

The diolkos, a unique paved way that enabled Greek warships and merchantmen to be moved overland across the Isthmus of Corinth from sea to sea, is progressively crumbling into the water at its western end.

First built probably by Periander (625-585 B.C.) (stonework and masons' marks), it is mentioned by Thucydides in connection with transport of fleets during the Peloponnesian War as something granted, thus already ancient. After Actium in 31 B.C. Octavian shipped his warships across the diolkos to pursue Antony and Cleopatra to Asia and then Egypt. Later, the Diolkos fell into disuse and now has been superseded by the modern Corinth Canal.

Excavations conducted between 1956 and 1962 by the Greek archaeologist and Ephor of Argolid and Corinthia, Nikos Verdelis, enables us to trace the course of Diolkos for about one kilometer on both sides of the Corinth Canal; indeed its course seems to develop in majestic turns, bringing the estimation of its length to about 8-km. The eastern end of Diolkos, reported by Strabo to be at Schoenus (modern Kalamaki), has not been found.

The surface of Diolkos, varying in width from about 3,5 to more than 5 meters, bears the grooves made by the wheels of the trolleys onto which the ships were loaded, mainly at a gauge of 1.52m. There is a part of the monument where ruts can be seen clearly cut into the blocks, so Diolkos has been called the world's first railway.

Although being a monument of first-class importance for the history of technology, and for the Greek achievement generally, the Diolkos has suffered extensive damage due to decades of neglect. Left at the mercy of the wake of the vessels passing through the Corinth Canal, the initial part of Diolkos has been heavily eroded. Today, for tens of meters, the front of the erosion has overpassed the monument completely, leaving it in serious distress up to downright demolition. The Diolkos deterioration is all the more dramatic since the monument has never been properly published, hence information is literally "erased". [Only the German researcher Walter Werner has proceeded to detailed drawings of the Diolkos' already seriously disturbed vestiges in 1988 and later].

Also in urgent need of care is the pavement of large, squared blocks, mentioned already by H. N. Fowler in 1932 (Corinth and the Corinthia) in connection with the Diolkos. This sloping platform, reported by Fowler to extend for a distance of about forty meters, lies today in shreds. [Fowler also mentions - reporting that his attention was called upon this by Oscar Broneer - blocks of stone at each side of the road leading to the ferry for Loutraki, as apparently forming parts of Diolkos. They indeed belong to Diolkos, as modern excavations have shown. BOTH parts of monument extending away from the road are by now heavily damaged where they meet with the Corinth Canal]. Neglect has had its cost also on the part of Diolkos excavated on the Attica side of the Canal, on the grounds of the Military Engineers' School. Here, a double row of stones resting upon the main course of Diolkos and bearing marks of ropes - a very interesting feature - has also suffered extensive mechanical damage.

On the Peloponnese side, the initial part of Diolkos that still manages to stand (because the strip of land between the monument and the Canal was larger at this area) is also progressively shrinking and seriously endangered, together with the vestiges of an ancient extension of gravel seemingly lying on the side of the Diolkos.

Actions to save and restore the monument are imperative.

CONSERVATION



**ΕΞΩ
ΑΠΟ
ΤΑ ΔΟΝΤΙΑ**

ΑΣΥΣΤΟΛΟ ΨΕΥΔΟΣ

Ή παραπληροφόρηση υφισταμένων;

Οι αναγνώστες τη εφημερίδας μας έχουν γίνει αψευδείς μάρτυρες μιας προσπάθειας να σωθεί ό,τι έχει απομείνει από το "Διόλκο" της Διώρυγας Κορίνθου. Ο πρωτεργάτης της υπόθεσης αυτής σ. Εκπαιδευτικός και Συγγραφέας κ. Γιάννης Μπαλαφούτας, μας έστειλε την παρακάτω επιστολή, την οποία επικροτούμε και δημοσιεύουμε, ως έχει:

<< Η από 12-10-1999 έγγραφη απάντηση της Υπουργού Πολιτισμού κ. Ελισάβετ Παπαζώη προς τη Βουλή των Ελλήνων με κοινοποίηση προς το Υπουργείο Εθνικής Αμύνης και

Βουλευτή Κορινθίας κ. Αναστάση Παπαληγούρα, για τη σωτηρία του Αρχαίου Διόλκου Κορίνθου, ότι η αρμόδια Εφορεία του Υπουργείου Πολιτισμού, έχει απευθυνθεί στη Διοίκηση της Διώρυγας, για τη σύνταξη ρευματολογικής μελέτης, ώστε να προταθούν μέτρα προστασίας του μνημείου κ.λ.π. αποδεικνύεται ψευδέστατη, προκλητική και θρασύτατη.

Κατά την επικοινωνία τόσο της εφημερίδας "Η ΦΩΝΗ ΤΗΣ ΚΟΡΙΝΘΙΑΣ" με τον διευθύνοντα σύμβουλο της Διώρυγας, κ. Δημητριάδη, όσο και του Βουλευτή κ. Αναστάση Παπαληγούρα

την 1-12-1999 με τον ίδιο διευθύνοντα σύμβουλο και τον Πρόεδρο της Διώρυγας κ. Τζούμπα, διαβεβαιώνουν ότι, ούτε έγγραφα ούτε προφορικά απευθύνθηκε προς τη Διώρυγα, η Εφορεία του Υπουργείου Πολιτισμού, για τη σύνταξη ρευματολογικής μελέτης.

Με έκπληξη δε πρόσθεσαν, ότι οι πάντες γνωρίζουν, ότι η Διώρυγα δεν διαθέτει επιστημονικό προσωπικό για τέτοιες μελέτες. Οι αναγνώστες κρίνουν την σοβαρότητα και την υπευθυνότητα του Υπουργείου Πολιτισμού.

Γιάννης Μπαλαφούτας >>