



# Voices of Butrint

An oral history approach to Butrint

Final Report



July 2014

Report  
Voices of Butrint

This report undertakes to represent the work of the Centre for Albanian Cultural Heritage (Trakult Centre) in the frame of its Voices of Butrint Project (VoB), carried out with financial support of the Butrint Foundation.

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Front-cover: Field interviews in Butrint (Mirgen Shametaj interviewing D w v t k p v " P c v k q p c guardian Hismet Osmani)

Back-cover: Field interviews in the village surrounding Butrint.

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## **Acknowledgments**

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*Finally, and perhaps most importantly we wish to extend our thanks to many individuals and local people who generously offered their time and provided material to the project.*

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## Abbreviations

BF	The Butrint Foundation
BNP	Butrint national Park
Trakult Centre	Centre for Albanian Cultural Heritage
In interviews, nr. 1	Interviewer
In interviews, nr. 2	Interviewee

## Project background

Between February-June 2014, the Centre for Albanian Cultural Heritage carried out the oral history project 'Voices of Butrint'. This project was made possible thanks to the financial contribution of the Butrint Foundation and consultation of experienced adviser Karen Knight. The aim of the oral history project was to extend the historical knowledge of the Butrint National Park through memories of people living near the site and to provide to the Butrint Foundation an oral and historical archive, which, in the longer term can be used to provide resources for local schools and visitors to the site.

The geographic scope of the project encompassed villages of Ksamili, Vrina, Shën Dëlli and Xarra (Fig. 1). These communities are an integral part of the historical transformation of the site of Butrint during recent past. As such, the oral history and interpretive outcomes will make an important contribution to the development of knowledge of history of the site during 20<sup>th</sup> century. Recording and analysis of personal experience stories are of particular interest as they portray the cultural, social and economic uses of the Butrint National Park. In addition to this, by recording and valuing the personal memories of farmers, workers, mechanics, fishermen and others associated with the site, the oral history is a powerful acknowledgement of these people contribution to the history of the site and consequently to the history of Albania.



*Fig. 1 Map of villages included in the project.*

## Methodology

The project was conducted in three phases:

**First phase** of the project was carried out between mid-January to end February 2014. It included research, consultation, identifying interviewers and understanding the processes of oral history recording. The selection of four villages related to their proximity to the site of Butrint and the involvement of their inhabitants in different projects at Butrint. We then selected elderly local people; farmers, park workers, and anglers as our target group who held special memories of Butrint. The age of interviewees was set over 40 years old, with both genders included.

Another important task in this phase was to prepare guided-questions for interviews outlining a standard methodology. (BL Standards for Oral Archives)

**The second phase** was the conducting the field interviews that were held between 10<sup>th</sup> of March and 2<sup>nd</sup> of May. The interview strategy employed was informal and focused on personal stories and experiences of local residents who had direct or indirect knowledge and other experiences in Butrint (Fig. 2-3).

In order to use the material gathered in the fieldwork, interviewees were asked to give written assignments of copyright and other rights by signing a *Recording Agreement* between the Butrint Foundation and each interviewee. The purpose of this form was to enable parts of recorded interviews or extracts from transcriptions to be used in publications, learning materials for schools, visitor information, exhibitions or on the internet; and to record in writing any closure or restrictions on access or use that the interviewee may wish to make.



Fig. 2  
*Interviewees from the village of Xarra*



*Fig. 3*  
*Interviewees in the village of Shen Delli*

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**The third phase** started in early May until mid-June. During this phase, all field interviews were transcribed into Albanian and translated in English. Difficulties were faced translating the interviews involving old Albanian phrases. Sometimes the interviewees used subtly worded proverbs, which cannot easily be translated in other languages. Nevertheless, the complete recordings are preserved in a database that will be handed over to the Butrint Foundation at the end of the project. The database can then be used by the Foundation in a variety of ways as mentioned above; for learning and for visitor information.

From the interviews and other information taken during the fieldwork, a narrative was then produced to provide a context for individual interviews. This has integrated different events and stories related to Butrint from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century until today. It is organised in chronological order and focused on different themes of making a site, such as archaeology, politics, local communism and the environment. The narrative analyses important events and ~~e q p e g t p u " y k v j " a t h e r q u a n t i t y b e i n g c o l l e c t i v e a n d s t a t i s t i c a l~~. The full text of narrative is attached to this report as an appendix. (App.1). The narrative will be added to the archive and could be published as a small pamphlet at some future date.

## Results

During the Voices of Butrint Project fieldwork, 34 people were interviewed in four villages.

The majority of interviews were conducted with individuals, although there were also a small number of group interviews of up to six people. Interviews were conducted in private homes, in coffee bars, agricultural land and within the site of Butrint. Interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes, although initial introductions, rapport building, and other hospitalities often extended the time.

The project's main interest was focused on the significance of Butrint, the transformation of the environment around the site and work practices linked to personal histories. While working within a reasonably structured set of questions, the aim of the oral history was to evoke memory and experience rather than pursuing a set or predetermined line of questioning. All interviews were recorded on mp3 recording device and often interviewees were encouraged to take notes to supplement the recordings. Each interviewee was photographed by agreeing in advance.

In general, the interviewees share different feelings, memories and perspectives about Butrint. In some groups the impressions of the interviewees, who are closely connected with the site, noting the close presence of nature and a serene environment and an underlying concern for the welfare of Butrint:

*When I went to Butrint at that time (early in the past) it was very quiet. It looked as though you were entering a different world there. It was very silent; you could only hear the children playing. The place here is bare, but when you were there, it was like another world*

Obviously, a further element attaching people to Butrint was its place as a venue for festivals and celebrations. In the years of communism, there was a regular May Day festival, where the workers of the nearby villages and towns and their families would gather to dance and feast, concerts were held in the theatre.

*Yes, yes. We came here Smt-ja with a group of tractors. I also came with a group of mechanics, because I was a mechanic. The mechanics and the tractors organized something for the 1st of May. We came by bus. We came and celebrated for 5 or 6 hours at Butrint. At that time, the roads were paved with stones. Later they paved them (with asphalt). I visited Butrint in the 3 ; 7 2 u . " y j g p " K " y c. <sup>1</sup> " 4 7 " q t " 4 8 " { g c t u " q n f í*

In addition to formal celebrations, Butrint was a traditional place to visit for newly married or engaged couples, the romantic environment seemingly having promoted numerous proposals. Butrint still retains this function of course, and is a stop on the wedding photo trail today.

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<sup>1</sup> Interviewee LQ (m) 13.

<sup>2</sup> Interviewee MK (m) 11.

*“We used to go there to celebrate the 1st of May. We crossed over with boats, but we, the youth, we would swim across for fun, because it was only 80 meters. In 1967, when I got married, we went to Butrint”<sup>3</sup>*

*“Yes, I used to go there with my girlfriends. We celebrated birthdays there or had picnics. We would go there for a tour when family that lived far away came to visit. My mother was from Elbasan. Therefore, we would take them to Butrint for a visit. We would have lunch in the meadows inside Butrint. We came and took photographs at the Lion Gate when I got married”<sup>4</sup>*

The full transcripts of the interviews are attached to this report as App. 2

### **Numerical record of outcomes**

Thirty-four interviewees recorded of which 25 men and 9 women

Thirty-four interviews recorded of which 34 transcribed and translated

Thirty-three interviewers trained in methodology of oral history recording

Sixty-four was the average age of interviewees

Twenty-seven was average age of interviewers

Total project costs 6350 Euro of which 5820 Euro funded by the Butrint Foundation.

Project delivered from March to July 2014 within timeframe foreseen to the application.

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<sup>3</sup> Interviewee BS (m) 19.

<sup>4</sup> Interviewee MS (f) 23.

## Conclusions

The site of Butrint has a long, fascinating and rich history. This project provided a different point of view and stories of the site. From interviews in four villages located close to Butrint, it was possible to articulate the social historical uses of the site and give context to the personalised experience of local inhabitants.

The project collected and brought to the Butrint Foundation and Butrint National Park a rich archive with new evidence and records from local communities. It is hoped that the material collected in this project will be used for educational and interpretative purposes, a hope that will form a separate application for further grant aid. That wider use of the new material can add value to the learning and visitor resources that Butrint has to offer in the future. Most importantly, the material gathered can also help the sustainability and future of Butrint by building relationships and connections for and with local people.

The stories of the local interviewees can for instance, be used to share knowledge with the younger generation in local schools. Local stories and memories can engage children in the storytelling process so that they can make their own meaning and explanations within the story creating a sense of identity and building respect and connections to their present world. Using the material gathered in imaginative ways can help build stronger relationships between Butrint and the local cultural heritage that surrounds it.

The intergenerational elements of the project should not be understated. By emphasising the interviewees have gained a sense of involvement and respect for the voices of the elderly in current situations and debates. The elderly in their turn, have been listened to and respected by younger people.

The example that this project has set in producing these qualitative outcomes within a rigorous such as the site management of Apollonia, within CHwB and in the Ministry of Culture.

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