

River Acheron: natural landscape and historical place-monuments

Saltagianni, E^{1*}, Gousis, Ch² And Siska, F.³

¹Archaeologist, EFA Preveza, Ethniki Antistasi, 108-110, Preveza

² Doctor, Plateia Lourou Prevezas

³ Archaeologist, EFA Preveza, Ethniki Antistasi, 108-110, Preveza

*corresponding author:

e-mail: esaltagianni@yahoo.gr

Abstract: The river Acheron was known in antiquity as the river which led the souls to Hades. The region has undergone many changes over the centuries, changes related to the size of the "Gliki Limena"¹ current bay Fanar, the exact position of Acherousian lake, which was dried after the Second World War, and of course the bed of the river itself in the classical period (eg floating Kastri). However the area, where many geological changes without completely changing the geomorphological state from ancient times to nowadays, is described by several writers and travelers from ancient to modern times.

The region of Acheron river is a cultural landscape and a place of natural beauty. A good visibility and proper use will contribute to tourism promotion and development. The development should respect the natural environment and monuments that surround the river, the history and importance of the site.

This abstract tries to show the natural landscapes and archaeological monuments and areas around the river Acheron and actions appropriate for tourism promotion and development. The abstract consists of two parts:

1. landscape, archaeological monuments and sites 2. tourist promotion of the area with respect for the monuments and landscape.

Keywords: river Acheron, antiquity, monuments, landscape, management of cultural heritage, tourism promotion and development

1. Introduction

The Acheron, one of the largest rivers in Epirus (with its tributaries Kokytos and Vouvopotamo), starts its journey from the south of Ioannina, crosses the Prefecture of Thesprotia and the Prefecture of Preveza, creating their natural boundary at a distance of over 60 km . and ends at the bay of Ammoudia where it flows into. The distance from the source to the ending is over 60 km.

The region where the river ends are shaped, ie the delta, a protected wetland.

The importance of it can be shown from the continuous living and the presence of settlements near the river and its tributaries from antiquity to nowadays. In ancient times people even believed that the river Acheron, with the help of Mercury and Charon, used to lead the souls to Hades.



Fig. 1. Acheron River ([www.http://www.preveza.gr/](http://www.preveza.gr/))



Fig. 2. Acheron River (<https://el.wikipedia.org/>)

2. Natural landscape and changes during the centuries

The region has undergone many changes over the centuries, changes related to the size of the "Gliki Limena"-current bay Fanar, the exact position of Acherousian lake, which was dried after the Second World War, and of course the riverbed in the classical period (eg floating Kastri). However, despite the geological changes the region suffered during the centuries, preserves geomorphological state of antiquity, described by many writers from antiquity to modern times.

The "Gliki Limena" in ancient times had a large capacity, as shown by both the **stranding** 150 Corinthian ships before the battle of Sivota (433 BC), and the Octavian 350 ships before the battle of (31 BC Aktion), as well as ships of Gouiskardou Roverdou in the 11th century AD. The description of "Gliki Limena" in antiquity has similarities to the bay of Ammoudia (Fanari), and differences such as the depth of the press. The bay should have been much deeper, while over the centuries the valley has been extended towards the sea because of sediment transported by Acheron for thousands of years. Silting the

¹ Gliki Limena in Greek language means Sweet Port

rivers and changing the bed of the lake Acheron turned into a marsh and finally dried in the 50's.

The river Acheron in Antiquity was navigable to the place that is called Kasti on the inside of Acherousian Lake and its mouth was in its current location in Ammoudia, in a former period was about three kilometers southerly, in Kerentza where the river current had opened up rift in the coastal mountain range. The riverbed as shown by geological cores was probably moved to its modern bed on the south side of the ancient Acropolis Kasti after 1500 BC and before the beginning of the 19th AD century.

Most of the plain north of the mouth of Acheron was created in modern times from deposits along the coast. That bay previously stretched at least 3-4 km eastwards in the hinterland (Besonen M., 1997).

The Acherousia lake, known as Aornos lake, which means the lake that gives off poisonous fumes, was icy and lifeless. It formerly was located in the east of the hill of Ephyra to Kasti.

According to estimates, several deposits along the shoreline from Roman times onwards decreased the depth of the port ("Gluki Limena"), located west of Ephyra in prehistoric and historic times and the sea reached west of prehistoric Acropolis, probably to the hillside that is now known as Punta, right on the south of Kasti. It began to form in this area in part perhaps over the modulated physical port, the Acherousia lake, possibly after 800 BC. Q an area between the hills south Ephyra and the Necromanteio.

3. Current situation: the place nowadays

Acheron (river) starts from the mountains of Souli and ends in the bay of Ammoudia. It forms a unique landscape with rushing water, flowing from sources and cliffs and moves towards the sea and rivers forming marshes, dunes, reeds and general riparian vegetation, mainly bushes. Generally an important wetland is formed by the state and action of the river.

The plant species in the "delta" area are diverse, although during the recent years have received interventions by the human factor (crop intensification and infrastructure).

The land and sea animals and the birds are numerous fish (eg trout. Dusk), reptiles (viper, potamochelona), mammals (eg wolf, otter, weasel), birds.

The area is protected by the European network of protected areas Natura 2000 (GR2140001 code), of the Ministry of Environment (OG 7 / B / 01.13.1977: Acheron bed and tributaries Kokytos and Vouvopotamou are historical sites and particularly natural beauty) and the archaeological law 3028/2002 "For the Protection of Antiquities and in general of Cultural Heritage".



Fig. 3. [Eurasian penduline tit](#)



Fig. 4. Acheron River

nest above the river, (<https://en.wikipedia.org>) <https://en.wikipedia.org>

4. Archaeological landscape-monuments - settlements

4.a. Acheron River-Lake Acherousia: summary report by foreigners and Greeks writers

The area of Acheron was important for writers from antiquity to modern times.

The "Psefodoskylakas" in "Periplus" mentions the port named "Elea", which flows into the Acheron and Acherousia lake. The Acheron flows into the lake Acherousia.

In Argonauts, the seer Phineas advises the Argonauts to cross the Acheron (Apollonius Rhodius, Argonautica).

In Homer's Odyssey (k) is mentioned the river Acheron alongside Pyriphlegethon and Kokkyto.

Thucydides, the first historian, mentioned the Acheron River and Acherousia lake and described the region as region of Eleatis.

References to the Acheron are in the works of the three great tragic poets of antiquity and Plato.

In Roman period Strabo describes the region and says that by the small islands of Sivota opposite the Epirus is Cheimerion and "Gluki Limena", where the river Acheron poured, which stems from Acherousia lake and accepts many rivers sweetening the waters of the bay. Above this bay there is Kichyros, ancient Efyra city of Thesprotia.

Later Lucian refers to the river Acheron and Acherousia lake and places Nekromanteio Babylon (Dialogues of the Dead) and Pausanias mentions that Homer Hades is in Thesprotia and gave the names of the rivers.

Dio Cassius, a Roman historian of the second and third centuries AD, said that the "Glyki Limena" is the palace where Octavius (31 BC) anchored his ships a few days before the battle of Actium with Mark Antony and Cleopatra.

Several centuries later, there are reports of the region in "Synekdemos" of Hierocles, as well as in church sources of the time, mostly about the city Euroia. This city probably was nowadays in Choika or Gluki while the new location (after displacement of the population due to the barbarian invasions) was Kasti (Pandosia) or Ioannina

In 1084 A.D., as mentioned by Anna Comnena, the fleet of Norman Duke of Apulia and Calabria "Robert Gouiskardou" anchored in Port Glyky.

The modern image of the area is very different, at least as far as the port size of the region of Phanari and the non-existence of Acherousian lake, but there are still similarities.

In recent years, travellers, archaeologists and others described the monuments in the region of Acheron, like William Martin Leake (Travels in northern Greece), Hammond (Epirus), Dakaris (excavation in Necromantio) and Muselimis.

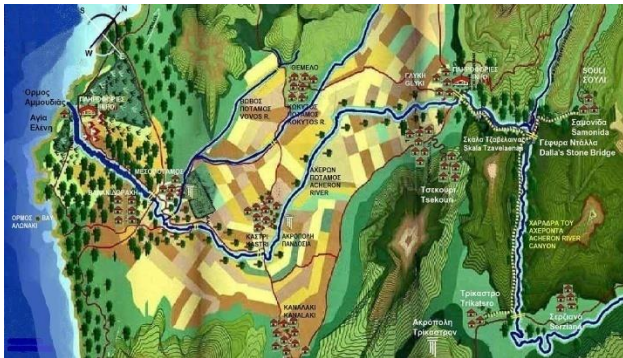


Fig. 5. Acheron river: map (<https://el.wikipedia.org>)

4.b.Antiquities near Acheron

Near the river there were colonies of the Mycenaean period, such as Efyra, Ilia colonies of the 7th century BC, like Pandosia and the Necromanteion, famous by poet Homer (the Oracle of Acheron). The area was important in the Byzantine era and modern times, the surrounding area was the place of confront between the Venetians and Ottomans (Margariti, Parga), Ali Pasha, local leaders (agas) and the village of Souli.

A brief presentation of archaeological sites and monuments around river Acheron

From the source to the mouth of Acheron, there are important archaeological sites that offer great prestige in the region and make it a tourist attraction.

In the West of the Acheron sources there is the spectacular ancient acropolis . with polygonal walls called **Triakastro**, an area that belongs to the Prefecture of Preveza.

Glyki, probably in the wider area of the ancient Euroia and the region of the Bishop Donatos (later Saint) where during the first centuries of the Byzantine Empire, an early Christian church probably the great basilica of St. Donatos of the Middle Byzantine period was built.

Noteworthy are the buildings of modern times in the wider area (bridge, Ottoman fortresses etc.). **The villages of Souli** are also associated with the residents activities of the plain around the Acheron.

The bottom of the river Acheron and the valley of Kokkyto formed **ancient Eleatida** which was the land around the city of Elea (Thesprotia) in Epirus. In this region there are some of the most important archaeological sites in the Prefecture of Preveza.

The ancient settlement of Pandosia which is surrounded by a polygonal wall that was built in the 4th century BC. Pandosia was founded by Ilia settlers (and other like Batiai, Elatreia and Bouchetion). In 343/342 BC Philip gave this region to Molossos Alexander. The foundation course of the city dates back to the 7th century BC and then. It was systematically inhabited in Roman times when it regained part of its power. Some scholars mentions that this place is the New Euroia, a city of the byzantine times.

The ancient **Nekromantio** which used to work in the past during the ancient times (forecasts, connecting people with the dead) was abandoned after 167 BC with the arrival of the Romans. Its function was previously the hellenistic period. The ruins that exist until now are dating back from the hellenistic period.

The Hellenistic complex is surrounded by fortification wall made with blocks at the polygonal system. The rectangular complex was built in two periods. It consists of the main temple, treadmills, square space, the maze and the central courtyard surrounded by eight rectangular rooms. It is the most famous oracle of the underworld gods. In the early 18th AD century (during the Ottoman occupation) a fortified house (koulia) was erected on top of the hill and, over the main part of the sanctuary, the church St. John the Baptist.



Fig. 7.Nekromanteion, <http://www.preveza.gr/>

Fig.6.Nekromanteion, <http://odysseus.culture.gr/>

Homer Efyra is on the hill in the North of Necromanteio. It was fortified by the Mycenaean settlers in the 14th BC century with three Cyclopean walls. The Efyra is the most important Mycenaean settlement in Epirus and is located on the hill Xylokaastro, entering the plain of Acherousian. In ancient times this place was suitable for trade to West (Italy). It was also on the communication network with the hinterland, especially the oracle of Dodona.

The **monastery of St. Demetrios** in the region of Kipseli, in Fanari, in the Prefecture of Preveza, is an important monument of the Late Byzantine period near the Acheron River and its tributaries. It has a preserved inscription of the name Michael. Some scholars believe that it refers to the founder Michael II Komnenos - Doukas, ruler of Epirus or according to other scholars it refers to Michael Zoriano, officer Michael B .



Fig. 8. The monastery of St. Demetrios in region of Kipseli, <https://www.preveza.gr/>

Between the bay of Ammoudia and Kerentza peninsula of Saint Helena, traces of fortifications (Hellenistic distinguished). It is very likely due to the strategic position of the fortifications to be associated with the control of the two ports of Sand and Pandosia.

In the peninsula of St Helena (an area between the bay of Ammoudia and Kerentza) there area ancient fortification

probably the Hellenistic period. It is very likely due to the strategic position of the fortifications to be associated with the control of the two ports of Sand and Pandosia.

According to the findings of the area **north of the Bay Alonaki, close to Acheron, human activity** covers a wide chronological period. The stone artefacts represent both the upper Palaeolithic and the Neolithic. During the Middle and Late Bronze Age, the site occupies almost the entire hill, and artifacts of these periods were detected across the region above the plain.

During the Ottoman period, the area around the Acheron was known for its action mainly of Souli. The area near the Ammoudia, known as **Splantza** became known for the battle between Kyriakos Mavromichali and small Greek forces. The Greek force if tried and did not succeed to open the road to Kiafa to send aid and supplies of Souli, who for the second time took the road of exile.

5. Tourism promotion and development-Proposals

This area combines natural beauty and archaeological interest. It is an area that historically has been present since prehistoric times to the modern Greek history. The house (chateaus) like Koulia in Necromantio and the region, ie in Paramythia (Koulia) in Margariti (mansions in the type of tower) attract the architectural interest in the houses of the Ottoman period with common features in almost all the Balkan countries.

The proper utilization of the wider area of the river Acheron, which is a remarkable natural, historical and archaeological landscape, without harming the environment and monuments, is the duty of the younger in order to to make known the region in the world.

It is also an area that is a source of important information in the field of environmental education and history.

The exploitation requires measures and infrastructure such as river cleaning works and arrangement of the bed to prevent flooding, common navigation routes, cycling, bird watching and other animals, enclosures and fencing work, brochures and signs to meet the naturalistic and archaeological routes that combine the beauty of the landscape, environmental education with rich animal kingdom and plant life in the region. All these must be examined simultaneously with the archaeological monuments in the area, such as the early Christian basilica in Glyki, Necromanteio, Ephyra, Pandosia. Church of St. Dimitrios and Hellenistic fortifications in Saint Helena.

Alongside the development will protect both the antiquities and the riverbed.



Fig. 9. Acheron river: rafting, <http://www.ethnos.gr/>

The combination of the space with monuments, the updating of the local and not only society, the advertising by professionals and the development of tourism promotion and management of the Prefecture of Epirus, will contribute to the publicity of this space and monuments and will bring revenue to the state. Part of this revenue can be given for the protection and promotion needs of both the river, the wetland formed and the adjacent monuments.

Alternative tourism will also increase the revenue of the local community by reinforcing the possibility of economic survival in remote areas of the Greek territory.



Fig.10. Acheron river, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2f/Acheron_today.JPG

A SWOT analysis: development and tourist promotion

A SWOT analysis will help in the development and tourist promotion of the area while protecting the cultural heritage:

Strengths:

1. Tourist development many tourists who come for the beaches
2. Utilization of river activities
3. Connection of archaeological monuments with the river Acheron through routes Browsing
4. Utilization of Parga tourists, which is a large number of tourists

Weaknesses:

1. Nearby tourist places can gather tourists while these areas are left untapped
2. Antiquities and river belong to two different administrative areas and exploitation can be hampered
3. Absence of tourist accommodation capable of serving a large number of tourists
4. Roads and medical coverage

Opportunities:

1. The monuments covering a period from the ancient to the modern Greece
2. The proximity to other areas that are known worldwide
3. The beaches and the natural environment of the river Acheron

Threats

1. The degradation of the natural environment
2. The potential of the area in relation to a large number of tourists

6. Conclusions

This area should be developed tourist. The development should respect the human and natural environment.

References

Foreign Language:

Besonen Richard Marc (1997), "The Middle and Late Holocene Geology and Landscape Evolution of the Lower Acheron River Valley, Epirus, Greece", Minnesota University

Besonen Mark, Rapp George, Jing Zhichun (2003), "The Lower Acheron River Valley: Ancient Accounts and the changing Landscape," στο James Wiseman and Konst. Zachos εκδ. "Landscape Archaeology in Southern Epirus, Greece", Hesperia Supplement No 32, ASCA, 199-234.

Hammond, N. G. L. (1967), Epirus. The Geography, the Ancient Remains, the History and the topography of Epirus and Adjacent Areas, Oxford

Leake W., Travels in Northern Greece,

Tartaron, T. F. (2004), Bronze Age Landscape and Society in Southern Epirus Greece, BAR 1290, Oxford

Wiseman J. (1998), *Rethinking the "Halls of Hades"*, Archaeology 51 (3) ,12

Greek Language:

Dakaris, pp. I (1972), Thesprotia "Ancient Greek cities", 15, Athens

Dakaris, S. (1993), The Nekyomanteio Acheron, Athens

Zachos, Kon. (1990), AD 1990, 45, B1, p. 250

Preka-Alexandri, K. (1989), SC 1989, 44, Time, p. 313-314 & Tab. 170d.

Papadopoulos Ath., Proceedings of the Archaeological Society 1978 p.107, 1979, s.119 - 120, 1980 s.44, 1981 p. 78, 1982 p. 89-90, 1983 p. 81 -82.1984 p. 122-124, 1986, p. 101-102, 1987, p. 125

Papadopoulos Th. I., Kontorli, L. (2003), Prehistoric Archaeology Epirus Ionian islands, Ioannina

Sakellariou, MW (1997), 4000 years Epirus Greek history and culture (1997) Editorial Athens, Athens