

Statement of Significance

The Bridge of Arta is the most important of all Greek stone bridges for its rare architecture and the legends about it spread all over the Balkan peninsula. With a length of 145 meters and four uneven arches, the bridge of Arta joins the two banks of Arachthos. The length of the Bridge of Arta is 145 meters, but soils covered a large part of it. The asymmetry of the four semicircular arches, neither of which has the same diameter as the others, and the smaller arches add aesthetic value. The width of the cobbled pathway, which also rises asymmetrically, reaches 3.75 meters.

According to a local scholar, the pedestals up to the high of the arches maybe date to the Despotate of Epirus. **The construction of the high arch, which was collapsed, traced back to the Ottoman period.** The differences in the masonry are convincing evidence, that the bridge did not build in the 17th century for the first time. On the contrary with the upper part, which is a construction of the Ottoman period, the bases are built with a characteristic technique of the Classical and Hellenistic period, the opus isodomum (ισόδομο σύστημα). There is no evidence for the existence of an older bridge at the same location. However, archaeologists believed that this location would have been used since antiquity and the Byzantine period for transportation and trade necessities. The bridge, as we know it today, is supported maybe to bases dated to Classic and Hellenistic period, whilst the upper part dropped down and built again several times. The last repair seems to take place at the beginning of the 17th century and is this, which tradition mentions. The craftsmen of bridges, köprülü (from the Turkish word korpu=bridge) originated from Epirus However, new archaeological data suggest that the river Arachthos did not run through the same location in antiquity (Source: Ephorate of Antiquities of Arta). In the Classical and Byzantine period, the river Arachthos was navigable for smaller vessels until the vessels reached the fortification, thus the transport needs would have been met also in this way. Arachthos river, which today flows under the Bridge of Arta, was navigable up to the Castle of Arta in the times of the Medieval State of Epirus. The massive pedestals of the bridge evidence the many attempts carried out, probably since the time of King Pyrrhus according to the opinion of many scholars. Every effort, however, was "suffocated" by the impetuous Arachthos. **The human and animals' losses made necessary the permanent constructions.** Usually, the architects chose a narrow spot of the river, as the short distance on both banks and the stability of the ground was favored the foundation. The case of the Bridge of Arta was different, as the vast plain of Arta offered only soft and flat soil ground, which made all the efforts of foundation and repairs difficult (Μαντάς,1984). Due to this flimsiness, oak and cedar trunks were used to support the stone foundations of the bridge.

Annexation of Arta to the Kingdom of Greece

In 1881, the Arachthos river functioned as a natural border between the Kingdom of Greece and the Ottoman Empire.

In 1881, when Arta was annexed Greece, the bridge was the border between the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Greece. The two-story neoclassical building at the western end of the bridge - built in 1864 by an Austrian architect and now houses the folklore museum - was originally used as a Bridge outpost and later - after 1881 - as a border post by Ottomans. In the late 1930s, concrete additions were added next to the ancient pedestals to support the original wooden bridge, which the German occupiers reinforced with rail beams for the passage of their vehicles. In 1945 a regular railway bridge was built which in combination with its coarse cement foundations destroyed the northern side of the Old Bridge. Only a few years ago, the monument got rid of these "malignant tumors" and with the fixing works, it regained its original shine (Γιαννέλος, 2003).

The two-story neoclassical building next to the fertile plain of Arta (view from the west bank), which was built in 1864 by an Austrian architect, functioned initially as a Bridge bastion. With the annexation of Arta in 1881, the building functioned as a Turkish border inspection post. It was the 96th Ottoman station of Arachthos Bridge.

Mythology

In regards to the myth on the construction of the Bridge of Arta, which requires the master-builder to wall up his wife within the structure, has given 333 variations alone in the territory of present-day Greece and many more variations in the Balkans and South-East Europe (the folk-ballade of the walled-up wife). According to scholars, the Arta folk-ballade has its origins in the Greek tragedy and more particularly is liaised to the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, daughter of Agamemnon, in order for the goddess Artemis (Diana) to allow the ships to set sail for Troy. This cultural trait has been maintained and transferred to Europe via the Greco-Roman pantomime.

The interpretation of the myth

As many great human achievements also the construction of the Bridge is a "super-human" achievement and as such it has to clearly demonstrate the tremendous toll it had to take in order to be realized. As in the case of Iphigeneia, whose sacrifice, was an ultimate request of the Gods to her father and military leader of the expedition. The acting Agamemnon resembles the acting Abraham, from whom God requires the sacrifice of his son. Not just any sacrifice, e.g., an animal, or even a human, but the victim shall be from the bloodline of the leader. Only in this way can be understood at a cognitive and emotional level of the myth, the magnitude of the act and the greatness, the impact of the achievement at the level of the myth.

WWII detonation attempt

On September 27, 1944, when the Germans withdrew after their crimes at the Massacre of Kommeno, they wanted to blow up the Church of Panaghia Paregoretissa, Saint Theodora, and the Stone Bridge of Arta as Vasileios G. Kontodimas, a relative of a freedom fighter, narrates. But the plan was leaked by the Gestapo Lieutenant Ludwig Lunik and quickly the local Chiefs of National Resistance reacted. A secret meeting at the Saint George of Glykorrizou Artas took place. The Germans were free to leave without block if they didn't target the bridge among other targets. They attached explosives only to the legendary Bridge of Arta, but with the agreement that the explosives will never explode. Indeed, the monument remained untouched. The bridge was once again saved, as the haunted master mason's wife has protected it (Σχισμένο, 2000). The former mayor of Arta

Vayas reports that the Gestapo officer Ludwig Lunik liaised with a local girl, which was afterward shot, convinced his superiors to allow him to execute the task. Lunik has blown up the Imaret, so as to have the clatter heard. Both Lunik and his superior, who was responsible for Filippiada, did not follow the German troops but surrendered to EDES, who sent them to Ioannina. Of their further fate, nothing is known (Báγιας, 2004:267).

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