to the central nave. Naves and naos feature wooden ceilings. The space of the altar is separated from the naos by an iconostasis. The church has entrances on the west, south and north sides. On the west side, the church is preceded by a square porch in plan, which is open on three sides with arcades on thin stone pillars. On the eastern side, the basilica ends with a semicircular apse. The masonry of the church was built with stones and is coated with a thin layer of plaster, leaving out the corners of the walls and shoulders of doors and windows, worked with carved stones. The roof has collapsed and is currently being restored.

* The narthex is an architectural element typical of early Christian and Byzantine basilicas and churches consisting of the entrance or lobby area, located at the west end of the nave, opposite the church's main altar. Traditionally the narthex was a part of the church building, but was not considered part of the church proper.





THE CHURCH OF ST. MICHAEL

The Church of St. Michael (Kisha e Shën Mëhillit) was built in the bottom quarter of the village of Vuno and its paintings date to 1783. The only entrance and window are located on the northern side. It consists of a naos, which is separated from the altar by an iconostasis. Traces of the apse roof on the east side show that the church had once been covered with stone slabs. The masonry was built with flattened grout and lime mortar. It ends with a simple stone frame. The corners and the shoulders of the door and windows, which were made of hewn stones, and the apse with saw-tooth frames are the only elements made with special care and attention.





THE SAINT MARY'S CHURCH, MESODHI

The Saint Mary's Church, Mesodhi is situated in the southeast quarter of Vuno. It is a simple church: one nave with a rectangular layout and humble internal dimensions. It is covered with a wooden gabled roof and is without a ceiling. It has an entrance on the west side and is the only space by means of which the church can be enlightened because windows are completely missing. The naos is separated from the altar by an iconostasis. The apse is shifted slightly on the right and is covered with stone slabs, which proves that this was the authentic coverage of the church. It was painted in 1783. The church walls were built with stones and lime mortar.





THE SCHOOL AND THE CYPRUS TREE QIPARISI I KAMBONARES SE KISHES SE VUNOIT, A BIO-MONUMENT

Despite the very small of population, Vuno has provided the Albanian society with some key figures of arts and culture, such as art directors, actors, writers, important politicians, as well as parliament members. The current prime minister of Albania, Mr.Edi Rama's family from the mother side, originates from Vuno. All these figures are a significant indicator that shows the desire that the Vuno people have cultivated towards education and knowledge. The 200 year old school in Vuno and the history of the village, clearly depict this fact. The school was built very close to the main Church of the Village, to offer room for education to the young people.

The school of Vuno closed down some years ago, due to the very limited number of students. Currently, it is being used as a hostel during summer season.

Some people claim that in June 1939, a Cyprus tree was planted in a vase like jutting cantilever on the Bell tower of the school. Regardless of the fact that no one really took intensive care of the tree, to either irrigate or shear it, the tree is still alive and green today. But, the tree never grew taller... it has almost the same size as the time it was first planted. The Cyprus tree of the Church (Qiparisi I Kambonares se Kishes se Vunoit) is a natural monument.



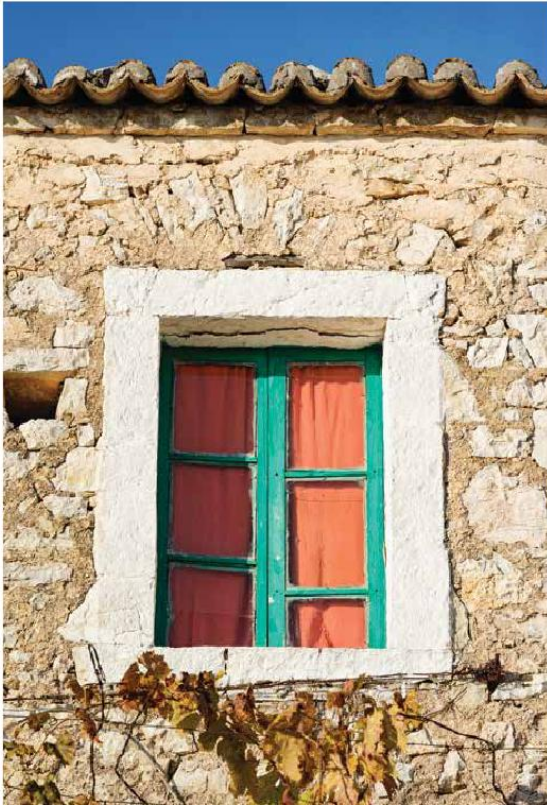


VILLAGE OVERVIEW, FACTS & FIGURES

The village of Vuno has approximately 500 inhabitants. Similar to the villages in the Southern Coastal Region and Himara, Vuno also “suffers” the migration phenomena, having very few elderly residents during winter and many visitors during summer season. The inhabitants live mainly on tourism activities and migration incomes.

Expanding in the middle of the hillside, cut through by the national road, built against steep hills with roads that cut back and weave in between almost vertical stacks of houses, Vuno is amazingly panoramic and offers breathtaking views. Seen from above, Vuno gives the impression of a large acropolis that emerges from the rocks.

There are some highlights one can visit in Vuno, such as the Church of Saint Mary of Mesodhia (1783) and the church of Saint Spiridhoni (1778).





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Irakli Koçollari

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