

Fortified settlements between the Ambracian Gulf and Acherontas River in Preveza

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Abstract

The prefecture of Preveza is an area that has been an ideal place to live because there are the fields (are necessary for cultivation), the mountains (important for safe landscape), the rivers (are necessary for drinking water and watering the fields) and the sea (for trade and fishing). Such a landscape is formed between Acheron river and Louros river and their tributaries. In this article we will talk about two fortified settlements near Louros river and its tributary: the castle of Rizobouni and the Kastle of Rogon. These castles are fortified settlements of antiquity and grew again in the Byzantine era and the Ottoman period. The natural environment was an important factor for the selection of these places and their continuous habitation up to the Ottoman conquest. The aim of the article is to present the ancient remains in combination with the natural landscape, to protect the antiquities and the environment, to promote tourism development without altering the environment, looking for environmental management and policies and the environmental impacts of tourism without proper organization

Keywords: Ambracian gulf, Castle of Rizobouni, Castle of Rogon, rivers, tourist development, environmental management.

1. Introduction

This paper concerns the Ambracian Gulf and Rivers Louros and Acheron, as well as the fortified sites located in this natural landscape. The presence of fortified settlements is associated with the rich natural environment of their time. Even today, the fortified sites of the Castle Rogon, the Castle of Rizovouni (Baties) and Trikastro dominate the area and can be used as centres for the tourism development and promotion of the area with respect to the natural environment.

2. The natural environment

2.1. Ambracian Gulf

Ambracian Gulf is located in northwestern Greece and its present form is the result of a long-term development, while it is also connected to the Ionian Sea through a shallow and narrow opening. In particular, it is located between the cities of Preveza and Arta. It is a semi-enclosed basin and a lagoon system consisting of twenty (20) lagoons and is also covered by deltaic deposits from the rivers Louros and Arachthos (Agorgianitis, 2007). Many lagoons are separated from

the sea by narrow sandy strips, and some have been formed from deposits of gastropods, crustaceans and bivalves (Mertzanis, 1997). These are among the few “crustacean beaches” in the Mediterranean (Daskalopoulou, 2012).

2.2. Rivers Louros and Acheron

Louros River flows from Mount Tomaros or Olytsika, which is part of the Regional Unit of Ioannina and is located near the oracle of Dodoni. It passes through limestones in the Regional Unit of Preveza, receiving a number of tributaries and spring waters and since 1954 its waters are trapped in the Artificial Hydroelectric dam of PPC Louros and flows to Michalalitsi, at the Salamoras bay in the Ambracian Gulf.

Rivers Arachthos and Louros with their sediment transport make the Ambracian Gulf an ideal environment for the development of flora and fauna. The reeds and the marshlands are home to numerous birds, such as Dalmatian pelicans, flamingos, ferruginous ducks, grebes, etc. (Intzebelis et al., 2009).

On the other side, there is River Acheron with its tributaries, Kokyto and Vouvopotamos. Acheron River also starts its journey from Ioannina and ends up in Ammoudia Preveza. The history of the river is linked to the Necromantic Oracle (archaeological site) and Hades (Saltagianni, Gousis & Siska, 2017).

3. Antiquities between Ambracian Gulf and Acheron River

Between these two rivers, Louros and Acheron, there is an intense geomorphological environment with low and higher mountain ranges and relatively narrow valleys. This area has been an ideal settlement place since antiquity, as revealed by archaeological remains both at the estuary of Acheron River and by the monuments preserved to the present day.

3.1. The fortified locations: Castle Rogon (Vouchetio) and Kastro Rizovouniou (Vaties)

We will focus on the Vouchetio-Castle Rogon and the Castle of Rizovouni-Vaties. More specifically:

-The ancient fortified settlement in Kastro Rizovouniou is in the location of ancient Vaties, the settlement of Ilian colonists that was fortified after 343 BC. During the Hellenistic times, when the settlement flourished, it was associated with Cassopaia. The region, after being destroyed by the Romans in 168 BC, had the same fate

as other continental cities. The Roman aqueduct that supplied Nikopolis with water passed through the foothills of Kastri hill while findings from late antiquity were found in the wider area, such as the Early Christian Basilica, in the place where the church of the Assumption of Virgin Mary is today. Moreover, the walls indicate interventions during the late antiquity, but probably also during the Byzantine and Ottoman times. The katholikon (major church) of the Monastery was built and painted in 1670 according to an inscription on the lintel of the west door in the church. (Dakaris, 1971, Hammond, 1967, Dimitrakopoulou, 1997)

-The fortified settlement of Castle Rogon, near Nea Kerasounta, is in the location of Vouchetio, an Ilian colony founded in the late 8th-early 7th century BC. Until the 5th century AD the hill was an island with marshland areas and served as a port. From the Classical era on it was walled with isodomic walls and towers, while the settlement gradually expanded and was fortified by means of a new polygonal wall. In the 9th century AD there is a reference to the Diocese of Rogoi, which was part of the Metropolis of Nicopolis. A bishop from Rogoi attended the Ecumenical council of 879 AD while the Diocese of Rogoi was also mentioned in the *Tactica* of both Leo the Wise and Constantine Porphyrogenitus. In the Late Byzantine era, it experienced growth as a fortified settlement and on the top of the hill, where the church of the Assumption of Virgin Mary of Monastery Rogon is located today, the Byzantine citadel expanded, with the walls still preserved to the present day standing quite tall. Thomas the Despot defended this castle in 1304, while the Byzantines also besieged it, when it was defended by Kavasilas, who together with Vasilitsis defended the independence of the continental state against the Byzantine Empire. It was consecutively occupied by the Serbs, the Albanians and the Ottomans. (Dakaris, 1971, Sotiriou, 1927, Dakaris, 1977, Sakellariou, 1997).

4. Promoting the natural and cultural environment through SWOT analysis

This area between the Ambracian Gulf and the springs of Acheron is a place of amazing beauty, inhabited from the prehistoric age to the present day. At the same time, the local economy will be strengthened so that part of the declining population could be preserved. Tourism development should be considered in harmony with and absolute respect to the natural environment. This paper examines through the analysis (Siomkos, 2013)

Strengths:

- The unsurpassed natural environment with rich flora and fauna. Rivers Louros and Acheron are famous, too.
- The archaeological sites and monuments that surround the natural environment and date back to the classical-Hellenistic era until the Ottoman times.
- Alternative tourism: religious tourism with visits to churches with rich painting decoration of post-Byzantine art, guided tours to archaeological sites etc.
- Close to well-known archaeological sites, such as Nikopolis and its museum, as well as Cassopaia

Weaknesses:

- The road network that is not well-maintained

- The archaeological sites have no visitor service facility,
- The rivers have no touring paths, except Acheron
- There are no hotels in the area to support tourism

Opportunities:

- There are new junctions scheduled in the near future close to the studied area connecting the region with Ionia Motorway
- In the summer, traditional festivals take place in many of the villages of the studied area, while the monasteries that are currently closed are open to te public

Threats:

- Deserting of the villages that lead rural settlements in Greece to decline
- The vegetation hiding the antiquities and, in conjunction with the lack of touring paths, not allowing the public to visit the archaeological sites in the area

5. Conclusions

The studied area is a “strip” between two rivers, Louros and Acheron, and the Ambracian Gulf and this makes it a region rich in flora and fauna, while the landscape keeps alternating: plain, semi-mountainous, mountainous. The promotion of Zagori (www.gnto.gov.gr/sites/default/files/files_basic_pages/e_coeotb.pd) should become a model for the development of other areas in Greece, such as the studied area.

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