Back to the Mountains

A Guesthouse for the Preservation of Vernacular Memory on Mount Tomorr in Albania

by
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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

For millennia, the mountains of Albania have been a repository of vernacular knowledge, and in difficult times, a place of refuge from the often-hostile urban world. However, since the fall of Communism in the early 1990s, many Albanians have fled the mountainous countryside for the gleaming allure of urban centers within the country and abroad. Today, as the rural exodus shows no signs of decline, the traditional knowledge of the mountains is at risk of being forgotten as the country haphazardly urbanizes, and people become disconnected from their land. Identifying the mountains as carriers of collective memory, I situate this thesis on Mount Tomorr – a physically prominent and spiritually significant mountain in the national imagination. Through the review of historical accounts of guest travellers' journeys to this mountain, and my own site visits, I explore the histories, myths, and landscape of Tomorr. This exploration is then used to determine a program, and a site near the northern summit: a hill by a crossroads containing the scattered remains of ancient ruins. Here, beneath the majestic peaks of Tomorr's northern summit, I propose the design of a guesthouse. Drawing inspiration from the site's past architectural legacy as well as the traditional practices of the mountain, the building embarks on a journey that rekindles the traditions of transhumance, alpine herbalism, and the hospitality characteristic of Albanians. The guesthouse serves as a conduit for the preservation of collective memories by employing elements of vernacular architecture; with a particular emphasis on the morphology of the guest room as a space where memories and knowledge can be organically formed and shared. Guests are invited to immerse themselves in the vibrant tapestry of mountain life, not merely as passive tourists, but as engaged contributors in learning and preserving the memories and age-old customs of the mountains, all while forging a reconnection with the land.

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I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to my relatives in Albania for putting up with all my requests. To both of my uncles for their help in organizing my climbs of the mountain. My uncle Albert for going out of his way to coordinate and find a local guide for me to climb the northern summit, and my uncle Sokol for accompanying me on the climb to the southern summit. To my grandparents, for their love and support. *Ju dua shumë* - I love you all very much.

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Ultimately, I give my thanks to God, for He is good, and His mercy endures forever. None of this would have been possible without Him.

Dedication

Për gjyshërit e mi - For my grandparents.

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1.0
Leaving the Mountains





1.1 Introduction

"Na ka marrë malli të shikojmë pak mal," my mom would say every so often with a certain longing in her voice – I miss seeing some mountains.

There are no mountains to see in Toronto, not even hills. Mostly just a flat sprawl of suburbs with a couple of ravines scattered here and there, but no elevated topography so to speak of. "Does Canada even have mountains?" my dad would quip. Of course, we knew Canada had mountains, but not where we lived, somewhere far out west. They might as well have been in another country. What good were they when you couldn't even see them?

In Albania, the mountains are never far. Wherever you are in the small Balkan country, their hazy blue silhouettes serrate the horizon. Peaking through the corner of a bedroom window, or framed by city buildings lining an avenue, they provide a steady backdrop to people's lives; declaring their ancient constancy. *"T'i ngopin sytë"* – they satiate your eyes, my mom would say. Covering more than three quarters of the nation's rugged terrain,[1] these mountains are a defining feature of the country, its people, and their culture. For millennia, they have been a bastion of tradition and identity, preserving autochthonous knowledge from generation to generation. These unyielding mountains on the eastern edge of the Adriatic have always provided a stable place of refuge to the tenacious Albanians throughout history.[2] And it has been a history replete with invasion after invasion, whether it was from the Greeks, Romans, Slavs, Ottomans, Italians, Germans, or even the iron grip of communism following the Second World War.[3] After some 500 odd years of Ottoman hegemony, Albania declared independence in 1912, only to come under Italian occupation from Mussolini's forces crossing the Adriatic in 1939.[4] In '43, Hitler's armies occupied the country until they were expelled by the National Anti-Fascist Liberation Front.[5] A year later in 1944, Enver Hoxha's Communist party established a totalitarian regime clenching onto power for almost 50 years until 1992.[6] Today, the occupying forces of yesteryear are no longer a threat to the continuance of the traditional Albanian identity, instead, it is Albanians themselves who are leaving the mountains.

Fig.1.1 (Previous Spread) View of Albanian mountains seen outside an airplane window. Mount Tomorr is visible left of center.

Fig.1.2 (Right) Context map of Albania.

1 Raymond E. Zickel et al., eds., Albania: A Country Study, 2nd ed, Area Handbook Series 550–98 (Washington, D.C: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress : For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O, 1994), 59.
2 Mark Mazower, The Balkans : A Short History (New York : Modern Library, 2002), 42, http://archive.org/details/balkansshorthist0000mazo.
3 Robert Elsie, Historical Dictionary of Albania, 2nd ed, Historical Dictionaries of Europe, no. 75 (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010).
4 Elsie, xxxvi.
5 Elsie, xxxvi.
6 Elsie, xliii.

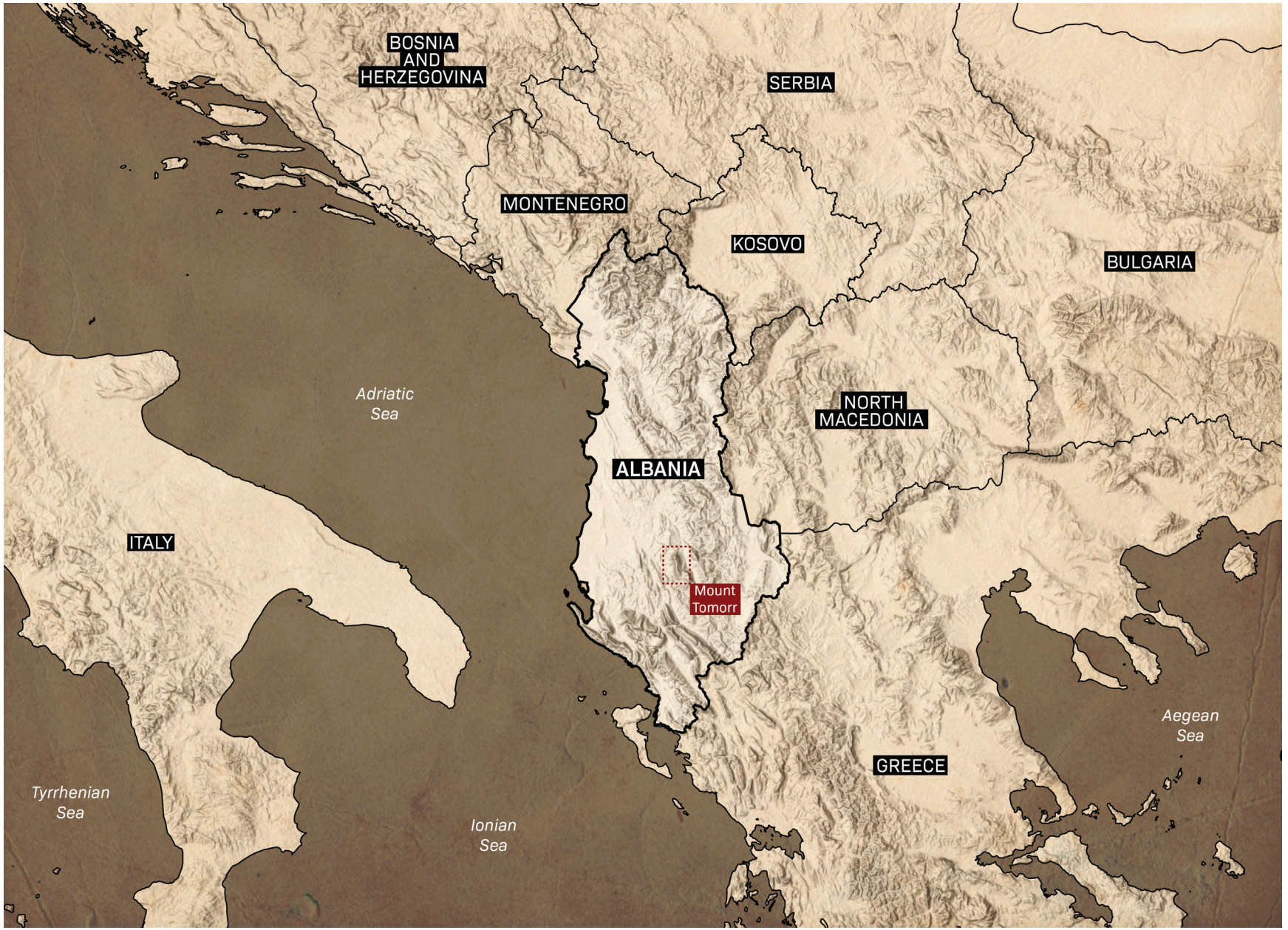

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
SERBIA
MONTENEGRO
KOSOVO
BULGARIA
Adriatic Sea
NORTH MACEDONIA
ALBANIA
ITALY
Mount Tomorr
Aegean Sea
GREECE
Tyrrhenian Sea
Ionian Sea



Fig.1.3 (Left) Skanderbeg Mounatins in Kruja.

Fig.1.4 (Right) Mount Tomorr and foothills framed by buildings in Poliçan.





Fig.1.5 (Left) A small village under the Albanian Alps in Northern Albania.

Fig.1.6 (Right) Dajti Mountains to the east of the capital, Tirana.


delta

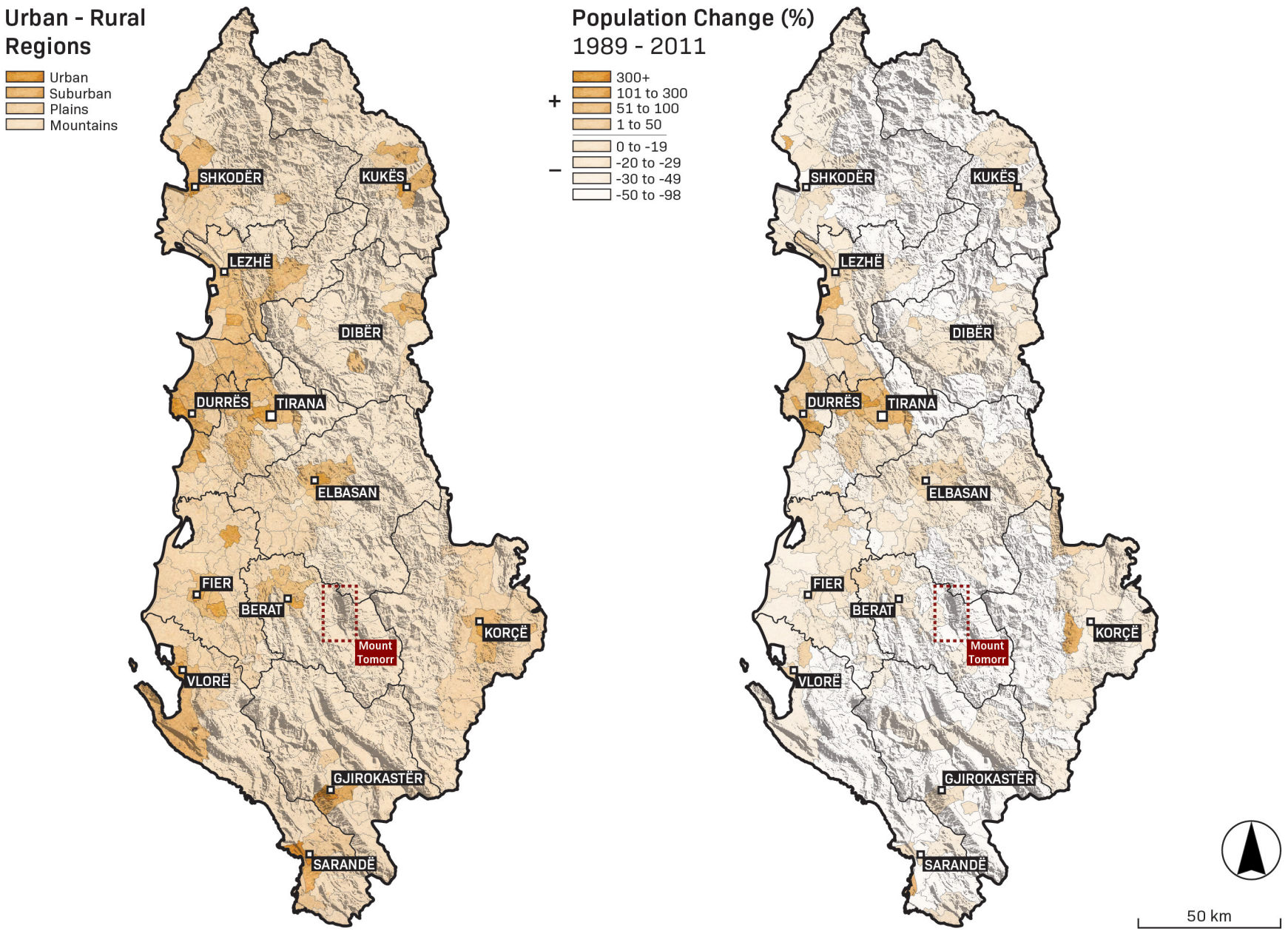

Urban - Rural Regions
Urban
Suburban
Plains
Mountains
Population Change (%)
1989 - 2011
+
300+
101 to 300
51 to 100
1 to 50
−
0 to -19
-20 to -29
-30 to -49
-50 to -98
SHKODËR
KUKËS
LEZHË
DIBËR
DURRËS
TIRANA
ELBASAN
FIER
BERAT
KORÇË
Mount Tomorr
VLORË
GJIROKASTËR
SARANDË
50 km

Fig.1.7 (Left) Maps of Albania highlighting the correlation between rural mountainous regions and a dramatic drop in population.

The few remaining snow-capped summits gleamed below us that April morning. Reluctantly, they gave way to the cerulean blue of the Adriatic, fading slowly in the distance as we looked out the oval window. Like many Albanians during the last 30 years, my parents immigrated and settled abroad in search of better opportunities for themselves and their children. During the past three decades it is estimated that more than 1.4 million people have left the country, representing almost half of Albania's remaining population of 2.8 million.[7,8] In fact, there are more people of Albanian origin living abroad today than there are in the country itself. This current wave of mass migration started with the fall of communism in the early 1990s when citizens finally gained the freedom to leave their own country.[9] In the following years, after a series of ensuing political scandals, nationwide pyramid schemes where many lost whatever few lifesavings they had managed to accumulate during communism, and civil unrest in the late 90s, the exodus has only slightly abated in the relatively milder decades since.[10] Currently being one of the poorest and least developed nations in Europe from years of political corruption and mismanagement; more than half the total population,[11] and particularly, around two thirds of youth currently say they have intentions to migrate abroad.[12] No part of the country has felt this exodus as much as the rural mountainous regions though. For the past 50 years, the rural population of Albania as a percentage of the total population has been rapidly declining, with a marked acceleration of decline after the fall of communism. This has left large swaths of the mountainous countryside abandoned, or nearly so, as the younger generations have moved either to Albania's cities or internationally for better work and education opportunities.[13] With this sustained exodus, the local cultures, traditional knowledge, and the collective memory rooted in the mountains are at risk of being forgotten.

Elevated rural exodus was not always the case for the country though. Throughout the communist period, Albania was unique in Europe for having the lowest ratio of urban to rural population,[14] with only around one third of its citizens living in urbanized areas. Today, that ratio is inversed,[15] although, the country still remains near the bottom of Europe in terms of urbanization, and agriculture continues to play a significant part in the economy.[16] Over a span of three decades from 1960-1990, urban growth was kept to a minimum through a strict policy of rural retention and stringent controls on internal migration by the communist regime.[17] This ensured that agriculture and food production remained the backbone of

7 "Albania Migration Trends Change, 52 Percent Mull Leaving," Reuters, October 19, 2018, sec. Emerging Markets, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-albania-migration-trends-idUSKCN1MT2HF.
8 "Albania Population - 1960-2021 Historical," Trading Economics, accessed April 30, 2023, https://tradingeconomics.com/albania/population.
9 Calogero Carletto et al., "A Country on the Move: International Migration in Post-Communist Albania," The International Migration Review 40, no. 4 (2006): 767–85.
10 Elsie, Historical Dictionary of Albania.
11 "Albania Migration Trends Change, 52 Percent Mull Leaving."
12 Sergej Flere et al., "Lost in Democratic Transition? : Political Challenges and Perspectives for Young People in South East Europe ; Results of Representative Surveys in Eight Countries," Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2015.
13 Kosta Barjaba and Joniada Barjaba, "Embracing Emigration: The Migration-Development Nexus in Albania," migrationpolicy.org, September 9, 2015, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/embracing-emigration-migration-development-nexus-albania.
14 Russell King and Julie Vullnetari, "From Shortage Economy to Second Economy: An Historical Ethnography of Rural Life in Communist Albania," Journal of Rural Studies 44 (April 2016): 198–207, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2016.02.010.
15 "Albania - Rural Population - 1960-2021 Historical," Trading Economics, accessed April 30, 2023, https://tradingeconomics.com/albania/rural-population-percent-of-total-population-wb-data.html.
16 D. R. Hall, "Albania: Rural Development, Migration and Uncertainty," GeoJournal 38, no. 2 (1996): 185–89.
17 King and Vullnetari, "From Shortage Economy to Second Economy."

the nation's existence in a country increasingly isolated from outside assistance by its paranoid dictator, Enver Hoxha.[18] The communist regime under Hoxha implemented an official state policy of autarky, or self-sufficiency, as external aid from other communist countries dried up in the face of Hoxha's displeasure at their warming ties with the United States.[19] While the nation has a favourable Mediterranean climate suited to growing many crops, autarky was never fully achieved[20] – as it seldom is. This, of course, led to constant shortages of basic goods, and the queueing that is typical of centrally planned communist economies.[21] It is no surprise then, that once "the Communist regime collapsed, everyone fled to [the cities]. Many then regretted it, especially the elderly: living in the city is not for everyone. Once you have left, however, returning to the village is almost impossible."[22]

Our reacquaintance with the mountains would end up being a sporadic affair; a summer here and there to meet relatives and douse our longing to see each other, while rekindling our memories. From both sides of my family, this saga of leaving the mountains for the cities and abroad has played out for the better part of a century. In the 1950's, my great-grandfather begrudgingly resettled his family from the secluded foothills of Mount Tomorr to the ever more frenetic capital of Tirana at the persistent behest of his eldest sons in the name of progress. Today, his progeny can be found in the cities of the country and the world, but not one in the mountains of their ancestors where the family lands sit abandoned. This story is not unique just to my family though, but can perhaps summarize the current state of an entire nation. You will seldom find a family that doesn't have some connection to migration. Now, it is particularly those most remote and mountainous regions of the country that have experienced, and continue to experience, some of the highest levels of rural exodus. The purpose of this thesis is not to resolve the many complex and various reasons for which people are leaving the mountains, nor is it to explicitly prescribe to people that they stay or return, for everyone has - and should have - their own agency in a free society. Instead, in the face of rural exodus and risk of cultural amnesia, this thesis aims to explore the preservation of the memory, intangible heritage, and traditions of the mountains through an architectural space inspired by its vernacular context.

Fig.1.8 (Right) View looking out Tirana International Airport with the Skanderbeg Mountain Range framing the horizon behind an Air Albania airplane.

18 King and Vullnetari.
19 Zickel et al., Albania.
20 Zickel et al.
21 King and Vullnetari, "From Shortage Economy to Second Economy."
22 Francesco Martino, "Rural Albania, the Bet of Those Who Stay," OBC Transeuropa, accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Albania/Rural-Albania-the-bet-of-those-who-stay-184918.



2.0
Places of Memory





2.1 *Lieux de Mémoire*

The mountains have always been both a symbol and physical place of refuge, freedom, identity, tradition, and memory for Albanians. Particularly during the Ottoman occupation, they acted as sanctuaries for the preservation of endemic culture.[1] In secluded mountain communities, Albanians were able to safeguard their traditions and impart their cultural identity onto future generations, who eventually succeeded in gaining independence from the Ottoman Empire.[2] A few decades later, after gaining liberty a second time from the subsequent German occupation,[3] the country was no longer under direct foreign rule. Instead, the new communist regime began to tightly weave its red thread into the nation's collective social fabric, and in the process, tear out any pieces of cloth it found nonconformist. Even during this authoritarian regime when the state permeated virtually all aspects of its citizens' lives, the most remote mountainous communities found some respite from the iron scissors of Hoxha. Under this new autocracy, Albania achieved the dubious distinction of becoming the world's first *de jure* atheist state in 1967, and sought to do away with any traditions it viewed as antithetical to the communist ideology.[4] All religion, and its practice, was forcefully outlawed, and Hoxha famously declared: "the faith of the Albanians is Albanianism," – a stanza from a well-known poem by Albanian writer, Pashko Vasa, that was taken out of context as a mantra against all religion when its original meaning was a rebuke against strife between different faiths in the country.[5] While during the religious purge all churches and mosques in the cities were destroyed or converted to warehouses, and the ban on practicing religion was strictly enforced, many mountainous communities were not under the same harsh hegemony of the communist state thanks to their remoteness.[6] There, Albanian highlanders escaped strict persecution for their Christian faith and managed to maintain many of their customs and traditions as they had done so centuries earlier during the islamization of the nation by the occupying Ottomans.[7] Even today, despite the ongoing exodus, it is particularly the rural mountainous areas that – unlike the rapidly evolving and globally influenced cities – are associated with the preservation of Albanian customs, social institutions, and memory.[8]

Fig.2.1 (Previous Spread) Ridge of Mount Tomorr leading to the northern summit on the right. Mount Shpirag is seen in the distance on the left with the Osum River dividing the two mountains.

Fig.2.2 (Right) A white cross made of stones seals the side of a mountain in northern Albania - a staunchly catholic region.

1 Ulf Brunnbauer and Robert Pichler, "Mountains as 'Lieux de Mémoire,'" Balkanologie. Revue d'études Pluridisciplinaires 6, no. 1–2 (December 1, 2002): 77–100, https://doi.org/10.4000/balkanologie.433.
2 Brunnbauer and Pichler.
3 Elsie, Historical Dictionary of Albania.
4 Elsie.
5 Frances Trix, "The Resurfacing of Islam in Albania," East European Quarterly 28, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 533–49.
6 Zickel et al., Albania.
7 Zickel et al.
8 Brunnbauer and Pichler, "Mountains as 'Lieux de Mémoire.'"







Fig.2.3 (Top Left) The name "ENVER" written in all caps on the ribs of Mount Shpirag in honour of the dictator's birthday in 1969.

Fig.2.4 (Bottom Left) The "E" and the "N" were switched by a local artist in 2012 to spell "NEVER".

This association with places to memory and national identity is further explained by French historian Pierre Nora. Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* (places of memory) posits that modern nations pin their collective memories and identities onto "places" which act as a shared symbolic and memorial heritage of that community.[9] With modernization, urbanization, and the written recording of history – collective memory is no longer organically passed down from generation to generation through oral history as it once was.[10] Instead, the role of recording and transmitting the nation's memory has been taken up by "professional memory-makers" such as the government, historians, and intellectuals.[11] With the gradual loss of local oral transmission of collective memories, it becomes more difficult for the community to meaningfully associate with the national narrative unless it is rooted in a shared popular experience and consciousness.[12] Therefore, it is required that "places of memory" whereby the larger community can relate to, "become bearers of collective memory that cannot be fostered and disseminated by the intellectual endeavour of professional history alone. Places act as symbols of collective historical heritage, and the meaning of an event also rubs off onto the "place" on which its imagination is fixed."[13] Through the collectivization and officialization of specific narratives by governing bodies, unique local memories can tend to get lost, overridden, and homogenized by the official collective memory. The risk then, is that these "places of memory" can become mnemonics for invented traditions – whether intentionally (such as when a ruling political party promotes a particular national narrative for its own various interests) or unintentionally. Yet, even before Albania's national awakening at the end of the 19th century and communist dictatorship starting in the 1940's,[14] the mountains have been an archetypal and universal "place of memory" for the people. In a sense, one of the most foundational of memories: the memory of the place on which they lived.

9 Brunnbauer and Pichler.
10 Brunnbauer and Pichler.
11 Brunnbauer and Pichler.
12 Brunnbauer and Pichler.
13 Brunnbauer and Pichler.
14 Elsie, Historical Dictionary of Albania.

2.2 Mountain of Memory

While *the mountains* in general act as a collective *lieux de mémoire* for Albanians, more formalized are specific mountains with local memories, legends, myths, and identities. Specifically, there is one mountain in the country that especially fits Nora's definition as a national icon and place of memory.

Mount Tomorr is perhaps the most recognizable mountain in all of Albania, certainly in southern Albania where it dominates the horizon as one of the country's highest peaks and on clear days can be seen from as far away as the Adriatic coast and even beyond from Italy. Comparatively referred to as Albania's Olympus or Fuji,[1] no other mountain is as prominent both physically and in the Albanian national imagination as Mount Tomorr. At 2417 meters it rises over the surrounding plains and foothills without any equivalent neighbours to rival it.[2] For thousands of years this majestic mountain has inspired awe from both locals and visiting foreigners alike. English artist and writer Edward Lear made mention of this "noble mountain" as he journeyed through the country in the late 1840s and noted that "the high form of Tomohrit, here seen from end to end, [is] the principal feature throughout."[3] He goes on to say:

> It was difficult to turn away from this magnificent mountain view — from these chosen nooks and corners of a beautiful world — from sights of which no painter-soul can ever weary: even now, that fold beyond fold of wood, swelling far as the eye can reach — that vale ever parted by its serpentine river — that calm blue plain, with Tomohr in the midst, like an azure island in a boundless sea, haunt my mind's eye, and vary the present with visions of the past.[4]

Fig.2.5 (Right) Edward Lear: 'The Pass of Tyrana.' 27 September 1848. View of Mount Tomorr in central Albania, looking southwards from the Krraba Pass between Elbasan and Tirana.

1 Jacob Mikanowski, "'The Music Moved Me to Tears': Falling in Love with Albania," The Guardian, May 18, 2023, sec. Travel, https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2023/may/18/albania-holiday-culture-tirana-walking-mountains.
2 Robert Elsie, The Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture (London: Hurst, 2001), 252.
3 Edward Lear, Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania, &c (London R. Bentley, 1851), 186, http://archive.org/details/journalsoflands00learuoft.
4 Lear, 98.







Fig.2.6 Mount Tomorr towering in the distance over apartment buildings in Berat.

As a young child, my memory, or rather, my consciousness of the mountains, and by extension Mount Tomorr, is faint. Their distant outlines were always just there – a backdrop that I took for granted and, for the most part, was incognizant of. But even then, I remember my excitement whenever finding out that we would be leaving the capital to visit my grandparents in Poliçan at the base of Tomorr for a weekend or two. More vividly I remember making bouquets for my grandmother with the seemingly endless wildflowers that speckled the nearby pastures or gathering blackberries with her and my cousins from the thick brambles lining the winding paths of its foothills. It is from these same foothills that I trace much of my immediate lineage. Three of my four grandparents, and before that, six of my great-grandparents were born and grew up on the southwestern slopes of Mount Tomorr. It is under its peaks that they formed their earliest memories and absorbed the knowledge and traditions that had been stored in its foundations.

After we left for Canada, I only became consciously aware of the mountain through my sporadic childhood trips back to Albania. It was through these visits that I noticed the large mountain that had somehow been there all along and enquired what its name was as my uncle drove us to my grandparents' home in Poliçan. Every time we turned a bend and came upon a new vista of the mountain, previously hidden behind a foothill, I asked if it was indeed the same mountain. Looking back to me from the rearview mirror, my uncle would respond 'yes' with a chuckle. It wasn't until the summer of 2015 that I got to visit its southern summit for the first time. Gradually, I began to build a mental map of the mountain and register its profound presence in the landscape from which I traced my roots with each trip I took back to Albania.

Fig.2.7 (Right) Map of Tomorr's southern summit.

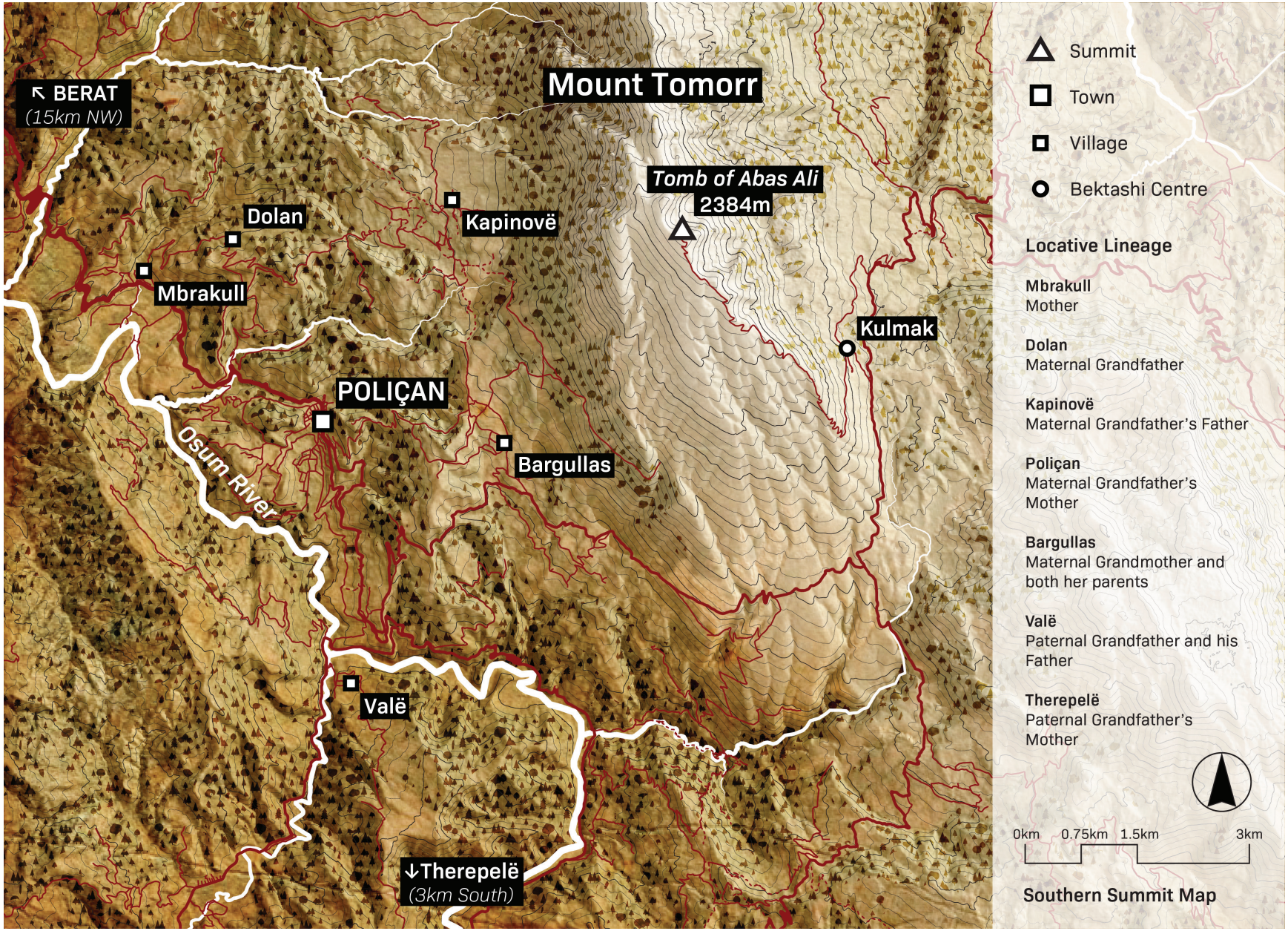

↖ BERAT
(15km NW)
Mount Tomorr
Tomb of Abas Ali
2384m
Kapinovë
Dolan
Mbrakull
Kulmak
POLIÇAN
Osum River
Bargullas
Valë
↓Therepelë
(3km South)
Summit
Town
Village
Bektashi Centre
Locative Lineage
Mbrakull
Mother
Dolan
Maternal Grandfather
Kapinovë
Maternal Grandfather's Father
Poliçan
Maternal Grandfather's Mother
Bargullas
Maternal Grandmother and both her parents
Valë
Paternal Grandfather and his Father
Therepelë
Paternal Grandfather's Mother
0km 0.75km 1.5km 3km
Southern Summit Map



Fig.2.8 (Left) Tomorr's southern summit in the evening sunlight. The town of Poliçan is draped on the mountain's foothills.

Fig.2.9 (Right) Winding paths along the foothills of Poliçan. Tomorr's ridge is visible in the background.



It was also on these trips that I heard the various stories and legends about Tomorr. And it was particularly these oral histories passed organically from generation to generation that I am drawn to as a form of memory preservation. A common tale told among the locals and that I have also heard from my relatives is the creation myth of the surrounding landscape and of the how the mountain came to be formed. While there are many variations of this legend, the general narrative goes something like this:

Thousands of years ago there lived two giant deities on the central plains of Albania.[5] The older and larger one was named Tomorr, and his younger sibling, Shpirag. One day, as they often did, the brothers went out to go fill water at a local spring. To their surprise, they stumbled upon a radiant maiden as she sat upon the stones drinking from the cool water. While they did not know it, this was the chthonic goddess known as the Earthly Beauty. The siblings were immediately awestruck by her boundless beauty and instantly fell in love with her. Each brother wanted the Earthly Beauty as his own wife and asked for her hand in marriage. The goddess, who herself had secretly admired the brothers from afar for many a time could not decide between the two as she loved them both equally. At this indecision, the impatient brothers decided to take matters into their own hands as to who would win the Earthly Beauty for his wife. The two began to violently battle with each other. Tomorr wielding his sword, slashed and gashed at Shpirag, leaving deep cuts in his side. While Shpirag with his mace, cudgeled Tomorr repeatedly, inflicting large wounds. Distraught at the sight of her two suitors fighting each other, the Earthly Beauty begged for them to stop and started crying irrepressibly. The two brothers though, would not give up in their quest to win her hand. They continued fighting for a long time, but neither could overcome the other. Eventually they both succumbed to their injuries and collapsed beside each other on the empty plain, in their death, calcifying into the two mountains seen today. That is why to this day Mount Shpirag is ribbed with deep cuts from Tomorr's sword on his eastern side, and Mount Tomorr is filled with countless large craters and caves from Shpirag's mace – remnant wounds from their battle petrified on their slopes. Heartbroken, the Earthly Beauty's endless tears filled the valley between them and created the river Osum; forever dividing them, yet belonging to neither.[6]

Fig.2.10 (Right) Context map showing Mount Tomorr and Mount Shpirag. Between them is the city of Berat and the Osum River that divides them.

5 Çlirim Mukli, 101 Legjenda Për Beratin, Tomorin Dhe Të Tjera... (Tiranë: Uegen, Shtëpia e Librit dhe e Filmit, 2019), 9–17.
6 Mukli, 9–17.

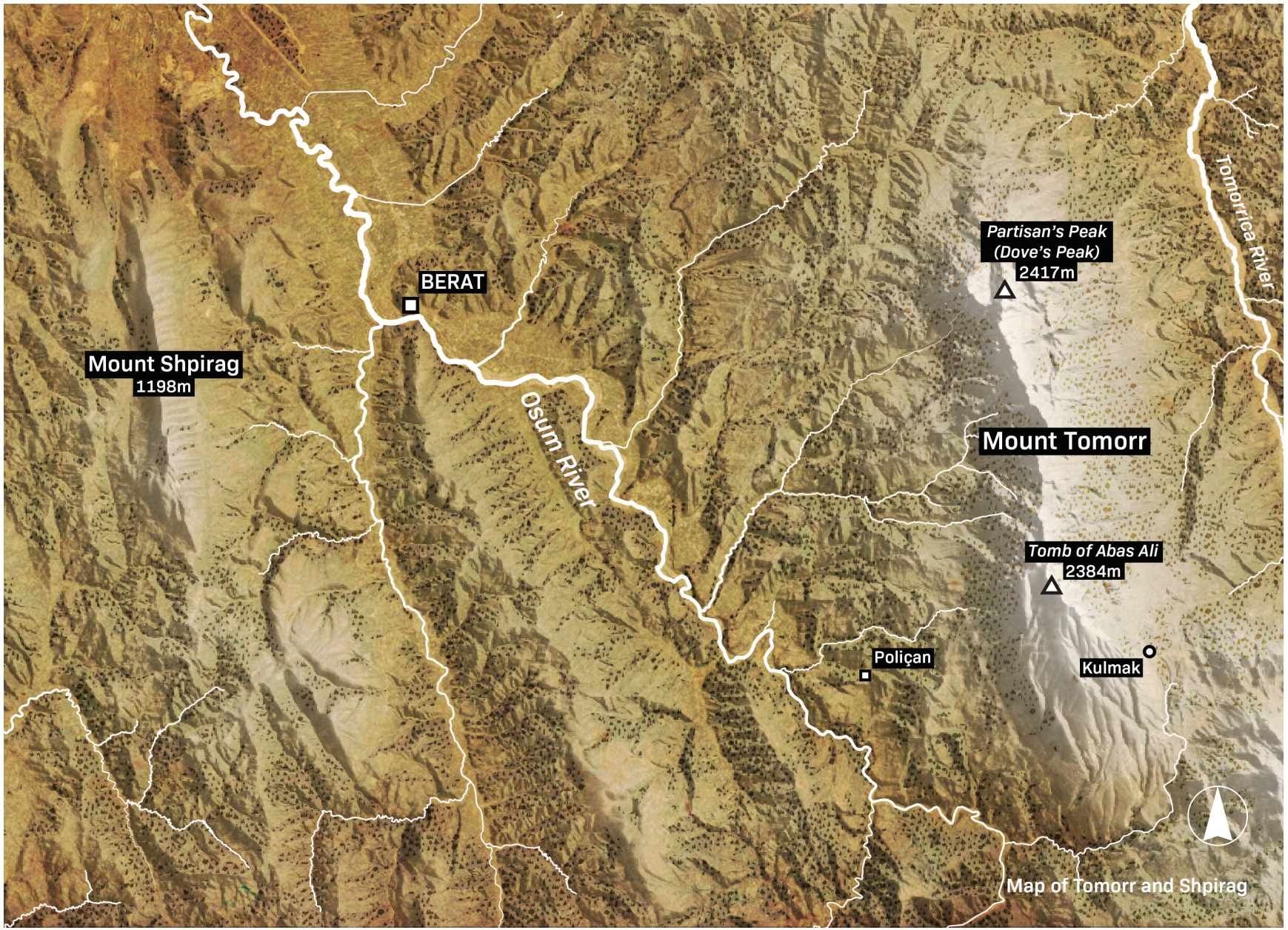

Partisan's Peak
(Dove's Peak)
2417m
Tomorrica River
BERAT
Mount Shpirag
1198m
Osum River
Mount Tomorr
Tomb of Abas Ali
2384m
Poliçan
Kulmak
Map of Tomorr and Shpirag



Fig.2.11 (Left) Image taken in Berat of Mount Tomorr in the distance with the Osum River in the foreground.

Fig.2.12 (Right) The ribbed eastern slope of Mount Shpirag is framed by the gorge of the Osum river cutting through Berat.





Fig.2.13 (Left) Shrine at the top of the southern summit of Mount Tomorr.

For millennia this mountain has been a sacred site for Albanians and has held a special place in Albanian folklore and mythology. Mount Tomorr is considered as either the home of the gods or as a deity itself – perhaps the remnant of an ancient Illyrian pagan god.[7] For many locals, oaths sworn on the mountain are more binding than those sworn on the Bible or the Quran.[8] People superstitiously refer to Tomorr simply as "*the* mountain" or "*it*," and it is understood which mountain is being spoken of.[9] During the Albanian National Awakening, Tomorr's sacred importance was folded into the national cultural revival,[10] further cementing its status as a place of memory. Naim Frashëri, a poet instrumental to the national awakening, writes a short ode to the mountain in his longer pastoral poem "Bagëti e Bujqësi" (Herds and Pastures),[11] and makes mention of its ancient sacred past while tying it to the turmoil of the people's struggle for freedom throughout history:

> *Tomor! o mal i bekuar, fron i lartë, që rrij Zoti,*
>
> *Pas fesë vjetrë që kishinë shqipëtarëtë qëmoti,*
>
> *Dhe ti Mali-Plak i lartë, që me syt' e tu ke parë*
>
> *Luftëra të mëdha shumë e punë që kanë ngjarë.*[12]

> Tomorr! Oh blessed mountain, high throne of God,
>
> After the old religion that Albanians in the past had,
>
> And you, old-man mountain, that with your eyes have seen
>
> Many big wars and happenings that have surely been.

This reverence to the mountain is perhaps also attributed to its perceived symbolic and actual role as a protector of endemic identity and tradition. Kostandin Nelko, also known as Kostandin Kristoforidhi, the translator of the New Testament into Albanian, writes: "On the peak of Tomorr sits God, sits the great one of life, sits he who protects Albania and doesn't let us fall into the hands of our enemies. The god of Tomorr is served by the eagles (s*hqipet)* of the mountain, they are his angels and that is why we are called Albanian (*Shqipëtar*)."[13] If not to be taken literally, Nelko speaks to the role of the mountain as a national place of memory in preserving Albanian identity in the face of various invasions, but also the importance of the guardian "eagles" – Albanians themselves – in maintaining those memories. For a place of memory without people to associate a memory to it, ceases to be a place of memory at all.

7 Elsie, The Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture, 252–53.
8 Elsie, 252.
9 Elsie, 252–53.
10 Elsie, 253.
11 Alfred Frasheri, Tomori, Mali i Shenjtë që ne Shqipetarët e Quajmë Baba, 2015, 17, http://archive.org/details/AFrasheriTOMORI.
12 Alfred Frasheri, 17.
13 Alfred Frasheri, 17.

Today, Mount Tomorr is particularly notable for the annual pilgrimage to its southern summit that has continued unbroken for thousands of years since ancient times, albeit with a substantial reduction in numbers and covertly throughout the banning of religion during the communist regime. With the fall of the monist system, and reinstatement of freedom of religion, the annual pilgrimage was quickly revived,[14] and has grown substantially to the point where each of the last few years have seen hundreds of thousands of individuals attend.[15] For the past three centuries, the pilgrimage has been run and claimed by the Bektashi – a liberal Sufi mystic order that is prevalent in the immediate region and today finds its world headquarters in Albania despite its origins in Anatolia during the Ottoman empire.[16] Every year in mid to late August, Muslims, Christians, and atheists alike partake of this pilgrimage where they bring animal sacrifices to a shrine at the southern summit said to contain the tomb of Abas Ali (son of Ali, first imam in Shia doctrine).[17] Below the summit by about 700 m is a Bektashi complex called Kulmak which has a tekke[18] – a building designed for gatherings of the Sufi brotherhood. The complex also contains a duplication of the shrine at the summit – complete with tombs of past Bektashi leaders, an abattoir for the sacrificing of animals, and niches for lighting candles.[19] Today, many pilgrims will just visit the increasingly more accessible lower complex in Kulmak – the road to which was recently paved and several hundred car parking spaces added – where they can make their offerings and pray (either to Abas Ali or the mountain itself) for intercession in various aspects of their lives and conveniently forgo the rocky journey up to the summit accessible only by foot or all-terrain vehicle.[20] Natalie Clayer, French author of Bektashi studies observes that "[t]he Albanians who have lived in socialist Albania are generally not yet inclined to go back to nature. Climbing without a car means, to those who were deprived of using cars during the socialist period, to go back to the past and to 'backwardness'… Generally, the pilgrims who come to Mount Tomorr are more willing to find a space of thaumaturgical expectation there than a space of personal fulfillment."[21] This increase in accessibility to Kulmak has paradoxically led to a decrease in pilgrims reaching the shrine at the summit,[22] and consequently a sort of commodification of the annual pilgrimage and distancing from its ancient roots. Joseph Swire, an English traveller made the journey up the mountain in 1930 and noted how the pilgrimage rife with pagan hallmarks came to be adopted by the Islamic Bektashi:

Fig.2.14 (Right) Bektashi shrine supposedly containing the tomb of Abas Ali.

14 Robert Elsie, The Albanian Bektashi: History and Culture of a Dervish Order in the Balkans (London New York (N.Y.): I.B. Tauris, 2019), 162.
15 "Holy Pilgrimage, 600,000 Pilgrims Climbed Mount Tomorri So Far," ALBANIA DAILY NEWS, accessed July 12, 2023, https://albaniandailynews.com/news/holy-pilgrimage-600-000-pilgrims-climbed-mount-tomorri-so-far.
16 Nathalie Clayer, The pilgrimage to Mount Tomor in Albania: A changing sacred place in a changing society, ISBN (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2017), 127–28, https://www.austriaca.at?arp=0x00374c16.
17 Clayer, 127.
18 Clayer, 132.
19 Clayer, 132.
20 Clayer, 132.
21 Clayer, 139–40.
22 Clayer, 132.



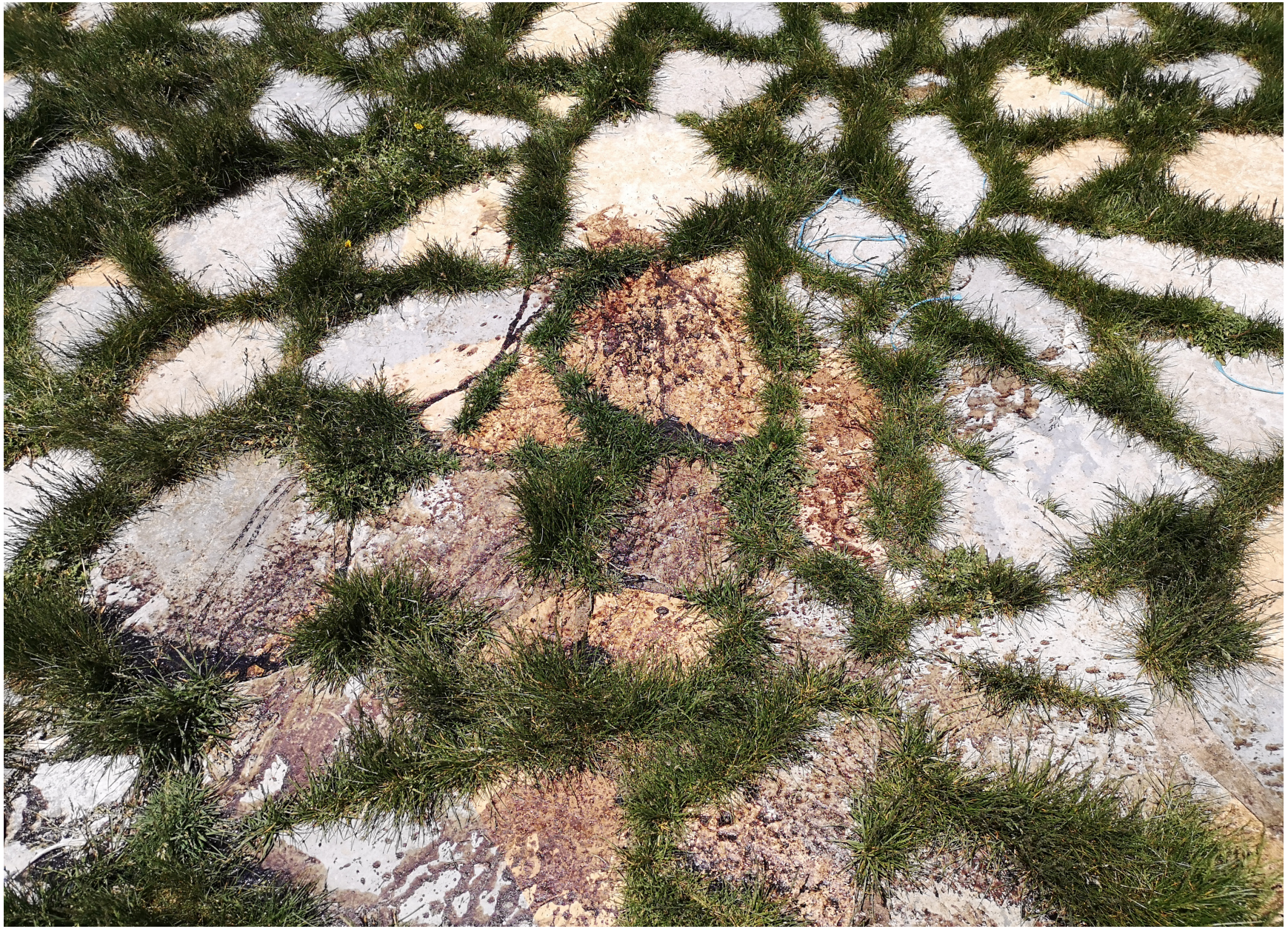


Fig.2.15 (Left) Blood stained stones from the recent sacrifice of a lamb just outside the shrine.

Fig.2.16 (Right) Inside the shrine containing Abas Ali's sarcophagus.





Fig.2.17 (Left) A series of stone niches built in Kulmak to accommodate the thousands of pilgrims wishing to light candles during the pilgrimage days in late August.

Fig.2.18 (Top Right) The Bektashi complex in Kulmak.

Fig.2.19 (Bottom Right) Parking space at the complex.







Fig.2.20 (Opposite) A secondary shrine a few kilometers before Kulmak said to contain Abas Ali's footprints on the mountain.

Fig.2.21 (Top) Abas Ali's "footprints" inside the shrine.

Fig.2.22 (Bottom Left) Candles balanced along the soot charred wall of the shrine.

Fig.2.23 (Bottom Right) An offering of mountain tea (ironwort) sprigs inside one of the "footprints".









Fig.2.24 (Left) Statue of Abas Ali on his horse at the southern summit.

> One August 25 long ago, goes the legend, Abas Ali came from Arabia to Berat; and mounting a great white horse (which has left hoof-marks upon the mountain) he fought the barbarians of the neighbourhood. When he had overcome them he rested for five days on Tomori, then went to dwell on Mount Olympus; but every year he returns on August 25 for five days, when there come Bektashis – and Christians too – sometimes eight or nine thousand people, to pay him homage. They bring their sheep for food, slaughter them on the summit, then take them down to their bivouacs by the tekké. So Tomori is a holy mountain and *për Baba Tomorit* [(for father Tomorr) emphasis added] a sacred oath. The shrine was built, so Baba Tyrabiu [a Bektashi figure] told me, on the site of an antique pagan shrine, so Abas Ali probably inherited his supernatural powers from the pagan god he displaced.[23]

The Bektashi claim the pilgrimage as an homage to Abas Ali and as his burial place, although they also admit themselves to the presence of a pagan pilgrimage before the arrival of their religion. The syncretic nature of the religion is further noted by Dayrell Oakley-Hill, a South African-born English traveller that made the ascent up to the southern summit in the late 1920s: "The legend was that some ancient saint had flown, Pegasus-wise, from Mount Dodona, near Janina in Greece, and landed here. Dodona was said to have been the home of Zeus and the other gods before Olympus; this I heard again when I visited Dodona many years later."[24] It is apparent that there is a merger between the two stories, and that the older pagan narrative is supplanted with Bektashi names and characters. As to which pagan god had been worshipped on the mountain before Abas Ali, Ronald Matthews, another English visitor of the summit, in no uncertain terms discerns:

> Then it was indeed to Zeus, under this so thin disguise, that the people of southern Albania still paid their homage… But of how Zeus comes to be worshipped on Tomori's summit, and of what Zeus it was that was honoured there, I have learned since; at least one bold Albanian archaeologist has his own views. He holds, not only that it was the Dodonian Zeus, 'whose priests have unwashed feet', but that Dodona itself, of the talking oak, was located on the mountain's slopes… If you go one way up Tomori to-day, you will eventually reach a village, itself called Tomori. Above it is a collection of ruins, so far unexplored, and known locally as Qyteti (the city). And the biggest among them is named by the villagers Dodona.[25]

23 Elsie, The Albanian Bektashi, 168.
24 Elsie, 73.
25 Ronald Matthews, Sons of the Eagle: Wanderings in Albania (Methuen & Company, Limited, 1937), 275–85.



Fig.2.25 (Left) Spray-painted graffiti on a communist-era bunker just below the shrine. Black subtext says: "Zeus was born here".

Fig.2.26 (Right) View of Tomorr's ridge from the southern summit looking towards the northern summit.



Matthews ends by making mention of the similarity in name of the less prominent Mount Tomaros in Northern Greece which is just beside the conventionally accepted site of Dodona, and is located less than 150 kilometres to the south of Mount Tomorr.[26] There are many local legends of an oracle that existed on Mount Tomorr in ancient times attesting to the interpretation that Dodona's original location was on Tomorr. Presently, the northern summit of the mountain is known as *Çuka e Partizanit* (Partisan's Peak), though this is a rename likely originating sometime during the communist regime. In some villages the summit is still known as *Maja e Peljes* (Dove's Peak).[27] This name ties into a local legend about the oracle on the mountain. The story goes that a black dove from Egypt came and landed somewhere on the northern end of Mount Tomorr.[28] Speaking to the people in their own language, the dove told them they had to build an oracle on the sacred ground where it had landed.[29] The locals understood this as a divine message and built the temple of Dodona there.[30]

While coming across these legends I became more and more interested with the northern summit of the mountain. Though the southern summit with the shrine to Abas Ali is by far the most popular, it is not actually the true summit of the mountain. Instead, Dove's Peak is higher by about 30 meters. The two summits are divided by a roughly 8-kilometer-long ridge running north-south, although they are not easily accessible to each other along this crest. While on the southern summit, Oakley-hill observes: "The ridge leading to the slightly higher northern point of Tomor was a knife edge, and I did not think I should care to walk along it."[31] The more remote and less frequented Dove's Peak is accessible by ascending from the northern side and provides a more difficult climb as there is no paved road leading to it as there is to Kulmak. This northern end of the mountain is also filled with ancient beach and oak forests.[32] It is said that somewhere on the mountain lived the three oracle sisters of Dodona to whom local kings and rulers of old would go to get their fates read or seek counsel from the gods on how they should proceed with various decisions.[33] The sisters would divine the future and provide directives by interpreting the rustling of oak or beech leaves in the breeze for their answers.[34] Noteworthy as well is the name of a village on the western slopes of Mount Tomorr known as Mbrakull. The root for the name Mbrakull can be broken down to *mbë-orakull,* meaning "to the oracle." Coincidentally, this is the same village that my mother was born in.

Fig.2.27 (Right) Map of Tomorr's northern summit.

26 Matthews, 285.
27 Mukli, 101 Legjenda Për Beratin, Tomorin Dhe Të Tjera..., 18.
28 Mukli, 18.
29 Mukli, 18.
30 Mukli, 18.
31 Elsie, The Albanian Bektashi, 73.
32 Elsie, 73.
33 Mukli, 101 Legjenda Për Beratin, Tomorin Dhe Të Tjera..., 19.
34 Mukli, 19.

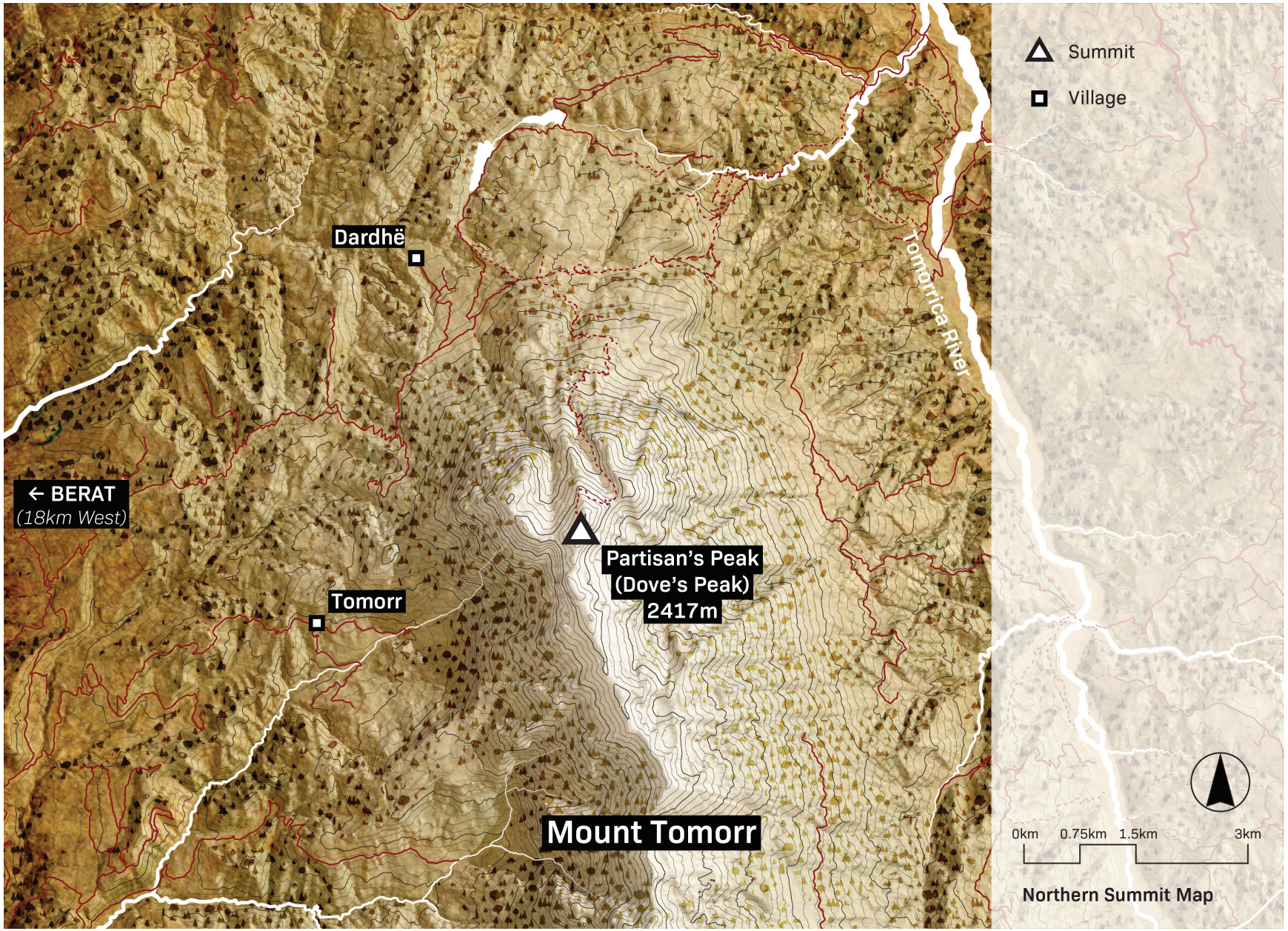

Summit
Village
Dardhë
Tomorrica River
← BERAT
(18km West)
Partisan's Peak
(Dove's Peak)
2417m
Tomorr
Mount Tomorr
0km 0.75km 1.5km 3km
Northern Summit Map



Fig.2.28 (Left) Mount Tomorr's ridge casting its morning shadow on a wheat field with the village of Kapinova in the background.

Another prominent legend associated with the northern end of the mountain is the supposed existence of a magical apple tree said to cure all ills. Matthews is told by his guide:

> 'You must know,' he said, ' that the shrine isn't Tomori's only claim to veneration. Somewhere on this northern side, they say, is a crag from whose topmost pinnacle there springs an apple tree. I've never been near there myself, I only speak of what I hear, but every one talks about it. For this apple tree's fruits are of more than natural size. But so steep are the precipices that tumble beneath it that not the hardiest climber has yet been able to scale them to pluck one. Now and then, in the autumn, a windfall will roll down the rocks to the turf below. Peasants who pass at that time of year always look to see if there is one there, for those great apples, they say, have the power of healing all diseases. Even the dying, I have heard men say, can be brought back to life if such a fruit is given them.'[35]

Margaret Hasluck, who also visited the mountain in the 1930s, reaffirmed a very similar version of this legend:

> … a sacred apple tree grows near the top. Only the pure in heart may climb up to pick the apples, and to this day no one has been found pure enough. The apples sometimes roll down to the path below as they ripen; unusually large and finely perfumed, they work miracles; a childless woman, for instance, has only to eat one to conceive. The tree is located by some in the black gully between the two summits and by others at the mouth of a cave above an inaccessible rock-face between the villages of Bargulas and Kapinova; these add that from both villages the tree may be discerned through field-glasses.[36]

Reading through these accounts by British travellers from almost a century ago stirs strange emotions of yearning and wonder for the past, especially since one of my great-grandmothers was from Bargullas and one of my great-grandfathers from Kapinova. They would have been young adults when these travellers were visiting the mountain, before the cultural revolution brought about by communism. Sadly, I only reached my great grandmother, and was too young to remember any stories from her. However, it is these legends passed orally for thousands of years and recorded by travellers that tie the memories of the mountain to the mountain. And it is the mountain as a place of memory that hosts them.

35 Matthews, Sons of the Eagle, 285.
36 Elsie, The Albanian Bektashi, 95.

Today, pilgrims continue to come to the southern summit of the mountain just the same, even as the dominant local religion changes from paganism to Christianity to Islam to atheism. Nathalie Clayer astutely puts it:

> What is quintessential is the immobile, eternal nature of these sites. They stay where they are and give legitimacy to any new symbols added to them. In the post-communist era, new legends about… the peak of Mount Tomorr are perhaps in the making to reaffirm the presence and the role of the Bektashi in Albania, among the Sons of the Eagle.[37]

Fig.2.29 (Right) The sun rising over Mount Tomorr's southern summit.

37 Elsie, 172.



2.3 Journey to the Summit

Having been twice to the more accessible southern summit of Tomorr, I felt a certain intrigue for the elusive northern and true summit of the mountain – wanting to further explore the landscape that inspired many of the legends I had come across during my research. It was also on this more remote and rural northern end that I envisioned any architectural intervention taking place as a way to preserve the memories of the mountain. Being more rural and inaccessible, the northern end is naturally a better conserver of vernacular memory and tradition with fewer external influences compared to the increasingly more commodified southern pilgrimage run by the Bektashi. Determined to visit Dove's Peak, I began to plan my journey to this secluded region of Tomorr and was able to find a guesthouse in the Village of Dardhë about 4 kilometers northwest of the summit. Dardhë, which translates to Pear, is 16 and a half kilometers away from the nearest paved road. The dirt road leading to the village consists of a thin layer of uneven rocks and gravel with deep ruts grooved in many sections, and is virtually impassable if lacking significant skill in driving an all-terrain vehicle. My journey started in the regional capital of Berat where I met two relatives of my soon-to-be-host from Dardhë. I was greeted by a young man who seemed a bit older than me, and a boy around 12. They had come down from the village to the city to run errands that day and had room to take me up in their 4x4 vehicle on their way back. The arduous and jerky ride was my initiation into the remote countryside as traces of urbanity quickly vanished in the rearview mirror. Slowly, we churned up the foothills to the erratic rhythm of tires on rock – Tomorr's northern summit beckoning us forward; re-revealing itself behind each bend we passed. After the typical Albanian pleasantries of introducing ourselves and inquiring about each other's local backgrounds, the conversation almost immediately turned towards me and what it was like living in Canada. The young man particularly was interested in how my family had immigrated and seemed keen himself in one day leaving the village either for Berat or abroad. It turned out the young man was an even younger man than me by about three years even

Fig.2.30 (Left) Dirt road leading to Dardhë with Tomorr's northern summit in the distance.

Fig.2.31 (Right) Signpost showing distances to Dardhë and Berat. Summit in the background.




QAFË
DARDHË
5.4 KM
BERAT
16.1 KM



Fig.2.32 (Left) A spring along the way to Dardhë.

though his appearance presented him older. "The struggles of living rurally have aged me," he joked. We continued on towards the village, along the way stopping at a couple of spring-fed fountains to drink fresh water and fill our bottles – their ubiquity in the countryside a welcome respite from the hot summer weather. After about an hour and a half of rumbling up the dirt road, we arrived in Dardhë where my host and his family were waiting for us with a delicious homemade lunch.

My host was a stocky man who had been born and raised in the village. He and his wife had migrated to Greece, as had many other Albanians, during that first wave of emigration after the fall of communism. They had spent roughly 25 years there working odd jobs in the hospitality industry, before they decided it was time to go back to their roots and start their own family business with the money they had saved. They saw the opportunity in their beloved mountains and felt that it was viable to start a guesthouse pretty much in the middle of nowhere. Yet despite its remoteness, the couple were proud to list all the different countries their guests had come from. The only thing holding the village back, they told me, was the lack of a paved road; perennially promised by regional politicians but never actually built. It would be a boon to the burgeoning agrotourism industry of the village they insisted. This I heard from many other villagers as well who saw the paving of the road as a panacea for all the village ills.

Later that evening my host toured me around Dardhë. As we walked past several abandoned homes, many of them ruins, he lamented that, "There used to be over 90 families in the village when I was young. Now, there are less than 20 left." Most, like him, had gone abroad, but unlike him and his family, many had never returned. We looped back and he showed me the family garden pointing out the different fruit and nut trees; "I don't know why this village is named Pear (Dardhë). We should be called Walnut instead because most of the trees that grow here are walnuts," he laughed while picking off a fresh fig for me. Pleased with his produce, he thought out loud, "here, the air is fresh, it is peaceful, and all our food is grown organically. We know what we're eating." "I don't really miss the city" he told me as we slowly made our way back to the guesthouse to have dinner and plan the climb to the summit the following day.



Fig.2.33 (Left) Abandoned shed in Dardhë.

Fig.2.34 (Right) Abandoned home in Dardhë.





Fig.2.35 (Left) The porch of the village guesthouse with Tomorr's summit in the background.

Fig.2.36 (Right) Host picking me a fig off a tree in his garden.



The next morning, we woke up before dawn and my host made me a breakfast of fried eggs (from their hens, of course) and sausages along with homemade feta cheese. He packed us provisions for the journey and gave me a long wooden stick, its upper portion polished from years of being held on hikes. We then hopped onto his truck, "to save us an hour of walking," he informed me. We drove along the rocky village road to the top of an open hill right beside a crossroads. Here, my host parked the truck and told me the area was called "St. Peter's Square" as we got out. This immediately piqued my attention. St Peter's? Here, in the middle of nowhere? I prodded him about the history of the site, but my host couldn't provide much more information besides its name and that there used to be a church there at one point. Not willing to waste the still-gentle morning light, he urged me forward. "Will you be able to keep up?" he asked, starting with a brisk pace before I could even answer. I followed suit trying to mask my breaths – obviously not used to navigating such a terrain at such a rate. And so, I began my journey to Dove's Peak, sneaking a few glances back to "St. Peter's Square," having decided that this would be my site.

Fig.2.37 (Right) Map showing path to northern summit of Mount Tomorr.

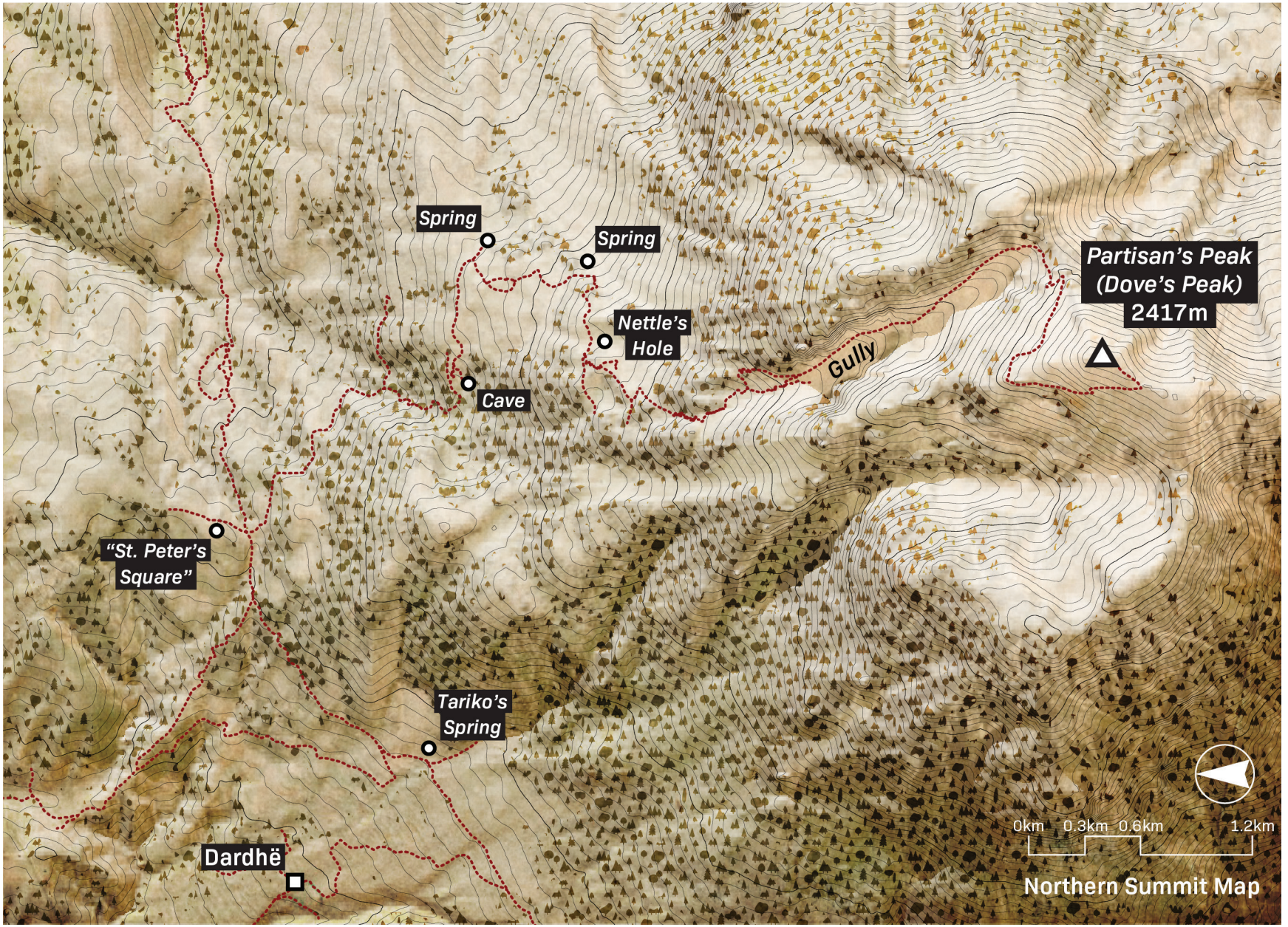

Spring
Spring
Nettle's Hole
Cave
Gully
Partisan's Peak (Dove's Peak) 2417m
"St. Peter's Square"
Tariko's Spring
Dardhë
0km 0.3km 0.6km 1.2km
Northern Summit Map



Fig.2.38 (Left) The three peaks of the northern summit are visible from “St. Peter’s Square”.

Fig.2.39 (Right) A view looking back to the hill as we began our ascent up the mountain.





Fig.2.40 (Left) Right after passing the crossroads we entered a pine forest with the path still clearly discernible.

Fig.2.41 (Right) The eastern-most peak of the north summit is visible through an opening in the forest.







Fig.2.42 (Left) The pine forest quickly gave way to a thick deciduous forest comprised mostly of beech and oak.



Fig.2.43 (Left) An old-growth beech tree in the forest. Coming across these ancient trees reminded me of the legend of the three oracle sisters of Dodona. I imagined it would be under such moss covered trees, gnarled with time, that the sisters would prophesy.

Fig.2.44 (Right) Beech branch with nuts. The oracles would listen to the rustling of these leaves in the wind to interpret answers from the gods.

Fig.2.45 (Far right) A hollow beech trunk.







Fig.2.46 (Left) View looking back after passing the beech forest.

Fig.2.47 (Right) The open hill in the center-right midground is the site. My host's parked truck is discernible as a white speck towards the left side of the hill.





Fig.2.48 (Left) As we kept on walking, I came across this tuft of wool tangled in a bush. I was curious if it had accidentally gotten stuck there by a passing sheep or if a shepherd had purposefully placed it.

Fig.2.49 (Right) Pastures with a view to the opening of the gully in the distance. By here, there was no longer any clear path to lead us on. Instead we followed and cut across contours with the gully as our distant guide.







Fig.2.50 The foothills of Tomorr's northeastern side with mountains in the distance. The morning haze transforms them into a wavy sea.



Fig.2.51 (Left) A series of overlapping wooden troughs cascading down the pasture used by shepherds to water their livestock.

Fig.2.52 (Right) A natural spring feeds a stone fountain built on the side of the hill. When needed, the wooden trough is placed under the stream of water to fill the subsequent troughs. My host told me that long ago there used to be a network of ceramic pipes that would carry fresh milk all the way from the mountain pastures down to the villages where it would be processed into various dairy products. He insisted that "back then" society was actually more advanced than it is now. As to what period he spoke of, I could not tell.





Fig.2.53 (Left) The remains of stone walls probably used for the containment of livestock on the mountain pastures.

Fig.2.54 (Right) More stone ruins on the grazing areas of the mountain with foothills in the distance.







Fig.2.55 A natural spring flowing from the side of the mountain channeled with a wooden spout.



Fig.2.56 (Left) Soon after the second spring, we came upon a slightly sunken area known as "Nettle's Hole". As a natural low spot, the area probably retains more moisture for plants such as nettles to grow. A small herd of cows was grazing there.

Fig.2.57 (Right) Near the middle of "Nettle's Hole" were two simple shepherd's huts with stone walls and wooden roof frames.





Fig.2.58 (Left) The vertical rock face of a cliff marking the entrance of the main gully leading to the summit.

Fig.2.59 (Right) Looking back down, there are many scattered stones. It is hard to tell if they have naturally fallen there from the mouth of the gully or if some of them are the remains of hand-constructed structures and walls.





Fig.2.60 (Left) It was around this part of the climb that my host took a wrong turn and we proceeded past the entrance to the gully and further south along the mountain's eastern side.

Fig.2.61 (Right) The horizontal strata of the mountain's white limestone layers alternates with strips of greenery on its eastern face.







Fig.2.62 Pushing a little further to confirm indeed that we were on the wrong path, we were rewarded with this view of the Tomorrica River valley on the mountain's eastern side draped in the thick green of pine and beech forests.



Fig.2.63 (Left) It was also on this less frequented area that we stumbled on some ironwort, more commonly known as “mountain tea”, growing on the mountainside.

Fig.2.64 (Right) As we traced our steps back, we finally came into view again of the edge of the cliff face leading to the gully. Right near the entrance was a small grove of beech trees among the pines.







Fig.2.65 View from the bottom of the gully leading up to the summit. Turning the corner, I was instantly awestruck by the sheer majesty of the rock walls. The landscape beckoned me forward like a grand hall. I understood now why this mountain had inspired locals to name it the home of the gods. It was not hard to imagine a religious procession to the summit taking place in such a setting.



Fig.2.66 (Left) The rock walls of the gully cupping the sky.

Fig.2.67 (Right) Pink wildflowers bestrew patches of grass between the stones in the gully.





Fig.2.68 (Left) Pine trees growing amongst the nooks and cracks of the rock face.

Fig.2.69 (Right) The gully was mostly filled with scree, making the climb especially difficult during this part.







Fig.2.70 (Left) View from an elevated section of the gully framing the distant mountain scenery.



Fig.2.71 (Left) View looking back down the gully from about halfway through.

Fig.2.72 (Right) Dove's peak at the end of the gully, still several hundred meters higher.





Fig.2.73 (Left) *Campanula Hawkinsiana*, a very rare bellflower native to Mount Tomorr in Albania. I was surprised at its endurance growing through the mostly shaded scree in the gully.

Fig.2.74 (Right) Creeping Globularia growing between the rocks.







Fig.2.75 View of a reservoir near the village of Dardhë framed by the gully.



Fig.2.76 (Left) After exiting the gully we turned to climb the central peak of the northern summit. Another parallel gully is visible on the left.

Fig.2.77 (Right) The terraces of Dardhë seen in the centre of the image framed by the mountain.





Fig.2.78 (Left) Mount Shpirag to the west seen through a dip in the mountain.

Fig.2.79 (Right) The western peak of Tomorr's northern summit.







Fig.2.80 The steep final leg of the journey before reaching the summit.



Fig.2.81 (Left) View looking straight down on the ridge of the mountain of upturned stone layers.

Fig.2.82 (Right) Dove's peak.







Fig.2.83 Circular stone shrine on Dove's peak.



Fig.2.84 (Left) View looking north from the shrine. Articles of clothing left behind by pilgrims on the walls of the shrine.

Fig.2.85 (Right) View looking south at the entrance to the shrine - centered between two peaks in the distance. As we entered, my host insisted that this was the true and older shrine on the mountain, and that the more frequented southern shrine only became popular due to its accessibility. This, I heard from an old man in the village as well. They were adamant that this was the original site of the annual pilgrimage.





Fig.2.86 (Left) Shrine made from the remnants of a statue emblazoned with a twelve-sided Bektashi star. On the side are a couple of coins as offerings left behind by pilgrims.

Fig.2.87 (Right) Shrine in foreground with view of Tomorrica river in the east.







Fig.2.88 View looking south along Tomorr's ridge with the southern summit on the left. Having now climbed the mountain from both the north and the south, and having seen the summits from either vantage point, filled me with a sense of accomplishment as we turned to leave.

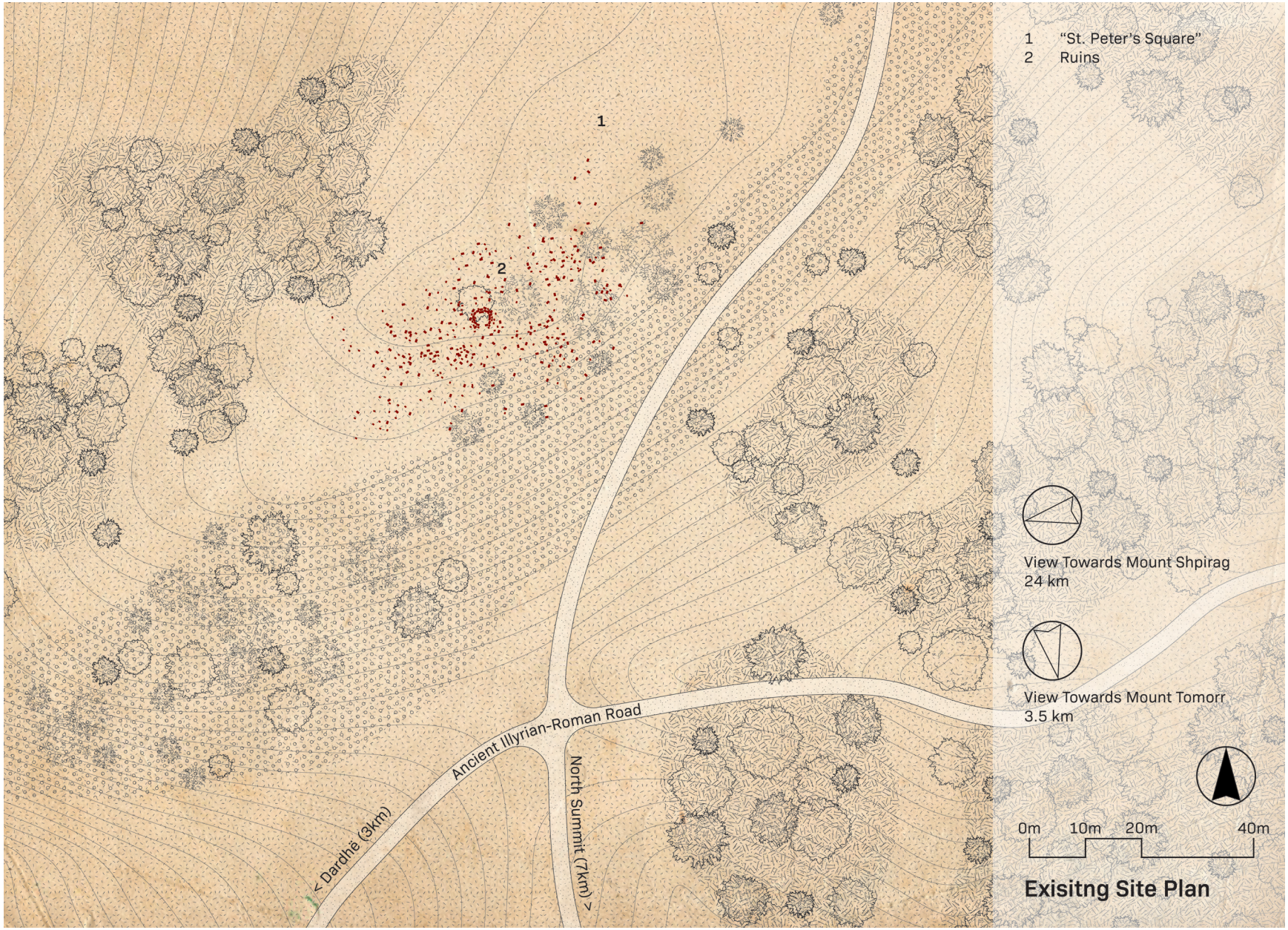
2.4 *Hibernum S. Blasii*

After descending from the mountain, we came back to "St. Peter's Square." Having accomplished the climb, my host wasn't in a rush to leave as quickly this time, so I wondered around exploring the site.

The top of the hill is relatively flat with clear views of Tomorr's northern summit towards the south as well as the entirety of Mount Shpirag towards the west. Most intriguingly, on the southwestern part of the hill there is a scattering of ancient ruins and building stones – many of them almost completely immersed in the landscape. These stones have a different colour from the whiter limestone-based rock that comprises most of the mountain geology – instead they have a more reddish-brown hue. Perhaps this suggests that they were brought in from a different location, or perhaps the discolouration is a result of their age and years of the surrounding soil tinting them. Whatever their origin, their situation on "St. Peter's Square" speaks to traces of ancient civilization and an architectural past on the site.[1] I would later find out both from further research and oral history passed on by the villagers of Dardhë that the site had hosted a litany of programs, but much of this record is forgotten, save for a few memories still held by some of the older villagers and an even greater dearth of written sources that mention the area. One of the old men in the village told me that there used to be a market on the site. This would make sense considering that the hill is located at the crossroads of an ancient Illyrian-Roman road and the path leading up to the northern summit of Mount Tomorr. This Illyrian-Roman road was the east-west connection between Macedonia and the ancient city of Apollonia near the Adriatic coast.[2] Furthermore, Albanologist Robert Elsie mentions that "there was a monastery to Saint Blaise built on the north slope of Mount Tomor and referred to in 1343 as Hibernum S. Blasii."[3] Could these be the ruins of that monastery? It is interesting to note that Saint Blaise is the patron saint of merchants and wool combers, and that as a physician, he was invoked for ailments of the throat.[4] That such a saint would be revered at this site is unsurprising, seeing that transhumance and

Fig.2.89 (Right) Site map of hill containing ruins.

1 Kurt Farka, "Në 'Shën Pjetër' Të Dardhës Së Beratit, Legjenda e Histori," Shqiperia.Com (blog), July 18, 2019, https://www.shqiperia.com/blog/ne-shen-pjeter-te-dardhes-se-beratit-legjenda-e-histori/.
2 Farka.
3 Robert Elsie, "The Christian Saints of Albania," Balkanistica 13 (2000): 48.
4 Elsie, "The Christian Saints of Albania."


1 "St. Peter's Square"
2 Ruins
1
2
View Towards Mount Shpirag
24 km
View Towards Mount Tomorr
3.5 km
Ancient Illyrian-Roman Road
< Dardhë (3km)
North Summit (7km) >
0m 10m 20m 40m
Exisitng Site Plan

its related traditions such as dairy production and wool working are a staple of the local economy. Being both a physician and the patron saint of throat ailments also ties in well to the contextual environment as it relates to the tradition of alpine herbalism and the various medicinal herbs the mountain is famous for – many of which are used to treat the throat. While I could not be certain that this was indeed the site of the monastery, the diverse history, ancient ruins, and strategic location of "St. Peters Square" certainly pointed to the high likelihood that it was. The few remaining ruins had probably lived several lives on the site; being used in the walls of different structures as time passed and programs changed. At one point, they may have also been a roadside inn as was mentioned by one of the villagers. Nonetheless, these stones and the traces of cloudy memories they contained were all that remained on the site.

Fig.2.90 (Right) View of the hill seen behind a pasture and pine trees while coming down from the mountain.





Fig.2.91 (Left) View from mountain path looking north towards the hill. The white truck is discernible behind some pines to the right of center.

Fig.2.92 (Right) At the crossroad between the ancient Illyrian-Roman road and the path leading up to Tomorr in the south.





Fig.2.93 (Left) Illyrian-Roman road looking east.

Fig.2.94 (Right) Illyrian-Roman road looking west.





Fig.2.95 (Left) View from the hill looking north.

Fig.2.96 (Right) View from the hill looking east.





Fig.2.97 (Left) View from the hill looking south towards the three peaks of Tomorr's northern summit. Dove's peak is behind the central one.

Fig.2.98 (Right) View from the hill looking west towards Mount Shpirag.





Fig.2.99 (Left) Ruins overgrown by ferns on the southwestern section of the hill.

Fig.2.100 (Right) The stones seem to be in a sort of ring wall.





Fig.2.101 (Left) More ruins on the hill.

Fig.2.102 (Right) The reddish brown hue of the ruins.





3.0
The Mountain Traditions



3.1 Introducing the Mountain Traditions

Inspired by the history of the site, I briefly take a look at three traditions that are a staple of the mountains – transhumance, alpine herbalism, and hospitality – in order to inform the program for a building to preserve them. Besides just being a symbolic host for the collective memory of the nation, Mount Tomorr and the mountains in general are more practically a physical host for the traditions that define the local identity. The unique characteristics of the mountainous landscape in hand with the hospitable culture of the Albanian people have shaped a particular way of life and created a regional set of practical and social traditions in the Balkan country. The climate, topography, ecology, and inhabitants have molded each other over thousands of years to create the distinctive environment still surviving today. At its root, it is this relationship between the mountains and the people who live on them that fosters these memories worth preserving. With the continual decline of the rural population, and ongoing exodus from mountainous regions, the connection between the people and the landscape is rapidly being eroded. As people move to cities on the plains or further abroad, they no longer have a need for the knowledge and practicalities essential to life in the mountains.

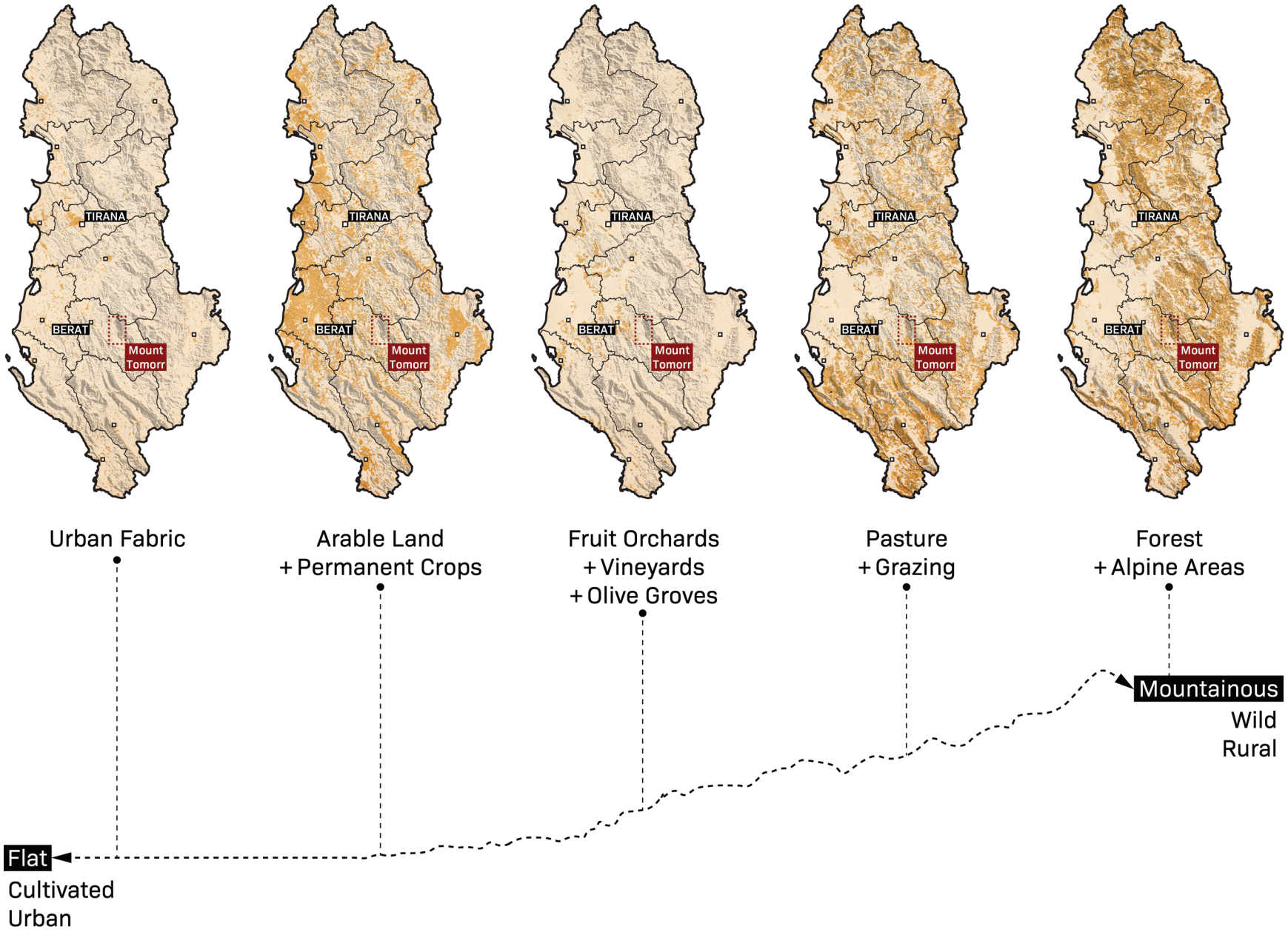
The gradient between different land uses, as the elevation changes from lowlands to highlands, punctuates the unique traditions suited best to the environment of the mountains. Albania benefits from a warm Mediterranean climate that is moderated by the higher altitudes of the mountains.[1] This combination of climate and topography means most of the country is suited to pastoralism and transhumance on the highlands, while the warmer plains and lowlands support more intensive agriculture throughout most of the year. The highlands are also home to many species of medicinal and aromatic herbs that thrive in such mountainous environments and play a significant role in the traditional healing and culinary practices of the country.[2] And as the mountains play host to the people and their traditions, the people themselves have a characteristic culture of hospitality, that tends to be more generous the higher in elevation you go, even if materially they have less to offer.

Fig.3.1 (Previous Spread) Ram on Mount Tomorr.

Fig.3.2 (Right) Diagram showing the shift in different land uses of Albania according to topography.

1 Raymond E. Zickel et al., eds., Albania: A Country Study, 2nd ed, Area Handbook Series 550–98 (Washington, D.C: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress : For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O, 1994), 65.

2 Elizabeth Gowing, "The Albanian Mountain Crops That Keep Us Looking Young," 50 REASONS TO LOVE THE WORLD, accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20210706-the-albanian-mountain-crops-that-keep-us-looking-young.


TIRANA
BERAT
Mount Tomorr
Urban Fabric
Arable Land
+ Permanent Crops
Fruit Orchards
+ Vineyards
+ Olive Groves
Pasture
+ Grazing
Forest
+ Alpine Areas
Mountainous
Wild
Rural
Flat
Cultivated
Urban

3.2 Transhumance

The practice of transhumance has been an indispensable part of the culture and economy of the mountains of Albania for millennia.[1] Transhumance is an ancient tradition that involves the cyclical movement of livestock from lowlands (plains and valleys) to highlands (foothills and mountains), and back again, in rhythm with the changing seasons.[2] During the warm summer months, mountain pastures provide an escape from the heat with a more temperate environment and ample grazing opportunities on various mountain herbs for livestock – typically sheep, goats, and cows.[3] However, in the winter, these pastures become covered in snow, and the livestock must be moved to lower altitudes where the climate is warmer, and there is better access to food and water for the season.[4] This cyclical migration is a delicate balance between the needs of the livestock and the environmental conditions of the mountains.[5] In Albania, transhumance has shaped and been shaped by the landscapes, culture, and economy of the mountains. As such, the seasonal movement of livestock has created unique ecosystems and landscapes, as well as a rich cultural heritage that is deeply rooted in the local communities.[6] The knowledge and skills associated with transhumance have been passed down from generation to generation, and the practice has played a key role in maintaining the memory of the mountains and rural way of life in these regions.

Transhumance also plays an essential role in maintaining the country's rural economy.[7] Many families own herds of sheep, goats, or cows, and the seasonal migration to mountain pastures is a vital part of their livelihood.[8] Livestock herding and the production of dairy products and meat associated with it have been a significant source of income for rural communities for generations. Particularly in the Tomorr region, transhumance is an important part of the local economy.[9] While visiting Mount Tomorr's southern summit in 1929, Oakley-Hill spent a night at the tekke at Kulmak and was treated to some of the local dairy produced from the mountain's pastures: "They showed us their cheese dairy, where they made large quantities of cream cheese and harder

Fig.3.3 (Right) Flock of sheep climbing Mount Tomorr.

1 Martine Wolff, "Transhumance in Kelmend, Northern Albania: Traditions, Contemporary Challenges, and Sustainable Development," in Grazing Communities: Pastoralism on the Move and Biocultural Heritage Frictions, ed. Letizia Bindi (Berghahn Books, 2022), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2vr8tp1.
2 Paul Halstead, "Traditional and Ancient Rural Economy in Mediterranean Europe: Plus Ça Change?," The Journal of Hellenic Studies 107 (1987): 77–87, https://doi.org/10.2307/630071.
3 Halstead.
4 Halstead.
5 "Albanian Transhumance," Trashegimia Kulturore Jomateriale (blog), September 28, 2022, https://regjistritkj.al/en/shtegetimi-i-bagetive/.
6 "Albanian Transhumance."
7 Francesco Martino, "Rural Albania, the Bet of Those Who Stay," OBC Transeuropa, accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Albania/Rural-Albania-the-bet-of-those-who-stay-184918.
8 "Albanian Transhumance."
9 Erjola Keci and Elisabeth Krog, "The European Union's IPA 2010 Programme for Albania Technical Assistance for Strengthening the Capacity of the Ministry of Environment in Albania for Law Drafting and Enforcement of National Environmental Legislation Activity A.3: Preparation of Strategy and Plans -Protected Areas Management Plans Tomorri Mountain National Park Management Plan," 2014, 40, https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.1676.1925.





Fig.3.4 (Left) Two men making Albanian felt caps (*Plis*). Sheep wool is plucked, moistened with soapy water, pressed on a mold, and dried (Photo: Hugo Bernatzik, 1929)

cheeses and sold them far and wide. They even exported them to America, for the benefit of the Albanian community there."[10] The high-quality milks and cheeses produced by Albanian shepherds are well-known throughout the country and are an important part of the country's culinary culture.[11] To this day, my grandfather still has milk delivered to him daily from a local shepherd. Every morning he will boil it, so it is pasteurized, and proceed to churn his own homemade butter in a two-liter plastic bottle, shaking it tirelessly for a quarter-hour. With the leftover buttermilk he makes *dhallë* – a traditional drink typically consumed in the summer. Any remaining milk is turned into yogurt. Nothing goes to waste.

The artisanal handcrafts associated with the wool produced from transhumance are another important by-product of the tradition. The wool industry has historically been a key part of Albania's economy.[12] During the communist regime, the country had several state-run factories producing various wool products – which were the second largest export at the time.[13] Although thousands of women were employed, rather than having the craft passed down matrilineally across generations, they were trained by the state on industrial machines in factories, reducing the craft to a commodity.[14] My grandmother, who was an avid knitter, regularly made sweaters, vests, and socks with love for her children and grandchildren. Several years ago, when she visited my family in Canada, she passed on the basics of knitting to my sister, instinctively keeping alive an ancient handicraft.

Traditionally, wool is typically shorn from sheep in the spring, then hand cleaned, carded, spun, and woven into various products such as blankets, rugs, and clothing.[15] These crafts are not only practical for everyday life in rural mountainous regions, but also hold cultural significance. They represent a link to the past, preserving skills and techniques that have been passed down through the ages, while also providing shepherds with an additional source of income. Additionally, these crafts serve as a means of expressing Albanian identity, as they are often made using traditional patterns and designs unique to the people. A quintessentially Albanian article of wool clothing is the *qelesh* (also known as *plis*) – a hand-felted brimless cap of ancient origin that is part of the national costume.

10 Robert Elsie, The Albanian Bektashi: History and Culture of a Dervish Order in the Balkans (London New York (N.Y.): I.B. Tauris, 2019), 73.
11 Antonio Laurìa, Valbona Flora, and Kamela Guza, Five Albanian Villages: Guidelines for a Sustainable Tourism Development through the Enhancement of the Cultural Heritage, 1st ed., vol. 211, Studi e Saggi (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.36253/978-88-5518-175-4.
12 Llazar Semini, "Training Opens 'a Window of Hope' for Albanian Rug-Weavers," Toronto Star, April 4, 2021, https://www.thestar.com/news/world/europe/2021/04/04/training-opens-a-window-of-hope-for-albanian-rug-weavers.html.
13 Semini.
14 Alexis Zoto, "The State of Traditional Albanian Kilims, Their Motifs and Narratives," Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings, 2021, https://doi.org/10.32873/unl.dc.tsasp.0130.
15 Semini, "Training Opens 'a Window of Hope' for Albanian Rug-Weavers."

Today though, transhumance and its related traditions are at risk of being lost due to rural exodus.[16] As young people leave the mountains in search of more lucrative opportunities in urban areas and abroad, the number of families practicing transhumance is decreasing.[17] This is leading to the gradual disappearance of the knowledge and skills associated with it, as well as the degradation of the unique ecosystems and landscapes that it has helped create and maintain in the mountains of the country.

Fig.3.5 (Right) Two shepherds in the mountains of Albania. (Photo: A. Den Doolaard, 1932)

16 Laurìa, Flora, and Guza, Five Albanian Villages.
17 Wolff, "Transhumance in Kelmend, Northern Albania: Traditions, Contemporary Challenges, and Sustainable Development."



3.3 Alpine Herbalism

Alpine herbalism has played and continues to play a significant role in Albania's culture, economy, and traditional-medicine practices. Despite being one of Europe's smaller counties, Albania is known for its rich ecological biodiversity which includes a vast variety of plants, many of which are endemic to the country's mountains. Of the more than 3500 plant species found in Albania, roughly a quarter of them have medicinal and aromatic properties.[1] The ideal combination of the country's coastal location, mild Mediterranean climate, mountainous terrain, and relative lack of chemical contamination during the communist period make it especially conducive for the natural growth of medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs).[2] These wild-growing herbs thrive where other plants cannot: amidst the cool mountain air and poor rocky soils. For centuries, herbalism has been part of everyday life for rural communities in the highlands of Albania, and has gone hand in hand with the tradition of transhumance; one complimenting the other.[3] Throughout the summer months, the shepherds and their families who tend their flocks on the mountains will also gather wild herbs for themselves.[4] In the meantime, flocks grazing on a diverse diet of herbs on the mountain pastures will in turn fertilize the thin soil on which they feed.

Mount Tomorr is particularly renowned for its abundance and diversity of MAPs since at least the 1670s when Evilya Çelebi, an Ottoman explorer, travelled through the region and noted that "[t]here are all sorts of useful plants and herbs and grasses on this mountain. Every year, physicians come here from Western Europe and Latinistan."[5] Of particular importance are herbs from the Lamiaceae family such as sage, thyme, and oregano,[6] which are used for both their culinary and curative properties. Ironwort, whose flower stalks are steeped to make *çaj mali* or so-called "mountain tea" – a remedy for several illnesses including the common cold – is also notably important and emblematic among the alpine herbs. These herbs have been used for millennia by locals to treat various ailments, and the knowledge of their use has been passed down from generation to generation. Aishe Ivani, a local

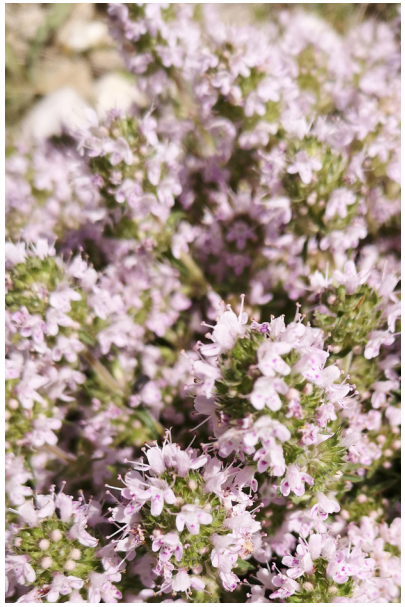
Fig.3.6 (Right) Flowers growing on Mount Tomorr.

1 D. R. Hall, "Albania: Rural Development, Migration and Uncertainty," GeoJournal 38, no. 2 (1996): 185–89.
2 Elizabeth Gowing, "The Albanian Mountain Crops That Keep Us Looking Young," 50 REASONS TO LOVE THE WORLD, accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20210706-the-albanian-mountain-crops-that-keep-us-looking-young.
3 Antonio Laurìa, Valbona Flora, and Kamela Guza, Five Albanian Villages: Guidelines for a Sustainable Tourism Development through the Enhancement of the Cultural Heritage, 1st ed., vol. 211, Studi e Saggi (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.36253/978-88-5518-175-4.
4 Martine Wolff, "Transhumance in Kelmend, Northern Albania: Traditions, Contemporary Challenges, and Sustainable Development," in Grazing Communities: Pastoralism on the Move and Biocultural Heritage Frictions, ed. Letizia Bindi (Berghahn Books, 2022), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2vr8tp1.
5 Robert Elsie, The Albanian Bektashi: History and Culture of a Dervish Order in the Balkans (London New York (N.Y.): I.B. Tauris, 2019), 166.
6 Development Solutions Associates, "The Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Value Chain in Albania" (USAID – ALBANIA AGRICULTURE COMPETITIVENESS (AAC) PROGRAM, June 2010).









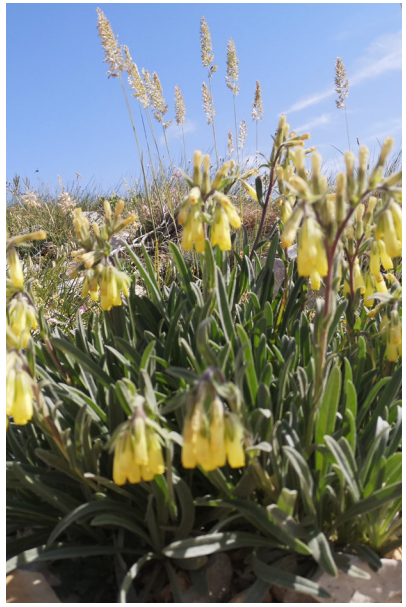



Fig.3.7 (Left) Collage of aromatic and medicinal plants photographed on my trips to Mount Tomorr. Top Row: Sage, Mountain Tea, Chamomile, Viper's Bugloss. Bottom Row: Creeping Thyme, Mountain Thyme, Yarrow, Onosma.

herbalist and nurse in one of Albania's mountain villages says that with access to "the nature God has blessed us with, we're our own doctors."[7] But, with the ongoing rural exodus away from the country's mountainous regions, there is a risk of losing this traditional knowledge and practice.

However, the tradition of herbalism is still valued in Albania, and efforts are being made to preserve and promote it. Non-governmental organizations and government initiatives are working to support rural communities and promote sustainable development in these areas. The harvesting and export of medicinal and aromatic plants abroad has become an important part of the rural economy in Albania since the fall of communism, with the sector comprising roughly 20% of agricultural exports. About 95% of MAPs gathered in the country are exported due to international demand for a final product that is organic and pure seeing that the vast majority of these plants are wild-gathered on mountainsides and therefore grow without the use of artificial pesticides or chemical fertilizers.[8] Despite the country's small size and mainly decentralized gathering practices, Albania is the 16th largest exporter of MAPs in the world and supplies between 50-75% of sage imports to the United States – which is the world's largest importer of the herb.[9] The industry is therefore particularly important in providing income opportunities for farmers and laborers in rural mountainous areas, where other job opportunities can be limited. In the Mount Tomorr region, roughly a third of residents' income is derived from the gathering and processing of MAPs.[10] In the rest of the country, it is estimated that over a quarter of the households in mountainous regions are involved in the harvesting and cultivation of MAPs, with some areas approaching two thirds of households.[11] This translates to about 100,000 families or roughly one in seven homes throughout the country that are directly involved in the industry.[12] Although, with shifts in the socio-economic fabric of mountainous regions due to rural exodus, this figure has decreased during the last decade.[13]

7 Gowing, "The Albanian Mountain Crops That Keep Us Looking Young."
8 "Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Sector Study Final" (Albania: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, May 2021), https://bujqesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/04-MAP-Sector-Study_FINAL.pdf.
9 "Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Sector Study Final."
10 Erjola Keci and Elisabeth Krog, "The European Union's IPA 2010 Programme for Albania Technical Assistance for Strengthening the Capacity of the Ministry of Environment in Albania for Law Drafting and Enforcement of National Environmental Legislation Activity A.3: Preparation of Strategy and Plans -Protected Areas Management Plans Tomorri Mountain National Park Management Plan," 2014, 40, https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.1676.1925.
11 "Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Sector Study Final."
12 Gowing, "The Albanian Mountain Crops That Keep Us Looking Young."
13 "Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Sector Study Final."

3.3 *Besa*, the *Kanun*, and Hospitality

In Albanian, *besa* is a word that translates roughly to faith, belief, or trust. *Besa* is more than just a word though; it is the given word. More formally, *besa* is one's word of honour, and a binding agreement that once given, could not, and should not be made violable.[1] The significance of *besa* in Albanian society even has biblical connotations of "the word" as the basis for everything: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."[2,3] For generations before statehood, and even today, Albanian society has been governed by the given word and the responsibilities it entails.[4] The institution of *besa* is therefore perhaps the oldest and most respected custom of Albanian culture. Having been inherited and transmitted orally for millennia, *besa*, along with other Albanian highland customs and traditions, was first textually codified in the *Kanun* (Canon) of Lekë Dukagjini - a member of the 15th century Albanian nobility.[5] The *Kanun* is the written conglomeration of a body of self-governing laws and ethical structures[6] used in Albanian society before the advent of a centralized state legal system and its associated powers of enforcement. In fact, these customary laws were, and are still upheld over modern laws in some remote mountain communities.[7] In the *Kanun*, *besa* is described as the highest authority and closely related to the notion of honour.[8] Lovro Mihačević, a Croatian priest who during the late 19th century lived in the mountains of northern Albania writes: "The besa equivalent to our word of honour, is sacred to the Albanians. Anyone who does not keep his besa is no man at all, and certainly not a gentleman. … The Albanian would rather die than break his word of honour, especially if he has taken someone under his protection."[9]

The adherence to *besa* and the traditions codified in the *Kanun* are particularly evident in the engrained culture of hospitality and guest-host relations which are deep-rooted in Albanian society. Hospitality is a strong tradition that is still prevalent today, predominantly in the rural mountainous areas of the country where ancient customs have steadfastly remained in the face of changing socio-economic circumstances. Tradition holds that a home should always have a spare bed ready at any time of day or night in

Fig.3.8 (Right) Village in the mountains of Southern Albania (Photo: Fred Boissonnas, 1913).

1 Robert Elsie, The Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture (London: Hurst, 2001), 35.
2 Alma Kushova, "Besa," openDemocracy, July 21, 2004, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/article_2114jsp/.
3 "Bible Gateway Passage: John 1:1 - King James Version," Bible Gateway, https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%201%3A1&version=KJV.
4 Kushova, "Besa."
5 Kushova.
6 Elsie, The Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture, 146.
7 Elsie, 147.
8 Kushova, "Besa."
9 Elsie, The Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture, 35.





Fig.3.9 (Right) Guests sit around a traditional low round table for dinner in an Albanian home.

case a guest arrives unexpectedly.[10] A traveller, stranger, or anyone seeking refuge can knock on the door of the first house they come across and ask for lodging, and the owner would certainly and happily oblige. In fact, it would be quite unthinkable to turn someone away and leave them without shelter, no matter who they are.[11] Albanologist Robert Elsie makes mention of a story concerning a proposal to construct a hotel in a mountain village during the communist regime. The villagers in question were insulted and infuriated at the idea of a hotel.[12] In their view, a traveller would simply have to knock on any door they wished to receive a warm welcome, food, and accommodation.[13] While travelling through the Tomorr region, Oakley-Hill experienced this characteristic hospitality:

> We were then conducted to the reception room, large and square, with the Turkish-style padded wall benches to sit on... After we had sat for quite a time, the door opened and [the hosts] brought in a table which they placed in front of us… The table was piled high with dishes of chicken and meat, bowls of fruit and bread, and glasses; there were melons, grapes, apples, pears, figs and nuts. It was unbelievable. The [hosts] filled the little glasses with raki and passed them round. Seldom has a meal been more appreciated or seemed more sumptuous.[14]

English writer and anthropologist Edith Durham was treated to this hospitality many times throughout the early 1900s as a traveller and honoured guest in the country.[15] She spent much of her life in the highlands of Albania and noted that "Albanian hospitality is unfailing,"[16] and that "hospitality is the law of the mountains."[17] It is also interesting to note that there is no distinction in the Albanian language between the word for 'guest' and the word for 'friend' which are both *mik*.[18] The guest holds a sacred place while they are being hosted, and they are treated with the utmost honour and respect while under the protection of the host:[19] "[h]ospitality to a stranger guest [is] a sacred duty."[20] This *besa* and hospitality afforded to the "stranger guest" was especially evident during the Second World War when Albania had the laudable distinction of being the only European country invaded by the Axis powers whose Jewish population grew during the holocaust.[21] Albanian families secretly hosted and sheltered thousands of Jews while under Nazi occupation – giving them Albanian names and treating them as part of the family.[22] Rexhep Hoxha, the son of one such family that hosted Jewish refugees says: "Not only the police knew, but all the neighbors knew as well. There was a circle of silence. It's something connected to our culture. You don't betray your guest."[23]

10 Shtjefën Gjeçov, ed., Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit, Bot. i 3 (Shkodër: Botime Françeskane, 2010).
11 Elsie, The Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture, 116.
12 Elsie, 117.
13 Elsie, 117.
14 Robert Elsie, The Albanian Bektashi: History and Culture of a Dervish Order in the Balkans (London New York (N.Y.): I.B. Tauris, 2019), 74.
15 M. E. (Mary Edith) Durham, High Albania (New York, Arno Press, 1971), http://archive.org/details/highalbania0000durh.
16 Durham, 72.
17 Fatos Tarifa, "Of Time, Honor, and Memory : Oral Law in Albania," March 2008, https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmlui/handle/10355/65142.
18 Elsie, The Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture, 116.
19 Elsie, 117.
20 Durham, High Albania, 329.
21 "Muslim Albanians Who Rescued Jews during the Holocaust," Yad Vashem, n.d., https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/besa/index.asp.
22 Cnaan Liphshiz, "What Made Muslim Albanians Risk Their Lives to Save Jews from the Holocaust?," Jewish Telegraphic Agency (blog), January 16, 2018, https://www.jta.org/2018/01/16/global/what-made-muslim-albanians-risk-their-lives-to-save-jews-from-the-holocaust.
23 Liphshiz.



4.0
Spaces of Memory



4.1 Memory without Monuments

Nora argues that collective memory can be pinned onto physical places, as is the case for the mountains in general and specifically Mount Tomorr in the Albanian national imagination, but the question of this thesis becomes: how can architecture in conjunction with the *lieux de mémoire* of the mountains preserve and convey collective memory, and in doing so, play a role in keeping the vernacular memory of the mountains and local traditions alive?

Stanford Anderson's seminal essay, "Memory without Monuments: Vernacular Architecture", picks up on that question, and provides the ideological basis for this thesis' approach. Rather than memorializing the myths, memories, and knowledge of the mountains through a deliberate monument or pinning them down in a museum, this thesis seeks to design a space for the passing-on of collective memory organically through vernacular-inspired architecture. In an earlier essay, "Memory in Architecture", Anderson defines two types of memories related to architecture: social memory, and disciplinary memory:

> I will begin by distinguishing between memory through architecture and memory in architecture; or one might say, 'architecture serving the causes of memory in society' as opposed to 'the operation of memory within the discipline of architecture itself'. Again, we might distinguish 'precedent serving a social cause', from 'precedent within architectural design itself'.[1]

In "Memory without Monuments," Anderson suggests that in preliterate societies, both the social and disciplinary memory conveyed through vernacular buildings provided information about the past.[2] Being preliterate also meant that their history was mainly passed down orally from generation to generation, and as such, was prone to being forgotten or modified.[3] In such a society, "[t]he past is not as much separate from, as subsumed in, the present."[4] Therefore, forgetting was just as important in shaping and evolving what constituted the collective memory.[5] By contrast, in a literate society, written records slow down the pace or even eliminate the transmutation of collective memory:

Fig.4.1 (Previous spread) View of the neighborhood of Gorica along the banks of the Osum River in Berat. Image taken from the Citadel of Berat.

Fig.4.2 (Right) Vernacular houses built on the hillside of Berat - known as the city of stacked windows.

1 Stanford Anderson, "Memory in Architecture," Daidalos, December 1995, 23, http://web.mit.edu/soa/www/downloads/1990-99/TH_Daid58_Dec1995_95.pdf.
2 Stanford Anderson, "Memory without Monuments: Vernacular Architecture," Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review 11, no. 1 (1999): 13–22.
3 Anderson, 16.
4 Anderson, 16.
5 Anderson, 16.





Fig.4.3 (Left) Host making coffee for his guest inside a vernacular Albanian dwelling (Photo: Hugo Bernatzik, 1929).

> Literate societies, on the other hand, cannot discard, absorb, or transmute the past in the same way. Instead, their members are faced with permanently recorded versions of the past and its beliefs; and because the past is thus set apart from the present, historical enquiry becomes possible. This in turn encourages scepticism; and scepticism, not only about the legendary past, but about received ideas about the universe as a whole.[6]

Historical preservation through kept records then allows for "self-conscious forms of memory," and from that arise the conditions for memorialization through architecture; architecture with the explicit role of preserving memory.[7] In contrast, Anderson identifies vernacular architecture built according to local indigenous tradition from unrecognized builders as representing the purest form of social and disciplinary memory preservation.[8] By the same token, Anderson does not argue to discard all modern architectural techniques and forms for the dogmatic following of exclusively vernacular designs.[9] In this day and age that kind of architecture is next to impossible due to the highly literate and historical nature of our societies.[10] Instead, Anderson suggests that various degrees of "vernacular usage" can be employed in architecture for the preservation of both social and disciplinary memory – "even into highly abstract modernism."[11]

By studying the form and evolution of Albanian vernacular architecture, particularly the rural mountain dwellings, this thesis aims to encompass a gradient of memory in architecture within the realm of the memory of the mountains. The proposal will be to design a vernacular-inspired architectural space for going back to the mountains with the intent to preserve both the endemic traditions of the mountains and the process for the organic evolution of collective memory.

6 Anderson, 16.
7 Anderson, 16.
8 Anderson, 21.
9 Anderson, 21.
10 Anderson, 21.
11 Anderson, 21.

4.2 The Shepherd's Hut and the Guest Room

Albanian vernacular architecture consists primarily of the rural domestic type with a few instances of vernacular religious buildings also found rurally.[1] It is the rural family home, usually found in the mountains of Albania that formed the backbone of the vernacular architectural tradition. Like all early architecture, the Albanian dwelling developed from the single-room primitive hut which is also known locally as *shtëpia e zjarrit* (the house of fire) due to the centralized hearth it contained[2] – around which family life revolved. This rudimentary dwelling provided the fundamentals of shelter to its occupants: a place to stay, cook, eat, and sleep away from the exterior elements. It was also precisely from these exterior elements that the primitive hut was, and to this day continues to be constructed in the form of the shepherd's hut.[3] Locally sourced stone and wood form the bulk of materials used in the construction of these dwellings which are made using a variety of different building techniques dependent on the local climate and available resources.[4] The shepherd's summer hut is perhaps a direct link to the architectural memory of the primitive hut, maintaining the same form and functions as the primitive hut except on a seasonal basis in conjunction with the tradition of transhumance. These structures are found scattered across the highland pastures of the country and provide a temporary residence for shepherds and their family in the mountains during the summer herding season.[5] Larger and more developed shepherds' huts might also include two floors allowing for the sheltering of animals and a room for the production of dairy on the ground floor, while maintaining the house of fire on the upper floor.[6] In many cases these temporary residences also acted as a genesis for the development of a permanent dwelling or expansion of a family residence on the site.[7]

Fig.4.4 (Right) View through the entrance of a ruined *stan* (pen for livestock) on Mount Tomorr constructed from locally sourced materials.

1 Frida Pashako, "The Yesterday's and Today's Vernacular Architecture in Albania: An Expressive Code of a Society Pursuing the Development," 6th International Seminar on Vernacular Settlements 2 (April 19, 2012): 492.
2 Pashako.
3 Instituti i Kulturës Popullore et al., eds., Vendbanime dhe Banesa Popullore Shqiptare, Vendbanime dhe Banesa Fshatare 1 (Tiranë: Botimet Toena, 2004), 199.
4 Instituti i Kulturës Popullore et al., 199.
5 Instituti i Kulturës Popullore et al., 199.
6 Instituti i Kulturës Popullore et al., 203.
7 Instituti i Kulturës Popullore et al., 203.





Fig.4.5 (Left) A shepherd's hut on Mount Tomorr.

Fig.4.6 (Right) Interior sketch of a simple "house of fire".

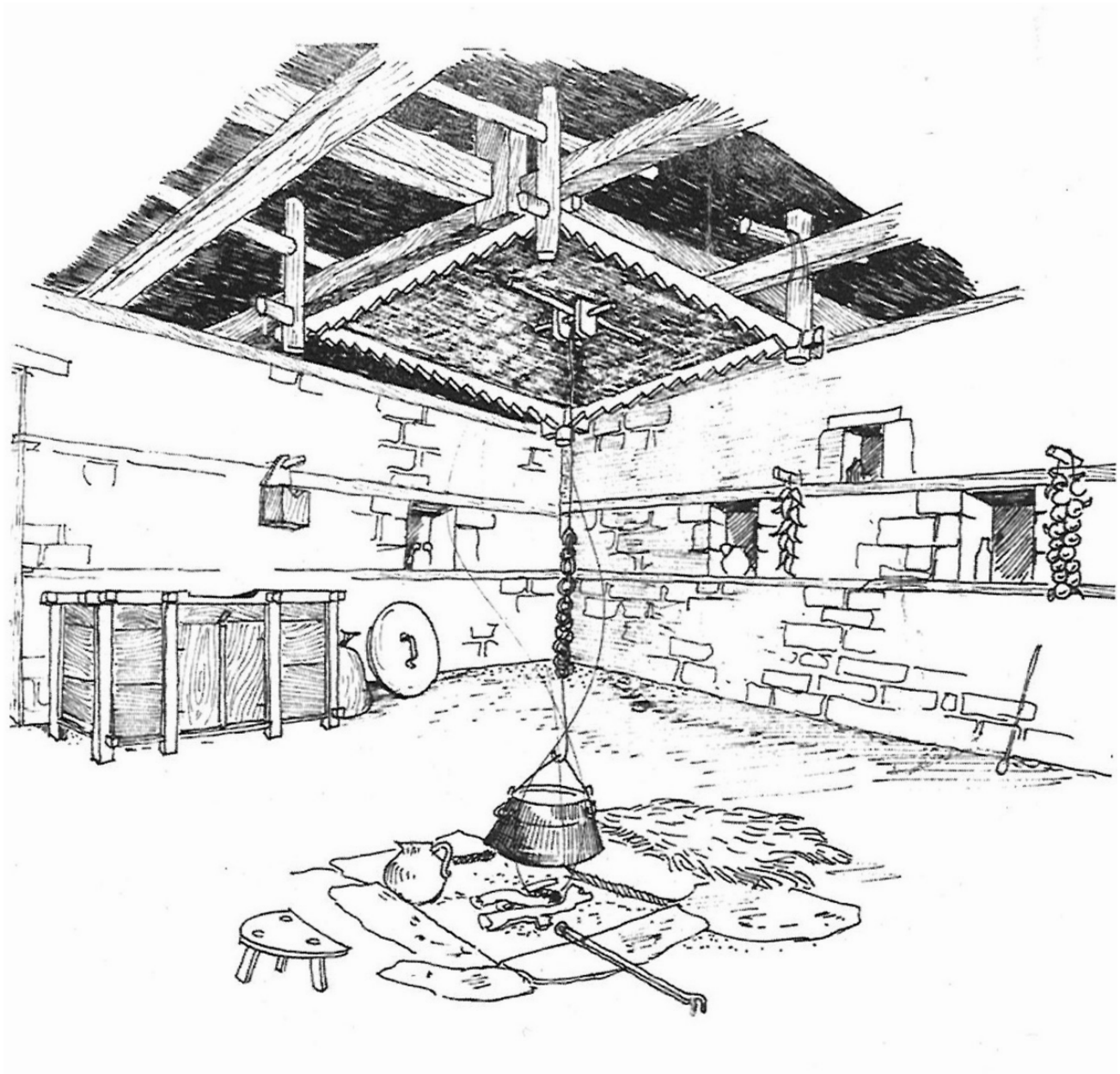




Fig.4.7 (Left) A mountain hut on Mount Gjalica near Kukës, Albania (Photo: Friedrich Markgraf, 1924-1928).

Fig.4.8 (Right) Inside a mountain hut on Mount Deja in the Mat region of Albania (Photo: Friedrich Markgraf, 1924-1928).



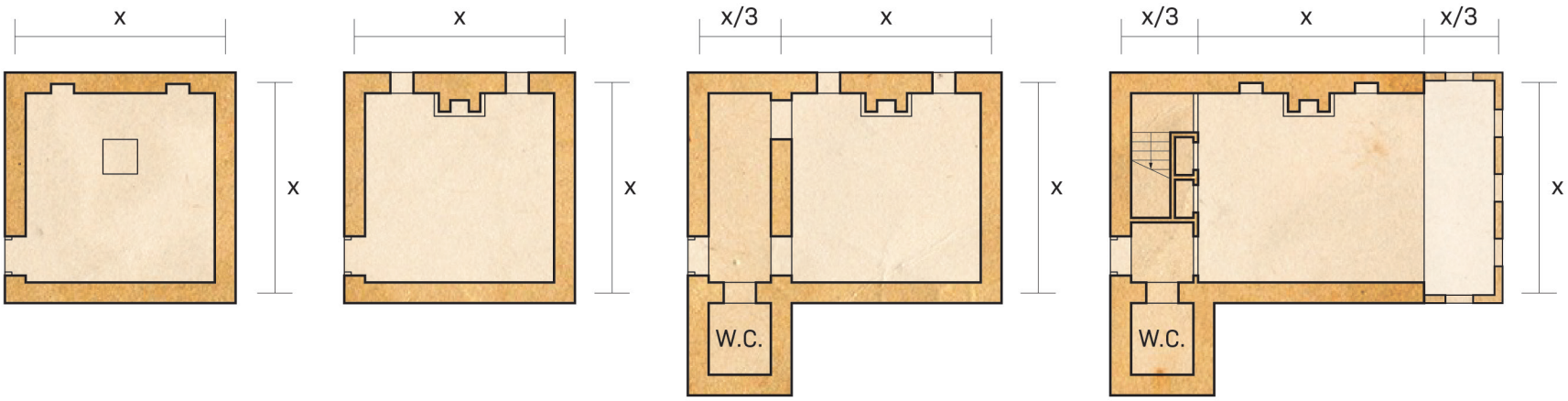
With the continual evolution of the primitive or shepherd's hut, the single-room house of fire began to be fragmented into multiple new rooms, each with a slightly more specialized function within the dwelling. Primary among these derivative spaces was the guest room, also called the good room or great room, which itself formally evolved from and was a reorganization of the basic unit of the house of fire.[8] Whereas before, the multifunctional single-room hut had also acted as a guest room, with the separation of spaces, the house of fire became the kitchen, and the important social function of hosting guests now had its own dedicated room. Hospitality, as outlined in the social institute codified in the *Kanun*, has always played an important role in the architectural social memory of the traditional Albanian dwelling. The preservation of this tradition along with its associated functions have been architecturally manifested, particularly in the guest room, as a characteristic part of the vernacular abode. This is made evident in the popular proverb which has also been immortalized in the *Kanun*: "the Albanian's house belongs to God and the guest (Article 602);" further underlining the sacredness of the guest and the necessity of having a place to host them in the home.[9] While the house of fire / kitchen remained the familial heart of the home, the guest room was the sacred, and in many respects, social heart of the home – its primary function being the welcoming and hosting of guests, travelers, neighbours, friends, relatives, and strangers.

This versatile room is where guests would socialize, eat, sleep, and spend the majority of their free time while being hosted. To accommodate these functions the guest room has several defining characteristics:

In multilevel dwellings, the guest room is always located on the highest floor, with the ground floor being reserved for animals and other economic activities related to the inhabitants' livelihood.[10] In comparison to the more introverted lower floors, the guest room is abundantly lit by large windows facing the surrounding scenery and path leading to the dwelling.[11] It is also typically the largest room of the house for both practical and symbolic reasons as is necessary for its significant physical and social functions.[12] A popular saying goes: *E bëjmë të madhe se aty kalojmë gëzimin e madh dhe hidhërimin e madh* (We make it great because that is where we spend the great joyfulness and the great bitterness) – the rites of marriage and death, respectively.[13] Architecturally it is with rare exception the most developed, and ornately decorated room of the abode. The ceiling of the room also has a superior treatment in comparison

Fig.4.9 (Right) Diagram of the evolution of the "house of fire" into the guest room.

8 Pashako, "The Yesterday's and Today's Vernacular Architecture in Albania: An Expressive Code of a Society Pursuing the Development."
9 Shtjefën Gjeçov, ed., Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit, Bot. i 3 (Shkodër: Botime Françeskane, 2010).
10 Pashako, "The Yesterday's and Today's Vernacular Architecture in Albania: An Expressive Code of a Society Pursuing the Development."
11 Pashako.
12 Instituti i Kulturës Popullore et al., Vendbanime dhe Banesa Popullore Shqiptare, 227.
13 Instituti i Kulturës Popullore et al., 227.



Basic unit of the House of Fire

Centralized hearth

Niches for storage

Hearth moves to side wall

Addition of windows

Fragmentation of spaces according to more specialized program

Addition of service corridor for storage and w.c.

Addditon of stairs leading up to Mafil

Addition of closets in guest room

Elaboration of windows and overlook area

Walls

Service (Musandër-Mafil)

Living (House of Fire)

Overlook

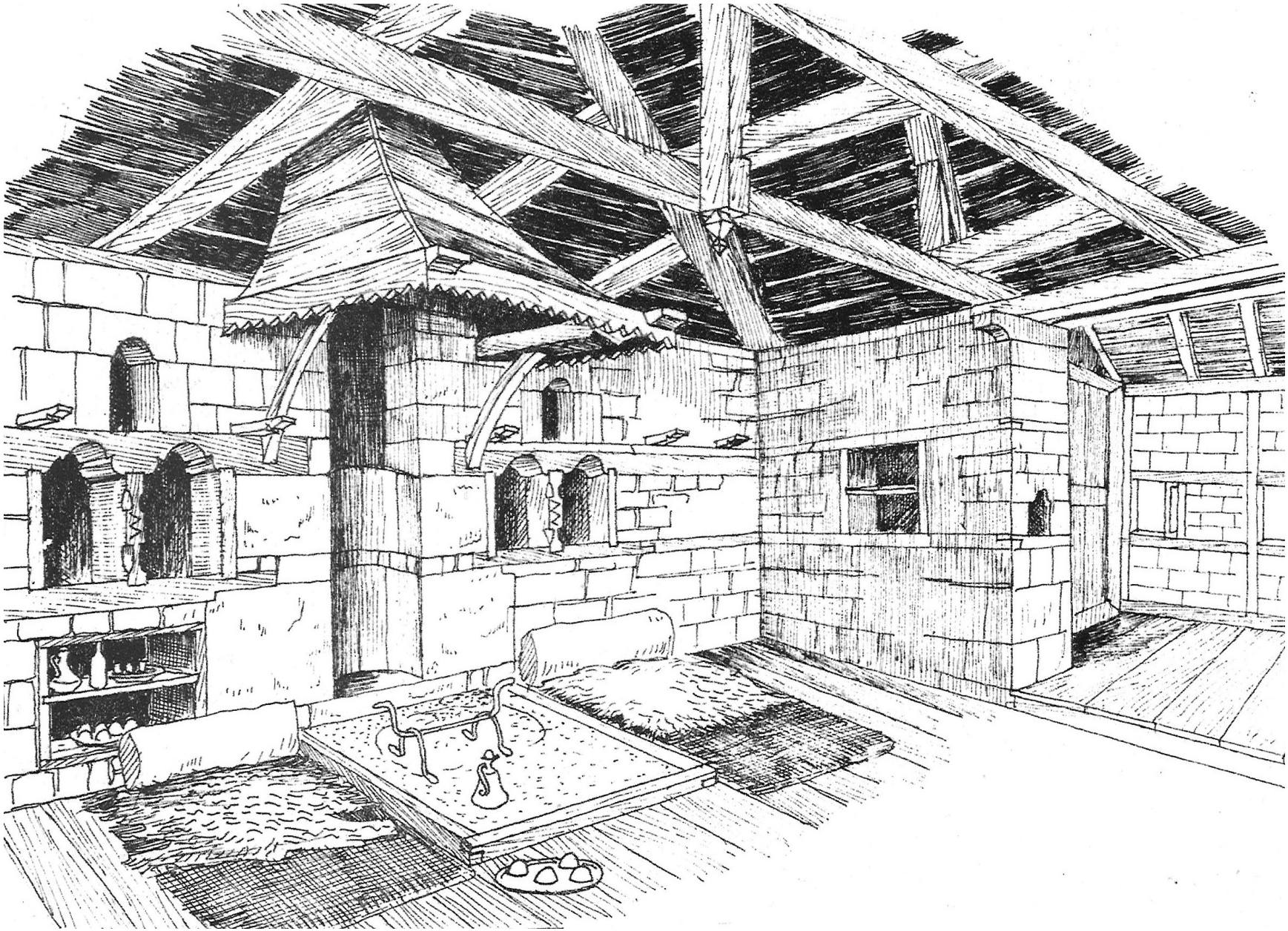


Fig.4.10 (Left) Sketch of mid-stage development rural guest room. Most of the decorative effort has been put around the hearth and niches where guests are welcomed, whereas the walls are not plastered and the ceiling is still open compared to later stage developments.

with other rooms of the dwelling.[14] This usually consists of intricately carved wood panels and ornamental designs. Great care is taken by the family to maintain and furnish the guest room as it is not only a way of showcasing their overall social standing, but also to honour the guest with the best possible environment they can offer:[15] "The tired guest should be surrounded by hospitality, with honor (Article 610)."[16]

The hearth, having typologically moved from being in the centre of the room to a fireplace on a side wall,[17] is perhaps the most prominent symbol of warmth and hospitality in the guest room. The host "leads [the guest] to the head place near the hearth. The fire is stirred; [the guest] requests more wood. The guest sees to the fire (Article 606-7)."[18] On either side of the fireplace there is a niche carved in the wall[19] for the storage of items used to make and serve the customary coffee and raki to guests shortly after they have arrived: "For a good [friend/guest], coffee, raki, and food laid out are necessary, with something more as well (Article 612)."[20]

The typological plan of the room has maintained the square footprint of the earlier house of fire, presumably to allow for the circular and egalitarian arrangement of seating and eating around a large circular *sofër* (low table) that is brought into the centre of the room for dining. The serving of food is fundamental to the tradition of hospitality: "For the guest, honor must be made: 'Bread and salt and the heart' (Article 608)."[21] This equal-sided open space is often bordered by built-in low-seated sofas and mattresses respectively called *nim* and *minder* which are used for both sitting and sleeping.[22] Cushions, sheepskins, and handcrafted wool rugs are draped over the sofas and floor for comfort and warmth.[23] Besides these, the room is overall devoid of any furniture to allow for its multifunctional use.[24]

Immediately adjacent to the guest room is a service corridor through which people would enter the room.[25] This corridor includes a washroom and sink for people to cleanse and refresh themselves before entering the guest room and is nearby for the overall convenience of guests.[26] Forming part of the wall system that divides the service corridor from the guest room is the *Musandër*.[27] The *musandër* is a built-in closet opening into the guest room that is used for the storage of linens, pillows, blankets, and bedding to accommodate the sleeping needs of guests: "bedding must be found ready for a guest at any time of night or day (Article 609)."[28] In more developed iterations of the guest room, there is a mezzanine space called the *mafil* – this is found above the *musandër* and occupies the second storey of the aforementioned

14 Maksim Mitrojorgji and Joli Mitrojorgji, Forma Përmbajtja dhe Arkitektura: Udhëtim në Banesën Popullore Shqiptare (Mediaprint, 2013).
15 Maksim Mitrojorgji, "Oda e mirë (e miqve)," Fondacioni Henrietta Leavitt (blog), November 26, 2018, https://fhl.org.al/oda-e-mire-e-miqve/.
16 Gjeçov, Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit.
17 Pashako, "The Yesterday's and Today's Vernacular Architecture in Albania: An Expressive Code of a Society Pursuing the Development."
18 Gjeçov, Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit.
19 "The Guestroom (Oda) of Berati • IIA," January 26, 2021, https://invest-in-albania.org/the-guestroom-oda-of-berati/.
20 Gjeçov, Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit.
21 Gjeçov.
22 Mitrojorgji, "Oda e mirë (e miqve)."
23 Mitrojorgji.
24 Instituti i Kulturës Popullore et al., Vendbanime dhe Banesa Popullore Shqiptare, 229.
25 Pashako, "The Yesterday's and Today's Vernacular Architecture in Albania: An Expressive Code of a Society Pursuing the Development."
26 Instituti i Kulturës Popullore et al., Vendbanime dhe Banesa Popullore Shqiptare, 229.
27 Pashako, "The Yesterday's and Today's Vernacular Architecture in Albania: An Expressive Code of a Society Pursuing the Development."
28 Gjeçov, Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit.



Fig.4.11 (Left) Later-stage development of a guest room in Gjirokastër. The space is extended with a highly glazed overlook area and the ceiling is enclosed with intricately carved wood panels.

Fig.4.12 (Right) *Musandër-Mafil* complex in the guest room in Gjirokastër. The *musandër* comprises the entrance and closet for bedding on the lower level, whereas the *mafil* is the mezzanine space above.



service corridor, through which it is accessible by stairs.[29] Together they form the *musandër-mafil* complex.[30] The *mafil* can either be open with just a railing for support or screened – providing a more intimate and private space while still overlooking the rest of the guest room.[31] The *mafil* can also be used as an additional space for sleeping if there is not enough room in the guest room.

Seeing that vernacular architecture in Albania was comprised predominantly of the domestic type with few if any public buildings in most rural communities, meant that the home - and especially the guest room – also served important communal functions beyond those of day-to-day familial life in many rural mountain communities. Before the arrival of public buildings and services to these areas, the guest room had historically also acted as a communal gathering place for the heads of families, clans, and villages.[32] It was a social space for friendly or serious conversation and doubled as whatever public building was needed – as was the case for my great-grandfather's home that also functioned as the village schoolhouse when there wasn't one in the mid 1900s. Most importantly, the guest room functioned as a social place where collective memories and traditions could be preserved, formed, and passed on between different relatives, strangers, and generations.

Fig.4.13 (Right) The guest room in the Ethnographic Museum of Berat.

29 Pashako, "The Yesterday's and Today's Vernacular Architecture in Albania: An Expressive Code of a Society Pursuing the Development."
30 Pashako.
31 Pashako.
32 Instituti i Kulturës Popullore et al., Vendbanime dhe Banesa Popullore Shqiptare, 351.





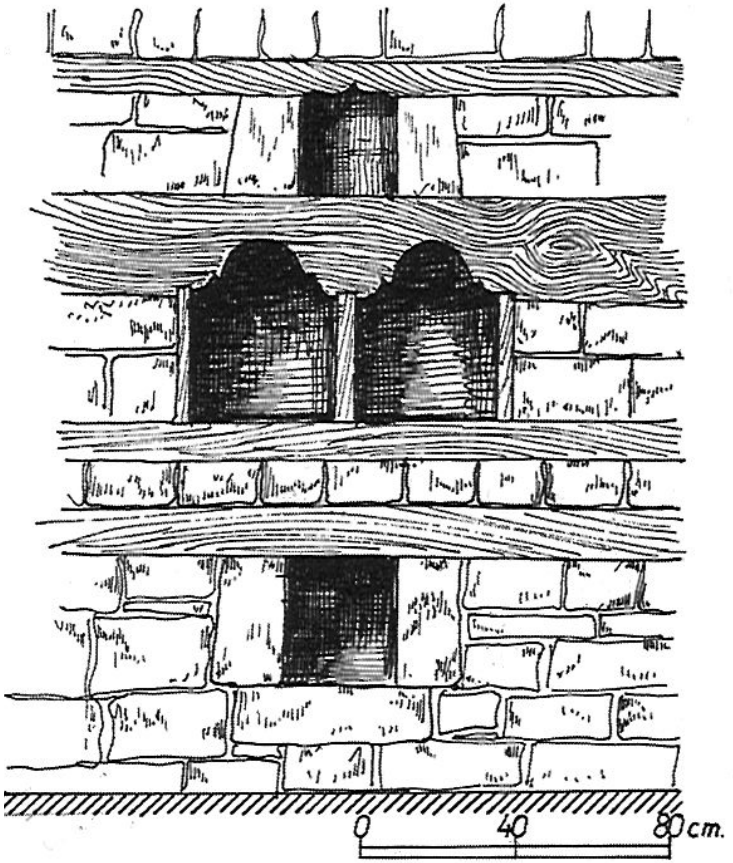

0
40
80 cm.

Fig.4.14 (Far left) Niche next to the fireplace in the guest room of the Ethnographic Museum of Berat.

Fig.4.15 (Left) Sketch of niches in stone wall. Throughout the development of the vernacular dwelling, niches have been a constant feature since the "house of fire". The versatile nooks which are well-suited to thick stone walls have a variety of storage uses in the dwelling.

Fig.4.16 (Right) Sketch of an exterior fireplace with niches in a covered porch area called a *çardak*. The *çardak* is an outdoor living space used during the warmer months of the year and its function is extended into the cooler months by the fireplace.





Fig.4.17 (Left) Side view of the Ethnographic Museum of Berat with stairs leading up to the *çardak*.

Fig.4.18 (Right) View looking out from the *çardak*.





Fig.4.19 (Left) Stone staircase leading up to the *çardak*.

Fig.4.20 (Right) The space underneath the *çardak* is used as an outdoor working area.

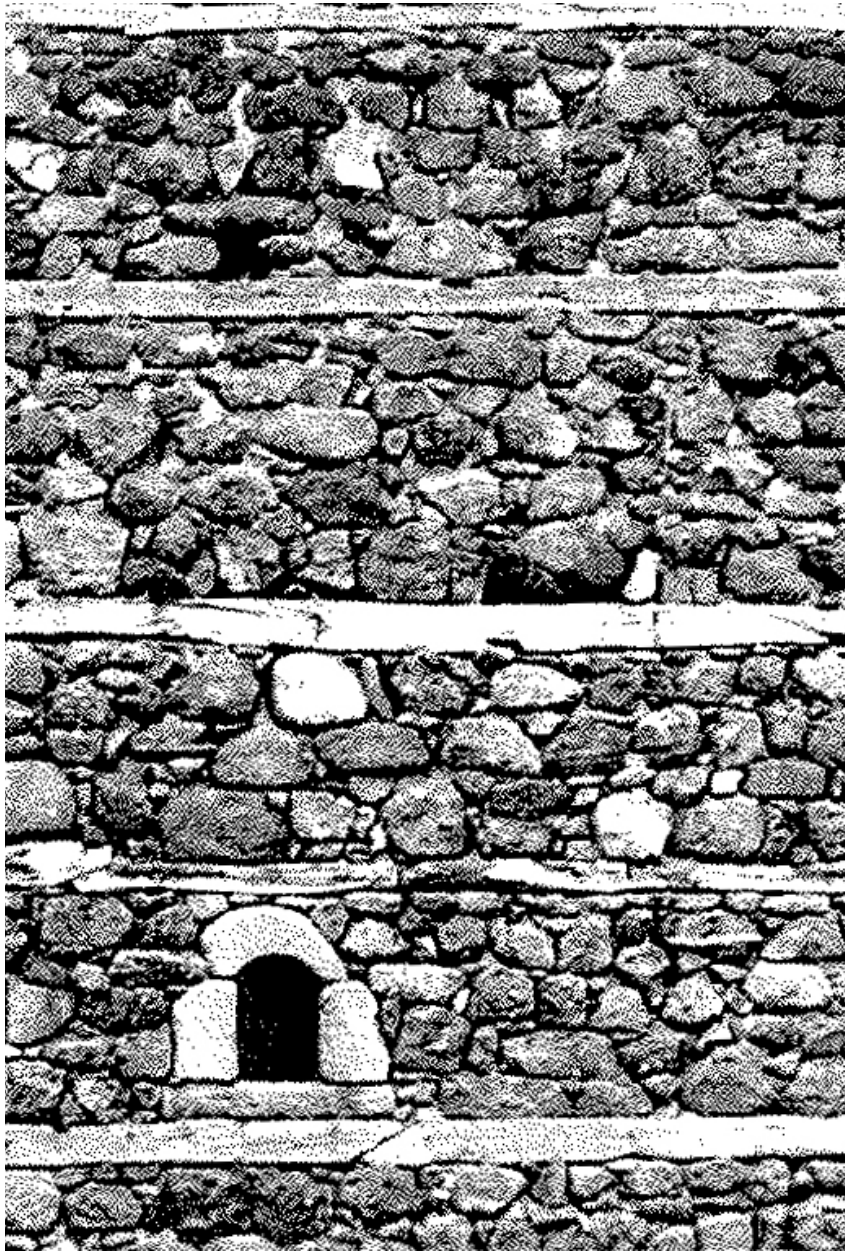




Fig.4.21 (Left) A work room inside the Ethnographic Museum of Berat with a loom and other tools for processing wool.

Fig.4.22 (Right) The fireplace inside the work room.





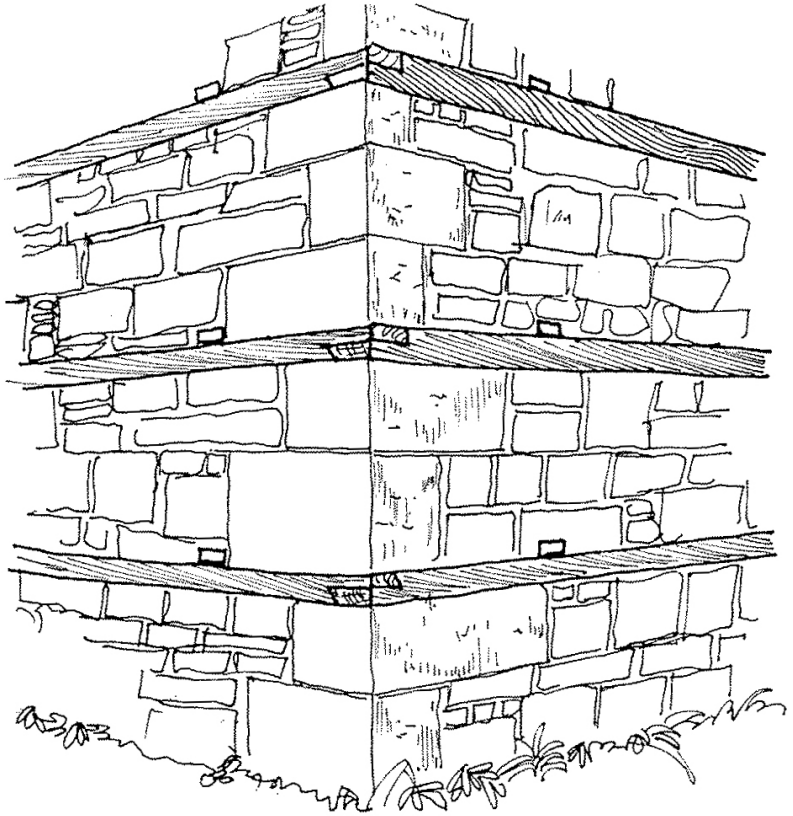


Fig.4.23 (Far left) Image of horizontal timber banding used in a traditional stone wall.

Fig.4.24 (Left) Sketch of horizontal timber banding at the corner of a stone wall. The horizontal bands are used as a method to reinforce the wall by better tying together the masonry as well as providing resistance to seismic loads.

Fig.4.25 (Right) Stone wall of a building in Poliçan using concrete instead of timber for the banding.





5.0
Back to the Mountains



5.1 The Guesthouse

The design proposal of this thesis is to create a space where guests can come to reconnect with the mountains and the memories that they have hosted for thousands of years. Using the past architectural history of the site as a starting point for the program, the building revives the traditions of transhumance, alpine herbalism, and the sacred duty of hospitality underneath Tomorr's northern summit. Guests can come to learn or re-experience the culture and history of life on the mountains, not just as tourists, but as active participants in keeping these memories and traditions alive while reconnecting with the land. The design of the building employs "vernacular usage" in its materiality, building techniques, and typology – as it relates to the elements of the rural dwelling and particularly the guest room – making use of both the social and disciplinary memory of the vernacular building tradition. Layered on top of this "vernacular usage", the architecture weaves the myths of the mountain into its tectonics – passively indicating traces of these ancient stories as one moves through the building. Finally, the circulation to arrive at the second-storey mezzanine is inspired by the journey to get to the northern summit from the crossroads, recreating the turns and changes in elevation at a reduced scale. Together, all these elements are intertwined to form the proposed guesthouse on Tomorr's northern foothills: a space of memory hosted by a place of memory.

Fig.5.1 (Previous spread) View of the three peaks of Tomorr's northern summit seen from the site.

Fig.5.2 (Right) Proposed site plan.

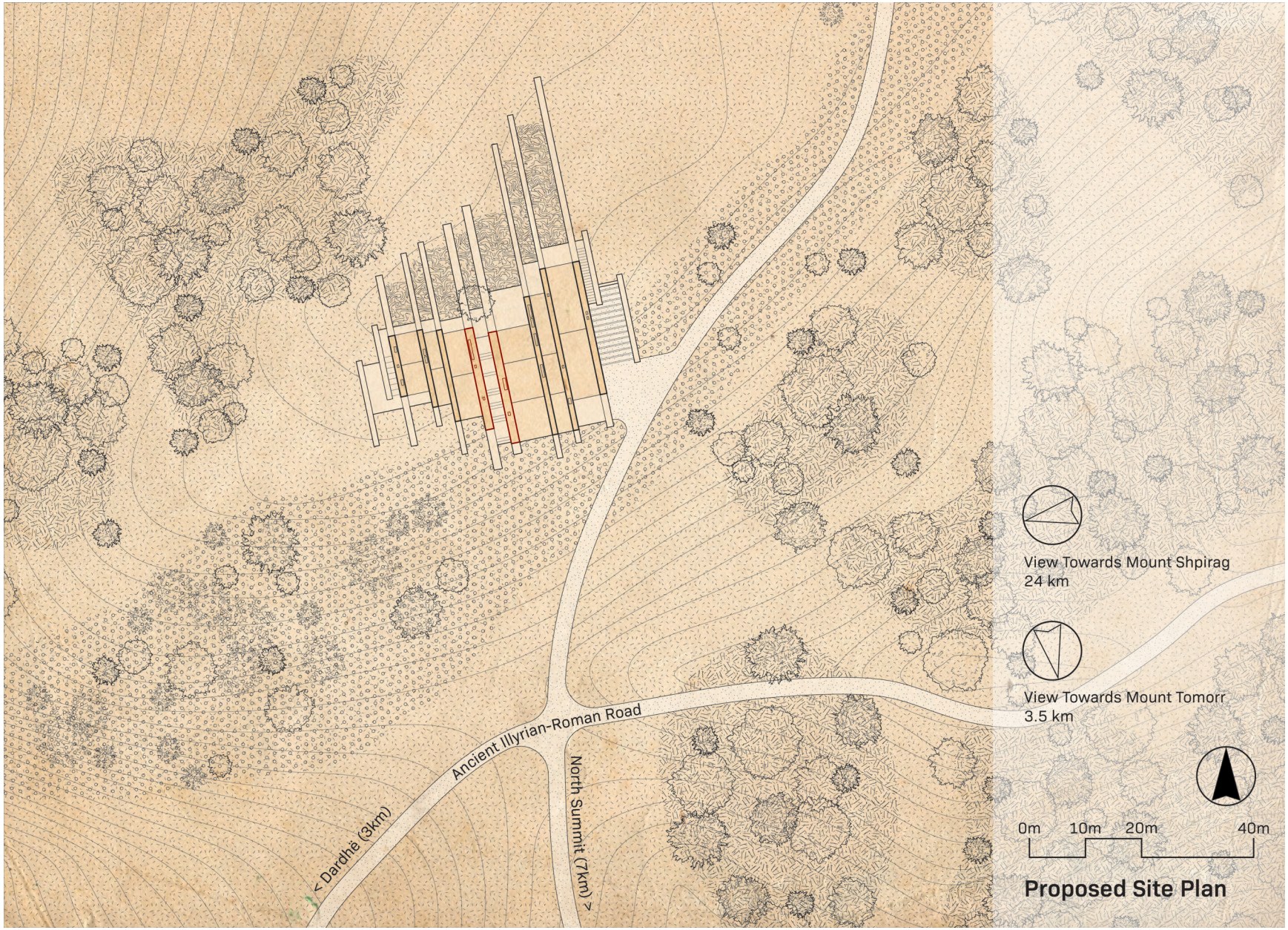
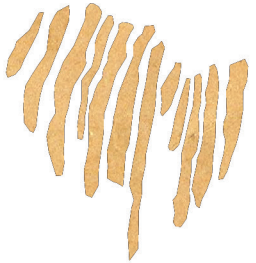

View Towards Mount Shpirag
24 km
View Towards Mount Tomorr
3.5 km
Ancient Illyrian-Roman Road
< Dardhë (3km)
North Summit (7km) >
0m
10m
20m
40m
Proposed Site Plan

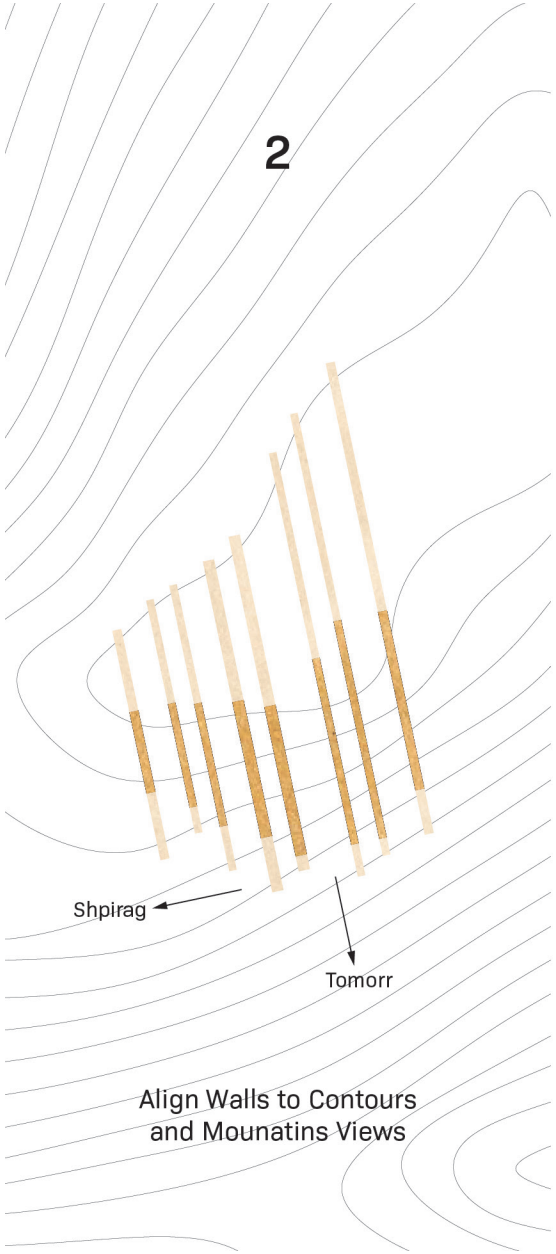


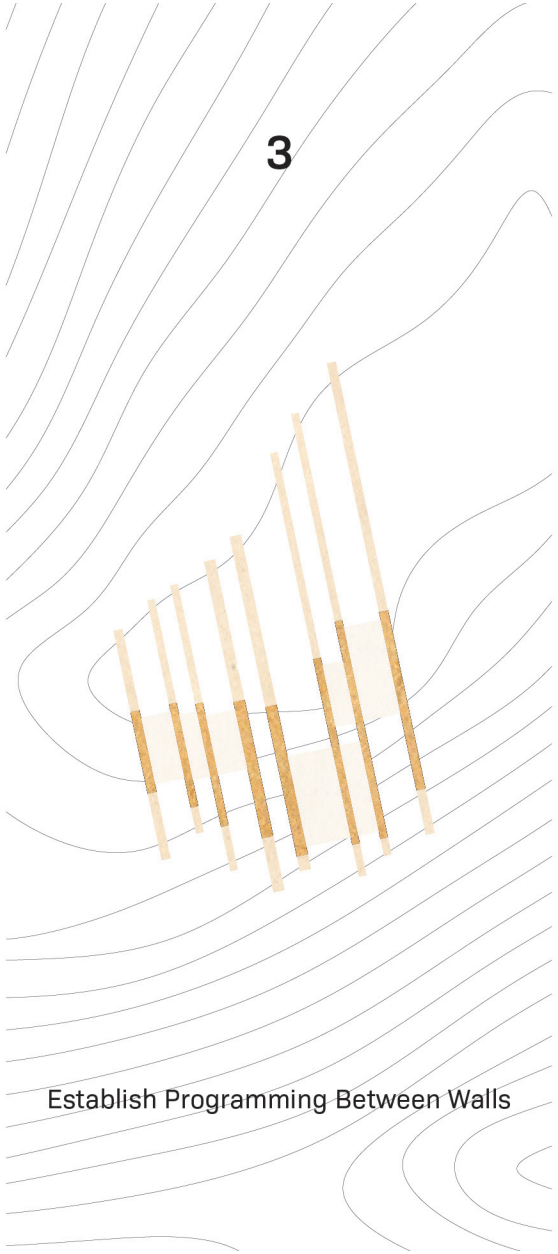
Fig.5.3

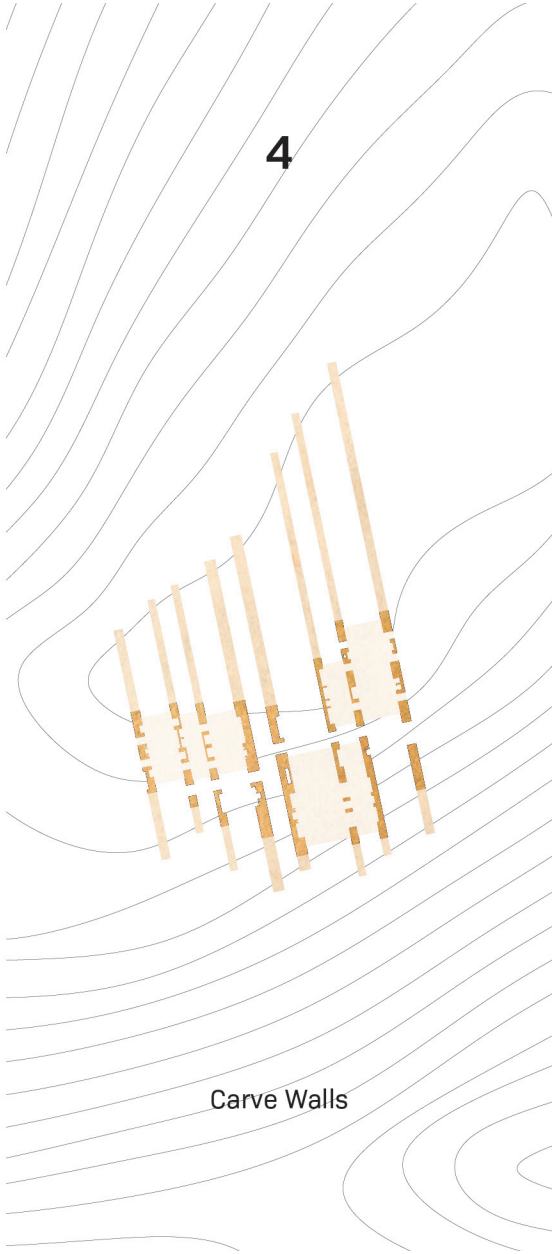
1



Establish Stone Walls


2
Shpirag
Tomorr
Align Walls to Contours
and Mounatins Views


3
Establish Programming Between Walls


4
Carve Walls

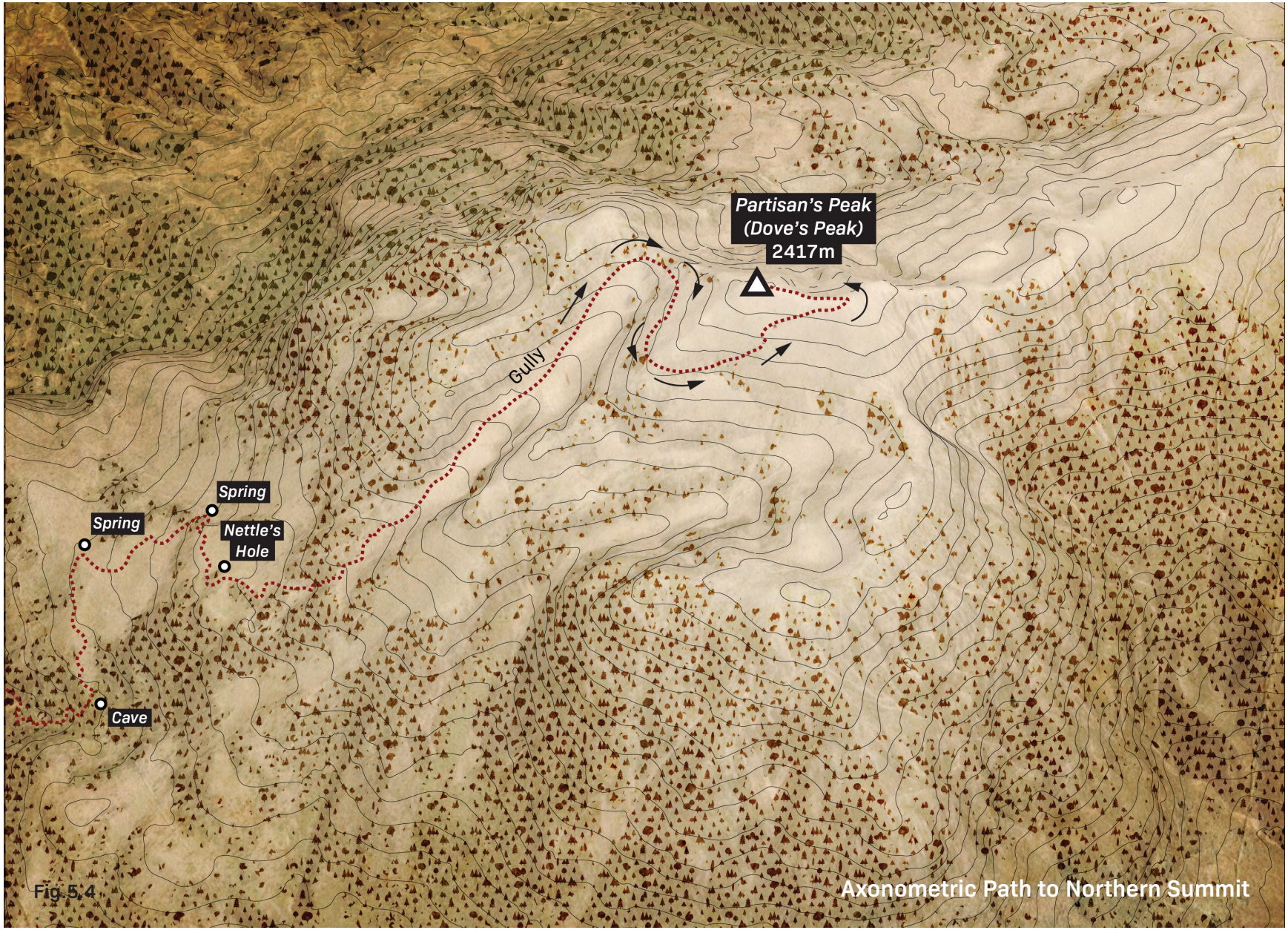


Fig. 5.4 Axonometric Path to Northern Summit

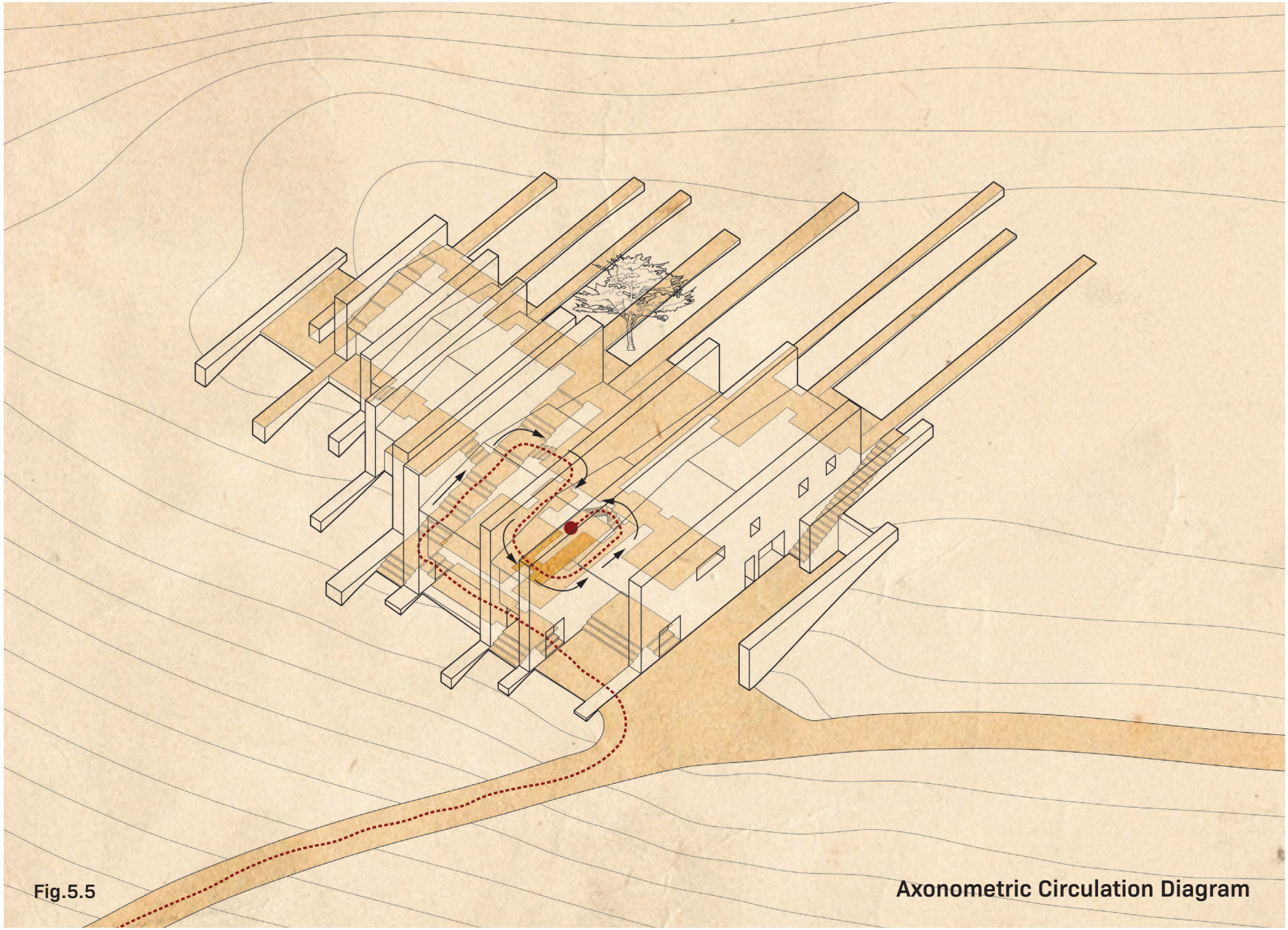


Fig.5.5 Axonometric Circulation Diagram

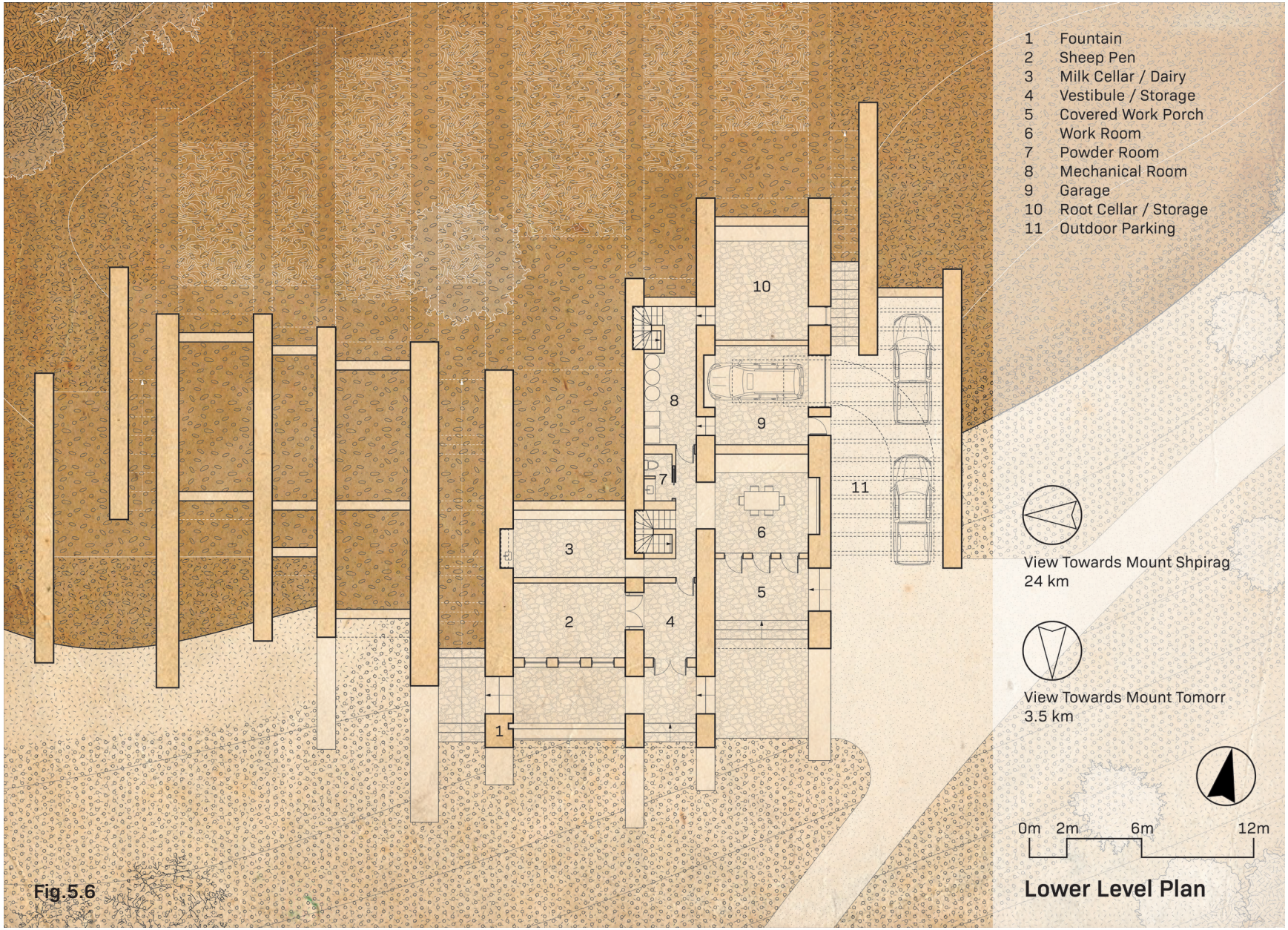

1 Fountain
2 Sheep Pen
3 Milk Cellar / Dairy
4 Vestibule / Storage
5 Covered Work Porch
6 Work Room
7 Powder Room
8 Mechanical Room
9 Garage
10 Root Cellar / Storage
11 Outdoor Parking
View Towards Mount Shpirag
24 km
View Towards Mount Tomorr
3.5 km
0m 2m 6m 12m
Lower Level Plan

Fig.5.6

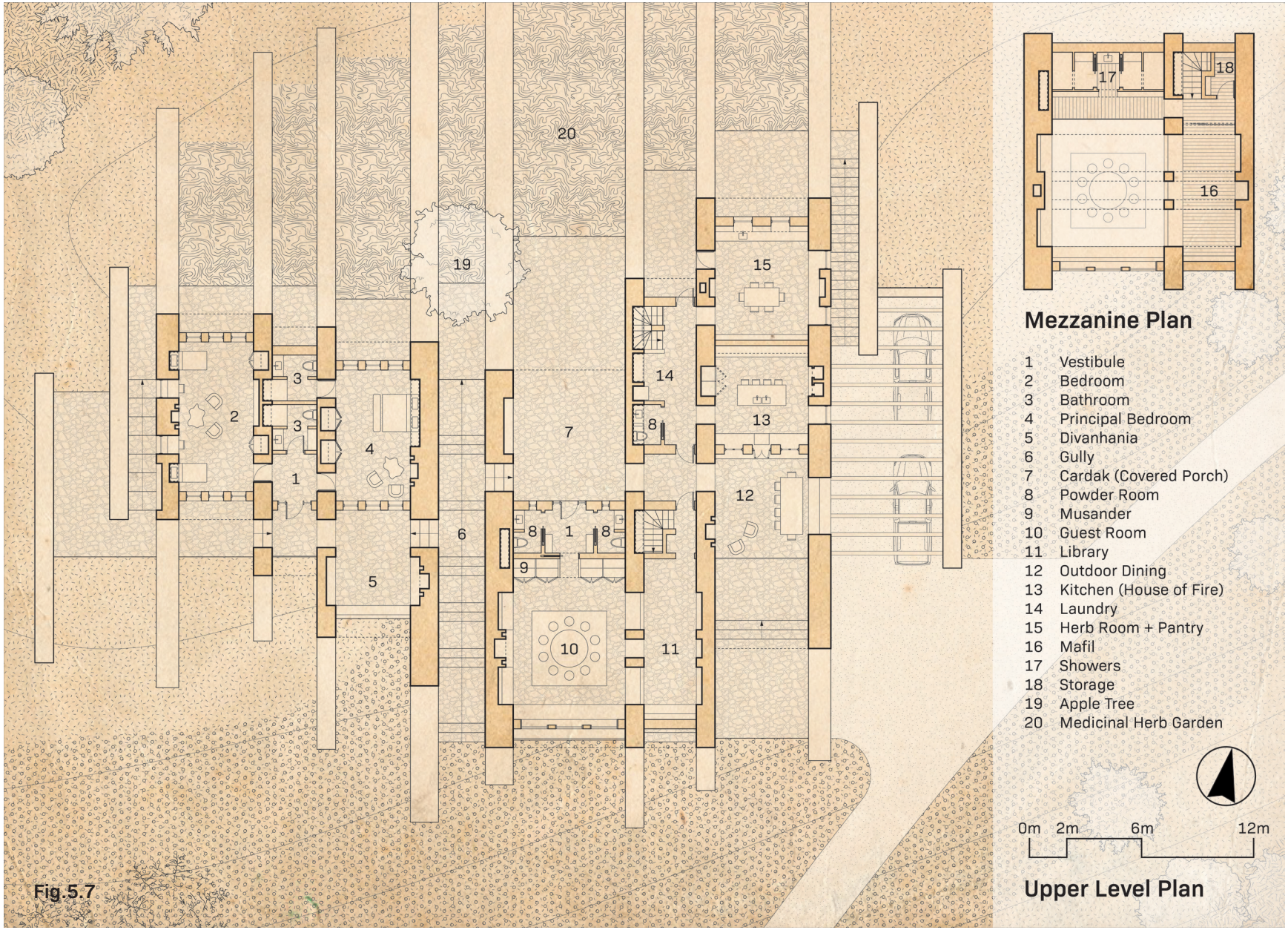

Mezzanine Plan
1 Vestibule
2 Bedroom
3 Bathroom
4 Principal Bedroom
5 Divanhania
6 Gully
7 Cardak (Covered Porch)
8 Powder Room
9 Musander
10 Guest Room
11 Library
12 Outdoor Dining
13 Kitchen (House of Fire)
14 Laundry
15 Herb Room + Pantry
16 Mafil
17 Showers
18 Storage
19 Apple Tree
20 Medicinal Herb Garden
0m 2m 6m 12m
Upper Level Plan

Fig.5.7

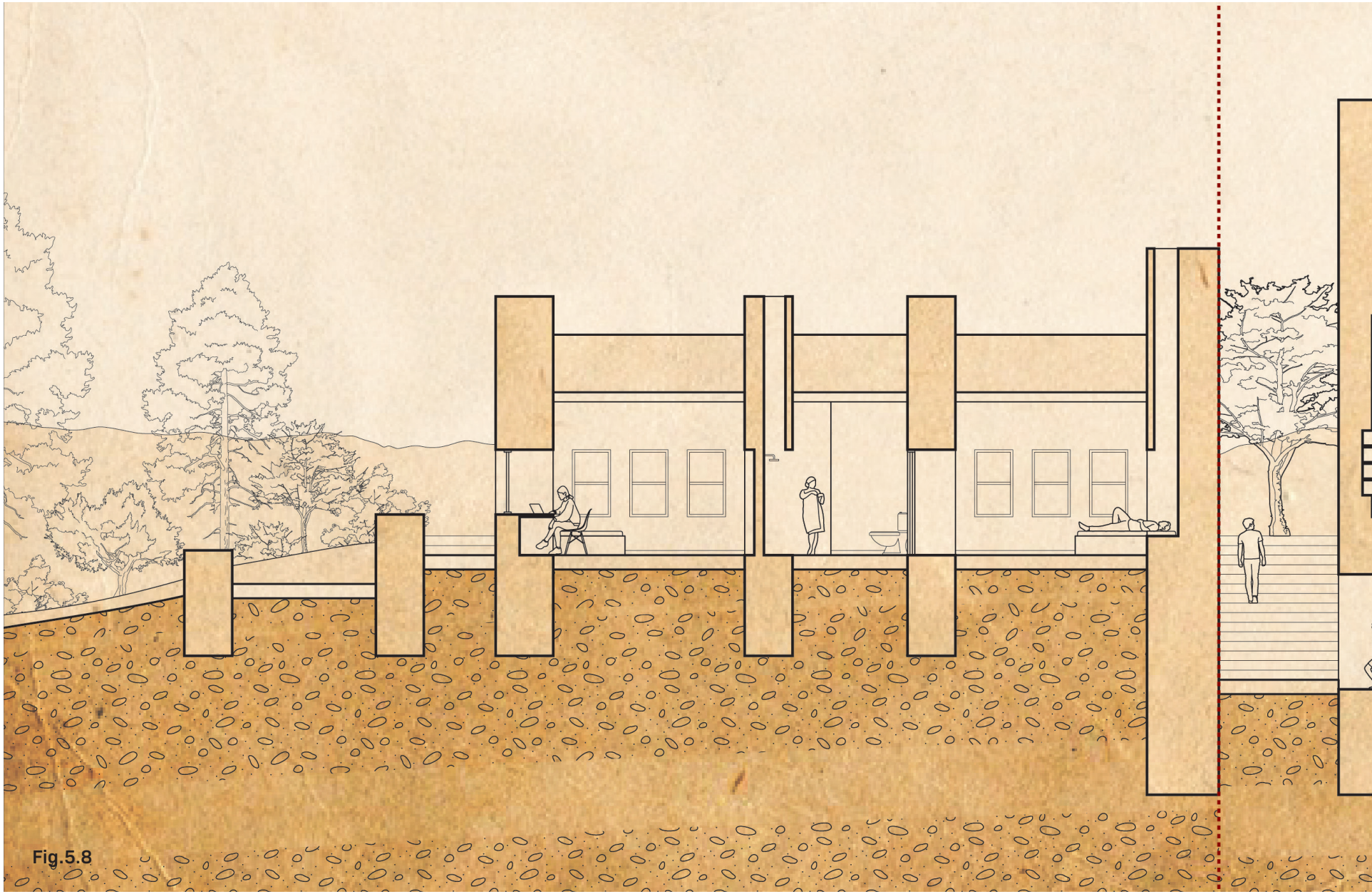


Fig.5.8



Long Section

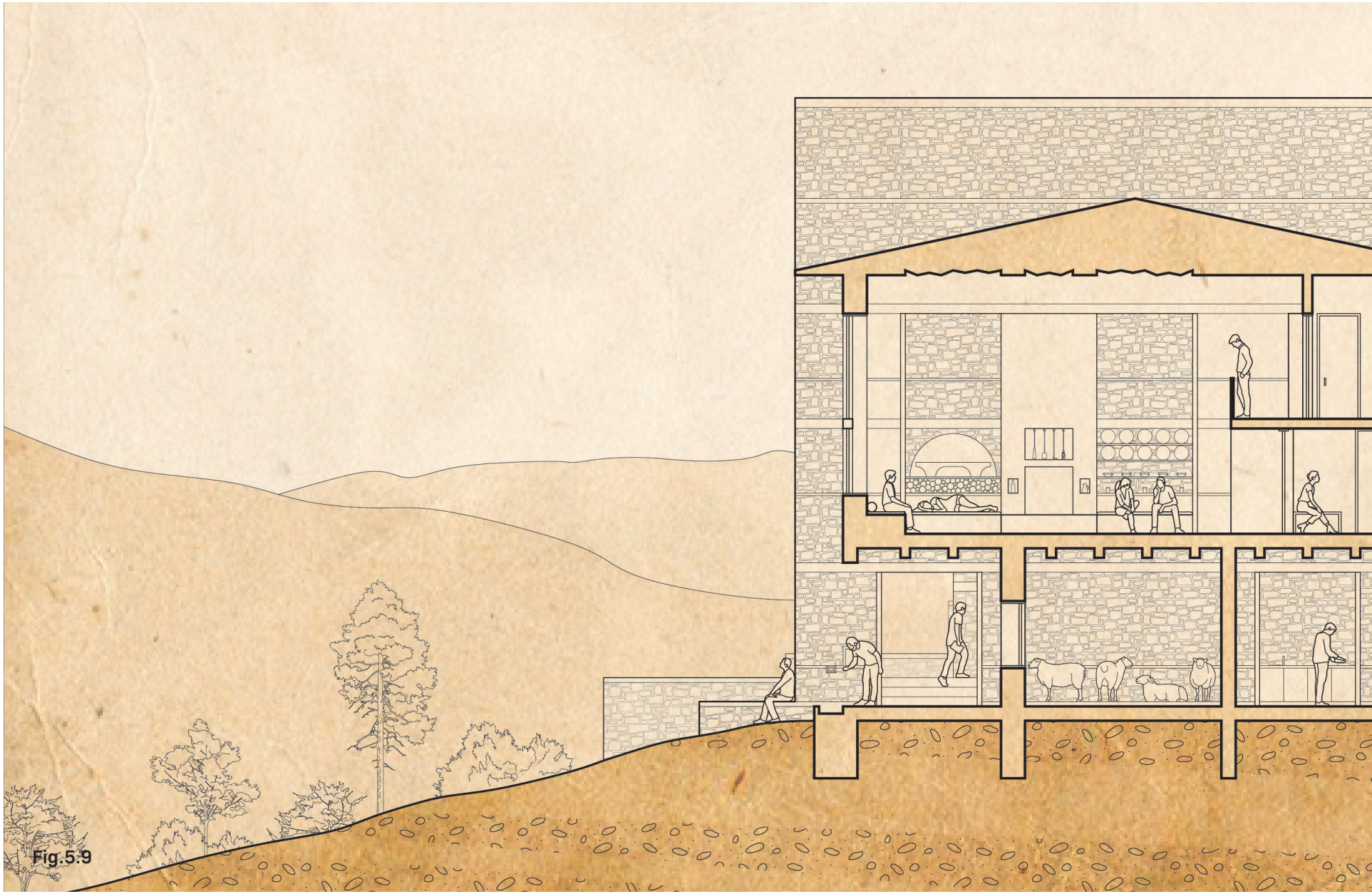


Fig.5.9



Cross Section



Fig.5.10 Front view of the building's main facade seen from the path leading up to the mountain. The overall form of parallel stone walls is inspired by the upturned layers of strata on the mountain's ridge - with the program contained between the different layers. The main stone walls, besides being composed of the mountain stone, also reuse the scattered ruins from the site - integrating the memory of the past uses within the new structure. Meanwhile, the form between the parallel stone walls takes heavy influence from the vernacular style of white plastered walls with vertical windows. Keeping to local materials, the roof is covered in stone tiles.



Fig.5.11 View of the arrival to the building from an all-terrain vehicle. From the side, the stone walls seem like sections of the hill extruded straight up - the horizontal concrete banding alternating with layers of stone reminiscent of the geologic strata. Wood beams provide shading to the parking area while also tying the stone walls to each other. The horizontal concrete bands also act as lintels and sills to create punched openings in the walls where required.

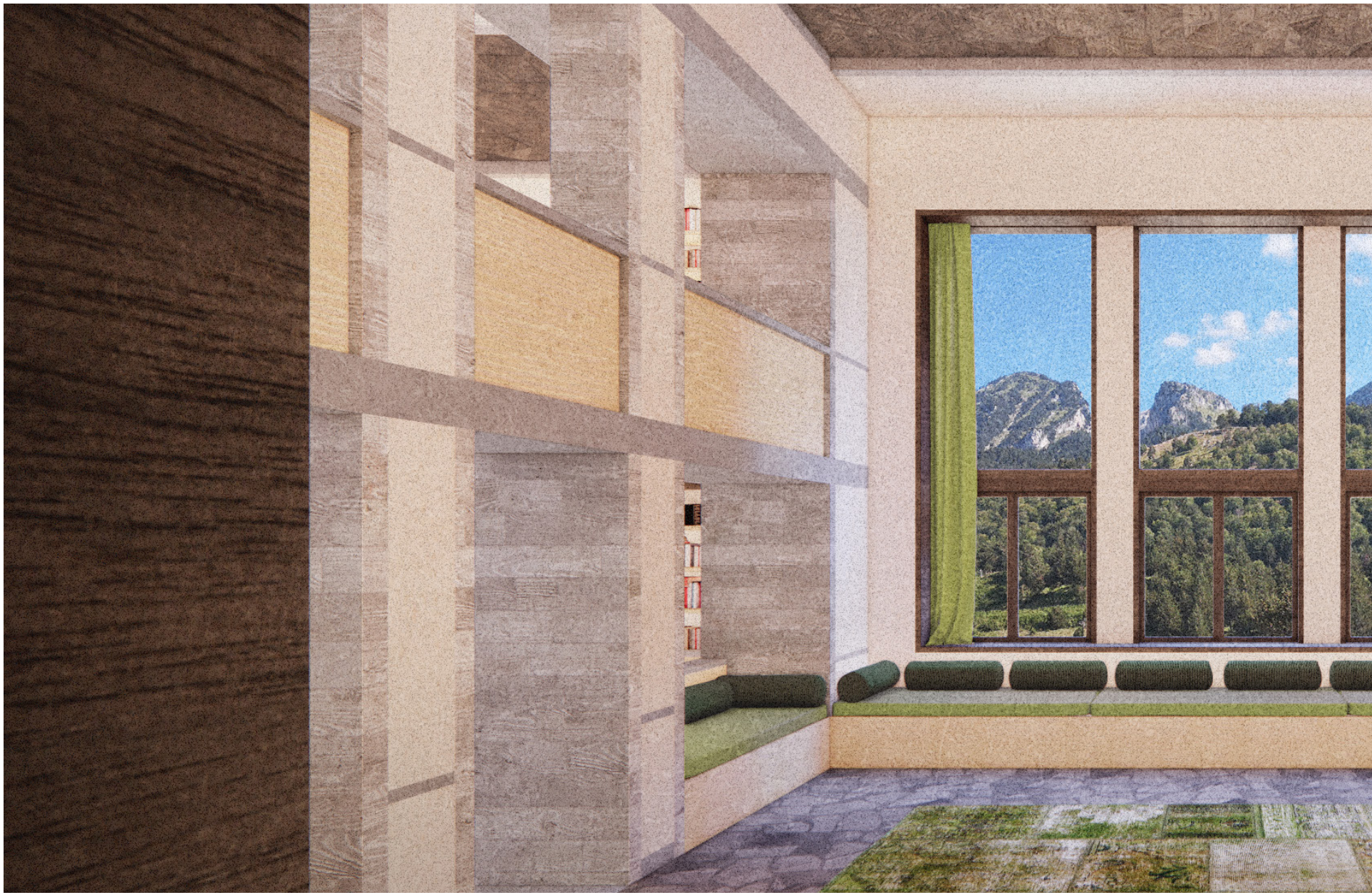




Fig.5.12 (Left) Walking through the walls you come upon a fountain spilling into a trough. Here you can refresh yourself, as the sheep drink, before continuing on your journey. Mount Shpirag is framed by the opening straight ahead. To the left and divided by the fountain representing the Osum River, is Mount Tomorr. Endlessly the fountain flows between the view of the two mountains, reminding passers of the creation myth. On the right, a sheep peeks through a window belonging to the pen.

Fig.5.13 (Right) Continuing on, you pass into "the gully". The massive stone walls frame the sky and a solitary apple tree. Could this be the magic apple tree that heals all ills and is hidden somewhere in a crag or gully on the northern summit? Curiosity and the stairs entice you forward.





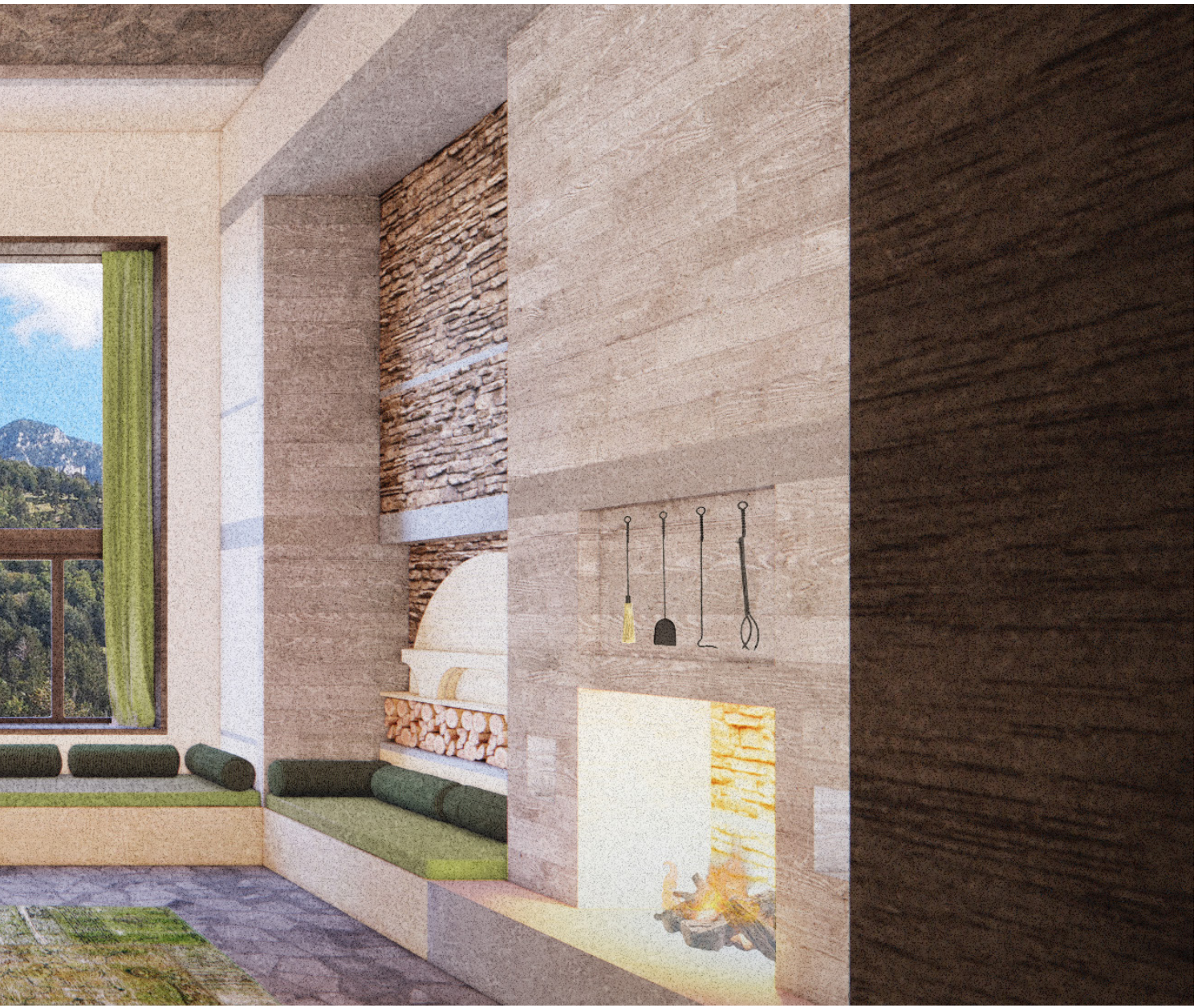


Fig.5.14 You finally arrive into the guestroom as you walk through the *musandër*. The three peaks of Tomorr's northern summit, framed by the windows, bid you a warm welcome. The fabrics and upholstery, similar to the local stone and wood, bring the natural color palette of the mountain landscape inside - rich dark pine drapes the cushions while the seating/mattresses are covered in pasture green. A gentle fire crackles in the hearth, ready to heat coffee for the guests.



Fig.5.15 View of the fireplace as guests sit around the guest room. The parallel stone walls are plastered on the interior except for where they are carved in. The concept of the niche as a ubiquitous vernacular feature is magnified in scale to extend the interior spaces while also accommodating the different programing required; whether that is sitting, sleeping, or storage. Meanwhile the horizontal concrete bands continue unperturbed on the inside as well as outside.



Fig.5.16 As dinner time rolls around, the table and dishware are removed form their usual resting place in the walls and are set up in the center of the guest room.





Fig.5.17 (Left) Slowly, the sky turns gentle shades of peach and purple in the evening, and the guest room is once again transformed to be prepared for sleeping. The cylindrical cushions for sitting are placed into the bottom shelves of the *musandër*, while pillows and linens are taken out.

Fig.5.18 (Right) Guests sleep under the night sky speckled with countless stars, undimmed by light pollution endemic to the cities. The mountain stands guard all night as its silhouette recedes into the sky.





Fig.5.19 (Left) The stairs leading up to the *mafil* are illuminated by a lightwell-niche carved into the stone wall.

Fig.5.20 (Right) The *mafil* is enclosed by a sliding screen door and the ceiling is lower than the guest room, creating a more private intimate volume. Here, in this oracular space, is contained a library and nooks for reading and enlightenment. The ceiling is treated with three sections of tessellated beechwood panels aligned with the niches in the stone wall. The geometric yet random undulation of the panels is reminiscent of the underside of a canopy rustling in the wind.









Fig.5.21 (Left) The tessellated beechwood panels continue past the *mafil* and into the main space of the guest room.

Fig.5.22 (Top) The reading nook is illuminated from above by a lightwell carved into the stone wall. Next to it on either side are two bookshelf niches also carved into the wall.



Fig.5.23 (Top) View from the gully looking past several layers of stone walls and into the outdoor dining area next to the kitchen.



Fig.5.24 (Right) View from the kitchen windows opening onto the outdoor dining area. The sill extends to create a ledge to place dishes on, and the dining table has its own built-in seating cut out of the wall.







Fig.5.25 (Far left) Host milking sheep in the sheep pen.

Fig.5.26 (Left) The milk cellar is located right behind the sheep pen - tucked into the earth where it is cool - and is used for the storage and production of various dairy and meat products. It is illuminated by a deep lightwell in the gully wall.

Fig.5.27 (Top) The work room is found on the lower level of the building. It is extended with an outdoor platform that is shaded by the roof above the outdoor dining area.



Fig.5.28 The upper level of the building corresponds with the grade at the top of the hill. Seamlessly, the horizontal concrete bands extend into the landscape, acting as pathways between the rows of the medicinal herb garden.



Fig.5.29 View of the herb room in winter. The "magic" apple tree is framed by a glass door leading out to the patio. While outside its branches are barren from the cold, on the inside, they continue dense with foliage as wood beams hanging with dried herbs. Perhaps the elusive magic apple tree, capable of curing all diseases, was just a symbol for all the medicinal herbs the mountain is famous for.





Fig.5.30 View of the back facade with Tomorr's northern summit in the background.

5.2 Conclusion

The mountains hold an immovable place in the collective memory and identity of Albanians. As the default geography, they represent a tangible and universal connection to the cultural heritage of the country. However, the ongoing rural exodus has resulted in the gradual erosion of the ancient customs and traditional practices once the lifeblood in these regions. While the allure of urban life and its conveniences often drives the rural exodus, it is important to recognize that life in the mountains is not inherently inferior to urban life. By embracing the unique opportunities and traditions offered by the mountains, communities can cultivate a balanced and sustainable way of life, much as they have done for thousands of years in harmony with the landscape. In the face of sustained exodus from mountainous regions, this thesis argues that there is something worth saving, and there is value in remaining or going back to the mountains.

Identifying Tomorr as a particularly rich place of memory, the proposed design imagines a guesthouse to host the memories of the mountain, while being hosted itself by the mountain. In recognizing vernacular architecture as the purest method for preserving memory through architecture, the guesthouse employs its usage as a tool in perpetuating cultural heritage. Within this context, the guest room emerges as a significant space for the transmission of collective memory through the ancient social custom of hospitality. It serves as a space where memories are shared, stories are told, and traditions are passed on. By incorporating vernacular usage in contemporary architecture and harnessing the guest room as a space of memory, the proposed design not only honours the past but also embraces the future.

I would like to conclude with a story from when I was departing Dardhë:

On the final morning when I was going to leave the village, my host asked me if I had ever ridden on the back of a pickup truck before. Seeing that he was one of the only rides down to the city, villagers had booked their spot on his truck weeks in advance, many of them being elderly and needing a seat. Gradually they began to show up to the village center to this de facto bus service. Being a city boy, I hadn't even thought that riding in the cargo bed was possible let alone legal, *and let alone* on the ragged dirt road leading to the village. Yet equally nervous and excited, I hopped on the back with two other villagers and a goat wrapped in a burlap sack - only its head sticking out. It let out a frightened bleat as the truck began to move and we all held on tightly to the metal railing behind the cab.

As we stood on the back of the pick-up truck, bobbing from side to side and having to duck for the occasional tree branch that

stuck out over the road, I struck up a conversation with the two villagers. After complaining to me about the state of the bumpy unpaved road, the conversation invariably turned towards Canada, and the differences between life in the city and countryside. One of the villagers' sons had told him: "I'd rather clean toilets in the city than stay here." Not because there was anything particularly wrong with 'here', but perhaps because of an intense desire to 'see the world' outside his secluded mountains, earn more money, get a more 'advanced' education, live a 'better' life, or an unexplained fear of missing out that permeates virtually every adolescent. Although I doubt cleaning toilets in the city is in any way better than being surrounded by the mountains he seemed so eager to leave.

Curious how far his son would be if he perhaps went to Canada, the villager asked me, "Can you get to Canada by train? Is it close to Turkey?" I was initially a little taken aback by his question, and not meaning to offend in my response, I tactfully told him that Canada was located north of the United States, hoping he would be more familiar with that country. The other villager prodded, "how long does it take to drive to America from Albania?"

I finally gave in after trying to not belittle their knowledge of world geography, "You can't drive there. They're across the ocean so its roughly a 9-hour flight over the Atlantic."

"Oh," they replied quietly, putting that knowledge in their back pocket in case another graduate student from Canada ever came by. We went on bouncing in the back of the pickup truck in silence for a little while after that.

In the moment, their ignorance had struck me. It seemed the complaints of a lack of quality education opportunities in the rural mountain communities weren't just complaints. But then I thought to myself, what did it matter that they didn't know where Canada or the United States were? Of what importance was it to them or their lives? The two men could probably collectively write books on different farming techniques, and their knowledge of the land and mountains would put even seasoned hikers to shame. I might have known where countries were on a map, but even without one, they knew how to get to where they needed to go.

They didn't have a lack of a quality education. Quite the opposite, they had a whole repository of knowledge in the mountains. I lingered on this thought the rest of the way until we finally reached the paved road and our bouncing smoothed to a gentle roll. Perhaps it wasn't in spite of the unpaved road that the villagers and their knowledge had survived thus far in this remote landscape. No, it was because of it, I thought to myself as I looked back to the mountains.

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