

## The Network of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. Stone Bridges in the Mountainous area of Zagori, Epirus, North Western Greece.

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### **Abstract**

In the mountainous area of Pindos in North Western Greece (south of the Greek Albanian border and opposite of the isle of Corfu) lies a geographical area known as **Zagori** or **Zagorohoria** which includes 45 traditional villages. These were first mentioned in texts of the 14th century AD. Mountains and rivers form a natural border around these villages, which consists of rough, rugged terrain with deep, steep ravines and gorges.

This paper describes and analyses the unique **network** of pathways and **arched stone bridges** forming links between villages, settlements and nearby towns. Forceful rivers and streams made the construction of bridges an essential part of infrastructure, allowing the daily movement of people and the development of commerce in the wider area.

A brief description of the historical evolution and the importance of bridges will be presented. Written evidence suggests that traditional bridges constructed in the area were initially made out of timber and were later replaced by more durable stone bridges. However, a large number of bridges have been destroyed due to natural disasters - for example flooding, earthquakes, or neglect - when parts of the network stopped being used following the construction of contemporary vehicular roads and bridges in the 20th century.

All bridges surviving today are arched stone bridges, the majority of which were constructed from mid-18<sup>th</sup> to the end of 19th centuries. There are no identical bridges as the construction of each one was adapted to the geomorphology of the site and the stability of their river banks.

Finally, conclusions will be drawn about the condition of the bridges and ideas will be presented regarding their contemporary use, enhancement and sustainability.