

# *Castles of Northwest Greece*

*From the early Byzantine Period to the  
eve of the First World War*

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**Aetos Press**

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# *Introduction*

## *The early history of the region*

There is evidence of human occupation in the area that now forms the northwest of Greece from the Neolithic period onwards. The earliest cities were established by a succession of colonists. Mycenaean colonies were founded in the 14C BC notably at Ephyra near the mouth of the river Acherontas. In the 7C BC Elean colonies were established at Bouchetion, Baties and Elatria to the north of the Gulf of Ambracia and at Pandosia in the Acherontas valley.<sup>1</sup> Corinthian colonies created at the same time included Ambracia, the location of modern Arta, and Anaktoria on the southern shore of the Ambracian Gulf. In the 5C BC the inhabitants of Corfu established a colony at Toroni to the north of Igoumenitsa, while at Nafpaktos on the Gulf of Corinth the Athenians planted a colony of Messenian exiles.

The native tribes of Epiros were the Molossi who occupied the central area around modern Ioannina; the Thesproti who held the valleys of the Acherontas and its tributaries and whose name survives in modern Thesprotia; and the Chaones whose territory now lies in southern Albania. Further south the tribes of Aetolia had created a federal state, or league, in the 4C BC as had the Akarnanians somewhat earlier. Epiros itself was first unified in the 4C BC by the Molossian king, Alexander. In the 3C under Pyrrhus its borders were greatly expanded and with the acquisition of Akarnania extended as far south as the Gulf of Corinth. However after the death of Pyrrhus's successor, Alexander II, in 240 BC, Epiros began to fragment and Akarnania regained its independence. There followed a protracted period of conflict between Epiros and the Aetolians. At the beginning of the 2C BC Epiros became involved in the wars between Rome and Macedon. Eventually the tribes split into two factions with the Molossians supporting Macedon. The final Roman victory at the end of the Third Macedonian War led, in 167 BC, to

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the sacking of seventy Molossian settlements in retribution. Epiros became part of the Roman province of Macedonia created after the defeat of a Macedonian uprising in 148 BC. Rome had defeated the Aetolians in 189 BC and Aetolia was thereafter a Roman client state. Akarnania also acknowledged the supremacy of Rome around this time. After the defeat of the Achaian League and the sack of Corinth in 146 BC the whole of Greece was divided into the two Roman provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. Both the Aetolian and the Akarnanian Leagues continued as political entities until 31 BC when, with the founding of Nikopolis by Octavian, their territories were forcibly de-populated to provide the first inhabitants of the new city.

A separate province of Epiros with Nikopolis as its capital was created at the beginning of the 2C AD. At the end of the 3C the Emperor Diocletian reformed the borders to create Epiros Vetus in the south and Epiros Nova to the north. Epiros Vetus, old Epiros, included all of modern northwest Greece as far south as the Acheloos River as well as the extreme south of modern Albania. New Epiros lay to the north and occupied southern Illyria, the area now occupied by the greater part of modern Albania. In 330 Constantine dedicated his new capital of Constantinople on the Bosphorus and in 395 the Eastern Empire formally separated from the Western. Over the following centuries the eastern half became the Greek-speaking entity we now call the Byzantine Empire. The Balkans as a whole were subjected to devastation from successive waves of invaders from the 3C onwards. The Goths in the 3C were followed by the Huns in the 4C and the Vandals in the 5C. These invasions led in turn to a general re-fortification of the main cities of the Empire. The prime example in Epiros is the 5C circuit of Nikopolis probably constructed after the Vandal raids of 475. From the 6C onwards the Balkans suffered repeated invasions by Slav tribes. Byzantine political control in most of Epiros was lost by the end of the 7C and not regained until the 9C in the reign of the Emperor Basil I. Further re-fortification may have occurred at this time.

## *The Norman Invasion*

The Normans had been active in southern Europe as mercenaries since the latter part of the 10C. In the 11C, led by the Hauteville family, they carved out a kingdom for themselves in southern Italy ousting the Byzantines completely in 1071 with the fall of Bari after a three-year siege. From this power base Robert Guiscard and his son Bohemond

## *Introduction*

embarked on an ambitious but ultimately unsuccessful campaign to conquer Constantinople itself. In 1081 they crossed the Adriatic, seized a number of ports on the Illyrian coast and occupied Corfu. The following year Bohemond captured Ioannina and made major improvements to its fortifications, elements of which still survive. He advanced east into Thessaly but was defeated at Larissa in 1083. The Byzantines regained their lost territory and the Norman campaigns came to an abrupt end with Guiscard's death in 1085.

### *The Despotate of Epiros*

In 1204 the Byzantine Empire was dealt a devastating blow by the forces of the Fourth Crusade from which it only subsequently partially recovered. The combined Crusader armies of Franks and Venetians conquered and sacked Constantinople and proceeded to divide up the Empire between them. The Venetians' agreement with the Crusaders had given them three eighths of the Empire, famously expressed as the fraction "one quarter and half of one quarter". Epiros was part of this allotment but in practice the Venetians were interested only in its coastal strongholds and ports. In 1205 Michael Comnenus Doukas, an illegitimate member of the Byzantine imperial family, seized the territory. In 1210 he reached an agreement with the Venetians to govern Epiros notionally on their behalf. The independent Byzantine state he created was eventually to become known as the Despotate of Epiros.<sup>2</sup> Only two other fragments of the Empire remained under Byzantine control. These were known as the Empire of Nicaea and the Empire of Trebizond and occupied small territories in Asia Minor.

Michael and his successor on his death in 1215, his half-brother Theodore, pursued a policy of vigorous territorial expansion and by 1230 their new state encompassed Old and New Epiros, Aetolia, Akarnania, Thessaly and much of Macedonia including the city of Thessalonica. Its capital was Arta, with Ioannina, much expanded by an influx of refugees from Constantinople, forming its second city. Theodore's attempt to create a new Byzantine Empire brought him into conflict with the Empire of Nicaea but his grand plan to recover Constantinople came to a halt when he was defeated by the Bulgarians in 1230. Michael II, the exiled son of the first Michael Doukas, used the opportunity to return to Arta and seize his inheritance. It was this Michael and his son, Nikephoros, who were jointly granted the title of Despot for the first time by the Nicaean Emperor John Vatatzes in 1253 during a brief



*Figure 1.2* Nafpaktos: The partially blocked up sea gate.

point in the Turkish period the walls on the west quay were modified for heavy artillery by the insertion of low level gunports virtually at sea level. These are still visible although they are either partially blocked up or, as with the passage through the wall onto the concrete jetty projecting into the Gulf, have been converted into gateways. In an enclosure

## *Aetolia and Akarnania*

built against the sea wall in the southwestern corner of the harbour stands a statue of Cervantes commemorating his role in the Battle of Lepanto when his left hand was permanently damaged by a Turkish bullet. At the far end of this enclosure the original sea gate is now partly walled up. It is best viewed from the shore. A single box shaped machicolation above the gate guards the entrance. A Turkish watchtower has been added to the parapet which retains its notched crenellations. A second statue stands on the west tower at the harbour mouth. The figure represented holding a torch aloft is Giorgos Anemogiannis, killed by the Turks in 1821 after attempting to burn their fleet in the harbour. There is no evidence of artillery modifications on the walls on the east quay. Only the D-shaped tower at the harbour entrance is now crenellated. A square watchtower with a pyramidal roof is built astride its parapet. Since 1909 this has been used to house a navigation beacon. Some twenty metres to the east a flight of steps leads down from the rampart to another small gate opening seawards. In the southeastern corner of the harbour area stands the Fetihe mosque built sometime between 1499 and the death of Bayezid II in 1512. Only the base of the minaret survives but the interior has been restored.

From the quays the walls curve inland enclosing the area of the mediaeval lower town. Beyond the sea gate the western section reverts



*Figure 1.3* Nafpaktos: Western harbour defences.

to its original Venetian appearance although much of the parapet is now missing. The line of the wall is broken by a modern street then continues north to a squat solid round tower with the typical Venetian external torus moulding at parapet level. North of this tower the line of the wall is broken again by the main east-west road which passes south of the west town gate housed within a large square Turkish tower. The outer entrance, now obscured by modern buildings, is set in the north flank of the tower protected by a box machicolation in the parapet above. The roof forms a gun platform with splayed artillery embrasures in the north, south and west faces. Old maps indicate that the approach to this entrance was originally across a bridge over a ditch in front of the wall. The passage within the tower makes a right-angled turn to the inner gate in the east face. This can be seen from the lane that runs inside the wall towards the white-painted Botzaris tower (Town plan, E). This heavily restored tower was once part of a fortified compound used by the Turkish governor of the town. It was acquired by the Botzaris family in the 19C and now houses the museum of the Battle of Lepanto.

The lane continues uphill northeastward to the gate in the crosswall between the upper and lower towns. Set at an oblique angle to the line of the walls this gate survives virtually complete. A Turkish fountain is built against the wall to the left of the approach. A square tower flanks



*Figure 1.4* Nafpaktos: Blocked up outer entrance of west town gate.

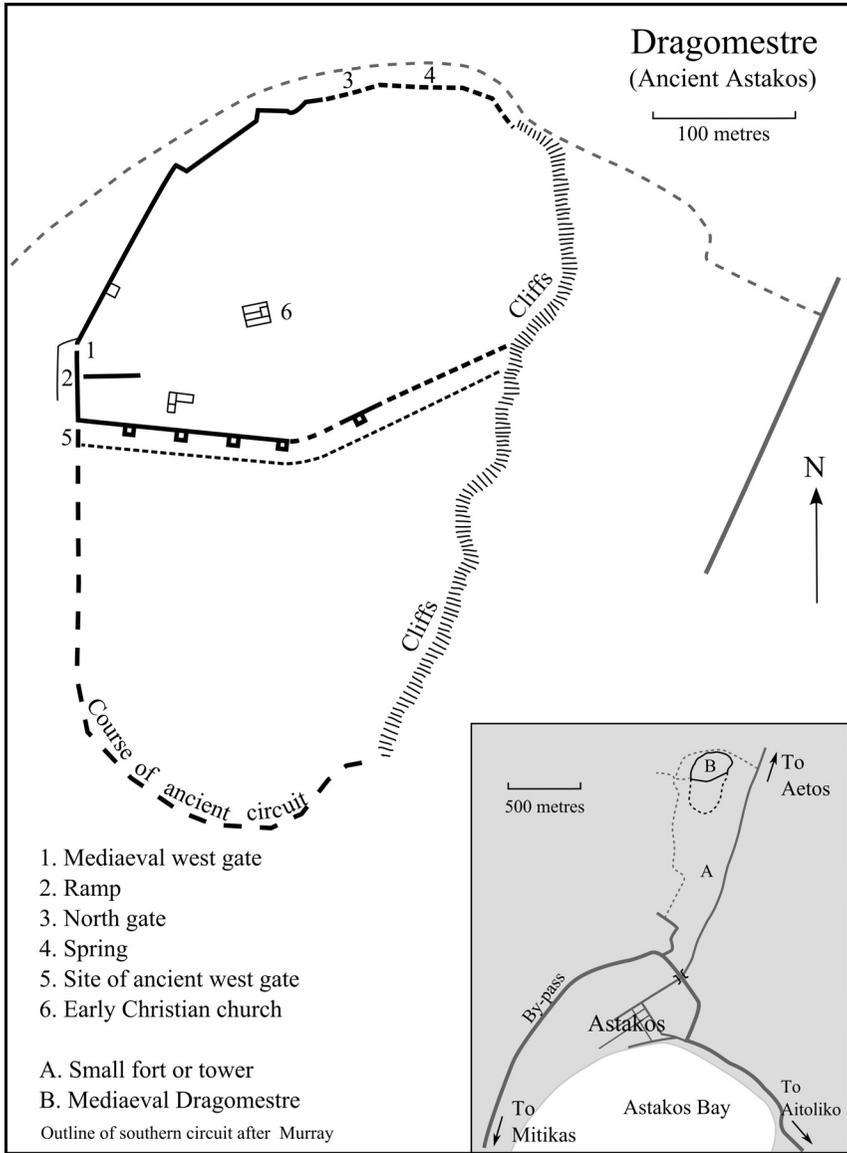


*Figure 1.5* Nafpaktos: Gate from the lower to the upper town.  
Above the gate is a well-preserved box machicolation.

the entrance on the west while a narrow tapering tower on the east projects across the face of the gate and conceals it from below. Another box machicolation at parapet level protects the arched opening which retains its iron studded wooden door. The gate is approximately at the mid-point of the crosswall that runs along the edge of a natural terrace in the hillside. This wall functions as a revetment to the steep slope and its southern face is therefore substantially higher than the northern side where the parapet is often close to ground level. To the west it meets the wall climbing from the west town gate at a large solid round tower. Access to this section of the walls is difficult. Through the gate the lane narrows to a paved path that continues east rising virtually to the level of the parapet. It leads past a half-round tower directly onto the platform of the clock-tower bastion. The clock tower itself is now a landmark for the town but was erected only in 1914 by the Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, Seraphim Domboetis. The bastion is a Turkish structure built directly over the original Venetian round tower that stood at the junction of the crosswall, the east wall of the upper town and the wall climbing the hill from the eastern defences of the lower town. The south face of this heavily battered round tower can still be distinguished from below. The Turks enclosed it in a much larger multangular structure as part of their modernisation of the defences for heavy artillery, although the gun



*Figure 1.6* Nafpaktos: The clock tower and the Turkish multangular bastion viewed from the northeast.



the shoreline in 1809 when Leake visited the area was a rough mole, or breakwater, and some warehouses.<sup>36</sup> The concrete quays of modern Astakos have brought the present shoreline further south and have obliterated all traces of an earlier harbour. Both the ancient city of Astakos and its mediaeval successor Dragomestre<sup>37</sup> are to be found one and a half kilometres inland on a flat-topped hill on the western side of

the valley that runs north from the head of the bay. Although the hill slopes gently to the south and is separated from the mountain to the west only by a low saddle, to the north and east it is surrounded by cliffs, and it forms an obvious defensible position. The valley below provides one of the few relatively large areas of agricultural land in Akarnania. It extends inland a further six kilometres to the north of Dragomestre and until the construction of the modern coast road it was the major route into the interior. The city wall of ancient Astakos encircles the hill and forms a rough oval approximately 500m by 300m. The mediaeval builders of the fortified settlement of Dragomestre re-used the northern half of the ancient circuit by building a crosswall from east to west reducing the defended area by about one half.

Dragomestre is first mentioned in the 1220s as one of the ten bishoprics of the see of Nafpaktos. Its history during the existence of the Despotate closely follows that of Angelokastro and it may date from the same period. It saw successive periods of Angevin, Byzantine, Serbian, Albanian and Italian control before finally falling into Turkish hands around 1460. The long period of Ottoman occupation was briefly interrupted in 1684 when the Venetians gained control of the Akarnanian coast from Santa Maura south to Mesolonghi. The following year Morosini used Dragomestre as the assembly point for his fleet before the Venetian campaign to subdue the Morea.<sup>38</sup> Dragomestre reverted to the Turks after 1700. Its final role in Greek history came in 1827 when Sir Richard Church, recently appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Greek forces fighting the Turks, landed with a force of one thousand men, converted the surviving mediaeval ruins into an entrenched camp and created a base for his subsequent operations in northwest Greece.<sup>39</sup>

The site can be approached either from the south via a track from the outskirts of the town or from the Aetos road to the east. The southern route passes first to the west of a ruined tower, or small fort, standing on a prominent knoll. The remains may be those of the tower seen by Leake in 1809.<sup>40</sup> They consist of a confused mixture of squared ancient blocks and later rough masonry. As there is no direct line of sight between the city and the harbour, a tower in this position would have provided a signalling point both in antiquity and in the mediaeval period. After a further 500m the track passes the southern half of the original city walls of ancient Astakos now very badly preserved. Little is visible beneath the dense cover of scrub vegetation although eleven towers were identified by Murray in this section of the circuit. He also identified the position of the ancient west gate.<sup>41</sup> North of this sector the line of walls running from east to west across the crest of the hill represents



*Figure 1.48* Dragomestre: The west tower of the mediaeval crosswall.

the southern face of the mediaeval enclosure. Four of its square reinforcing towers, much ruined, are still visible. The wall and towers are built of roughly cut irregular blocks with tile and brick fragments in the joints and re-used ancient blocks reinforcing the corners. Some 10m south of the mediaeval work the course of a second wall can be traced as a line of massive foundation blocks. They appear to run parallel to the mediaeval wall for its full length and may be all that survives of a cross wall that divided the city of ancient Astakos into two parts. The use of a crosswall dividing the interior space is a common feature of the ancient cities of Akarnania.<sup>42</sup> It is not clear why the mediaeval builders did not re-use these foundations unless the intention was to create a double line of defences at this point. From the western end of the crosswall the mediaeval circuit runs north and is built upon the remnants of the ancient walls. This southwest corner is the best-preserved section of the mediaeval circuit although the ruins are overgrown and confused. A new west gate was constructed in this period some fifty metres north of the crosswall. The approach ramp can still be traced although little else remains. The wall to the south of the gate stands on five or six courses of ancient blocks. Within the circuit a heavy interior wall runs eastward 30m north of the crosswall. This may have formed part of an inner enclosure. Further east again stand the ruins of an early

## *Preveza and Lefkas*

army during the First Balkan War. Preveza became formally part of Greece in 1913 with the rest of Epiros.

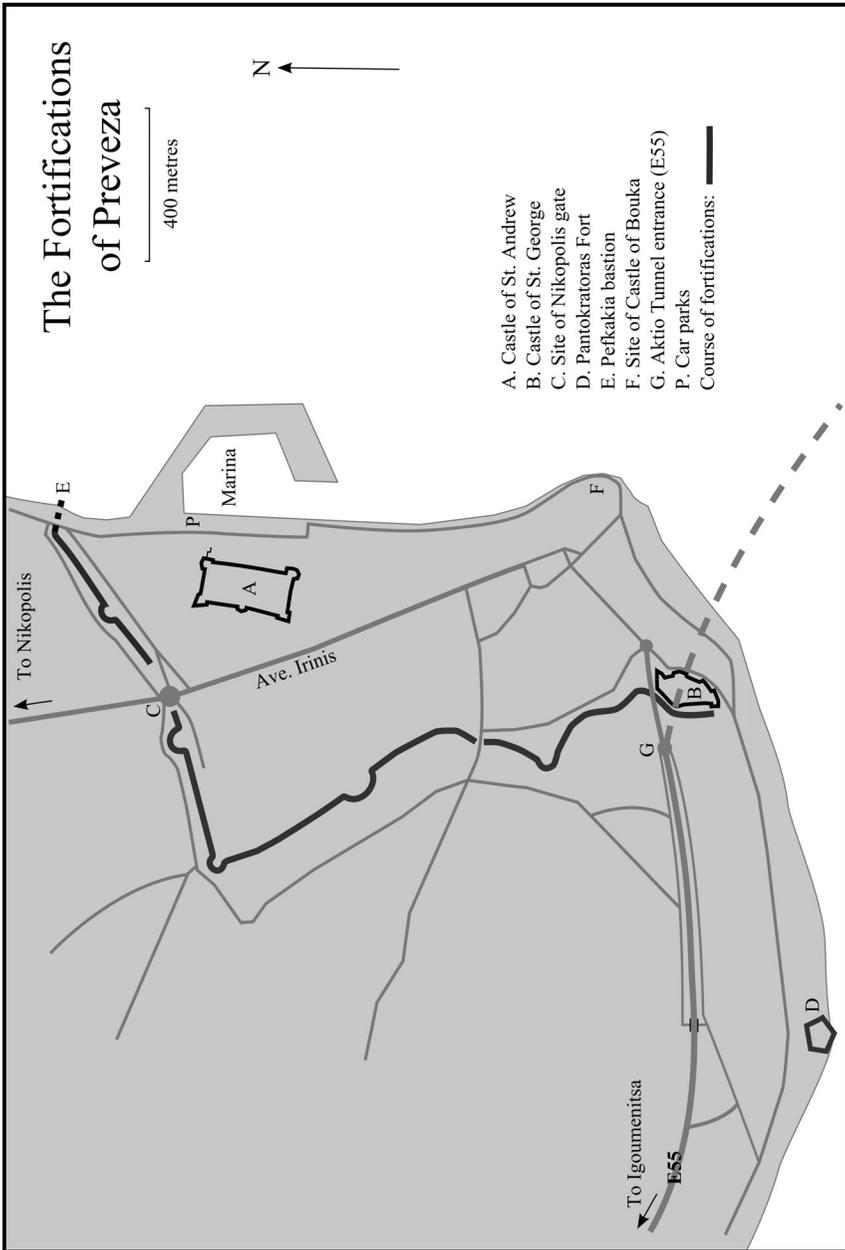
The town was first fortified by the Turks in 1478.<sup>2</sup> They built a castle at the southeast point of the peninsula overlooking the narrow entrance channel to the Ambracian Gulf. Known as the Castle of Bouka, its defences were improved by the Venetians after 1684. The Treaty of Karlowitz obliged the Venetians to hand Preveza back to the Turks but before doing so in 1701 they blew up the castle. The Turks did not rebuild on the same spot but chose to erect a new fort 800m to the north on the site of the present Castle of St. Andrew.<sup>3</sup> Today the fortifications that have survived are almost entirely the work of Ali Pasha and were built in the first decade of the 19C as part of his programme to consolidate his hold on the area. Each of the surviving structures is described below but students of military architecture of the period will find a visit to the Fort of Pantokratoras the most satisfying.

### *Castle of St. Andrew*

Although the fort built by the Turks in 1702 must have stood throughout the subsequent period of Venetian control, the remains that survive today date from the rebuilding by Ali Pasha and were completed in 1807. The castle is a quadrangular fortress approximately 250m by 100m, originally encircled by a ditch, with its long side facing the port. It is concealed surprisingly well by modern buildings. The landward side is protected by one central and two corner bastions of conventional shape but with shallow, ineffective flanks. Towards the port polygonal bastions occupy the northeast and southeast corners. Walls once extended from these bastions to enclose the port area. A short section of the northern wall with the remains of a gate still stands. The decades of use by the Greek Army have altered the appearance of the fort substantially. The interior has been levelled completely and is now occupied by abandoned military buildings. The original central gate is long demolished and the walls have been reduced in height to below the level of the parapet. Entry is by two modern breaches in the circuit.

### *The City Defences*

The rebuilt Castle of St. Andrew was just one element in Ali Pasha's extensive programme of fortification. In 1807 he surrounded Preveza with an earthenwork rampart and moat over two kilometres long built with the use of conscripted labour. In March 1809 William Leake



visited the town and described the newly constructed walls as already beginning to crumble.<sup>4</sup> The walls ran from the shore north of the port to another point on the coast to the south of the town. The northeast

## *Preveza and Lefkas*

extremity terminated in a masonry bastion projecting into the sea with embrasures facing south to protect the port. At its southern end the rampart was reinforced with a new fort, known as the Castle of St. George. With the exception of a very short section around this new fort the moat has now been filled in completely. Almost all traces of the rampart have also long since disappeared. Nevertheless its course can still be traced easily and a cycle path occupies much of the western section of the moat. A roundabout at the northern end of Avenue Irinis now indicates the site of the main north gate. However the northeast, or Pefkakia, bastion still exists. Although its interior has been filled in with earth the walls stand to their full height and the gun embrasures are clearly visible. The Castle of St. George, although also used by the Greek Army for many years, has survived in better condition than the Castle of St Andrew. Superficially similar in style, the walls stand to their full height with the original embrasures in the parapet visible. The fort is roughly triangular with the main entrance protected by the projecting northeast bastion. The one remaining section of the moat protects the west side. The southeast walls have an irregular, indented trace that now faces a small park but must once have stood directly on the shore commanding the entrance to the Gulf. Although no longer in military use the fort is currently locked and inaccessible.



*Figure 2.1* Castle of St. George.

*Preveza and Lefkas*



*Figure 2.2* Pefkakia bastion.  
View of the gun embrasures from the south.



*Figure 2.3* Castle of St. Andrew: Southeast bastion.

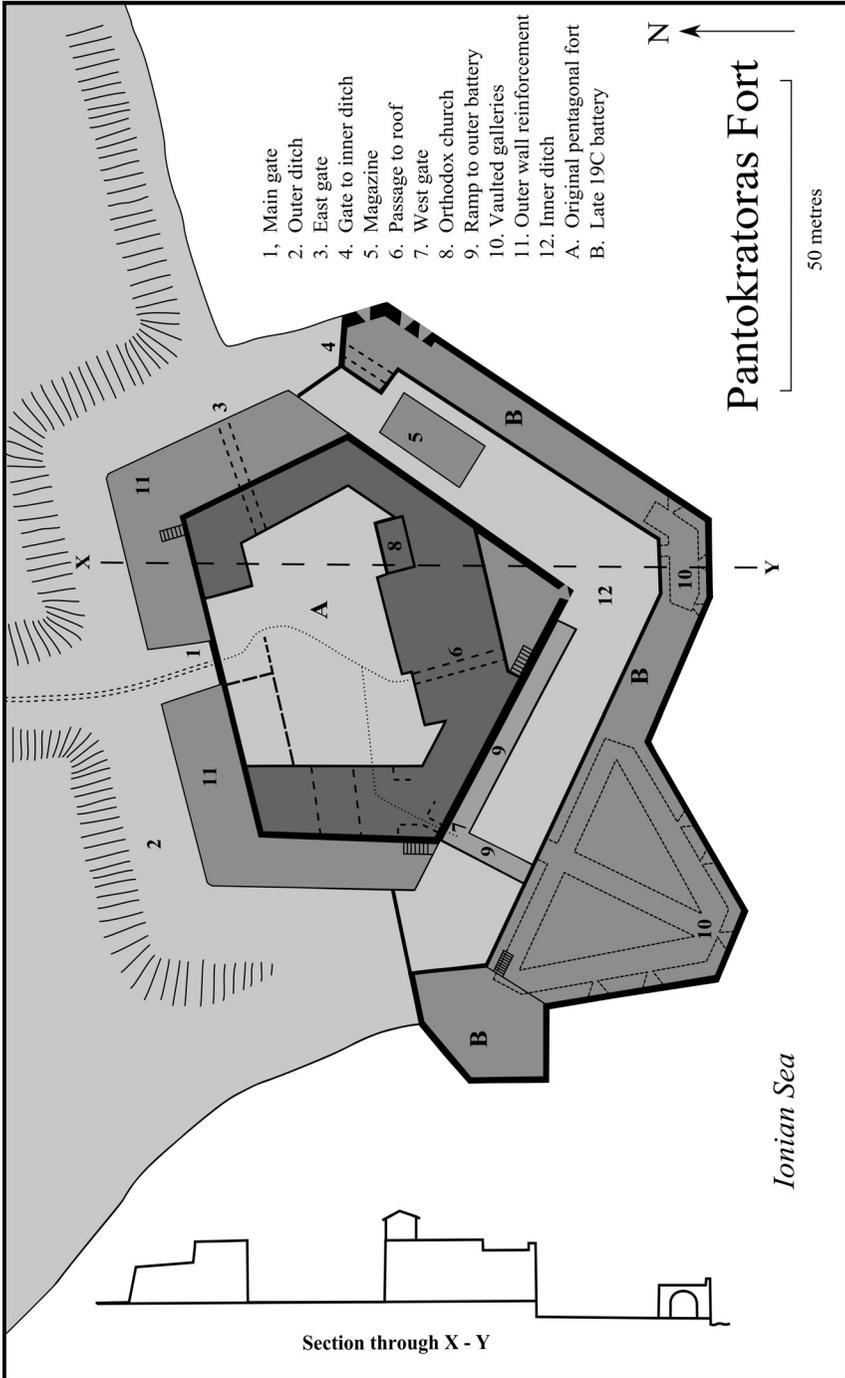
***Pantokratoras Fort***

One kilometre to the west of the Castle of St. George Ali Pasha built a new pentagonal fort in 1807 to command the sea approaches to the Ambracian Gulf from the north. Named the Castle, or Fort, of Pantokratoras after the church that originally stood on the site, it was strengthened and enlarged in the latter part of the 19C with the addition of an elaborate casemated sea battery to the south of the original work.<sup>5</sup> Today the fort still stands, well preserved, on a low headland on the edge of the modern suburb of the same name.

The original fort had a relatively thin and high outer wall enclosing an internal court lined with vaulted barrack blocks on two levels. The flat roofs of these blocks formed the fort's gun platforms. Although the parapets on the seaward sides of the fort are now missing or ruined photographs from the early 20C show a line of gun embrasures along the southeast rampart. The most prominent object on the roof of the fort is now a small modern church built incongruously on a concrete platform above the original vaults.<sup>6</sup>



*Figure 2.4* Pantokratoras Fort: General view from the east. The late 19C battery is in the foreground overlooked by the original pentagonal fort with the modern church on its roof.





*Figure 2.5* Pantokratoras Fort: Main gate.

At some point in the late 19C work began to update the fort's defences. The original northern outer wall was raised in height and its arched gunports were filled in. A substantial reinforcement of earth eight metres thick with a sloping masonry scarp was added to the external faces of the north, west and east walls to half their height. However the largest component of this modernisation was a completely new low-level battery built on the shoreline. This was constructed with its inner face parallel to the southeast and southwest faces of the original fort so as to form an additional ditch between the two structures closed off at each end by a connecting wall. There was provision for artillery both at rampart level and within internal vaulted galleries.

The fort is defended on the landward side by a dry ditch. A ramp leads down into the ditch to the main gate. Approaching the gate through the thickened walls, the modifications described above are immediately apparent. The gate leads directly into the inner courtyard. The vaulted structures built against the north wall have largely vanished but are substantially intact on the other sides. Immediately to the left an archway leads to a barrel-vaulted corridor through the east wall to what must have been the original sea-gate before the addition of the south battery. Ahead, a vaulted ramp leads up through the barrack block to roof level. From the west and northeast salient angles steps lead down

been provided with parapets but unfortunately all traces have disappeared. The final feature to note in the west wall is a postern gate by the fourth tower to the north of the west gate. This is located within the stairway-supporting arch. It may have been placed here to give access to the nearby Alkison Basilica. Although only half of the lintel survives the relieving arch above has ensured the survival of the wall,

The northern and eastern walls are as yet uncleared except for a short length of the southeast section where a further five towers have been exposed. Presumably a further east gate existed in this uncleared section. A north gate may have stood at the point where the modern road breaches the walls.

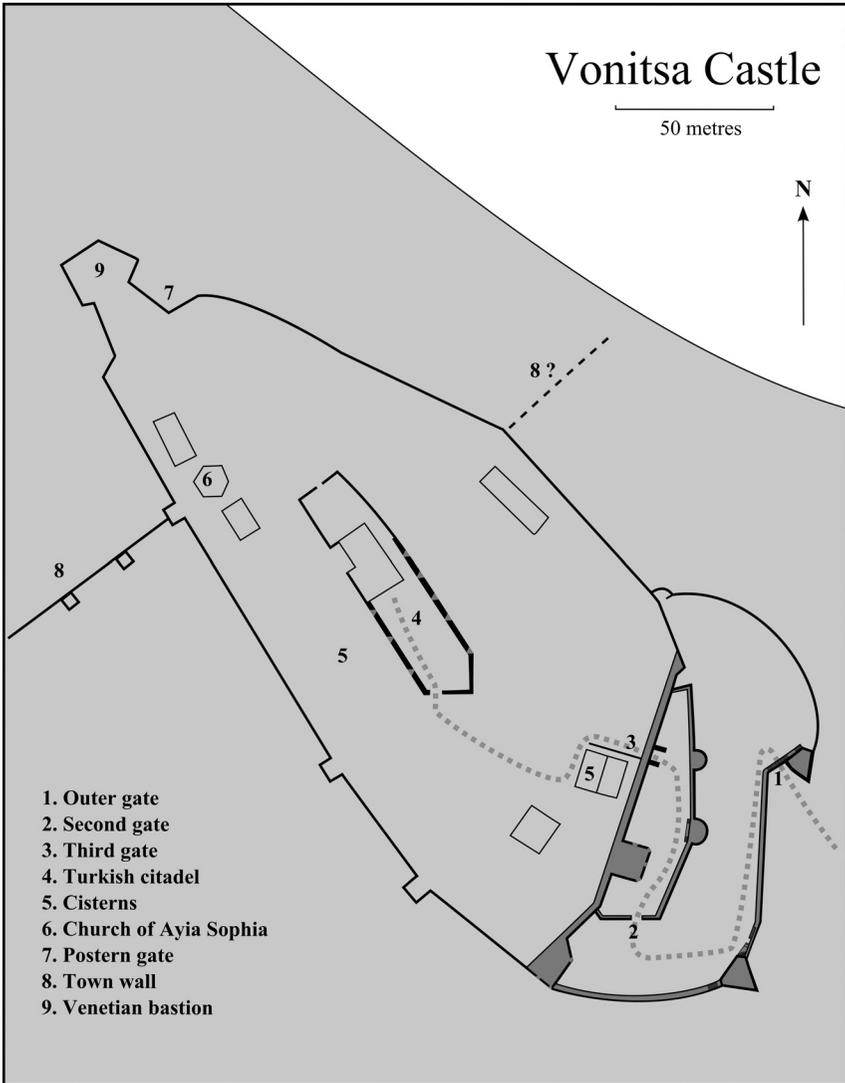
Nikopolis is an extensive site and several hours are required to visit all its points of interest. Fortunately only the areas surrounding the Victory monument, the museum and the principal basilicas are enclosed. These have the usual opening hours (8.30 to 15.00). The main Preveza – Arta road passes through the eastern half of the city and then traverses the area of the northern suburb before passing the stadium and the massive ruined theatre. Although the theatre is as yet unexcavated the stadium has been cleared and is approached through the remains of the original eastern entrance tunnel. A network of drivable dirt roads connects the other points of interest around the site and also allows inspection of much of the Roman circuit. The best-preserved Roman monuments are the odeion and the Nymphaea. The odeion, reached from the dirt road that passes through the Byzantine west gate, dates from the founding of the city. It is built of brick and concrete and the seating has been restored. Originally the structure was roofed. The forum, which has not been excavated, lay due south. Beyond the odeion the dirt road forks. To the right a track leads to the Roman north gate. To the left another track leads via a further right turn to the Nymphaea and the site of the Roman west gate.

### *Notes*

1. H. E. Lurier, *Crusaders as Conquerors: The Chronicle of the Morea*, p. 322.
2. N. D. Karabelas, *Το κάστρο της Μπούκας (1478-1701)*, p. 402.
3. The ruins of the destroyed Castle of Bouka survived until the end of the 18C when Ali Pasha re-used the materials in his new fortifications. Karabelas, *Το κάστρο της Μπούκας*, pp. 412-414.
4. Although Ali Pasha had first taken Preveza in 1798 with much

slaughter, his activities thereafter had been partially constrained by the convention of 1800 between Russia and Turkey. Primarily this treaty had established the Septinsular Republic of the Ionian Islands but it had also ceded the old Venetian mainland possessions to the Turks with the proviso that the privileges they had enjoyed from Venice should continue. Nominal control of Preveza was in the hands of a Bey appointed by the Sultan. However in 1806 war broke out between Russia and the Turks and Ali Pasha used the threat of a Russian takeover to re-occupy the town and assert absolute control. His major works of fortification began shortly after with the aim of transforming Preveza into his most important base on the coast. He also built himself a palace, or seraglio, on the site of the old Castle of Bouka. No trace of this structure survives. W. M. Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece, Vol. III*, p. 489.

5. ESCUTIS, *Muslim Presence in Epirus and Western Greece*, p. 414.
6. For much of the 20C the fort was used by the military and as a prison. Several other buildings stood on the roof in addition to the church. These have now all been demolished leaving only their concrete foundation platforms in place.
7. The Corinthians are believed to have colonised Lefkas and the coast of Akarnania in the 7C BC and cut the first navigable canal. The location of this canal and the topography of Lefkas in relation to the mainland of Akarnania has long been the subject of debate. Strabo (10.2.8) describes Lefkas as a peninsula which the Corinthians made into an island by cutting a channel through an isthmus. He locates this isthmus by the ancient town of Nerikos stating that it had become a channel now crossed by a bridge. Remains of a Hellenistic-Roman bridge lie submerged about 3km south of Santa Maura near the Russian Fort Constantine. Recent geological research has identified a raised area at this point, below modern sea level, which probably represents this ancient isthmus. However the nature of the ancient channel through the remainder of the lagoon area and the northern spit remains uncertain. Mediaeval and Venetian maps show the spit pierced only by a narrow moat beneath the western walls of the castle See P. Negris, *Vestiges Antiques Submergés*, pp. 354-360, and S. Brockmüller, A. Vott, S.M. May, and H. Brückner, *Palaeoenvironmental changes of the Lefkada Sound and their archaeological relevance*.
8. Angevin documents of 1300 record Charles II of Naples granting permission to John Orsini to build a fort. See William Miller, *Latins in the Levant*, p. 181.



long and 250m wide aligned northwest to southeast. The circuit that stands today is the product of many centuries of repair, rebuilding and adaptation but the original Byzantine foundation seems to have been built with relatively thin walls reinforced sporadically with square, half round or pointed towers. It appears to have relied on the steep slopes of the hill for much of its strength. To the southeast the ground slopes more gently towards the modern town and the castle's main defences are concentrated here. They consist of a triple line of walls arranged so

## *Gulf of Ambracia*

that entry is gained only by following a serpentine route through three successive gates. The plain outer gate is protected by a sharply projecting beaked tower. Recently restored, this tower has a single chamber in each of its two storeys, and a parapet, with merlons still partially intact, at roof level. An external flight of stone steps on the inner face of the tower gives access via a small landing to the arched doorway of the lower floor. Directly above this entrance a second arched doorway, now walled up, can be seen. The arches above both openings have been embellished with courses of thin red brick. The placement of these doorways and the clear discontinuities visible in the roughly cut masonry of the wall may indicate that another building originally stood against the inner face of the gate. The external stairs continue upwards carried on an arch across the gate passage and give access to the southern section of the outer wall. Its parapet is pierced by narrow loopholes at regular intervals. The intact wallwalk is interrupted by a second two-storeyed triangular tower some sixty metres to the south. At some point a large square gunport has been inserted in the eastern flank of this tower at ground floor level. To the north of the outer gate the wall curves around to the west to meet the inner circuit. The ruins of a hollow tower appear



*Figure 3.25* Vonitsa Castle: Outer gate with flanking tower.

*Gulf of Ambracia*



*Figure 3.26* Vonitsa Castle: Inner face of the outer gate.



*Figure 3.27* Vonitsa Castle: Exterior of half-round towers of the second line of defences.

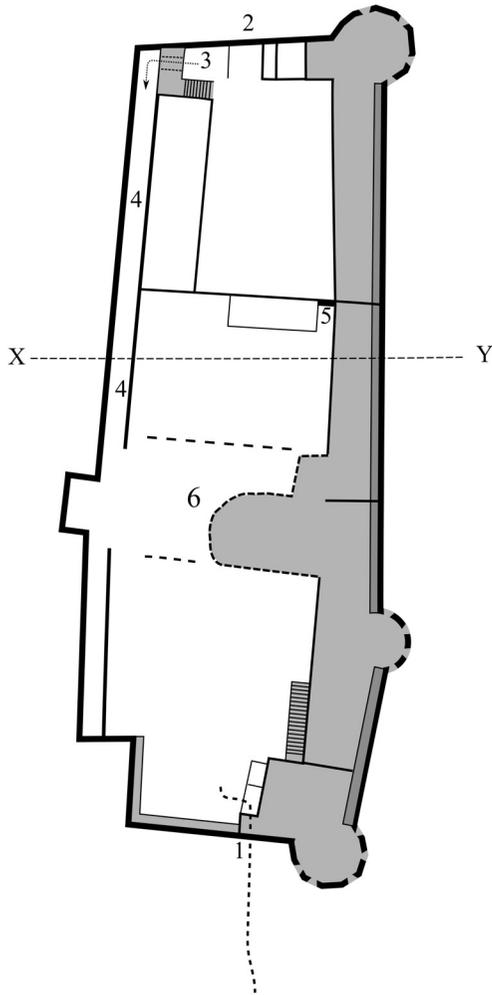


*Figure 3.28* Vonitsa Castle: Artillery bastion at the southern end of the third line of defence.

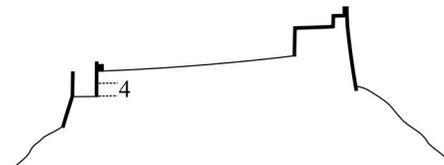
to stand at the junction of the two walls. The parapet of this section of the outer wall is now missing and the wall may have been lowered, possibly to provide a better field of fire for artillery mounted on the upper walls. The large outer court, or bailey, within this first line is now bare. The path to the second gate runs south through the bailey beneath the wall and the half-round towers of the second line. A large breach at its southern end marks the position of the gate which was demolished by German forces during the Second World War. The imposing artillery bastion at the southern end of the third line commands the approach to the gate. A second bastion towards the centre of this line overlooks the gate from the north. Beyond the breach the second and third walls form a corridor leading to the third gate. The centre section of the second line of walls is reinforced with two semicircular towers. These rise no higher than the level of the wall itself and simply provide open semicircular platforms at the level of the continuous wallwalk. Around the towers the parapet is provided only with tapering loopholes but elsewhere it is crenellated with a further loophole piercing each merlon. The third gate is now a plain opening in the inner wall but may originally have been a more complex structure. Two irregular projecting walls, or buttresses, of uncertain purpose flank the entrance. Once through the gate it becomes apparent that the greater part of the heavy,

# Castle of Kiasfas

25 metres



- 1. Main gate
- 2. Northwest gate
- 3. Gate to lower terrace
- 4. Entrances to casemates
- 5. Internal gate
- 6. Site of serai



Section through X - Y

## *Epiros*

palace by the fort's commandant in 1813.<sup>7</sup> After Ali's downfall and assassination in 1822 the fort remained in use as an Ottoman military post. Edward Lear visited the area in 1849 staying overnight in the serai which he describes as already dilapidated.<sup>8</sup> The fort appears to have been finally abandoned after the Greek conquest of Epiros in 1913 and at some point its internal buildings have been totally demolished. The area remains de-populated to the present day.

The castle is built astride a narrow ridge called the hill of Trypa connected to the main range of the Souliot mountains to the east by a high saddle, the site of the village of Kiafas. Numerous ruined houses can still be seen scattered across the hillside. The road along the saddle connected Kiafas with Avariko to the south and Samoniva and Souli to the north. To the southwest the slopes of Trypa fall some 600m to the gorge of the Acherontas. The castle occupies the centre of the ridge, which Leake reports had to be levelled before work could commence. The walls form a rough quadrangle 120m by 50m with a gate in each of the short faces. The circuit is reinforced by multangular towers at the northwest and southeast corners, a half-round tower in the long northeast face and a square bastion projecting from the centre of the southwest face. The northwest gate is now blocked by fallen masonry and



*Figure 4.5* Kiafas Castle: The blocked northwest gate.



*Figure 4.6* Kiafas Castle: Exterior of southeast gate.



*Figure 4.7* Kiafas Castle: Interior of southeast gate.

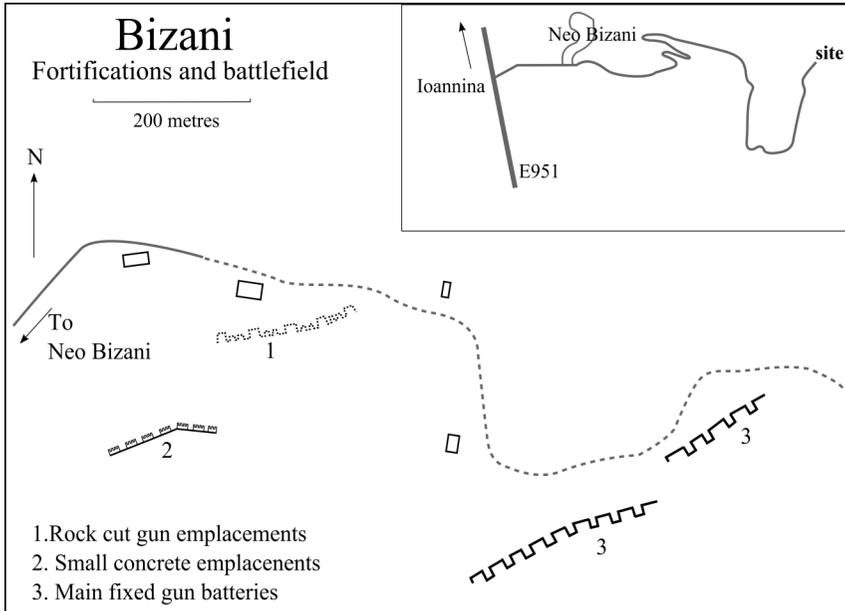
shot, and with bastions that only provided partial flanking fire. In fact, as the Turkish attack of 1821 showed, the Kastro relied on the separate artillery position at Litharitsia to defend the southern approaches. Ultimately the Turks had to build a ring of outer works around the town to bring the defences up to date at the end of the 19C.

The Kastro is still part of the modern town and its monuments and walls are readily accessible, at least externally. Its Kalé is open during daylight hours. The museums within the Kastro are open during standard opening hours (8.00 – 15.00). The town is crowded with traffic but parking is possible by the lakeside.

### ***Fort Bizani***

At the end of the 19C the Turks re-fortified Ioannina by building a chain of detached forts and bunkers to the west and south of the town placed to take advantage of the high ground at the edge of the plain. Lake Pamvotida provided a natural barrier to the east. Bizani is the Greek name for Fort Bijan, the largest of these new works. Along with the fortifications on the hill of Kastritsa some five kilometres to the northeast, it controlled the main route from the south. The whole defensive system was known to the Turks as the Yanya Fortified Area. Despite enduring heavy bombardment in the First Balkan war the fortifications of Bizani are a remarkable survival from this period.

The Turks had been forced by the European powers to cede Thessaly and the Arta district of Epiros to Greece in 1881. The new border followed the course of the Arachthos valley north from Arta to within twenty-five kilometres of Ioannina. The first Greek attempt to take the remainder of Epiros occurred in 1897 when a revolt on Crete, at that date still in Turkish hands, led to a general mobilisation on the Greek mainland. The conflict, which became known as the Thirty Days War, was largely fought in Thessaly. However a small force under the command of Prince Constantine attempted to advance on Ioannina but was repulsed at Pente Pigadia.<sup>59</sup> The Greeks were heavily defeated but the peace agreement signed in December 1897, while imposing heavy reparations, made only minor changes to the frontiers. The Turkish re-fortification of Ioannina seems to have occurred shortly after the events of 1897.<sup>60</sup> In 1912 these fortifications were put to the test. The countries of the Balkan alliance declared war on the Ottoman Empire on the 18th October and hostilities began immediately. The Turks were forced to fight on three fronts. Bulgarian troops advanced south into Thrace, the



Serbs marched south and west into Macedonia while the main Greek force attacked Thessalonica from Thessaly. A smaller Greek force moved north from Arta towards Ioannina. By the 13th December the Turkish forces in Epiros had retreated inside the Yanya Fortified Area. The first Greek attack on the Bizani positions came the following day. Initial Greek success in capturing the high ground to the south of Bizani was reversed after eight days of fighting and they were forced to fall back some two kilometres.<sup>61</sup> A second attack at the end of January 1913 was inconclusive despite the arrival of reinforcements from Thessalonica. The final decisive battle began on the 4th March and is known as the Battle of Bizani, or the Third Battle of Yanya. Within two days Greek forces broke through the Turkish lines to the west and east of Bizani and Ioannina surrendered on the morning of the 6th March. Despite a heavy Greek bombardment the Bizani fort remained in Turkish hands until the formal surrender was signed.<sup>62</sup>

Bizani occupies the flat summit of a hill rising 300m above the plain. The position overlooks Ioannina ten kilometres to the north. The work was not a fort in the conventional sense but a dispersed system of permanent concrete gun emplacements with bunkers, searchlights and trenches surrounded by barbed wire entanglements.<sup>63</sup> Today the barbed wire has long corroded away and the trenches have disappeared into the landscape but the concrete emplacements for the Turkish gun batteries



*Figure 4.57* Fort Bizani: The eastern fixed battery.



*Figure 4.58* Fort Bizani: The rear face of the western battery.