

**EXPLORING THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF MESSOLONGHI-
AETOLIKO AREA FOR THE CREATION OF THE ECO-
MUSEUM «PORT MUSEUM OF AETOLIKO»**





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Preface

It is a great honor for ERFC to undertake the task of promoting the Sacred Town of Messolonghi and the wider region as a quality tourist attraction within the framework of the European project MUSE which is co-funded by the Interreg Greece-Italy 2014-2020 Programme. The project's driving forces are the new ecomuseum of Aetoliko, which will be constructed and equipped under the responsibility of the Municipality of the Sacred Town of Messolonghi, and, beyond of that, the development of collaborative actions with the local stakeholders in attracting high quality tourism and the sustainable development of the wider region.

Starting from a "bottom up" exploration of the cultural identity of the region, along with the participation of the citizens themselves, we will try to respond with a sense of responsibility and respect to this difficult task. For this purpose, we launched a public consultation and we addressed an open call to the citizens and institutions of the wider region of Messolonghi-Aetoliko. Anyone who wants to add other items or suggest other events can email us at projects@erfc.gr.

President of ERFC
Nikos Petropoulos

Introduction

During the exploration of the cultural identity of the Messolonghi-Aetoliko region we attempted to capture and define those points which will play a decisive role in the creation of a port museum in the area of the ex "Exedra" in Aetoliko. These points will prove useful for the creation of a network between three ecosystems of Greece and Italy in Aetoliko, Corfu and Tricase. It should be noted that the development of the aforementioned network has led to the close cooperation of ERFC and the city of Messolonghi with the Italian project partners, while the Tricase municipality and the Bari Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari (CIHEAM-IAMB) have cooperated with Corfu's Port Authority. The axes that will delineate the common ground among these three ecosystems are: their geographical location, their environmental characteristics, their history and their cultural heritage, both material and immaterial.

The emergence of common points of reference of the Messolonghi - Aetoliko lagoon complex - history, tradition and environmental and cultural wealth- strengthens the potential of a sustainable development model that could be realized through the creation of the port museum of Aetoliko.

Methodological Framework

The exploration of the region's cultural identity was based on examining the European methodological practices for creating an eco-museum, especially Italy's useful practices, and on critically reviewing the existing bibliography. Particular emphasis was placed on local research in which local cultural and environmental factors were intertwined, while citizens and professionals from different sectors as well as the scientific community engaged in an open dialogue. The local community's involvement through interviews, actions and interactions, assisted in recording and imprinting the region's cultural identity by the assigned research group. The main research qualitative method used was based on focus groups.

More specifically, the focus group research approach refers to "a carefully organized debate, designed to draw perceptions and beliefs in a defined research topic within a permissive, non-threatening environment"(Isari and Pourkos, 2015). It offers a way for listening and learning from others. Focus groups are not group interviews with an interviewer asking questions and respondents simply answering them. Focus groups are group discussions in which participants are invited to talk to each other about a particular subject through either a "vertical" interaction process i.e. interaction

between the researcher and the participants, or more frequently through a "horizontal interaction" conducted among group's members. Moreover, focus groups produce data which bring researchers face to face with the multilevel and dynamic nature of the human perception as well as the contradictions and variable impressions evident in the respondents' views, feelings and experiences.

Even though the term "culture" has attracted various connotations over the years, experts converge in a definition of the term as expressing and serving the needs of a particular society at a specific moment of its historical course. Therefore, in order to understand the region's cultural identity, we relied on criteria that are considered objective such as common origins, genealogy, language, culture, religion and social institutions. Our interest is focused on the collective memory and the way in which a community maintains memories and its past.

It should be noted that our goal in this project is not to conduct an anthropological research, but rather to look at how the region can bring out and effectively use its rich cultural heritage in order to become an attractive tourist attraction. In other words, our research focuses on examining the multiple ways by which the region can adapt to the ever-changing market conditions, by taking advantage of opportunities presented, maintain its vitality and become a pole of quality tourism attraction. Finally, this project focuses on examining the multiple ways through which the region could identify and improve possible strengths and weaknesses while respecting the locals' needs and aspirations towards a common vision for the region's development.

Special Thanks

We would like to thank all the citizens who have supported our efforts, especially the following: the researchers Mrs Eleni Karanikola- Tsouvela and Mrs Margarita Papamitropoulou for providing us data and useful material regarding the local festivity of Ai-Symios and the identity of Messolonghi, data that proved very useful in constructing the area's profile. Mr Nikolaos Kordosis, founder of the Center of Speech and Art "Diexodos", for his discussions and his support in making the library of "Diexodos" available for house meetings for the citizens and locals. The tour guide Mr Georgios Apostolakos for his knowledge and passion for the history and the cultural background of the region, the president of the Byron Enterprise of Messolonghi, Mrs Rodanthi-Roza Florou; Ms Olga Daskali for her valuable information regarding the

region's important historical figures; the shipbuilder Mr Andreas Vilios for his passion for traditional shipbuilding and for the interview he gave us; Mr Ioannis Xatzis, director of DIEK of Messolonghi; the philologist Mrs Olga Giannakogeorgou, responsible for the Environmental Education Center, for her kind intention to implement educational environmental actions in the proposed eco-museum; Mr Fotis Pergantis and Mr Ioannis Selimas, President and Coordinator, respectively, of the Managing body of the Lagoons of Messolonghi and Akarnanian mountains, for the conversations, the photo albums, and for their active interest for the eco-museum and its operation; Mr George Rompolas from the Chamber of Aetoloakarnania· Mr Alexandros Panagiotopoulos and his associates in the "Messolonghi by Locals" initiative· Mr Nikos Xatzis from the Messolonghi Sailing Club· Mr Jo Mennen from the Messologgi Marina S.A.; the members of the cultural association "ANATOLIKO"; the Association of "Ai Symios" fest; the Cultural Association of Panaetolio and, last but not least, the philologists Mr Tasos Skarmoutsos and Mrs Sofia Lanara from the Cultural Center of the Municipality as well as all the staff of the Municipality of the Sacred Town of Messolonghi that contributed to our effort.

Aetoloakarnania: profile of the area

Aetoloakarnania, a place that seems endless, is the largest county of Greece and it occupies an area of 5.461km². It was officially named as the «County of Aetolia and Akarnania» by the decree of April 1833. Nowadays the county consists of seven municipalities. The county's total population is 224.429 people.



One county, two identities; Aetolia and Akarnania are united on the banks of Acheloos and they have been writing their common history for centuries. It is seldom that someone visits an area that reveals its beauty in so many different sceneries and alternate landscapes. Endless lagoons and mountain routes, tourist coastal forests and ancient states, natural and artificial lakes, stone bridges and picturesque villages, all appear in the area. Its three large rivers, Acheloos, Evinos and Mornos, its five large lakes, the hillsides, the forests and the beaches collaboratively construct an amazing landscape mosaic, representative of the whole county.

Since September 1833, the capital of the county is the Sacred City of Messolonghi, the «homeland for every free man», a city that moved the public opinion worldwide with its sacrifice and marked the end of the Greek Revolution.

Perhaps the most developed touristic area of Aitoloakrnanian is Nafpaktos, with its picturesque harbor and castle, a city with a historical background that has linked its name with the famous Lepanto Naval Battle that changed the course of history.



In continuation, Thermo is the homeland of Kosmas Aetolos, who was a tireless missionary of Education. The ancient city and the political and religious center of the ancient Aetolia are found in Thermo, where the new archaeological museum is located. A route to Trichonida, the largest lake in the Greek territory, starts from Thermo.



Between Trichonida and the smallest lake Lisimachia, Agrinio is found, the great residential and economical center of Aetoloakarnania. Above Agrinio rises Panaetoliko, the natural border of Aetolia and Evritania and a paradise for trekkers. As the route

continues the three artificial lakes of Acheloos appear: the lakes Kremaston, Kastrakiou and Stratou. Near the lake Stratou another ancient city emerges, named Stratos, along with the temple of Zeus and an ancient theater. Next stop is Amphilochia or the legendary «Karvasaras» as still preserved in popular memory.

Guests can also visit the ancient Limnea, the historical monasteries of Panagia in Retha and Agia Paraskevi in Varetada, the villages of mountainous Valtos such as Thiamos and Empesos until Perdikaki, the Vrouviana and Avlaki all the way to the border with the neighboring county of Evritania. The mountainous route is difficult, but the beauty of the landscape, especially the Acheloos meander, as it moves between the mountains, composes images that could be difficult to describe in words.

The west side of Aetoloakarnania from Vonitsa and Palero to Mytikas and Astakos, is quite different from what has been seen so far in the county. The Acarnania Mountains stand out in the heart of the historic province of Xiromero and shape the everyday life in the locals, thanks to their springs' rich waters. The picturesque and peaceful town of Vonitsa with its Byzantine castle promises calmness and relaxation, the castles of Griva and Agios Georgios offer a beautiful view of the passage from Sterea to Lefkada, while in the more touristic Palero a more cosmopolitan vibe emerges and Lefkada is its background.

In continuation, the coastal route leads to the picturesque and sheltered harbors of Xiromero, creating links with the Ionian Islands: the Mytikas harbor with its ancient city of Alizia and the Astakos harbor, with the traces of the castle of Dragamestos. The route is completed at the starting point, the Messolonghi lagoon, which in one of the most atmospheric landscapes of Aetoloakarnania.

Access to the county by land and sea

The existing infrastructure favors the county's connection with the rest of Greece. The "Charilaos Trikoupi Bridge" at the straits of Rio Antirio is the main gate to the county. There is also a tunnel bridge in the narrow streets of Aktion- Preveza. The Ionian road plays a major role in connecting the county with Epirus, Egnatia Odos and the Ionian Islands. According to international standards, the large port of PlatygiAli Astakos is a key transit center, while the Aktio Airport offers further connections with the rest of Greece and tourism development.



Finally, the development of the Messolonghi's Marina, which is an ideal point for those engaged in marine tourism in the Ionian and Corinthian bay, is the key to attracting quality tourism and investments in the Messolonghi-Aetoliko area if combined with an intelligent strategic planning (Development Masterplan).



Natural Environment

Aetoloakarnania, as we previously mentioned, is an extremely varied region. Extensive mountain volumes are intertwined with river valleys, lakes and alluvial plains ending up in rocky shores, beaches and wetland. The main mountain ranges of the county are the Acarnanian Mountains, Makrynoros, the Valtos Mountains, Panaetoliko Mountain and Rigani.

Aetoloakarnania, due to its geographical location, is a recipient of large watercourse basins. Two large rivers cross the land, the Acheloos river and the mythical Evinos (Fidaris) river.

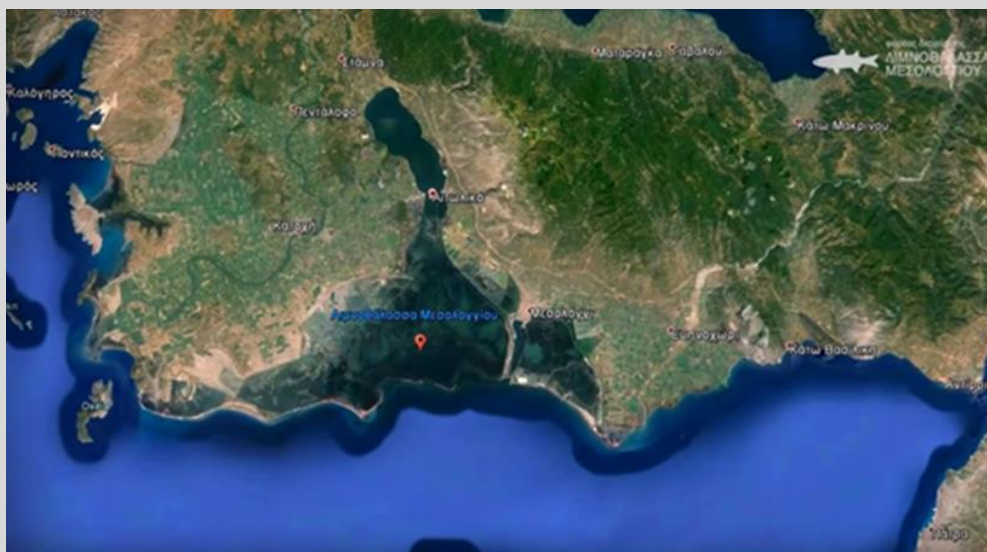


Aetoloakarnania experienced an intense geological change in time. More specifically, a large draft was created from Amvrakikos to Arakinthos Mount, which gradually began to evolve until the creation of four large lakes: Amvrakia, Ozeros, Lysimachia and the largest lake of Trichonida covering 97.000 acres.

The alluviums of Acheloos and Evinos in Messolonghi –Aetoliko- Iniades have created a truly «promised land», whose largest proportion is irrigated nowadays. This lowland extends to a cluster of wetlands of Messolonghi – Acheloos. Here someone could find the single largest Mediterranean lagoon of 145.000 acres, parcels, sand mountains, salt marshes, reeds, hilly islets and the longest coast of Greece, Loros, which is 14 km long.

The lagoon complex of Messolonghi-Aetoliko

The lagoon complex of Messolonghi- Aetoliko, in the south of Aetoloakarnania, is considered to be one of Europe's most important natural coastal systems in terms of ecological and environmental interest.



It consists of the lagoons Vorios and Diavlos Klisovas, Klisovas, Central Messolonghi, Aetoliko, Tholi and Palaiopotamos. The wider area has been designated as a National Park (K.Y.A. 22306/006, ΦΕΚ 477/31/5/2006). The entire coastal wetland area is protected by the RAMSAR International Convention, it is part of the NATURA 2000 Network and it covers a lagoon complex of 150.000 acres. Moreover, the lagoon cluster of Messolonghi-Aetoliko forms an integral part of Greece's largest wetlands, comprising areas that are distinguished by their great biological, ecological, aesthetic, scientific and environmental value. Finally, the lagoon cluster of Messolonghi-Aetoliko is the largest lagoon cluster in Greece and the second largest in Mediterranean Europe.

Furthermore, the lagoon cluster is divided by a coastal frieze created within the floods of the rivers Evinos and Acheloos in the high seas of the Patraikos Gulf. The lagoon's depth reaches up to six meters, while its waters are mainly shallow. The shallow depth near the shores makes the place ideal for salt evaporation ponds.

The area is known for its dense bird population and fishpond, while its shallow waters harbor plants that feed tens of thousands of ducks, dunes, cormorants and

seagulls. The high presence of birds of prey, such as the red kite and the imperial eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) is evident in the area.

The lagoon's landscape also includes the ship model "gaita", aquaculture and "pelades" buildings. In other words, the area includes boats, specifically made for shallow waters, natural fish farms and the wooden huts for fishermen, built on the water.



Through various forms of organization (tenants, co-workers, families, contract workers, etc.), work and everyday life - mainly surrounding fishing and the sea, labor and social claims, post-war or cooperative organization, and the necessary technical modernization- have generally developed in a spirit of adaptation to the particular natural environment. Local culture was based on work, family, religious tradition, festivals, dances, local products, dishes etc.

The history of the region, its cultural heritage, the natural environment, its position in Western Greece and the human factor are advantages that can support, for Messolonghi and the wider area, qualitative activities of production in the primary sector and highlight this area as a center of quality alternative tourism. Messolonghi is a place of pilgrimage. The historic city's integration into the UNESCO monuments can make a decisive contribution to the restoration and preservation of Messolonghi's character.

History of Aetoloakarnania

From Antiquity to Modern Times

The wider area, surrounded by the Messolonghi and Aetoliko lagoons in the south, Mount Arakinthos to the north, Evinos to the east and Acheloos to the west, is one of the oldest inhabited areas of the Greek area.

In Aetokoakarnania, the existence of human civilization is traced in the depths of the prehistoric era, as evidenced by the tools of flint that are mainly found in the lakes and riverside areas. Findings from the Neolithic period are traced in the caves of Varassa, caves in the Astakos area and on the hill of Ithoria. Traces of "the first season of copper" are found in Astakos. According to the myth the first inhabitants of the area were the "Kourites". The "Kourites" are considered to be the inventors of the drum and the dance fire.



During the ancient times, two important cultures, of the Aetolians and the Akarnanes, were being developed alongside the area. Their natural geographic limit was the Acheloos River. The Aetolian settlements were mainly developed on the outskirts of the southern foothills of Arakynthos and in the area around Trichonida lake and Thermo. The inhabitants of the area enjoyed nature's rich products, hunting and fishery products. They also cultivated olives, grapevines and cereals.

In "Iliad" Homer mentions the five Aeolian cities that sent ships against Troy, led by Thao. It was Plevrona, Calydonia, Pilini, Halkis, and Olenos. The nation of the Aetolians was organized in city-states that shared a common Aetolian-Greek national and religious consciousness. From the beginning of the 4th century BC the commonwealth of Aetolians favored the development of state institutions and the political regime of democracy. This community, based on the city-state social structure, evolved in the early Hellenistic period into a federation of cities, the Aetolian Confederacy. It is the first time in history of humanity where democracy is applied beyond the narrow boundaries of a city-state. An important moment of the Aetolian history is the victory and reclaim of the warfare of the Galates, in 279 BC. The Akarnans also created a Community before 400 BC, in which the city-states cooperate on issues of foreign policy and defense. Coastal Acarnanic cities experience the effects of colonization and international trade.



In 30 BC a significant proportion of the Aetolian and Akarnan population is forced to move to the newly established Nikopolis. The region is in decline. However, during the first Christian period there is an overall growth of population and culture. Several large Early-Christian royal temples are constructed.

During the Ottoman domination, the Greek population of urban centers and lowlands finds a way out in the mountains. There Greeks organize themselves socially and financially in a miraculous way. Monuments of this period are the stone-built

amphitheatres with the thousands of terraces on the mountain slopes. The most beautiful of those amphitheatres are located in Nafpaktia and in the mountainous villages of Thermo.

In the 17th century Messolonghi shows great prosperity, develops a seafaring fleet and encourages intellectual production. With the failed rebellion of the Orlofians in 1770, the city was destroyed, like other settlements in the area, and the population was pressed under the Ottomans.

The rich and eventful past of Aetolia and Akarnania is imprinted and confirmed in the multitude of monuments left by all historical periods. Sixty-one castles, the six ancient theaters, ancient temples, numerous Byzantine and post-Byzantine monuments, temples, monasteries, hermitages and works of art, all constitute an enviable cultural heritage, a source of knowledge and the foundation of modern civilization.



During the periods of Venetian and Ottoman domination, many spiritual personalities were shone. A production of spiritual work also takes place in various monasteries in the area, while in Messolonghi in 1760 Panagiotis Palamas founded the Palamas school, which was the spiritual core of the entire Western Roumeli.

In modern times, the region develops a model and exemplary social organization of the Greek population, based on community institutions, organized chariots, important factors in shaping the revolutionary climate that would lead to nationalization and freedom. Many were the Aetolians who were involved in the Filiki

Eteria. The struggle commenced on May 3, 1821, with the assassination of Dimitrios Makris against the tax collectors of the High Gate and lasted until April 1829. National figures of the struggle that acted in the area and emerged were Georgios Karaiskakis, Notis Botsaris, the Municipality of Tselios, Giannis Varnakiotis and many others named figures and anonymous.

Throughout the 19th century, the newly established prefecture plays a major role in the political, social and economic events of the country. Five prime ministers at the time come from Aetoloakarnania: Spyridon Trikoupis, Dimitrios Valvis, Epaminondas Deligiorgis and the most important political personality of the century, Charilaos Trikoupis. Another important person of the newer history from Aitoloakarnania is Damaskinos Papandreou, who served as archbishop, regent and prime minister during the difficult years of the German occupation and the Civil War.

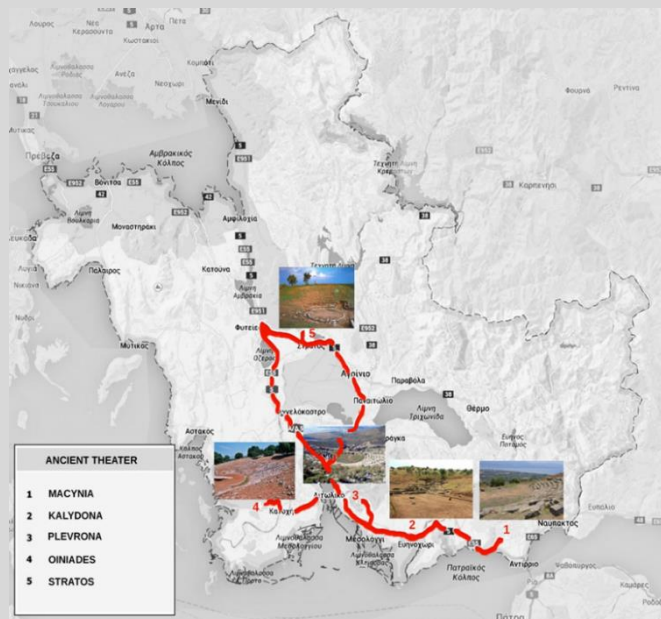
The mountainous communities of the prefecture have already been formed during the Ottoman domination. After the revolution, and until the middle of the 20th century communities are developed. Livestock farming in its traditional form is booming over the years. The fertile lowlands of the area, the large plain of Evinos, the lakes and the smooth highlands of the area constitute an area ideal for breeding. At the same time the careful cultivation of the olive and the vineyards continues in the Mountainous areas, while the maize cultivation is intensified.

Since ancient times, efforts have been made to drain marshlands and water management, which eventually yielded tens of thousands of acres of land. The tobacco industry is dominant in the prefecture and it dates back to the 19th century, but in the early 20th century it is further expanded. At the same time, product marketing and the standardization industry are developed along with the advanced technology of the time. The tobacco industry, focusing on Agrinio, is a profitable sector of National Economy.

Local culture

Traces of Antiquity

Aetoloakarnania is famous for its ancient theaters. Six ancient theaters are located in Aetoloakarnania, some of them known and visited, others still under development.



The biggest one is the theater in ancient Strato, 4th century BC. With a capacity of up to 7000 seats, it is visible, just 12 km away from Agrinio. Perhaps the best preserved is the theater of the Iniades, also from the 4th century BC which occasionally hosts performances. A theater with a peculiarity is that of ancient Kalydonas (11 kilometers from Messolonghi), with the noncircular but rather orthogonal orchestra, a rarely encountered detail. The theater on the acropolis of ancient Makinia, a breath away from Rio-Antirio bridge, definitely has the best view of all, with the Patraikos gulf laid out in front of it. Also, very interesting is the ancient theater of Plevrona, just outside Messolonghi, overlooking the lagoon, where 16 rows of figurines are preserved. Lastly, the theater of Amfilochiko Argos is located about 12 km away from Amfilochia and it is not easily accessible. It was discovered accidentally in 1916 and it has not yet been excavated sufficiently in order to be visited.

Traces of Folk Tradition

The folk culture of the countryside of Aetoloakarnania, throughout the new historical period, has many achievements. It experiences a unique wealth of customs and traditions, rituals and events, cultivates the arts and coexists harmoniously with the

natural elements. Today it offers a rich cultural heritage. Folk music and strong musical tradition maintain Messolonghi's, Aetoliko's and the surrounding villages' Byzantine musical tradition. A legacy of great historical, architectural and utilitarian value is the thirty stone bridges of the prefecture. In the mountainous area of Aetoloakarnania, hundreds of watermills, a network of trails often made by stone, roofed huts, are all monuments of a deeply rooted civilization.

During the recent period in Aetoloakarnania appeared great personalities in the fields of literature and art. Poets such as Kostis Palamas, Miltiadis Malakasis, Georgios Drosinis. Writers such as Kostas Hatzopoulos, Themistocles and Georgios Athanasiadis-Novas, Yiannis Vlachogiannis, Antonis Travladonis, the engraver Vasso Katraki, the painter Dimitris Kasolas, the athlete Stamatis Stamatiou, the director Dimitris Rontiris, the sculptor Christos Capralos, the critic, writer, poet and scholar I.M Panagiotopoulos.

Society-Economy- Sustainable Development of the Region

Modern Aetoloakarnania, endowed with landscapes of unparalleled beauty, with abundant natural resources and great cultural heritage, has a strong presence, adapts rapidly to the changes that it brings, realizes its comparative advantages and it is methodically and decisively oriented towards a new path of sustainable development.

The economy of the country is predominantly based on the primary sector. However, in the most recent years, significant activities have been developed in manufacturing and tourism sectors. Until recently Aetoloakarnania was of the country's main tobacco producing regions. Today it is the 3rd area nationwide in cheese production and the 5th in meat production. Also important is the production of oil and olives. Some hundreds of thousands of acres of wharves are irrigated and support seasonal crops of corn, clover, cotton, fruit and vegetables. The county still has large areas of citrus, while in recent years cultivation of specialties has been developed, such as asparagus and strawberry.

There is no large fleet of pelagic fishing in the county. However, coastal fishing with small fishing vessels is developed. Unique in Greece is the fishing tradition that was shaped in the large wetlands of Messolonghi and Aetoliko. For centuries now, the practice of managing fish ponds in lagoons by the dwarf method has been implanted. Eels, sea bream, sea bass, cephalopod, etc are fished and the valuable roe is produced.

Significant industrial activity involves the production and formulation of salt. Messolonghi salt ponds are the largest in the country and now produce 50% of national

salt production. Aetoloakarnanians realize that the processing and the standardization of their products give them added value and help the well-being of the local community.

In the field of intellectual creation, arts, collective actions and communication there is a particularly intense activity throughout the county. People dedicated to art, painting, sculpture and engraving create new horizons with their creations.

Many are the collective activities in the prefecture that promote culture and form a social consciousness, such as the Historical-Archaeological Society of Western Greece in Agrinio, the Agrinio Gymnastics Company, the Nafpaktos, Messolonghi and Agrinio Mountaineering Clubs, the Messolonghi and Agrinio Aerials and Navy Clubs of three major cities. In Agrinio operates the University of Natural Resources and Enterprise Management. Three TEI schools operate in Messolonghi with seven specialized courses. In Messolonghi and Thermo there are Centers for Environmental Education. In Agrinio there is the Municipal Regional Theater, which is well known for its high level performances, while in Messolonghi and Aetoliko there are Theater Groups and Art Workshops.

Municipal libraries exist in all the major cities of the county. Important cultural treasures of the prefecture are kept and exhibited at the Papastratio Archaeological Museum of Agrinio while paintings by great painters are displayed in the gallery of the old Messolonghi Town Hall.

In the most recent years there has been an intense mobility in the field of publications concerning literary works and poems, articles, circulation of newspapers and other publications. There are also many Aitoloakarnian clubs, both inside and outside the prefecture, some more picturesque and some more urban.

The citizens of Aetoloakarnania really value everything their region has to offer. They realize their long historical past, their unique and unexplored monumental stock, the wealth of natural resources their place has, their rare natural heritage. They harmoniously combine the old with the new while they keep creating a new legacy.

The cities of the lagoon: profile, history

Messolonghi is one the most historical places in the country. The distinguished and popular poet, Kostis Palamas, in his poem "Glory in Messolonghi" praises the history of this place.

Messolonghi is a city of the Western Central part of Greece. The city, built between the lagoon of Messolonghi and the Kleisova lagoon, is located in 249 km from Athens, about 35km from Agrinio and 37km from Antirrio.



The name Messolonghi was first mentioned by Paruta, who described the naval battle of Lebanon near Nafpaktos. It comes from the Italian words *mezzo* (middle, half) and *lago* (lake). It is a place surrounded by lakes. The name of the area is recorded since 1571. In the 17th century there was great prosperity and a seafarer fleet was developed. With the failed rebellion of the Orlofians in 1770, the city was destroyed, like other settlements in the area, and the population was suffering under the Ottoman occupation.

Historical development of Messolonghi

In her research concerning the identity of Messolonghi Papamitropoulou (2017) mentions the following:

«Originally, a fishermen's' district was created, living by the favor of the sea. The natural morphology of the area and especially the fish farms helped develop it. Then new inhabitants appeared -the Dalmatoi pirates and fishermen from Parga, Epirus- who due to their origins brought the elements of evolution, the urge for adventure, the need for wealth. Seafarers from Kefalonia were added and affinities were created.

[...]The first inhabitants settled around the 13th century on three islets, which were unified later on. Their positions correspond to approximately the current positions of the church of Saint Spyridon. In 1650 the area was called (like the neighboring Aetoliko, which existed before), Little Venice and the transportation between the islands was made with small boats and monks.

At the same time, ships of the citizens of Messolonghi were carrying on the Mediterranean, having as an anchor the so called "Karavostasi" outside the lagoon, between Turlidas and Vassiladios. The smallest ships entered the lagoon to the waterfront that was situated more in the North than it is situated today.

[...]The basis for the development of this new small society was, of course, fish farms, but other sources of income, and preferably related ones, were needed. With timber (appropriate and abundant) from Mount Arakinthos (or Zygos) and with the knowledge that existed, shipyards were created. Soon Messolonghi acquired remarkable facilities and a major merchant fleet, which

has been able to compete equally with Venice (1735). The 17th and 18th centuries are a period of exceptional maritime development».

After the Treaty of Pasarovich in 1718 the trade route between the European and the Ottoman Empire was opened, as the port of Messolonghi constituted from the beginning the hub of a system of Ionian ports with internal interconnection and interdependence in productive activities. και ο 18^{ος} αιώνας είναι περίοδος εξαιρετικής ναυτιλιακής ακμής.»

The Adriatic Sea trade blossomed as well as the Adriatic Economy. Terrestrial and maritime trade is developed between the cities of the Western Balkans and the cities of Italy, such as Valetta, Livorno, Trieste, Genoa, Ancona and Marseilles. In 1726 the Venice sub- consulate was established in Messolonghi with the first consul of Spyridon Barotsis.

Akasia Kordosi says in a relevant interview: Messolonghi had developed trade, shipyards and a fleet with eighty merchant ships that mainly contacted Italy, since there were also Messolonghi agencies in the ports of Italy. Messolonghi had a shipyard, which received orders from all the Greek islands, but also from Italy. The fact that so many ships, most of which have been built in such a small city as Messolonghi, lead us to the several years ago that Messolonghi was already a dominant maritime and commercial center since the early 18th century.

The types of ships manufactured in Messolonghi shipyards

According to Apostolopoulos (2016) in the article "Messolonghi sovereign shipping center of the 18th century" the ships usually built in the Messolonghi shipyards are Martigana, Tartana, Pigos, Mistiko, Polaka, Fregata and Kaiki.

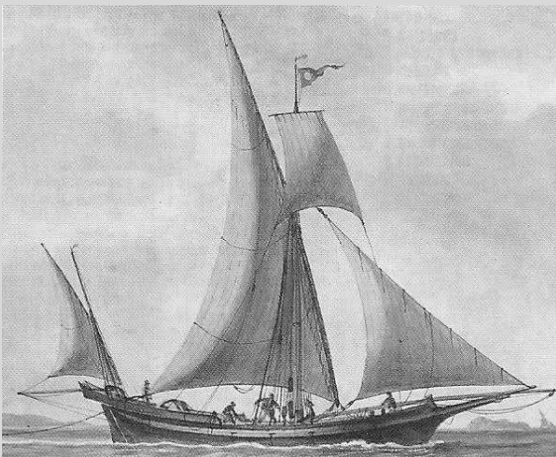
Martigos (or Martigana) was the most widespread type of vessel in the period 1700-1820. It was a cramped boat with a prominent protruding cane on the bow (typical of the Mediterranean tradition), usually with three squares of sails, "metzana"(the mast to the stern) and a large triangular bow (polaccone). Its crew ranged from 18 to 34 men. Its average capacity was a 48 –ton gate. In Messolonghi ships' capacity is much higher than the capacity of an average ship, which confirms the dominance of Messolonghi in major commercial and shipping centers.



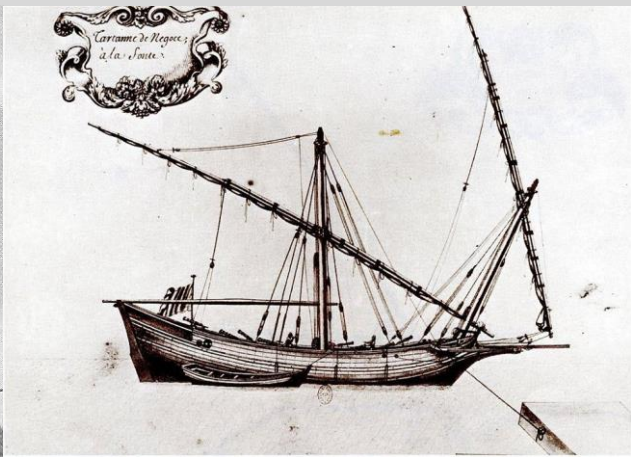
Martigos

Tartana was a vessel with intense Mediterranean features, the model from which other types of vessels came from, and it was divided into three types: the one-quart, which was purely a fishing boat, the squat, a purely commercial boat with a raised stern and heavily inclined in front of the floating mast and the "trikatarti" where the bow was small enough and had a stern with a mirror.

Tartanas were widely used by seafarers in Western Greece and the Ionian Sea in the 18th century, mainly from Kefalonia, Messolonghi, Zakynthos and Galaxidi. The average ship crew in Messolonghi consisted of approximately 13 men.



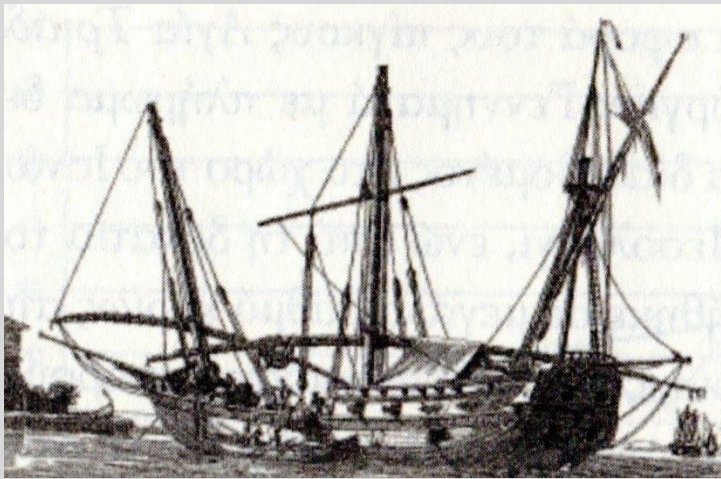
Tartana



Two-masted tartana

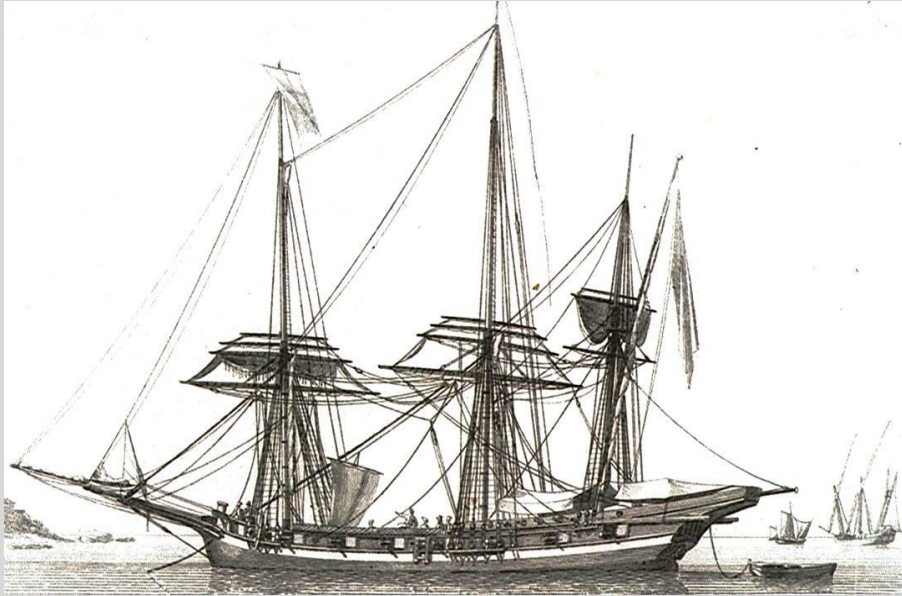
Pigkos is one of the oldest types of Mediterranean merchant vessels. It was widespread in the Ionian and Western Greece and mainly Messolonghi.

The Genovian Pigkos has a lowered antenna in the middle mast. A third boat, with a long bow, a stern of a mirror, brought three latin triangular sails but instead used square sails. Its average capacity was 82 tons and its crew consisted of 15- 20 men. In the list of Lappos with the ships of Messolonghi and Aetoliko, we see piles with a much larger capacity than the average. Thus, the dominance of Messolonghi is prominent as a major commercial and maritime center.



Genovian Pigkos

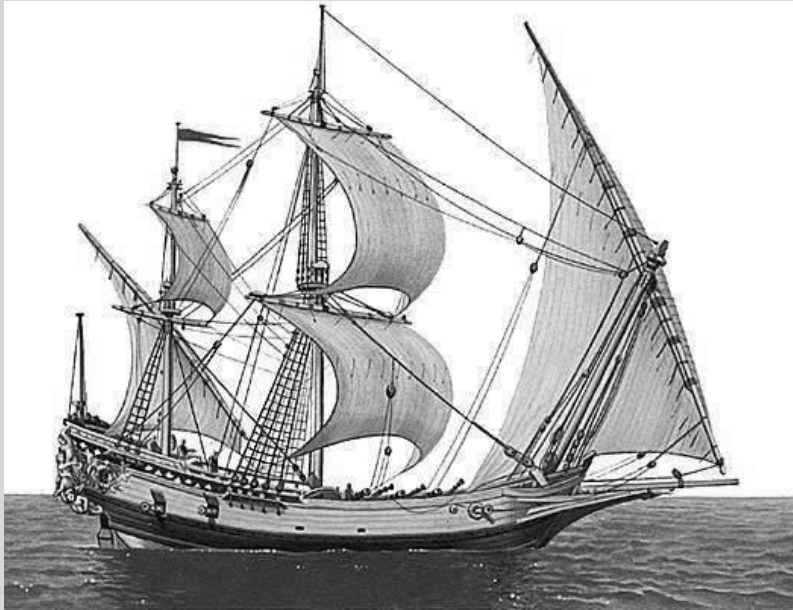
Mistik (sebek) which was spread in the Mediterranean by the Berber pirates, was a martial artillery with long firearms, long, versatile, with a long beadle, a triplet where the front and the middle mast were the same size and bigger from the aft and initially brought "latinia" to all three tissues. From the second half of the 18th century we find it with square slats with a girdle in the middle. Its dimensions were usually 1 to 4, with a length of 35 meters and a width of 8.8 meters in the center. It was equipped with 10-29 cannons, and had oars as an auxiliary means of propulsion. The paddlers stood upright, face in the wind. In the 17th and 18th centuries they were mainly used by the Berber pirates. In the Ionian Sea the Messolonghi and Kefalonia appear to systematically use the Mistik especially after 1769.



The Mistik with "latinia"

Polaka, (Polacre in French). The word Polacre probably comes from the Greek "polles akres" which means many edges. It was primarily a Mediterranean, large, merchant-lorry sailboat, not equipped, with a large triangular sail (polaccone) that was the main feature of it.

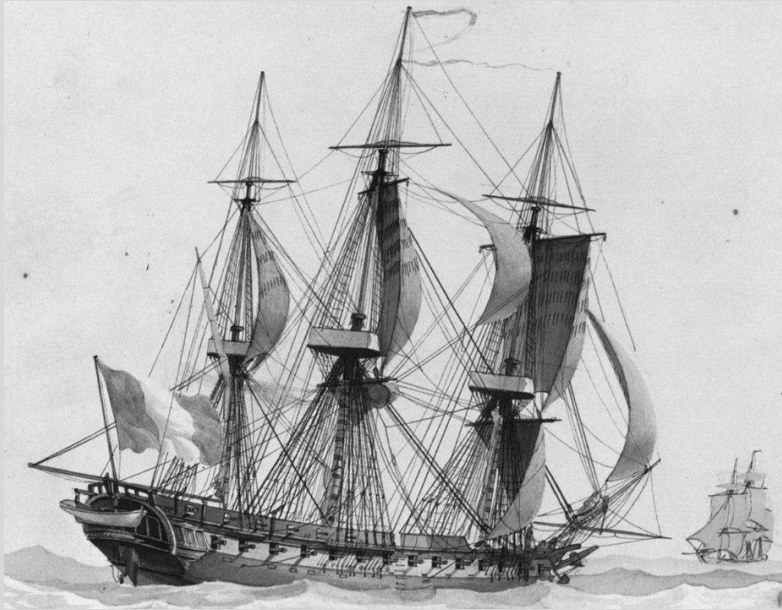
The cloth was supported by a bow, which had a strong front bend (bobber), the middle mast carried two square sails and the mast to the stern side of a slat. Their average crew was about 20 men. The Pears of Messolonghi had a capacity of up to 160 tons, well above the average of the respective Europeans of the time, which confirms the great dominance of Messolonghi as a commercial and maritime center.



Polaka

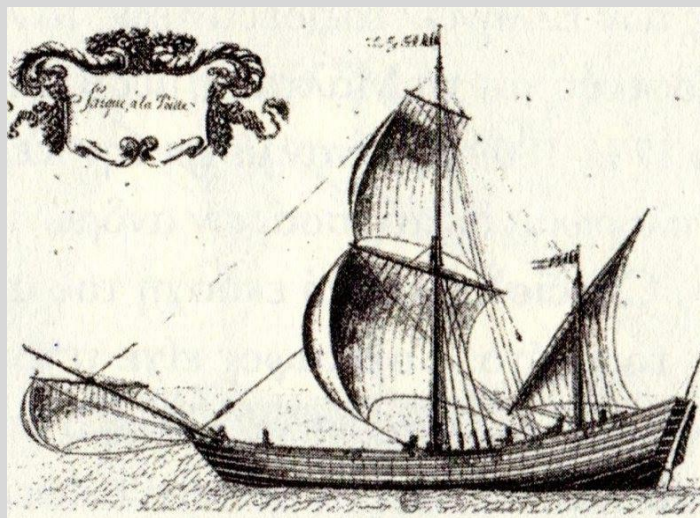
The Fregata was mainly a warship, a heavy cruiser with guns. The fregates usually carried about 30-40 cannons and were used to escort merchant convoys. However, the fregates of the Greeks must be more closely related to the fregadon, which was a large merchant ship, with a large bobbot mast (long pole protruding from the bow) and artermonna (usually triangular cloth).

The Fregates owned by Greeks, as it was common in the 18th century, belonged to Messolonghi and Kefalonia sailors as they crossed the routes between the Ionian and Adriatic and they were estimated to have an average capacity of 72 tons. Again, here we observe that the Messolonghi fregates had a very large capacity that ranged from 69 to 70 tons.



Fregata

The kaiki (Kekkia or Saaka) was a small fishing and merchant vessel very widespread in the Greek seas. It was used extensively for timber transportation. It had a large, very tall mast with square sails and a "latini" cloth in the mantle. Its stern was square and heavily raised. Its crew reached up to 15 men.



Kaiki

In the 18th century, alongside the development of commerce, a remarkable intellectual movement developed in Messolonghi, which brought to life a series of remarkable

spiritual people led by P. Palamas, the founder of the famous Palamas School (1760), which later became a school of Interactive Teaching (a method that had just appeared in Europe). In 1762 the Patriarchate established the Messolonghi School of Greek courses with Anastasios Palamaris as the leader. A crowd of Greeks flock to the city to find work and to be educated. The city acquired its famous mansions in a unique rhythm and color.

This economic and intellectual development of Messolonghi was violently interrupted by the involvement of Messolonghi and the disposition of all their fleets at the service of the Great Idea in the historical period of the Orlophos.

On April 10, 1770, Messolonghi' citizens offered to sacrifice themselves in the Altar of Independence. The revenge of the Turkish Albanians is reflected in the letter of the French consul of Patras to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of his country: "I saw for three days and nights the burning of Messolonghi and its 80 boats, while the inhabitants who escaped the massacre fled to the Ionian Islands".

In 1775 the inhabitants returned to Messolonghi from Zakynthos and until 1813, on the eve of the Revolution, they managed to build a new fleet of 60 ships, to rebuild their trade and to enrich it with new products from the fertile plains of Aetolia and Paracheloitida, rebuild mansions and churches, reopen the Palamas School and help Messolonghi regain its economic and spiritual radiance.

Messolonghi entered the Independence War on May 20, 1821, with philosophers Anastasios Palamas and the leader of Arkynthos(Libra), Dimitrios Makris. He immediately came in the center of the national struggle in West Central Greece and began to prepare fiercely to confront the Turkish conquerors.

The glorious history

The siege and the Heroic Exodus (April 10, 1826)

The first siege

The first major threat came from the sea on July 20, 1822, when a Turkish and Egyptian army was joined under the command of Hasan Pasha with 84 ships. Their purpose was to conquer Vasiladi. After the failed attack, they tried to capture Tournida but failed again. The fleets remained off the Lagoon to prevent the city from being refueled.

In November 1822, Omer Bryonis and his army joined the forces of Kioutachis Pasas and his army that barracked outside Messolonghi with a total of 11.000 soldiers. In the besieged Messolonghi, an extraordinary war council was convened along with the participation of A. Mavrokordatos, G. Trikoupis, Anatolia Palamas, Bishop Joseph Rossi and T. Razikotsikas from the outside by a ditch 2m wide, 1,20 m deep and 1600m long.

The people of Messolonghi began misleading negotiations to gain valuable time to strengthen their guard. On 8 November, Hydraika and Spetsiotic ships dismantled the sea blockade and transported food, munitions and men to the besieged city. The force of the guard had 3.500 fighters. They immediately stopped the negotiations and ordered the Turks that "if they wanted Messolonghi, they had to come and get it". The fence of the city resisted the multiple attacks of the Turkish army. The Turks set a new attack on Christmas Day in 1822 in order to find the Greeks unprepared because of the celebration. But on the eve of the attack, Kostantinos Gounaris from Giannena, the Greek secretary of Omer Vryonis, whose wife and children were hostage by the Turks in Arta, revealed the plan to the Greeks, so Messolonghi fighters vigorously repudiated their attacks and forced the Turkish army to withdraw.

The Philhellenes- Lord Byron

A very important chapter in the history of the Revolution and especially of Messolonghi is the presence of many admirers of the Greeks throughout the struggles, not only as the descendants of the ancient inhabitants of this historical site, but also as fighters of independence and individual liberties.

The phenomenon of philhellenism was manifested through the creation of philhellenic unions and committees (comitata) as well as in various practical ways. Close to romantic ideologues, archaeologists, liberals and enthusiastic students were willing to become soldiers and tried to reach the scene of the war. Those who took part in the war events were estimated to be around 1.200 people (a large number of Germans, followed by French, Italians and fewer Polish, Swiss and British). There were also representatives from other European countries as well as from America. One of the first missions was the one of Mavrokordatos led from Marseilles to Messolonghi.



Byron arrived in Messolonghi, as the envoy of the English "comitato" and the Greek Committee of London, on Christmas Eve in 1823, carrying with him two small cannons, many medicine boxes and money in cash and checks. Byron immediately became the center of controversy among the people of Messolonghi. He himself preferred to stay in Messolonghi near the Souliotes (a body that he organized and founded on his own), with whom he was preparing a campaign for the liberation of Patras. At the same time he recommended lending financial resources to the Greek government. Byron tried to bridge the civil conflicts that existed among Greek fighters.

Byron decided to go to Salona. He began to stand close to the Greeks as a politician or even a military leader if necessary. In the first poem he wrote in Italy (Journal in Cephalonia, 19.6.1823), he clearly stated: «The dead woke – and I will sleep».

A little later, in Messolonghi, he experiences the most important moment of his life: He puts down the pen and raises his helmet. Unfortunately, the trip to Salona will never happen, since Byron was prematurely and unexpectedly lost on April 7, 1824, within a few days after he suffered from fever in Messolonghi. He died just when, without prejudice, he was able to properly assess things and contribute to positive results.

The arrival and early death of the famous poet in Messolonghi sparked a worldwide interest for the struggle of the Greeks and confirmed the existence of the acute Greek problem, which governments could no longer ignore nor diminish. With the action of Byron and the English representatives of the Greek Committee of London and with the negotiations on the loan (transition of Greek envoys to London, contacts of the English comitatus with the Greek Administration), the British Philhellenes took the reins of the organized philhellenic movement, something that did not please the French government. Thus, philhellenic activity was revived and intensified and new "comitata" were established, among them some in Paris, Geneva and Marseilles.

As Papamitropoulou M. (2017) states:

«The phenomenon of philhellenism was manifested through the creation of philhellenic unions and committees (comitata) as well as in various practical ways. Close to romantic ideologues, archaeologists, liberals and enthusiastic students were willing to become soldiers and tried to reach the scene of the war. Those who took part in the war events are estimated to be around 1.200 people (a large number of Germans, followed by French, Italians and fewer Polish, Swiss and British). There were also representatives from other European countries as well as from America».

Before 1824, we come across liberals who wanted to escape the authoritarian regimes in their homelands, and after 1824 the volunteers of the second phase were expert officers with a long career in the Napoleonic wars or several conscious democrats advocates of a particular political party.

The second siege

On April 15, 1825, the second siege of the city began with Kioutachi's 30.000 men. In Messolonghi there were 4.000 Greek fighters. In the sea, the fleet of Mahmud Pasha patrolled and supplied the Turks with food and munitions. In June, Kioutachis ordered a general raid that was opposed with passion. Seeing the heroic resistance, Kioutachis negotiated a treaty, but the Greeks denied. For 8 months Kioutachis failed to take the city and he was forced to accept the Egyptian military assistance of Pasha Ibrahim. On 26 December 1825, the army of Ibrahim with 15.000 men camped in front of the Messolonghi walls. The city was resistant to continuous cannon shootings, so Ibrahim warned the besieged that they should abandon their full armament and the lives of their fighters and their families will be saved. The answer of the besieged city was written in the first act of Sacrifice: «The keys of our city are in our cannons». After the fierce battles, the fortified islands were conquered by the Turks, Vassiladi and Dolmas. The blockade became more stifling. Hunger reaps and munitions were scarce. Appeals for help to the Central Administration remained unanswered. However, on March 25, 1826, the enemy suffered its defeat on the island of Kleisova, where .000 men were killed. Miaoulis, after his unsuccessful attempt to break the city's barrage and refuel Messolonghi, writes to the Administration: "... you thought Messolonghi was lost because there was no way to get into more food".

The Heroic Exodus

Thus, in the courtyard of the church of Agia Paraskevi, the Council of Death was convened and the Heroic Exodus of the Guard was decided on the evening of Lazarus, at dawn on April 10, 1826. The guard and some civilians in three groups would head for the Monastery of Saint Simeon. Of the three bodies that formed the two consisted of the armed forces headed by Noti Botsari and Dimitri Makri, while the third group would be the Flemish fighters with their families. Their plan, however, became known to Ibrahim. The two bodies of the armed men were struggling to open corridors through enemy bodies. In the third body, however, panic prevailed at the time of the Exodus. Most of them returned back to town and were lost. The helpless people who had been fortified with the elder, Christos Kapsalis, set fire and blew the gunpowder. The high priest Joseph Rossus, after resisting for two days at the windmill, he set fire to the last barrel with the munitions, ending the Episode of the Bif Exodus on April 12, 1826. Out of the 3.600 only 1.300 fighters managed to reach Amfissa and then Nafplio, where they were perceived as heroes. Of the 7.000 civilians, only 300 were saved. The rest were slaughtered or captured and taken for slaves. But the losses of the Turks were also overwhelming. 20.000 Turks and 8.000 Egyptians were lost during the siege. The Sacrifice of Messolonghi, the civilians that heroically resisted for 12 months, prompted the discussion of the Greek issue, as no other event. Europeans were overwhelmed with emotions of admiration and awe and they rose to a true crusade for the liberation of the Greek nation. The shift of European politics to the Greek question is reflected in Maternichs response to the Portals appeal for help: «... unfortunately Messolonghi has come to pass». Messolonghi as the only Holy City in the world, officially proclaimed in 1936, based on the greatness of the heroic Exodus and the sacrifice of the Greeks and the Philhellenes for freedom, is internationally known as "CITY OF FREEDOM" more recognized than any other Greek city during the war of 1821. It is the land of Solomos poem "Free Prisoners", the city that has been the favorite subject of so many artists, such as Delacroix and Hugo, the inspiration for Lord Byron and Kostis Palamas, and for this reason a proposal for the title of the European Capital of Culture for 2021 has been submitted.

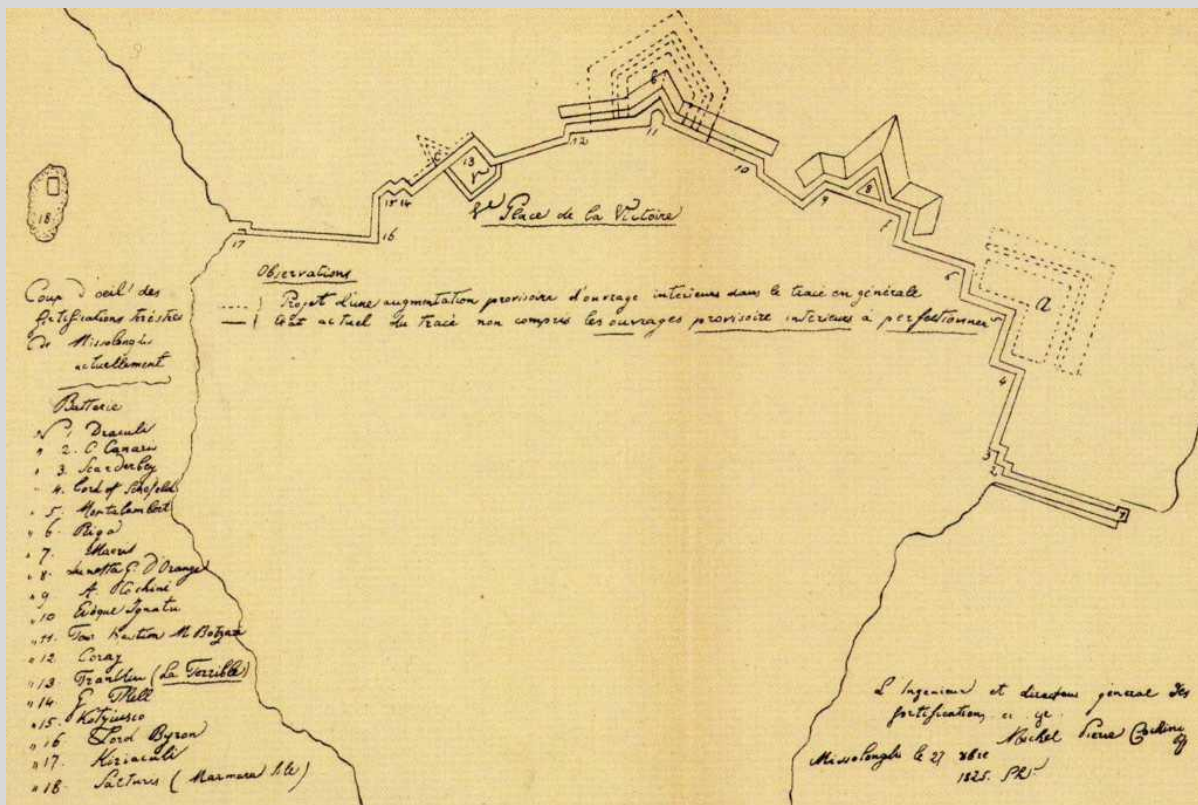


The formation of the Sacred City

The conditions and requirements of the race begin to be reflected in the formation of the city quite early. Messolonghi, vulnerable by land, was protected by a low wall, built when the Revolution started, by the chieftain Athanasios Razikotsikas. This wall was reinforced (from the outside) with a trench about 2m wide, 1.20 m in depth and 1.600 m long, created mainly by the excavation to extract the necessary materials. On the wall there were two churches, Nikolas and Mother Mary. A few meters further there was a chapel of Agia Paraskevi. It was built on the site of an older temple that had been destroyed by the Turks when they prevailed in the area. There, the Temporary Committee of the War met in order to discuss the heroic Exodus in April 1826. After the liberation of the city, it was built in the same place, in the place where the sanctuary of the old church (which no longer existed), a small chapel, Ag. Paraskevoula. This historical continuity dictated the creation of a new temple, in a central part of the city, dedicated to Agia Paraskevi, to Ag. Nikolas and Virgin Mary. This wooden church was replaced by Messolonghi in 1859 with the magnificent church of Ag. Paraskevi, which is still present, built of stone by craftsmen from Krillellia. As mentioned above, this area was one of the three islands where the first inhabitants settled (Papamitropoulou, 2017).

The fortification

The first fortification in Messolonghi, combined with the guards, resisted the siege of 1822. Nonetheless, it was considered incomplete for future massive attacks, which would certainly in the city in the course of the war. The reconstruction and completion were commissioned by Mavrokordatos to an engineer from Chios, Michael Kokkinis, who had come from Europe to Greece to participate in the War. In February 1823, work begins with the participation and personal work of the inhabitants. A new wall was built, mostly a stone built, a new widened and deepened moat was built, 18 ramparts were built and 48 cannons and bombs were placed. Later on (from May to August 25), more equipment was installed. Something impressive was Kokkinis prediction of the possibility of attacking the prominent bastions of enemy forces from the rear, if they succeeded in approaching the wall or its gates. That's why the wall was shaped like an open polygonal line. The fortification was completed with 14 fireworks on the island of Vassiladi.



The wall and the Gates

The acquaintance of the visitor with the center of the historic Sacred City begins with the view of its most prominent point, the Messolonghi Gate (on the east side), on either side of which stretched the wall that protected the city during its Third Siege. The Symbol Gate of the Exodus Sacrifice for the freedom behind the bridge where the fighters battled has a dual role with great emotional charging: on the one hand, it constitutes the point of entry of the visitor into the Holy City and the start of his exploration of the historic Messolonghi, on the other hand it is a sign of the heroic Exodus of Messolonghi, which marked the tragic end of the Third Siege. It is, therefore, a point of transition for the user, visitor and resident of the historic city, for a journey not only in space but also in time, a journey to historical memory, now and then.

The Gate in its present form is made of semi-finished stonework. It is attributed to Othonas, who- in a visit to Messolonghi in 1838- ordered the reconstruction of the wall on the trail of the old one. The wall brought two gates: One eastward, towards Evinochori, and one westward, towards Aetoliko. The old wall, built with great participation in personal work and materials of the city's inhabitants and not with financial support from the Central Administration, begun to be demolished by the survivors -and was dispersed in the rest of Greece Messolonghi- who upon their return to the city, after their liberation (1829), they asked for the return of the stones of their houses from the wall.



Messolonghi: An open-air Museum

The gate of Exodus



Messolonghi wall was polygonal and had a length of 2km. The engineer Michael Kokkinis, who was killed on the night of the Exodus, had planned and supervised the construction and the ongoing repairs. It stretched all along the northern side of the city, the only one that connected it to the land. So the water of the sea that was

entering the deep trench that had been digging from the outside isolated the city as if it were an island.

The Garden of Heroes



During the Exodus the wall suffered great damage. Part of it was rebuilt in 1838 when Othonas was king. The current gate, which for many years remained closed at night, is at the site of the old gate of the fortress. The space of the Hero Garden in Messolonghi, at about 14 hectares, and it was the place where the fighters of the holy city fought, martyred and were

buried during the struggle for independence. It is located on the northern side of the peninsula of Messolonghi and its present surroundings are almost identical with the fortification of the city, the siege and the Exodus. In this soil thousands of Greeks and Philhellenes were buried, they fell in the battle "for Christ's faith in freedom".

The bastion of Fraglinos

When Kokkinis drew the wall design, he also gave names to the bastions of, for example, Markos Botsaris or Rigas Ferraios. Today, a few meters west of the Heroes Garden, the last bastion, which the locals call "cannon", became famous for its brave resistance. It was also called "Square of Victory"

Lord Byron statue



Next to the mansion of Christos Kapsalis, on the upper floor of a two storey house, also Kapsaleikos, Lord Byron stayed in Messolonghi for a short period of time. With the explosion of Kapsalis on the night of the Exodus, the house was destroyed and in its place on the anniversary of the hundred years of the death of Byron (19 April 1924) the University of Athens painted a memorial column, work of Anthony Sochos.

Museum of Trikoupis



It is one of the oldest buildings in the city that belonged to the Trikoupis family. It was built in 1730, but due to the disasters it suffered during retirement, it was rebuilt in 1850. It was first built in 1771 and the first prime minister of the independent Greek state Spyridon Trikoupis and the other prime minister,

his son, Charilaos Trikoupis, lived there. In 1993, on the initiative of the municipality, it was renovated and has since functioned as a museum; it includes furniture items, photographs, souvenirs, medals and books of the great historical family of Trikoupis.

Center of Speech and Art DIEXODOS



On the central pedestrian street of the historic center of Messolonghi dominates one of the few surviving pre-revolutionary buildings of the Holy City. It is a building of the 18th century in which the head of Exodus guard Athanasios Razizotsikas was born and lived. This building, which was about to collapse, was bought in 1998 by the lawyer Nikos Kordossis and after restoring it to its original form, he founded the "Diexodos", a multipurpose museum-gallery, which at the same time operates as a center of speech and art.

Museum of History and Art of the Sacred City of Messolonghi



The museum is a neoclassical building built in 1932 in the mayoralty of Christos Evangelatos. It is located in the central square Marko Botsari. At the entrance of the Museum are the busts of Charilaos Trikoupis and Epaminindas Deligiorgis, two of the five Messolonghi prime ministers. Here we find a rich collection of historical documents and many rare paintings by Greek and foreign painters, inspired by the Messolonghi war. It is worth paying special attention to them: "The Mesologitissa" by Delasankou (1828), "The Exodus" painting by Vrizakis, copy by Giannis Kasolas, "The Bishop of Roges communes the warriors" by De Sezer, copy of Kasolas, "The Blast of

Kapsali" painting by Brizakis, "Freedom through the ruins of Messolonghi" Photocopies of Delacroix located in the Bordeaux Museum.

Messolonghi: City of poets and five prime ministers

Messolonghi is not only THE protagonist of the Greek Revolution but also a source of great spiritual and political figures. In less than a century, five great prime ministers had their origins in Messolonghi. Spyridon Trikoupis, historian and first prime minister of free Greece, his son, Mesolongios Mitros, the guard of Messolonghi Mitros Deligiorgis Epaminondas, and the law-abiding and senior magistrates, brothers Zenovios and Dimitrios Valvis, with dedication to duty, succeeded in laying the city's foundations in a time of adversity for the creation of the Greek State.

Messolonghi has enlisted many writers who have influenced their place of origin, contributed to the formation of Modern Greek Literature. The most representative of them are Kostis Palamas, Miltos Malakasis, Georgios Drosinis, Antonis Traylandonis and Mimis Limperakis.

Aetoliko: The city of water - "Small Venice" of Greece

Aetoliko began as a small island complex in the middle of the lagoon, where fishermen joined their shores with wooden bridges. Slowly these islands joined together creating a single island.

For the explanation of the name Aetoliko there are several versions. The first is that during the revolution it was named "Anatoliko". Historical references and public documents of that time refer to this name on the grounds that it was the eastern island of Echinades or because it was east of Acheloos.

As "Anatoliko" refers to many folk songs. But its normal origin is from the word "pump", because of its location so close to the surface of the water, wherever it was excavated, even in the shallowest spots, it was pumping water. The name that prevailed is "Aetolikon". As it was finally revealed, it was its original name 100 years before the beginning of the 1821 revolution. The islet of Aetoliko communicates with the eastern and western land by two stony bridges of about 300m in length and 8m in width.

The need for the construction of stone bridges is imperative for the islets in the heart of an amazing and rich ecosystem that includes a lagoon complex, the sustainable plain of the Achelloos delta, and the equally endless lagoon. Aetoliko, already from the years before the revolution, had the one and only internal port in Greece and a fleet of merchant vessels that gave it a strong naval presence throughout the Mediterranean.

All the agricultural products of Paracheloitida are almost exclusively transported from the port of Aetoliko. The stable stone bridges facilitate the communication and the movement of its products, its trade and its naval presence are imperative and the goal of their construction-immediately after the liberation of Aetoliko by the Turks- is a common desire of the local community.

Since February 2002, the stone arched bridges connecting the island have been proclaimed as historic and preserved monuments. They are a remarkable example of 19th century infrastructure engineering and are indissolubly linked to the memories of locals.



Museum "Vasso Katraki" - Center of Engraving Arts



The museum hosts the entire work of Vasso Katraki and consists of about four hundred exhibits, many engravings and a large part of woods and stones on which she carved her works. There are also large and small sized black and white and colorful drawings and preparation drawings for the creation of the engraving.

The collection is embellished by art objects, art posters and paintings.

Human – Society - Place

According to Papamitropoulou (2017):

«From the time period of prosperity, Messolonghi and Aetoliko had developed forms of urbanization, with the presence of merchants and craftsmen. Among them ironmongers are mentioned, who trade their creations as far as Istanbul. In these two urban centers, the trade in raisins, oil and wine and employment in the nautical profession were profitable. In particular, fishing was and still remains the traditional occupation. As mentioned above, and from archaeological sources and local historiography, the original settlements were constituted by residents who ensured their living mainly by fishing and complementary to agriculture and in the marketing of a small part of the fishery production, mainly raw fish».

Adaptation to the environment

The great importance of the wetlands for the Aitolians is apparent from ancient myths about the human tragedy with the Acheloos and Evinos rivers that shape the geophysical land and lagoon environment.

The lagoon has shallow calm waters and rich food ingredients for fish. It communicates with the waters of the high seas and is thus renewed, as the phenomenon of ebb and tide prevails in the area. During the 24-hour period, there are two fingers and two rashes. These tidal streams are based on the renewal of lagoon waters and the removal of polluting products of metabolism of aquatic organisms.

Lagoons from an ecological and physical point of view are special biotopes, differentiated from the seas and delta rivers. Due to their small depth, they are directly affected by the climatic factors (wind, temperature, rainfall, barometric pressure, etc.), resulting in periodic changes in water that lead to mass migrations of fish to the open sea. Few species of fish can cope with adversity and the required high energy expenditure.

Employment in this environment also creates for people similar forces and tendencies to adapt. With mild activities in the quiet shallow waters of the lagoon but also with mild fishing in the coastal area, they have exploited the natural wealth by gaining experience and creating a special tradition and culture.

Social evolution

In the historical path of the microcosmos of the lagoon and in particular in Messolonghi-Aetoliko, people, besides the dynamic and adaptability they exhibited in the local ecology, also formed separate ways of reacting to the historical conjuncture and participation in social changes. Small fishermen communities have been joined by newcomers and pirates, with the ultimate intention of investing in new related, primarily economic and productive activities, such as merchant shipping and shipbuilding.

Changes have also been made to fishing, especially in fish farms, in the production and commercial process, always within the permissible limits imposed by product vulnerability. In any case, many fishing techniques were introduced by the settlers from the lagoons of Italy. The word *ivari* (fish farm) is of Italian origin (*vivarium*). The process of organizing production in fish farms, however, takes place within the framework of the fundamental Ottoman state institution of the system of letting of fishing grounds, which refers to the creation of small sized productive enterprises.

The struggle for Independence finds Messolonghi with elements of economic prosperity, despite the total destruction of 1770, with education and culture. Although it was born again, it no longer had a large merchant fleet of the past and had not become new military personnel, as was the case in other areas.

The social stratification was quite advanced, mainly fishermen, merchants, farmers and intellectuals, due to the intense activity of the Palamas School, with Panagiotis Palamas and his followers, in the work of creating Greek consciousness. All classes participated in the war operations and finally unanimously opted for a decent death.

In Messolonghi, as a capital of southern Aetoloakarnania, a process of urban concentration, as well as a picture of micro-urban life and culture, is evolving later- and throughout the 19th century- as a symptom of, among other things, the downward trend of the pre shipbuilding and maritime and commercial activity. The urban background of the city is now based on the primary sector (fishing and agriculture) and the tertiary sector, due to the increased importance of its administrative character (prefectural center), the development of customer relations (city of the five prime ministers) was an investment in the symbolic chapter of the glorious and heroic past.

In the 20th century, the decline of provincial urban centers is universal in all of Greece. Especially in Messolonghi-Aetoliko it has emerged since the beginning of the century as definitive, so there is almost a general shift towards fishing activities.

Organization of work and everyday life

Fishing in the lagoon and fishing outside of it set out ways of working and living, characterized by complementarity. The lagoon fishermen move through closed and traditionally organized Iberians within a cooperative or salaried work while offshore fishermen, self sufficient in production means, e.g. the family boat, are another stronger and more numerous group, based on the most risky and autonomous spirit of the owner- fisherman. However, the unified water body, the continuous flow of water with the ebb and the tide, the lagoons specific resources and the basic survival conditions themselves, keep them united, industrious and ready for the constant confrontation with danger and uncertainty. Economic and social behavior as well as the experiential nature of the relationship with the sea constitutes the cultural identity of the local society, based on the lagoon culture and the culture of work and life in and around it.

Fishing in the Iberian, according to sources from the Ottoman Empire, was a sultan's income, which was paid through a formal or informal hiring process for a certain period. After the establishment of the Greek state, the system continued with the Hellenic State as a landlord, which gradually and until World War II transformed the fishing unit into a privately- owned enterprise with 15-20 fishermen. It is documented that during the 19th century and about 1934, fishermen were not only from the related industry but also from other powerful economic and social statuses. They may have been landowners, merchants, and lawyers etc. who acted as investors in a profitable business. The labor status, the low wages and the daily routines of fishermen and their family led them to claims to change the exploitation relationships of fish farms. The period of occupation and the Resistance (1940-44) is considered a period of intersection for the shaping of these assertions. Despite the traumatic memory of war and occupation and the dismantling of the Civil War, fishermen with social cohesion and cooperation and support practices and achieve major changes. Both Ivarades and sea fishermen successfully promoted the cooperative organization as the main economic and social change. Despite the total lack of resources and the full dependence on bank

lending, the sense of belonging and interest in improving their living conditions, inspired their self esteem and protects their families from occasional failures. Moreover, as mentioned above, the cooperative spirit has been historically cultivated in this particular production area, based on the adaptation to ecological commitments and the interdependence of the two fishing groups.



The organization of the production on the ivari requires a concerted action of a group of people, which, in a hierarchical organization (depending on the specialization), cover all phases of fishing activity, processing (fish husk, roe production), transport and distribution of the product. Most of them stayed on shifts for many days on the ebb,

using houses as well known as wooden houses above the water surface, which were built with piles in the lagoon, examples of a folk architecture that also adapted to the sensitivity of nature and the peculiarity of the landscape. Their construction, as well as the construction of the cauldron, which defined the extent of the hill, was undertaken by fishermen with constructive and knitting experience, which made them respected in the fishermen group.

From the mid 60s, the rod with a plastic mesh and the manure- spinning rod of the goat with a gasoline engine began to be replaced. These changes, along with other smaller ones, have improved the conditions of fishing and labor and, moreover, have changed the social and personal lives of fishermen, themselves and their families. The fishermen limited their time spent in the sea and had more physical strength to deal with the family, relatives and friends. The younger generations of fishermen know that their fathers did not have that luxury.

At the same time, as far as free fishermen, namely the fishermen of the sea, traditionally formed rules set their limits of action in relation to the lagoon. With their own means of production, they also develop tailored techniques and then, based on

their specialized knowledge and technique, they act as (small) family type enterprises in the context of the market economy.

Women's Participation

In the above mentioned framework of fishing activity, in the Ibias or at sea, women and the family circle have their own participation. In particular, women provided long term support in specific tasks, their position was very important in family, society and culture. Although they typically stayed at home, they undertook special tasks, cleaning the long line, trimming the knife with paraphernalia, repairing nets etc.

Gradually women withdrew in the urban neo Greek model, when it began to expand into all groups of population. The restriction of their participation was covered by women who entered professionally in these activities, as the collective memory suggests.

Generally, women did not belong exclusively to the domestic area. They also developed collective action, such as participation in folk and religious celebrations, or individual action such as weaving and embroidery. Within the family the real power of each household was women, as much as they themselves claimed that power belonged to their husbands. Men as fishermen and older sailors and boaters, had an actual but limited social presence as family leaders, parents and spouses. Overtime, technical facilities give fishermen more time for the family and broaden the social activity.



Local Culture - Tradition – Past and present

Work – religious life

Collaboration and mutual aid were dominant elements in the working rules, customs and society and the worldview of fishermen, and the constant confrontation with the liquid element, the uncertainties and the dangers were within the content of their religiosity. Celebrations and devotional acts completed the daily routine of fishing in its various phases. Through the strong cultural context of this small society, fishermen and their families, women and men, communicated socially, reproduced social relationships and established inner cohesion self respect and adaptation to social reality.

The Messolonghi fishermen, formerly the sailors, were most dedicated, without being all close to the official institutions of religion. They made vouchers and donations. Sometimes sailors and wealthy sailors built churches or made other important religious tributes.

The churches of Agios Sostis and Panagia Prokopanisti in the homonymous islets, the Holy Trinity of Kleisova (where the events of Agios Symios and the monastery of Agios Ioannis in the ivory of Tholos are completed are some of the pilgrimages in the lagoon where they celebrated and the preparation, the commencement or the end of the fishery production, of course, after the religious celebration , the folk celebration was celebrated in eve, the preparation of the church, of food , the organization of the table etc. belonged to women. It is and was a confirmation and guarantee of their presence in the public social space.

Local fests

The monastery of Agios Simos, on the southwestern slope of Zygos, remained in history as the place of meeting of the expedition in April 1826. It was founded in 1740 dedicated to Saint Symeon Theodoros (the elder priest who held Christ as an infant in the Temple, and said the famous "Rescue your slave, trappings...". Frequently, captains and thieves fled there before and during the war. For the fishermen, the Saints feast (February 3) coincided with the end of the year before the start of the new cultivation season, as from February to May the lagoon was inaugurated and it The collective and social memory, however, were marked by the great Exodus and gave the celebration new content. From the middle of the 19th century, the folk feast was transferred and identified with the three-day celebration of the Pentecost, with a religious and national

character. The celebration of the horses and the horsemen of Agios Symios today constitute the predominant element of the tradition and the local identity of the city. The celebration is completed in Ag. Triada and Klisovas on the day of the Holy Spirit and the next day we have the remembrance of the fallen fighters of the heroic island.



A similar traditional feast is also organized in Aetoliko, in honor of Agia Agathi, a third century martyr. Initially the popular celebration, closely related to the fishermen, was held on 5 of February, the day of Saint Agathis memory. The feast however took place on 23 of August, with a religious and historical character and corresponding events. The historical element is linked to specific events that occurred in

December 1824. A gathering of Mavrokordatos and chieftains on 23 August in Psili Panagia, a ruined Byzantine monastery on the western slope of Zygos, had led to the Assembly of Aetoliko at the Holy Temple of Theotokos on 17 December 1824. When, as usual, a deadend has occurred and the Convention led a wreck, a strong earthquake occurred. This was considered a divine sign the division was overcome, and an oath was given in front of the Virgin Mary to continue the war with internal cohesion. After the Exodus, the 23rd of August was established as the climax of the celebration in memory of these events. The base of the celebration is the chapel of Agia Agathi in Stamna Aetoliko. The traditional songs with "zurnades" and "daoulia" dominate.

The products of the lagoon and the wider area – deli foods

The uniqueness of the physiognomy of Messolonghi is naturally based on the distinct peculiarity and beauty of the natural landscape, with the liquid element combined with the whole vegetation and the birds. It also includes, in addition to the pure visuals, elements of the image of the city, in the broadest sense, elements which are engaged with all human senses. The Myth of the area is also very rich here. The mythical King Kalydonis associated with the first cultivation of the vine by people and the production of wine (a name derived from the name Oineas). It was a gift of Dionysus to the King in return for the excellent hospitality he had offered him in the palace.

In particular, in the field of local primary production and traditional flavors, the identity of Messolonghi is mainly sealed by fishery products and their traditional processing:

a. The bottargo, or “caviar of the Mediterranean”, an emblematic and precious



delicacy and treat with a distinct delicate taste and aroma. It is similar to caviar in flavor and nutritional value (balanced proteins, beneficial fats, significant amounts of omega 3 fatty acids, antioxidant vitamins C and E, selenium and zinc), as natural as can be. It is produced by the female cow and is a product known and sought after for centuries (the goddess of the Byzantines). In recent years it has been recognized as a Protected Designation of Origin product. It is a different experience for those who will taste it in a Messolonghi fish tavern or even in the lagoon next to the fishermen (fishing tourism).

b. Messolonghi fish are famous for their high quality. Eels, sea basses and sea bream that swim in the shallow waters they provide a unique taste. Sprats as well as sea bream, some species of cephalopods and eels are kippered. Paddy is mainly made in winter, when the fish are thicker. It's a 20-30 day process. Fish paste can be kept for up to 40 days. Some are eaten raw or roasted, others only grilled.

c. Pedals are made in summer by sea bream, clover and eel. They are opened in the middle from the back to the abdomen and from the head to the tail. The two parts are held by the ventricle. They are salted, left for 3-4 hours in salt, washed and dried under shade. They are kept for at least two to three days and are eaten when they are dried.



d. The eels of Messolonghi ανό are considered among the tastiest in Europe and they are a popular dish. The lagoon is an ideal place to live for species such as Sumblobari, Kavatsa, Vitselouro, Katharohello and Droggos. They can be eaten cooked or roasted, in the oven, deliciously padded or polished. Much of the local production is exported in Italy.

e. The hacks or oysters με cooked in various ways of local cuisine.

f. Various local desserts such as: sweet boletus, bun, ravani, basin or porridge, piquette, halva etc.

g. Salt είναι is still a valuable natural gift of the lagoon. The small depth of the water, depending on the high content of natural elements and the appropriate meteorological conditions, is the basis for the creation of productive alluvia. Today in Messolonghi there are two salt pans. The production of salt is done in natural heaters with the continuous coagulation method. The harvest in the <white > big salt mine, on the way to Aetoliko, become mechanized, while in the <black> mine of Turlida, with traditional means. The area of the two salt ponds is 14.000 acres and the annual salt yield exceeds 130.000 tons and accounts 90 % of the primary salt in Greece.

Reference should also be made to the products of the land. The most important is the olive oil that also forms the basis of a Mediterranean diet. Citrus, fruits, vines, cereals and animal feeds cotton etc. are also grown.

The importance of fishing in the local cuisine - The local fest of Agios Symios

The local festivity of Agios Symos began as a festivity for fishers. Therefore, delicacies of the sea played a major part in the festivity's local cuisine. In any case, delicacies of the sea appear in formal dinners, daily meals and local feasts from Classical times. These delicacies of the sea could be consumed roasted, hardboiled or salted. Furthermore, one of the most popular delicacies of the era was the eel. In Aristophanes' comedies the eel is presented as a symbol of prosperity (Karanikola-Tzouvela, 2016).

In the local festivity of Agios Symos, salted fish delicacies appear in abundance, usually consisted of a combination of little fish (ligdes, golden great mallets, anchovy and annular sea breams).

In the old days, fish were hanged right above the fireplace in order to get dry and smoked, and they were called "smoked fish". Moreover, fish could be cooked in specific ways called "savoro" and "burieto". In any case, the preservation of fish and the cooking method applied were both influenced by the availability of ingredients, communication with other cultures, expertise and technological advancement. For example, the cooking methods of "savoro" and "burieto" it is possible to have their origins in the Italian cuisine, which influenced the Ionian Islands' cuisine and afterwards Messolonghi's local cuisine. As it may be inferred, the local cuisine of Messolonghi has received various gastronomic influences. According to Kordosi Akakia's "Miliste Messolonghitika", the word "savoro" originates from the Italian "sapore" or "savor" which means tasty.

Exodus fest

The celebrations of the Exodus are considered of high importance for the locals and they are held in town every year. In these celebrations locals willingly participate not only in the conducted parade, but also in the events' organization. Furthermore, locals attend a spectacular procession.

The whole town has to prepare for months before the celebrations of the Exodus, while spectators and participants from all over the world are gathered to attend the celebrations. Furthermore, the celebrations of the Exodus include a variety of cultural and artistic events such as exhibitions of art and photography, recitals and traditional dance performances from different parts of Greece, special tributes to Byron, Meyer and other philhellenic fighters during the Revolution, speeches, educational activities for children etc.

The celebration of the Exodus reaches its peak the day of the holy parade and the pilgrimage in the Heroes' Garden, where a memorial service is sang for the dead of the Siege of Messolonghi. The celebration of the Exodus ends with the enactment of the Exodus and the explosion of the heroic figure Kapsalis Dimitris' powder store.

The fight of Ntolmas

"Ntolmas" is the name of an island close to Aetoliko. In the 28th of February 1826 Turkish and Egyptian ground forces seized the islands of Ntolmas and Poros, traced in the Messolonghi lagoon, and interrupted any kind of communication with the outside world. The commander Liakatas Grigoris was found dead, among others, with his 300 men from the Aetoliko region. The remembrance day of the fight of Ntolmas is celebrated in its entire splendor.

The horse race of Agios Georgios

Every year, the church of Agios Gewrgios celebrates the custom of the horse race in the village of the same name, Agios Georgios in the municipality of Messolonghi. This custom is realized with religious veneration and its routes can be traced in the Tourkish period, as well as, in ancient times, when the first horse races are recorded in Ancient Kalidona in the 4th century B.C.

The celebration of fish in Aetoliko

The Aetoliko's fish celebration is held every last Saturday of September since 1995. During the celebration, visitors have the chance to familiarize themselves with the region, the locals' hospitality and the area's special gastronomy. Volunteers and locals prepare and serve thousands of fish dishes for visitors and guests. Finally, in recent years, a half marathon is organized by the Aetoliko's Running Club and a creative streetpainting event coordinated by the architecture Apostolis Mplikas and the newspaper "The Bridges".

The Festival of the Ancient Theater Oiniadon

The Festival of the Ancient Theater Oiniadon was created by the community leader of the times, the leader of the county's theater in Agrinio and the Lawrence and Kansas University 30 years ago. The Festival of the Ancient Theater has evolved into a popular tradition throughout the years. The theatrical performances are held in the ancient theater of Oiniadon- created in the 4th century BC- and are all productions of the Athens Festival and the Epidaurus Festival. Every two years the Lawrence and Kansas' Universal Theatrical Group stages an ancient tragedy in the ancient theater Oiniadon after a two-month stay in the area. The festival's objective is to attract internationally recognized theatrical groups from all over Europe.

Arts and Letters

Messolonghi played a major role in the culture of the national Greek consciousness primarily through the Palamaiki School's activity. After the Greek Revolution, some of the most well-recognized literature figures of Messolonghi were Palamas K., Malakasis M., Drosinis G., Traulantonis A and Limperakis. The Valvios Library's (property of the Valvios family) and the State Archives' (Xristos Kapsalis' campsite) important historical sources and references contributed to Messolonghi's high intellectual production.

The Messolonghi Byron Society operates the Center for Study and Research about Byronism and Philhellenism. The Messolonghi Byron Society organizes international conferences and participates in international events concerning popular philhellenes and Romantics of the era.

Byronism is a method for poetic composition and thought that is closely related with the composer's way of thinking and acting, as well as, with Lord Byron's life and works. The literary phenomenon of philhellenism appeared in literature before Byronism and after the Decline of the Byzantine Empire.

The lyric and satiric poetry of Lord Byron -an international symbolic figure of romanticism and liberty- became a symbol of philhellenism for Greeks and a legendary figure, worth of worship. His poetry and activity was that concerned with Greece that our country was considered as his second homeland while Greeks often called him "Byron the Greek". Lord Byron dedicated his life and works in the issue of the Greek revolution, he stayed and died in Messolonghi, having offered a priceless material and intellectual help that continued to influence others even after his death.

In the 19th century, the poetic movement of Byronism appears in Greece, contributing to a variety of political extensions. The Greek poet, adherent of the Byron movement, is a romantic poet that expresses his inner feelings, participates and actively shapes the sociopolitical scenery of his place. At the same time, the Byronism's poetry expanded and became internationally recognized and valued through translations, reviews etc.

The Messolonghi Byron Society steadily increases its influence throughout the years, in cooperation with the International Byron Society that frequently hosts a variety of events and conferences in Messolonghi, Greece or abroad.

Finally, descendants of Lord Byron frequently attend events in Messolonghi, while the Messolonghi Byron Society has twinned with Nottingham's schools. Byron's ancestral home is located in Nottingham since 1991.

Messolonghi's Photo Festival

Messolonghi's Photo Festival is considered as one of the most important events of the country that attracts not only Greek but also citizens from all over the world interested in the art of photography. The festival is conducted with the assistance and continuous effort of the Messolonghi's Photography Club (named "Photoleme"). Furthermore, the festival is realized along with the close cooperation of the Benaki Museum that it has hosted a great variety of internationally recognized photographers such as Kwstas Mpalafas, Dimitris Xarisiadis, Kwnstantinos Manos, Giannis Mpexrakis and others. The Messolonghi's Photo Festival became an international festival in 2014, along with the participation of internationally recognized foreign photographers such as Kwnstantinos Manou from USA, Laurent Fabre and Nikos Aliagas from France and Jordi Oliver from Spain.

Present and Future: The power of Messolonghi in changing the development of Eco-Museum Port-Museum

The cultural potential of the two cities, Messolonghi and Aetoliko, provides a great opportunity for pinpointing environmental and cultural issues that could be dynamically addressed through not only the creation, but also the sustainability of the eco-museum port-Museum.

The natural element, which prevails and dynamically shapes the area's features throughout the years, has determined human activity in terms of economic activities (trade, navigation etc.) and cultural production (education, history, mythology, arts and popular culture). Consequently, the creation of the eco-museum could be regarded as in accordance with the area's cultural identity and natural features. Finally, the eco-museum promotes the area's value within an environmental framework, in which natural processes could evolve smoothly indicating the region's high cultural value.

- "Diexodos" Cultural Center
- TEI of Western Greece (Messolonghi Department)
- The Messolonghi Byron Society
- Messolonghi's Photography Club
- Agrinio-Messolonghi Aero-Club
- The Sailing Club of Messolonghi-Aetoliko Environmental Education Center
- The Management Organization for the Messolonghi-Aetoliko Lagoon and the Akarnika Mountains.
- Local Hub "Messolonghi By Locals" DIEK of Messolonghi
- Cultural Association of PanAetoliko
- "TO ANATOLIKO" Cultural and Educational Association of Aetoliko
- Messolonghi's Society for Archeology and History
- KOIN.S.EP Acheloos Grow Up
- The Messolonghi Cultural Center
- Filoi tis Limnothalassas, PROTECTA
- Social Solidarity of Messolonghi
- Volunteers for Research and Rescue- E.O.E.
- The Folklore Society of Evinoxwri "Agios Iwannis"
- Oreivatikos Sillogos Messolonghiou
- Simvoulío Apodimou Ellinismou
- "Kwstis Palamas" Center for Poetry and Modern Greek Literature
- Hellenic Musicological Society
- Institute for the Study of Byzantine and Greek traditional music "To psaltiri"
- The Riding Club of Evinoxwri
- Aiotoloakarnania's Local History and Cultural Research Center
- Messolonghi Art and Cultural Center
- Margari Gallery
- Messolonghi Folk and Cultural Association
- Cultural and Educational Women's Association of Messolonghi "I Thusia"
- Radio Station I.P. Messolonghi (Benefit Association),
- "Friends of the Cinema" Association- Cinema Club Messolnghi Agroperivalontiki
Simpoliteia Diethnis Adelfotita Apogonwn tw n Eleutherwn Poliorkimenwn
Messolonghiou
- The Association of Panigiristwn Messonghiou «Agios Symios»
- Folklore Costumes and Weapons Association "Liaros"

- Society for Archaeology and History of Western Greece
- Educational Association "the friends of Lagoon»
- Association "Friends of Music - D. Solomos"
- The Musical Society of Messolonghi "Iwsif Rwgwn"
- Association for the Preservation and Revival of Aetoliko's History "Oi Taksiarxes"
- "Friends of Messolonghi Balveios Library"
- Commercial Industrial Association of Messolonghi
- Chamber of Aiotolokarnania
- Messolonghi Marina SA.

Ideas about events and thematic itineraries

- *MOU: Memorandum of Understanding between Sacred Town of Messolonghi "St Nikolaos Route – LaViaNicolaiana® European Cultural Route Agios Nikolaos of Muron"*

The Memorandum of Understanding's prime objective is to record various areas of the Aetoloakarnania Region and it is part of the European Project of Cultural Routes titled *Nikolas Route – La ViaNicolaiana® European Cultural Route Agios Nikolaos of Muron*.



- *Lagoon festival (Anatolikon Cultural Association)*

The Lagoon Festival is a three-day festival that offers sports activities, dances, musical performances, horse riding, sea sports and other interesting activities. The Lagoon festival is held in the end of July near the statue of Aetoliko. The well-known festival tends to be part of the city's customs in recent years.

- *Interactive riddle games «Sacred Town: the game» (Association "friends of Music – Dionysios Solomos")*

In accordance with the structure of escape-rooms, hidden treasure and riddle games, the suggested games will involve plots inspired by the Siege of Messolonghi in 1826.

The participants will be separated in groups and they will try to solve mysteries, riddles, puzzles while they will face various challenges. They will have to cooperate with each other and combine existing information in order to complete their final mission.

- *Half-Marathon of the Lagoon of the Messolonghi Sacred City. (Racing Association of the Sacred City of Messolonghi in cooperation with the Municipality's Spiritual Center) <http://www.meshalfmarathon.gr/>*

Apart from the half-marathon of 21.097 meters, a race of 5 km (running distance) and a race of 1.000 meters (running distance) for students of primary and secondary school are simultaneously held. The races are held by EOLSMA-Y and they are dedicated to the departed Gerasimos Tzanos, a physical education teacher.

- *Crossing the Trixonida Lake (PanAetoliko Association)*
- *Regatta Messolonghi-Kalamos (Sailing club of Messolonghi & Diexodos)*
- *Philharmonic Festival*

The "Philharmonic Avenues" Festival, held during the Celebrations of the Exodus, inspired the suggested Philharmonic festival. The Philharmonic festival will be held for two days, and philharmonics from the West Greece Region and one European country will participate.

- *Choirs Festival*

The county's Choir Club has displayed a remarkable route of attendance in music festivals around the world throughout the years. Therefore, the county's Choir Club has the experience and potential to organize a remarkable Choirs Festival, along with the attendance of choirs from abroad.

- *Short film festival*

The Short Film Festival for students will be held in the summer of 2016. Along with the cooperation of the Messolonghi Short Film Club, in the aforementioned festival students from all over the region will have the opportunity to participate actively with their short

films. The films will be inspired from the love for nature, humanity and life, while they will foster creativity and intercultural awareness. Finally, directors will have the opportunity to send their short films in relevant international films festivals.

- *The Revival of the "Trikoupeia" Tradition*

The "Trikoupeia" Tradition will be revived in 2016. The "Trikoupeia" tradition refers to events of political reflections and it will be held in Messolonghi on an annual basis.

- *A Theme Park for Greek History*

The proposed Theme Park will include a reenactment of the Greek Revolution experience and the events of the Exodus of Messolonghi. Moreover, literature competitions will be announced by the municipality's Cultural Center within 2016. The competitions' main objective will be to promote the literary works of local poets and writers.

- *Music and Poetry: Planning until 2021*

The implementation of cultural activities in Messolonghi is strongly advised along with the cooperation of other relevant bodies and important figures of the existing social and intellectual life. The section's prime objective is for the city of Messolonghi to host a variety of cultural and scientific events.

Finally, the following indicative events are suggested:

- Engraving Festival in Aetoliko
- In cooperation with the Museum of Naval Tradition: display of the "gaita" in the new museum "Aetoliko"
- Workshop traditional shipbuilding: the art of "karavomaragos" (traditional ships constructor)
- Environmental education programs of the Environmental Education Center
- Educational workshop for sailing for beginners and professionals (Sail Association of Messolonghi)- Diaplous me gaites kai pani "latina"
- Aetoliko Food Festival: the celebration of the fish (events in the local neighborhoods and in town, hosting of world-recognized chefs) - Gastronomy Festival: PDE products, Hosting guests in local houses - exploring the local cuisine
- Thematic Literature Routes: From Romanticism to beat poetry - From Byron and Palamas to Gkorpas
- I. M. Panagiotopoulos: an author born and raised in Aetoliko
- Birdwatching and photography in the lagoon

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«Messolonghi-Taksidevontas sti Mageutiki Limnothalassa»

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