



Research Article

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The Dentheleatis Historical Path and Its Monuments in Mt Taygetos Greece

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Abstract

The mountainous area "Dentheleatis", today under the name "Alagonia", is situated at the west part of Mount Taygetos, upon the Messenian Valley. Throughout this area are located, path routes connecting the districts of Messenia with Laconia that created a constant conflict between them, from Classical to Roman Times, to establish their respective borders. During Byzantine Times, this territory degraded and was depopulated from barbarian invasions until the arrival of Slavs in the 6th c. A.D., situated in the area and gradually unified with the local population. These routes and paths from Ancient Farai, Dentheleatis, and Ancient Sparta to those travelled during the late Ottoman period from Kalamata and the villages of Alagonia to the city of Mystras embody important archaeological and historic information, telling stories of legends and kings, of generals and poets, testifying the constant presence and occupation of the area from the classical times up to the establishment of the Modern Greek State playing an important role during the Greek War of Independence.

This paper presents a visualization of this journey through storylines written in a map environment. Using ArcGIS StoryMaps, an interactive story map was developed, incorporating digital models, to present the archaeological data of the area between Kalamata (Ancient Farai), the Alagonia villages (Ancient Dentheleatis), and Mystras and Ancient Sparta as well as the evolution of the roads used to communicate between them demonstrating the continuous use of these routes and the need for recognition and protection.

Keywords: 3D Modelling, Photogrammetry, GIS StoryMaps, Dentheleatis, Cultural Heritage Routes

Introduction

Visualization has always played an important role in the presentation, interpretation, and dissemination of data. Archaeological and historical information introduced from numerous aspects using visualization techniques from different scientific disciplines with applications using eg. GIS software has proved invaluable in the study of spatial and temporal relations of archaeological factors. Faster and easily accessible Internet connections in collaboration with versatile handheld computers and smartphones, introduce a different category of applications developed for a wide range of end-users, available for scientific study and presentation

of results. To produce a documentation of the sites and items to incorporate into our storymap a number of digital technologies was applied. Documentation included deciphering the bibliography as well as extensive field survey. In order to document monuments, Unmanned Aerial System UAS were incorporated in the survey process to produce orthophotos of the areas where significant artefacts can be found, or archaeological materials were found. Photogrammetry and 3D modelling was used to create 3D models of three monuments, the Monastery of Mardaki in Nedousa, the Chapel of Panayia of Volimnos and the acropolis of Mystras.

The mountainous area “Dentheliatis”, today under the name “Alagonia”, situated at the west part of Mount Taygetos, upon the Messenian Valley, is part of the Kalamata Municipality (Figure 1). Throughout this area are located, path routes connecting the districts of Messenia with Laconia that created a constant conflict between them, since the Archaic and more intensively from Classical to Roman Times, in order to establish their respected borders. During Byzantine Times, this territory degraded and was depopulated from barbarian invasions until the arrival of Slavs in the 6th c.

A.D., situating in the area and gradually unified with the local population [1]. These routes and paths from Ancient Farai, Dentheliatis and Ancient Sparta to those travelled during the late Ottoman period from Kalamata and the villages of Alagonia to the city of Mystras embody important archaeological and historic information, telling stories of legends and kings, of generals and poets, testifying the constant presence and occupation of the area from the classical times up to the establishment of the Modern Greek State playing an important role during the Greek War of Independence.



Figure 1: Region of Dentheleatis, Peloponnese, Greece

This paper presents a visualization of this journey through storylines written on a map environment. ArcGIS Online provides cloud-based services to build interactive maps that share insights and location intelligence to specified groups or the wider public [2]. ArcGIS Story Map web application was used to create, an interactive story map presenting the archaeological data of the area between Kalamata (Ancient Farai), Alagonia villages (Ancient Dentheliatis) and Mystras and Ancient Sparta as well as the evolution of the roads used to communicate between them demonstrating the continuous use of these routes and the need for recognition and protection.

Ager Dentheliates refers to the geographic area settled in Northwest Mt Taygete's, on the borderline between Messenia and Laconia holding a vast road network connecting the regions of Messenia, Laconia and Arcadia. This fertile area was famous in antiquity for its wine “Denthis” according to the Spartan choral poet Alcman [3]. In the area of the first settlement of Limnai the temple of Artemis Limnatis was located, used by both the Messenians and Laconians, the possession of which created friction between them, a reason for the trigger of the first Messenian war and continuous disputes after Messenians independency on 4th c. B.C. [4]. Dentheliatis region covered the wider area surrounded from the north by the Taygetos mountain, the east the gorge of Santava [5,6], to the

south the Messenian gulf naturally borders the region that spreads to the west through the Nedon valley to the river Tzirorema [7].

Strabo mentions the Temple of Artemis Limnatis where the Spartan king Teleklos was killed following the violation of the Spartan virgins taking part in a ritual in the shrine that led to the deterioration of the relations between the two cities (Strabo 8.4.9; 6.1.6) [8]. Pausanias later also mentions the temple and reason for conflict presenting both sides where the Messenian's argued that the assassination of Teleklos was in defense after they uncovered his plot to murder high ranking Messenians that were present at the sanctuary by dressing armed young Spartan men in women's clothing to carry out the mission (Pausanias 4.4.1 - 3; 3.2.6) [9]. Artemis Limnatis was an important sanctuary with a cult dated as early as 8th c. B.C in the religious ceremonies of both Messenians and Laconians and was located in the area of Volimnos where today is the chapel of the Panayia Volimiotissa, in the valley of Nedon river an important crosspoint between the two regions [10].

The area of Volimnos, also known as Limnai may had in fact included large bodies of water, lakes, as attested by its name, but no mention of a lake was ever recorded since antiquity. This is probably the result of drainage due to geological phenomena [11] or the name is referring to the famous sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Spar-

ta located in a swampy area [12]. Throughout the Dentheliatis area artifacts were found. A significant number of artifacts clay, metal and ivory were recovered in the area and have been attributed as dedication items of the Sanctuary. These items have a chronological time span from 8th century BC to the Hellenistic era professing the continuous presence of followers of the Goddess in the area [13].

During the Roman period Dentheliatis continues to play a part in local politics and economy. The emperor Octavius Augustus allocates Dentheliatis along with ancient Farai and Thouria to the Laconians in 31 BC only to be re-established under Messenian rule in 25 AD by Roman emperor Tiberius after the latter argued for the right to the land by referring to the ancient distribution of the Peloponnese by non-other but Hercules himself where the region and therefore the Temple of Artemis Limnatis was allocated to Messenian rule (Tactitus Annales 4.43) [14]. A fragmentary stele found in the city of Ancient Messene records the decision of this late arbitrary that assigns the region to the Messenians and defines the borders between Messenia, Laconia the Eleutherolaconian League, with boundary-markers incised on Mount Taygetos. Various boundary-markers have been spotted in the borderline of Mount Taygetos through extensive survey [15].

In the 8th c. AD the Byzantine emperor Constantine the 5th brings a significant population of Slavs to the Peloponnese in order to protect the Empire's borders as well as remedy the demographic crisis in the area due to a plague. The northwestern villages of Taygetos, where Dentheliatis is situated, are re-populated by the Milig Slavs which for many years maintained their cultural, religious and nomadic characteristics not integrating with the local populations which migrated to lower areas of Taygetos [16]. The Slavic tribes successfully increased in population in the area subsequently impacting even the names of the villages. Eventually the was called Koutsaves or Koutsava meaning "the area with houses". Up until very recently the locals were referred to as Koutsavites. By the end of the 10th century AD the area of Koutsavas included six villages from north to south over the NW Taygetos ridge, Megali Anastasova (Nedousa), Sitsova (Alagonia), Mikri Anastasova (Piges), Tsernitsa (Artemisia), Koutsava Ladas (Lada) and Koutsava Karveli (Karveli). During the 10th century AD, the Slavic tribes eventually converted to Christians in a very difficult effort to integrate them to the local population in order to control their activities which in the previous years had caused problems in the area [17].

After the first fall of Constantinople in 1204 during the Fourth Crusade, the Franks and Latins divided the territories of the Empire along with the Peloponnese which was granted as a Feud to the Villehardouin house. The Franks conquered Lacedaemonia, Medieval Sparta, in 1207, and according to the "Moreos Chronicle" Milingans as well as locals from the lower area of the villages of Volimno (Lakkoi) had gathered alongside with the Byzantine troops to face them. Franks continued to subjugate a significant part of the Laconia prefecture excluding Monemvasia, the lands of the Tsakonians in Parnon and the Slavic Milingans in the Taygetos mountain range. The city and castle of Monemvasia were conquered by the Frankish Prince of Achaia in 1246, after a three-year long siege. On his return from Monemvasia in 1249, William II built, in a key position to control the valley of Evrotas, six kilometers southwest of Sparta, an emblematic fortress at the top of Myzithra Hill. During

the period 1259 to 1349, Mystras became the seat of the Byzantine general, "Sevastocrator", who ruled the entire Peloponnese and was replaced yearly. In 1349 Mystras was upgraded to a Despotate, becoming one of the most important provinces of the weakened Byzantine Empire. Mystras bond to the villages of Koutsava was inevitable due to their location on the roads from Laconia to Messenia through the Taygetos Mountain. These routes with ancient origins were still in use and served to the main road network. After the Turkish conquest the whole region belongs to the Mani district as reported by the Ottoman traveler Evliya Celebi who visited the area in the 17th c. and attested their autonomous situation and their agricultural activities, referring also to their armed troops [18].

At the beginning of 19th c. many Greek chieftains as the well-known Nikitaras, coming from this area are taking part in the preparations of the Greek War of Independency. On 18th March of 1821 a large supply of ammunition arrives to the small harbor of Almiros from Smyrna, one of the largest commercial ports in the Ottoman Empire, sent by the "Philiki Eteria" (Society of Friends). With the assistance of villagers and mules the ammunition was transported ("Dromos Baroutiou"-Road of Gunpowder) from the harbor to the Monasteri of Mardaki outside the Taygetos Mountain village of Megali Anastasova (modern Nedousa). In order to transport the shipment Papaflessas received customs documents from Petrobei Mavromichalis, Greek ruler of Mani who was occupied with his family for many years in commercial transactions, involving him in the scheme [19]. On the 23rd of March all chieftains from the area with their troops are gathered in the Monastery of Velanidia, ready to act for the liberation of the city of Kalamata. As the battle was avoided at the end all Greek troops gathered in the city to celebrate. In the later years they assisted again in various battles against the Turks, until the formation of the New Greek State. In the 1927 all Slavic names of the villages were changed to the reminiscent ancient Greek names.

Materials and Methods

The story map presented in this paper came to serve as a portal to display in a unified location a collection of individual projects. The collection of available and newly developed material led to a common narration under the scope of Dentheleatis, the geographic area in North West Mt Taygetos, on the borderline between Messenia and Laconia. In order to produce a documentation of the sites and items to incorporate into our story map a number of digital technologies was applied. Documentation included deciphering the bibliography and previous research. Extensive field survey in selected locations was realized and photogrammetry was applied for digitization of landscapes (orthophoto generation) and 3D scanning for specific monuments. A UAS was incorporated in the survey process to produce orthophotos of the areas where significant artefacts or archaeological materials were found, i.e., Mystras Acropolis, Mardaki Monastery and Chapel of Panagia of Volimnos. Photogrammetry and 3D modelling was used to create 3D models as well [20].

Orthophoto generation was implemented for the sites using a DJI Mavic 2 Pro UAS, ground control points (GCPs) set over the study area, for further georeferencing of the model, and a Top Con GR5 GPS GNSS receiver to measure the positions of the GCPs. All data was collected in the Greek coordinate system EGSA '87. Images

for the photographic overview of the study area were captured with at a relative altitude of 50-80m from takeoff point depending on the surrounding. The number photographs and GCPs are relevant to the case study, surroundings and differentiations in elevation on site. The UAS, navigated using the 3D Survey application, followed a grid flight pattern while maintaining at least 75% overlap of the attained images.

For example, in the case of the area surrounding the Chapel of Panagia of Volymnos 76 photographs of the area were captured at relative altitudes of 45m using a single grid flight path, 90% over-

lap with 3 GCPs (Table 1). The processing procedure, implemented using photogrammetry software Agisoft Metashape Pro, in brief, includes image (camera) alignment, referencing system conversion, importing target coordinates (GCPs), generating the dense point cloud, classification, mesh creation, generating the DEM and orthomosaic (Figure 2). In order for the software to accurately define the model's (in reality each camera's) position, GCP coordinates are identified as markers and added to the model. The position of the markers in each image must be adjusted separately to confirm the correct placement above the visible GCPs within each image [21] (Figure 3).

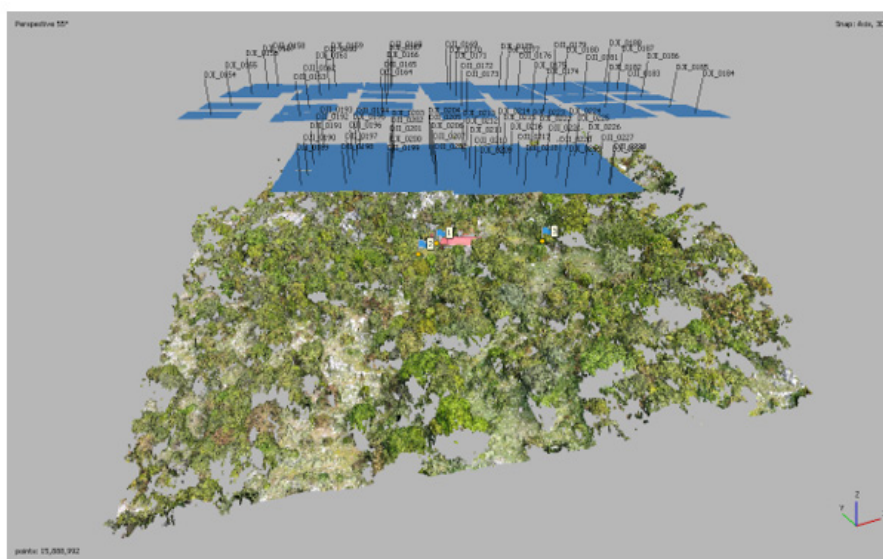


Figure 2: Image Alignment - Dense Point Cloud (Panagia of Volymnos)



Figure 3: Panagia of Volymnos area Orthophoto

Respectively, in order to create 3D models of the mentioned monuments photogrammetry with the UAS was implemented with additional flights where implemented, at a much lower altitude and following manual photo capture. Images were captured in both cases with an overlap of 75-85% and the photogrammetric processing followed a similar procedure as described above for the orthophotos. In the case of the Chapel of Panagia of Volymnos the 3D model was created using photographs captured on the ground using a

DSLR camera. The Chapel was signified using markers instead of GCPs to create a measurable model. The processing procedure differs only related to the markers where scale bars are used to import measured distances on the object (Chapel) in order for the software to create a scaled digital model. (Figure 4) displays camera alignment over the Chapel's dense cloud and Figure 5 displays the 3D model created.

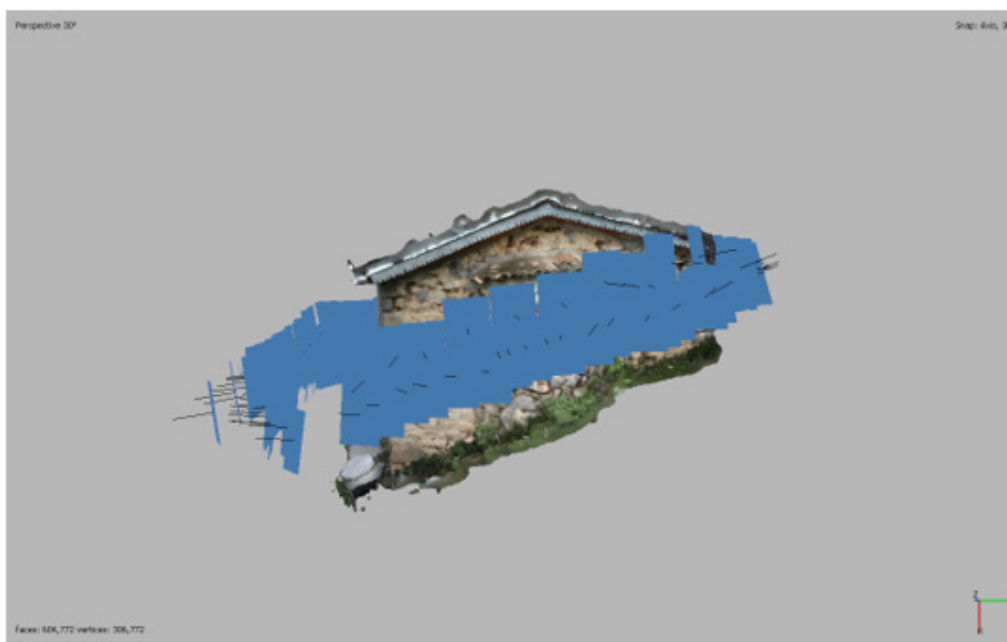


Figure 4: Photograph alignment, Chapel of Panagia of Volymnos



Figure 5: 3D model of Chapel of Panagia of Volymnos.

The chapel of Panagia of Volymnos preserves in its construction architectural remains “spolia”, many of them bearing inscriptions dated from the Hellenistic to Roman times and referring to the worship of Artemis Limnatis, as the goddess of transition to a new space, situation, social status and mainly adulthood. Some of the in-

scriptions bear the name of Artemis Limnatis or names of Spartans and Messenians related to individuals or families known from other inscriptions as well. In addition, various bronze and ceramic artifacts have been found in the surrounding area, dated from the 8th c. B.C. to Hellenistic times, many of them female personal items that

reflect women's close relationship with the goddess. All these sufficiently document the special importance and glamor of the sanctuary, especially in the archaic and classical times, certifying, together with the Hellenistic and Roman inscriptions and some architectural

remains adjacent to the chapel, the uninterrupted continuity of the sanctuary, whether it was under the control of the Spartans or of the Messenians [22] (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Inscribed architectural remains built into the chapel of Panagia of Volymnos.

The digital products were included in the Story Map created to present the timeline of the Denthelatis area using ArcGIS Story Maps, an online spatial web application that offers interaction not only with the map but with the text and images provided. A number of templates are available offering a variety of presentation outcomes. In Story Map Cascade the historic journey through Denthelatis takes place. This initial application creates spatial depic-

tion of the wider region from a collection of published historic and archaeological data. Denthelatis spanned over the area south west of Mt. Taygetos following the peak paths from "Ai Lias" to the Santava gorge and Malevo peak through the river beds of Nedon and Tzirorema from the west to the Messenian Gulf [23]. The region is presented in the Story Map application on a map from Google Earth providing an overall visual aid (Figure 7).

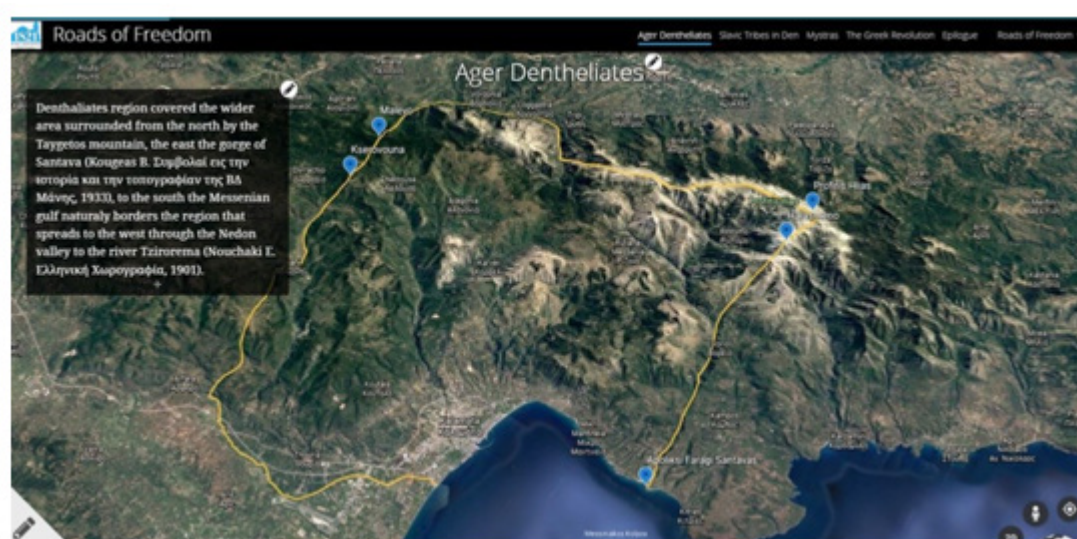


Figure 7: Denthelatis Region Google Earth.

The Story Map is organized into four sections based on events that impacted the area significantly. Each section includes the historic information for the time period in combination with thematic maps created in ArcGIS online and can be accessed via tab buttons above the main frame of the application (Figure 8). Each section is further enhanced using images of artefacts or historic maps of

the referenced section. The Story Map includes: the period from the Messenian Wars to the end of the Roman period approximately 5th century B.C. to the 4th century A.D, the impact of the Byzantine Empire on the region with separate reference to the addition of Slavic tribes in the region by emperor Constantine the 5th, Mystras and finally the early 19th century and the Greek Revolution.



Figure 9: 3D Model of Mystras Acropolis Fortress using DJI Mavic 2 Pro [Zacharias N., 2022].

Entering the application, the user begins navigation with the first section where he is introduced to the context and the meaning of Ager Dentheliatis. The section is boosted using images of the area from exhibitions such as McDonald and Hope Simpson [24] where they recorded findings of the temple of Artemis Limnatis. The section continues through the Messenian War conflicts ignited by events in the area up to the Roman Empire. Images of characteristic findings from the time period referenced are included. In the second section the user is transported to the Byzantine Empire and the introduction of the Slavic tribes to Dentheliatis. It is here where the importance of their contribution to the increase in population density in the area through narrative text is depicted. The villages established during this period are presented using ArcGIS online maps with a topographic ESRI base map and interactive pins signifying the villages.

The user moves along to the city of Mystras in Laconia, where the Peloponnese region establishes its powerhouse during Byzantine rule. This information is enhanced with images taken by UAS as well as an 18th century engraving of the city. Mystras played an important role through its communication with the villages of Dentheliatis which were at the crossroads towards the southwest Peloponnese maintaining their status as the connection between the Laconian and Messenian borders. The application is embellished using a 3D model of Mystras Acropolis (Figure 9). The emblematic fortress at the top of Myzithra Hill follows the natural morphology of the mountain, occupying the entire rocky peak. Structurally, the

fortress is divided into three sections, the exterior wall, the interior wall and a large building within the second enclosure. The castle has only a single gate ensuring the control of the entrance to the outer fortification, of the exterior wall. The sections correspond to defense zones, the exterior wall or outer enclosure, a second enclosure internally significantly smaller than the outer one and a rectangular two-storey building [25] located at the south east of the interior wall. The Frankish citadel is the main defense complex in the overall organization of the city [26].

Finally, in the fourth section users complete their historic journey by discovering the events that took place in Alagonia, Nedousa and the other Dentheliatis villages in order to prepare for the commencement of the Greek Revolution. Mardaki Monastery is located approximately 27 kilometers northeast of Kalamata, on a hill top between Alagonia and Nedousa with a view towards the Messenian Gulf. Built in the early 16th century or most probably the early 17th c., according to patriarchal sigillia issued for the monastery, played a role in the 1821 revolution and deserved to be included in the history of the revolution. At the beginning of the 19th century the monastery must have been in an economic growth. This fact, as well as its inaccessible and naturally fortified position, explains why Philiki Etaireia and chieftain Papaflessas chose it as a strong military base in view of the Revolution. After the liberation, Mardaki was one of the monasteries that was not dissolved by the Othonian decree of 1833. From then on, however, and despite the great wealth it had preserved up to that time, the gradual decline began [27].



Figure 10: View of Mardaki Monastery today church of the Assumption3D model.

The monastic complex built of local materials, rough stones, and slates abundant in the area, is situated in a steep and inaccessible part of Taygetos and shows a strong fortress character, seen even in the masonry of the church that battle holes were made. The monastery was constructed in a triangular shape with the cells located at the northwest and southwest ends. The Katholikon is a

small cruciform single aisled church. The existence of a water mill and estates outside the monastery made it self-sufficient. The monastery itself ensured the quantities necessary for its operation in water, with the cistern in the courtyard, and in goods, with the large storage areas [28].



Figure 11: Layout of Mardaki Monastery.

The contribution of the region's population to the Greek War of Independence is described with an interactive ArcGIS online map. The map depicts the routes the Greek forces followed through the Taygetos Mountain and from coastal Mani villages in order to take

their designated places on the hills surrounding the castle of Kalamata, the first Greek city liberated during the Revolution of 1821 (Figure 7).

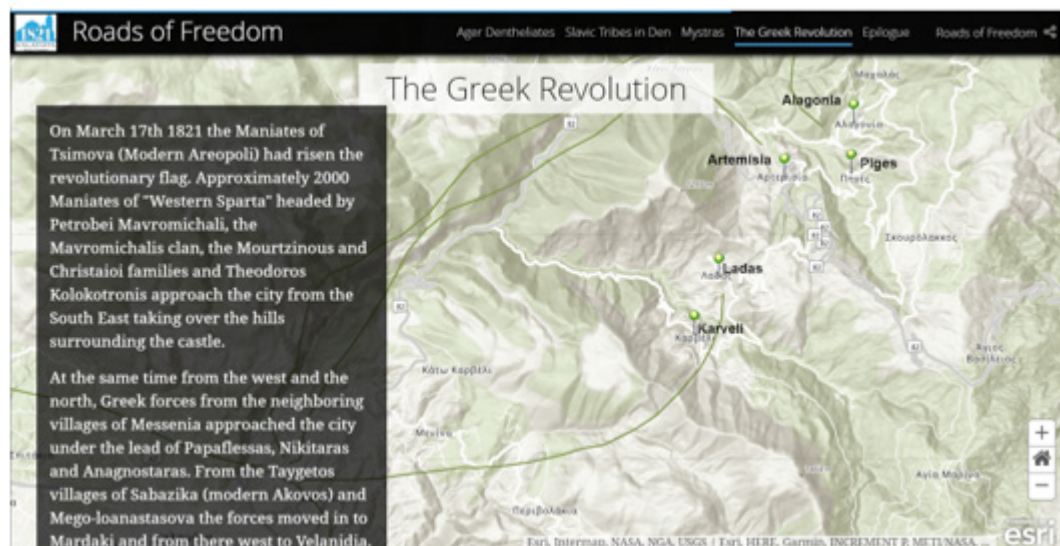


Figure 12: The Greek Revolution, routes from Dentheliatis to Kalamata.

Results and Discussion

The area of Dentheliatis was of great importance in antiquity as a landmark of territorial occupation and definition of ethnicity through its famous Artemis Limnatis Sanctuary. The area was a shelter for populations trying to isolate or to escape in order to maintain their freedom. The routes of these parts of Taygetos, survived until recently as the main road network connecting Messenia

and Laconia but also as a road of freedom to these remote isolated mountainous areas. The Roads of Freedom story map was created to offer a global visualization of the area, incorporating important historical and archaeological information, in order to provide users with a more comprehensive way to understand its history. In this way users can follow the journey from antiquity in this remote area, not well preserved and studied in a visual and playful way, easy to manage (Figure 1).

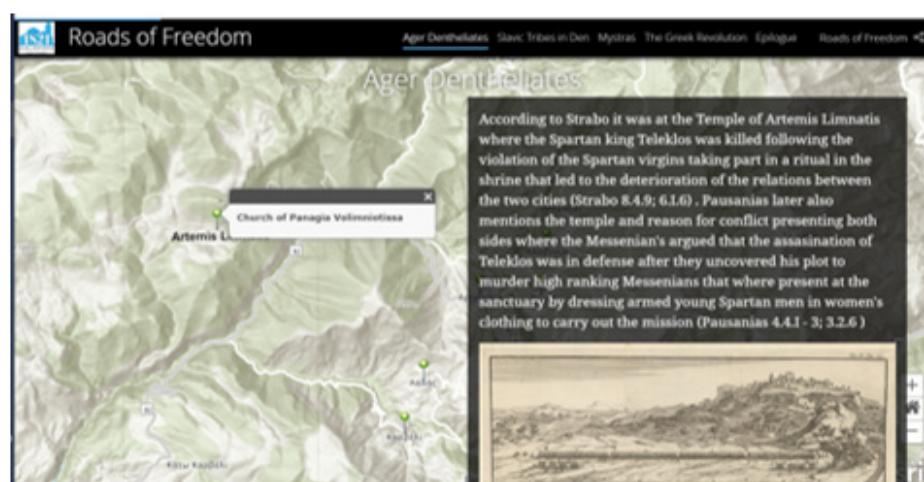


Figure 13: Text Interaction.

This method of presenting data is ultimately more engaging for the reader who can participate in the presentation process [29].

As previously mentioned, the Dentheliatis region has a long and rich history embellished with legends while taking part in the events that occurred as far back as the 5th century B.C. Collecting the data for the area is on its own quite a difficult task, presenting it to the wider public in an informative and understandable format even harder. Using a visualizing format such as an interactive map offers a satisfying result. The ultimate goal of this project is to gradually build the communications routes of the Dentheliatis region by following the findings referring to Dentheliatis of Artemis Limnatis, including artifacts and inscriptions.

Conclusion- Future Aims

This digital story map is created to offer a global visualization of the area, incorporating all those important historical and archaeological information, in order to provide the visitor with a more comprehensive way to understand its history. In this way visitors can perform a journey throughout time in this remote area, not well preserved and studied in a visual and playful way, easy to manage. In addition, continuous research on data concerning the area, in order to accumulate as more information available to incorporate in the map will intrigue visitors to interact repeatedly with the application. Another future research goal is to identify, record and illustrate in the map existing path-routes connecting the area so to catalogue their status and preserve their traces, useful in a wider project of cultural heritage management of remote areas of important natural and cultural beauty. Reviving the interest for this area will provide new studies and evidence for its history as well as more visitors and scholars would like to explore also in person this vast territory. Ultimately future tasks include additional work such as identifying quarries, following viewshed analysis, identifying past settlements and land use in the area where cultivation was significant in the “hidden pastures” of Taygetos.

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Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest.

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