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# Landscape of historical identity. Exploring Landscapes in the State of Liminality in/and the case of Sofratika

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## Abstract

*The aim of this paper is to examine (the concept of) historical landscape in the state of Liminality, their vague nature and associations to modern landscapes research and practice. Specific consideration will be given to associations of conventional landscapes with the subject of identity, history, cultural and heritage. An unmistakable position in these dialogues is possessed by the so-called traditional or historical landscapes which are specifically accepted to be in the state of liminality - rather stable and slow developing; of pre-modern root; appearing one of a kind cases of historical continuity of local landscape shapes as well as practices; uncommon and minimally protected.*

*During different periods, the town of Sofratika has been occupied by different regimes that have influenced her landscape. This paper will examine how the state of liminality has affected different elements of the landscape.*

## Introduction

One of our most profound needs is our sense of identity and belonging. A common denominator of such identity can be the human connection to landscape. The latter is not essentially what but how we see: we see it with our eyes but decipher it with our intellect, and we also attribute to it intangible values that are as much spiritual as they are historical. In this way we can think of a cultural landscape in which our sense of place and memories inhere. Therefore, in this paper, the aim is to recognize and set up a connection between Sofratika and its region (the Dropull region) as precisely and completely as possible in order to tell its history, the way it was built and annihilated, the individuals who lived there, and different activities and happenings. This research is based on the work of Arnold van Gennep 1909 on liminality to explain the process of transitioning from one cultural modality to another. During such liminal states, a society gains perspective on the preceding period while still not participating fully in what will eventually come next. So, an efficient way to derive data is to study

the different regimes that have influenced the image in and of the city of Sofratika and the whole valley of Drinos. These transitional periods have also influenced the creation of the liminal landscape embedded in the construction elements that represent their political power. In this context, we can call these spaces as liminal landscapes. The image of this concept will be conceptualized in the case of Sofratika's Amphitheater in order to explain how the transitional process of the passage of different periods has created an intermediate state.

## Meaning of Cultural Landscape

The term "cultural landscape" comes from the German language "Kulturlandschaft", meaning a clearing in the forest with animals, huts, fields and fences. In its beginning has meant a "man-made" trace. In the nineteenth century, the term "landscape" spread in Europe and North America in terms of wilderness or wild nature: something not related with people. Experiencing a landscape was linked with solitude, and traces of people would ruin this loneliness. Some natural heritage

lobbyists, in 1980s and 1990s, linked the term of nature with culture, whereas in certain extremist views, man was not part of nature and the landscape was not seen as a cultural structure. In contrast to this, it gained scientific significance when the geographer's view of the landscape began to be valued as a way of seeing.

The landscape is and will always be a cultural structure full of humanistic meanings and values. In addition with the gathering of physical landmarks on which geographers and others focused until the last thirty decades or so, today it is widely acknowledged that landscapes reflect human actions and are diffuse with social values. Landscapes combine components of space and time, and as they have evolved over time, and as human action has changed, they have acquired numerous layers of meaning that can be decomposed through verifiable, archeological, geological, and sociological thought. The meanings of 'cultural landscape' and 'historic(al) landscape' are sometimes misunderstood and conflated. Cultural Landscape refers to those landscapes that have been influenced, impacted, or formed by human involvement. A cultural landscape can be related with the individual or with the event. It can also be large expanses of land or a modest residence. It can be studding field industrial site, park, garden, cemetery, campus, and more. 'Cultural landscapes are divided into four types: historic places, historically designed landscapes, historic vernacular landscapes and ethnographic landscapes.' (Jason Wood, 2016) To determine the meaning of historical

landscapes, it risks burdening the reader with the prevailing set of considerations and views. Historic Landscapes incorporate private gardens and community parks, beautiful interstates, country communities, cemeteries, battlefields, and zoological gardens. They are composed of many character-defining highlights that exclusively or collectively contribute to the 'landscape's physical appearance as they have evolved over time. In addition to vegetation and geography, cultural landscapes may incorporate major water points such as lakes, streams and wellsprings, significant sources of circulation such as streets, paths, schools and walls buildings; and decorations, seats, lights and sculptural objects.

### **What are "liminal" landscapes**

The sense of being not here and not there opens up conceivable outcomes of powerful experiences through the arrangements of edges and limits, both physically and metaphysically. The concept of "liminal landscapes" was first introduced by the ethnologist Arnold Van Gennep in 1909 in his book "The Rites of Passage" (Gennep, 1960). This book speaks about the state of "in-between-ness", where, during the rites, one goes through different phases of experience. Interpreted as a tripartite series of ritual observance, a separation state, and accompanied by a transition to the actual re-incorporation experience, it focuses on a sense of disorientation. This sense of uncertainty provides the basis of how the prospect of encountering worlds beyond the present generates liminal spaces.

Thus, liminality refers to the journey of a person experiencing a transition, being neither this nor that, neither here nor there, and at the same time being both or in both. Liminality abounds in juxtapositions. This very "journey" or straddling ambiguous thresholds during these transitional phases, and what affordances landscapes might play, is the essence of this paper.

For landscape architecture, the concept of liminal spaces in landscapes comprises two categories: utilizing liminal spaces as the setting, and the other is the insertion of liminal elements to act as metaphorical reminders. However, both categories collectively offer opportunities to enrich encounters within landscapes, which are tacitly capable of achieving parallel goals of evoking 'contemplative 'departures.' This sense of capability raises another question: how would the landscape be shaped to evoke a critical state of mind "to cross the intermediate state"? Another way to approach this could be found in the past, current, and future layering as a design approach.

Such layering resonates with the concept of the present or presenting of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger says: "a distinction between space and place, where 'spaces' gained authority, not from 'space' appreciated mathematically but 'place' appreciated through human experience." (Sharr, 2007) According to Heidegger's scheme: "it involves an imaginative projection from here and nor, to there, in our minds." This imaginative projection can involve us thinking to seek an unforgettable state, an unforgettable event that happened there, something memorable and even unforgettable fiction made about it.

### **Between Cultural and Historic (al) Landscapes.**

The municipality of Dropull is in the region of Gjirokaster, situated on the highway between Gjirokaster and the Greek border in Kakavija. The villages of the municipality of Dropull are on the mountain slope, arranged one after the other along with the mountain range, and parallel with the leading international road. Among the numerous villages of Dropull, it is the village of Sofratika that combines beauty,

nature, and history. The town lies on the necropolis of the antique Roman city of Adrianopoli (aka Hadrianopolis), built in the 2nd century B.C. Emperor Adrian requested the building of Adrianopoli in order to join together the communities of Drino Valley, which needed a territorial capital after the popular city of Antigonea was destroyed hundreds of a long time ago. The settlement of Hadrianopolis lies within the broadest segment of the valley of the river Drino, west of Sofratikë and 14 km south of Gjirokastër. Hadrianopolis is first mentioned in Tabula Peutingeriana, which places the town on the road from Apollonia to Nikopolis after Amantia<sup>1</sup>, while Hierocles<sup>2</sup> ranks Hadrianopolis among the 12 cities of Old Epirus<sup>3</sup>.

The latter was chosen as the main road outside Egnatia Road, and allowed a direct link from the Greek mainland to the Adriatic coast through the Drin valley. In the 6th century AD, emperor Justinian I of the Byzantine Empire re-found it as Justinianopolis.

#### *The periods that were studied:*

I. Late Classical and Hellenistic period: The data obtained from the archeologist R.Perna<sup>5</sup>, who has studied the history of Drino Valley, evince the presence of settlements in the surrounding villages located on the slopes of the mountains. These data are more detailed for villages like Jergucat, Theriat and Frashtan. While for the village of Sofratika there are no traces of settlements, but there some vague traces with monumental character. However, given that it is in a field, the area could be more easily imagined as a gathering place for the community. The Aeacidaedynasty<sup>6</sup>, the dynasty of Pirro of Epirus, which corresponds to the foundation of Antigonea, controlled the entire valley by creating a complex defensive system with simple fortifications.

II. The Roman Era: After the end of the third Macedonian war, it is likely that the center of Sofratika started to take the place of Antigonea, as a center of the entire valley and served as a control point for the system of thoroughfares. As we can see from the general plan (Fig.2 and Fig.3), this

<sup>1</sup> / (Miller, 1887-1888)

<sup>2</sup> / Hierocles was a Byzantine geographer and author of the sixth century and is the writer of Synecdemos. Synecdemos contains a table of administrative divisions of the Byzantine Empire and lists of the cities of each.

<sup>3</sup> / The Assignment is confirmed in the 6th century; (Hieroclis, 1735)

<sup>5</sup> / (Paci, 2007); (Perna, Le indagini archeologiche ad Hadrianopolis (Sofratikë) e nel territorio della valle de Drino (campagne 2008-2010), 2012); (Perna, R. and Çondi D., 2010b)

<sup>6</sup> / Refers to the Greek descendants of Aeacus, mentioned several times in the Iliad of Homer.

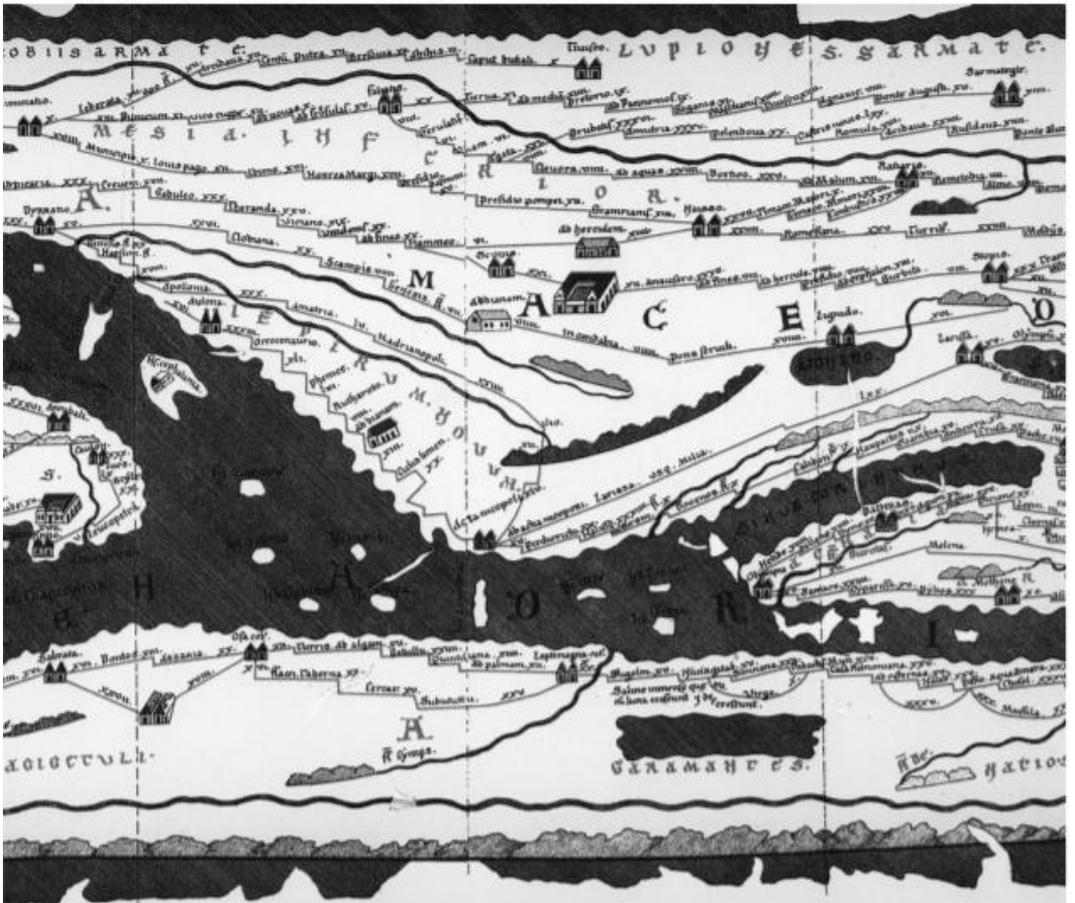


Fig. 1 / Tabula Peutingeriana. VII, 3, evinces the city of Hadrianopoli, between Apollonia and Amantia<sup>4</sup>

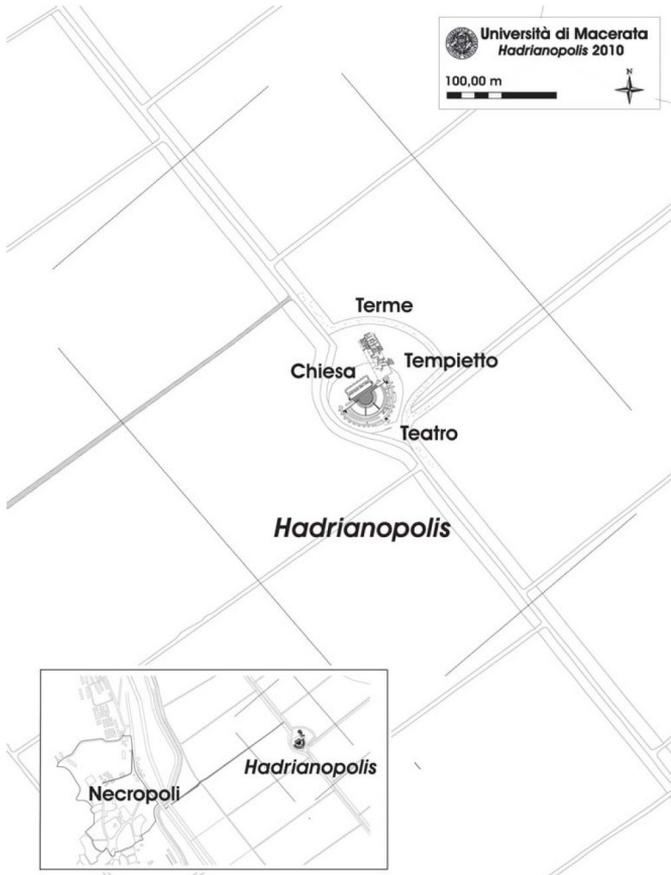


Fig. 2 / Hadrianopolis, general map of the city.  
Source / Archaeological research in Hadrianopolis (Sofratika) and in the territory of the Drinos Valley (campaigns 2008-2010) [Author: Roberto Perna; Dhimiter Condi]

<sup>4</sup> / Photo taken from (Perna, Hadrianopolis e la valle del drino (Albania) Considerazioni sulle Trasformazioni dell'insediamento e del territorio dell'eta Ellenistica a quella Bizantina (campagne di scavo e surveys 2011-2015), 2014)

phase may know the first interventions in organizing the site into a functional site. There is a drainage system above which there was arable land, or maybe a road. However, starting from the imperial age, the settlements started a process of intense 'monumentalization' that led to a series of public buildings, concentrated especially around the building with thermal features. At the Tempietto<sup>7</sup>, the square area was later incorporated into the late complex and theater. Luca Bomardieri, at the Symposium on Mediterranean Archeology, expresses: "Distinct from the drawing it is seen as the establishment of a village without the articulation of a city" (Luca Bomardieri, 2013).

III. The document shows that during the Byzantine period, at the beginning of the 6th century AD, some service buildings were altered without substantially altering their function. What stands out from the excavations is the erection of a small space in the center of the urban area, oriented to the east, which is thought to have been used as a place of worship. At the end of the 6th century, the area underwent extensive abandonment and collapse. Against the barbarian attacks and the crisis of the Imperial system, surrounding walls were built throughout the area. The last documented phase documented is associated with constructing some right-angled walls that may have served as vegetable gardens for the people. So, the next phase was the progressive abandonment of the area.

IV. Some ancient remains, including a Roman theatre, were already known from the reports of 19th-century travelers, but Albanian excavations on the site started only in 1974. The theater structure was unearthed during excavations made by the Institute of Monuments of Culture headed by A. Baçe from 1984 to 1986 (Baçe, 1983; A. Baçe, G.Paci and R. Perna, 2007). During the years 1940-1970, archeologists and historians were more interested in other archeological sites that were more accessible and did not require much excavation. After the end of the Second World War and until the 1990s, Albanian archaeologists had no interest in making excavations at this archaeological site. Italian archaeologists who came with expeditions to make the excavations said that the whole territory was covered, and it was almost impossible to identify this location. However, this fact is a bit doubtful, as, during the 1960s, drainage

canals were built there for the cultivated lands. As explained in the scientific articles by Prof. Perna, the amphitheater of Sofratika has been completely covered with earth, and it took many expeditions to clean it up and get to the current state. As he explains, there are still many traces of civilization that are buried and require further expeditions. (Perna, Zbulimet arkeologjike ne qytetin antik te Hadrianopolis, 2013).

V. The modern Sofratikë is situated on the slope of the mountain; from its center, there is a beautiful view of the archeological city of Hadrianopolis, a view that could become an integral part of the territory and the inhabitant's historical memory. It is impossible not to mention the fact that everything has stopped there. Adrianopolis-Joustinianopolis and Drinopoli (Dropull) are now valuable archeological sites that open up strong discussions about the following problems such as:

- The abandonment and return to the old centers or the creation of new ones near them;
- City life and the balance between the new inhabited city with the archaeological site;
- The re-use of the space, and how has the space been reused in different periods.

### **The potential of liminal landscapes**

The question remains: for how long will the current liminal landscape phase of Sofratika continue? How can we see the potential beyond this liminal phase? A possible answer may be: as long as the city of Sofratika is part of the Antigonea Archeological Park and preserve the ruins of the most important cities of southern Albania during the Roman Empire. So the fact that the city of Sofratika is in a state between past and future must be viewed positively.

First, there is 'pre-liminal' separation phase which stands at the break of the landscape from the existing modality. This situation has already happened in the case of the ancient city of Hadrianopolis, because in unconscious conditions, the inhabitants of the city are situated along the ridge of the 'Wide' Mountain. In doing so, the "death" of the ancient city of Hadrianopolis took place because the new city left the old one and did not develop on the ruins of the ancient city as it was done in Durres, Berat or other cities. In the second liminal phase known

<sup>7</sup> / Small Temple

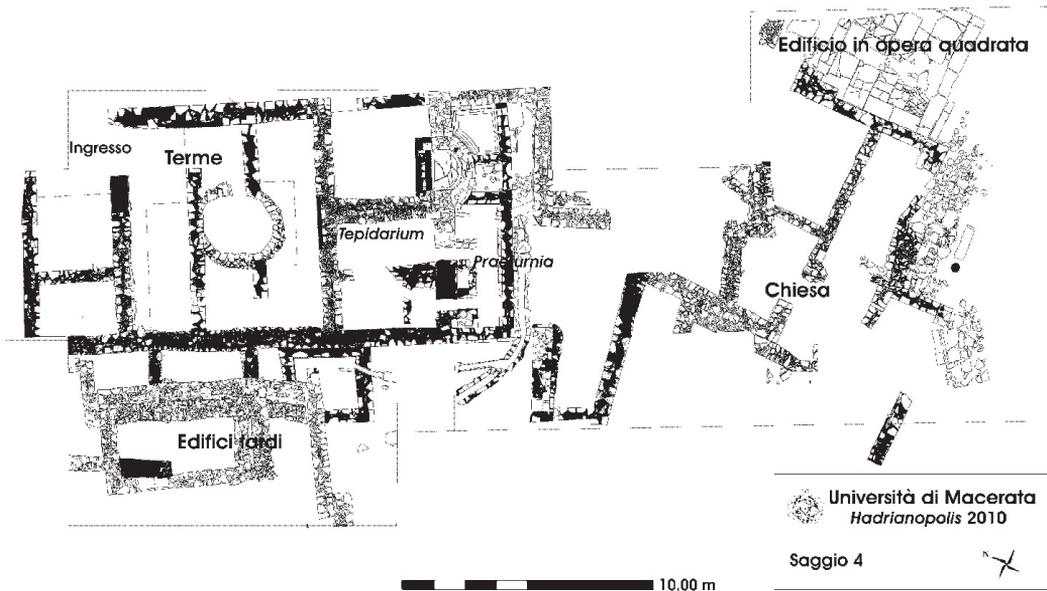


Fig. 3 / Hadrianopolis, archeological plan  
 Source / Archaeological research in Hadrianopolis (Sofratika) and in the territory of the Drinos Valley  
 (campaigns 2008-2010) [Author: Roberto Perna; Dhimiter Condi]]

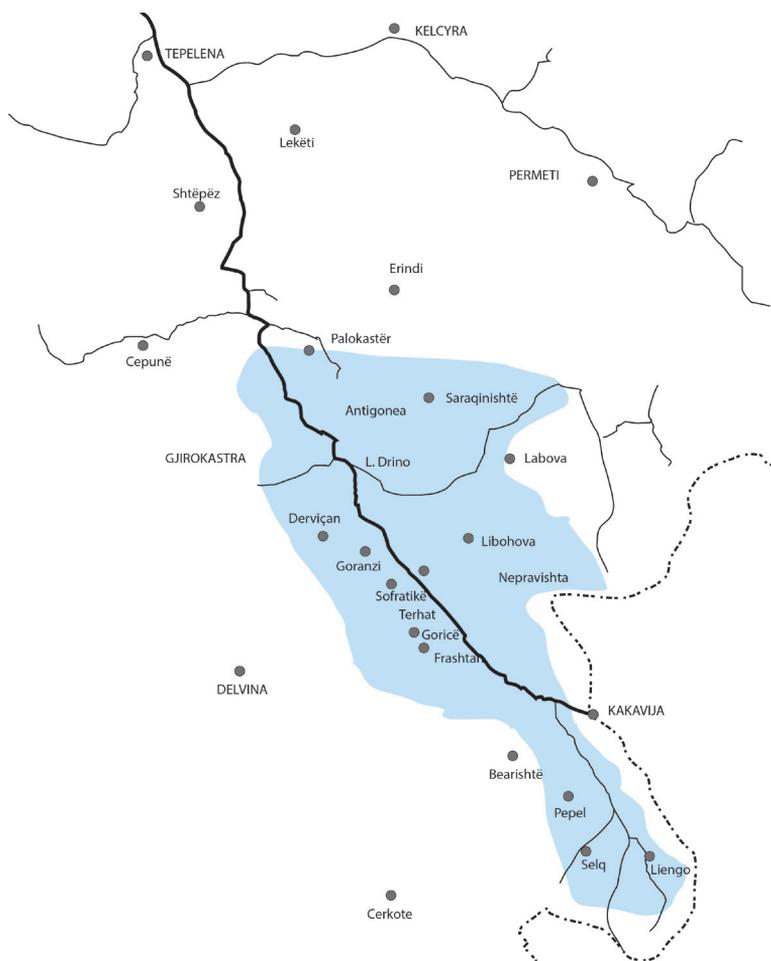


Fig. 4 / Valley of the River Drinos, southern Albania. Source / the author

as transition, the landscape elements lose their meaning, and they are reinterpreted in new ways. In Sofratika, this phase is epitomized by the city's rebirth at the slope of the mountain, taking on elements of the typical constructed buildings of that area.

On the one hand these buildings have their own historical identity, and on the other hand, they cannot remain separate

from the landscape's breadth. In the case of Sofratika, the landscape consists of the mountain, the city/village, and Hadrianopolis. This grouping is part of a reinterpretation process and can be removed in the future if the meanings of each element cannot be interpreted in a way that fits with the future social modalities. In some cases, the remaining most valuable elements are historically

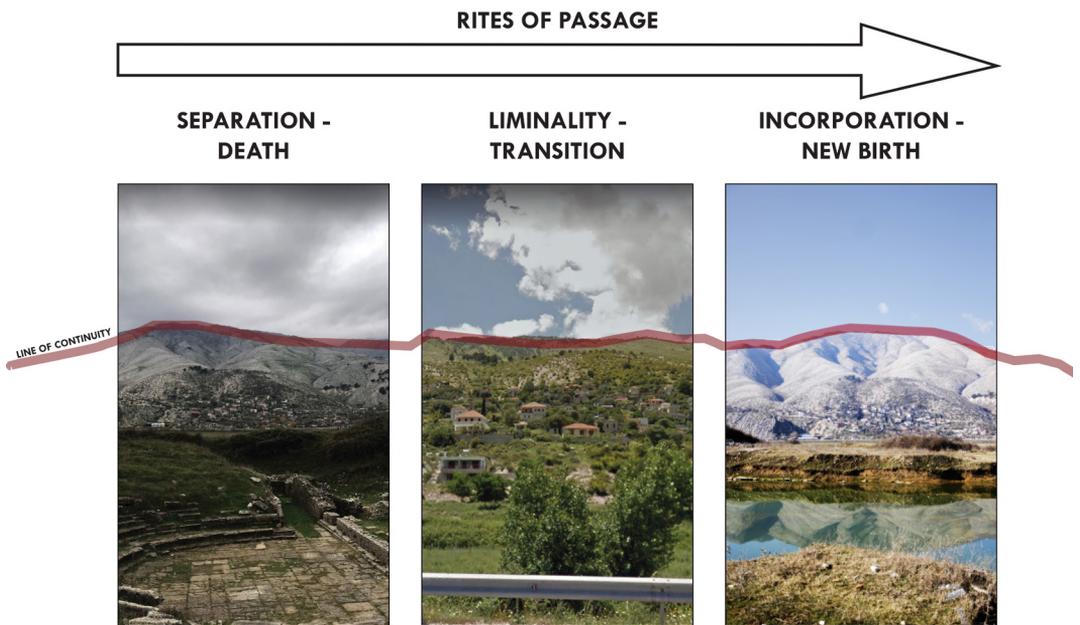


Fig. 5 / Rites of passage in case of Sofratika. Source / the author

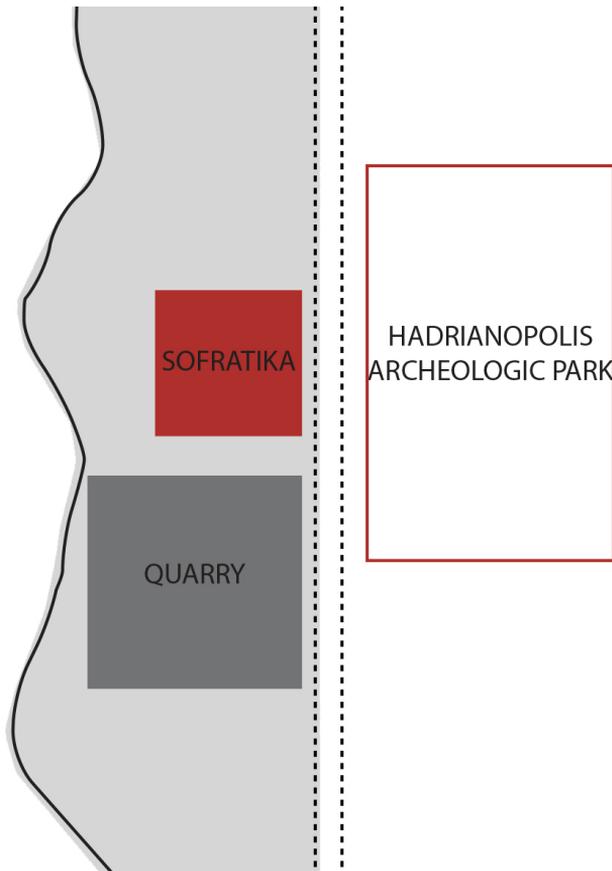


Fig. 6 / Diagram of liminal landscape phase of Sofratika. Source / the author

preserved carefully in order to prevent the former modality from being completely forgotten. Studies of the transitional periods tend to underline that there was a high degree of continuity of the cultural elements during the early historical periods. We have a total disconnection from history and culture during the late periods, losing the landscape's historical identity. Here it is worth mentioning the fact that adjacent to the city of Sofratika, a quarry has been erected, which is gradually destroying that cultural landscape that

has taken thousands of years to be created. However, many elements have been retained and if these elements are reinterpreted, we will be able to fill the gaps we have in interpreting the historical landscape.

Thus, the third phase of "reaction", the post-liminal phase - the "re-birth", will occur when the remaining historical elements of the landscape will be distinguished more than those that damaged it. This means that their activity must be reduced to preserve the landscape. As for how long

this liminal state of Sofratika's landscape will last, attention must be paid to the changes of the city's landscape.

## Conclusion

Cities like Sofratika, which have dominant elements like Archaeological Parks, as is the case of Hadrianopolis and Antigone, must have strong laws to preserve the historic landscape. To make the city of Sofratika part of historical and archaeological context, we must pay attention to the fact that the city is unique. The proposed methodology of the cultural landscape offers a conceptual framework by which we can imagine how a built environment reflects the gradual process of historical change. A liminal landscape like that of Sofratika is at the same time backward-looking and forward-looking. In the case of transition of liminal landscape of Sofratika to post-liminal landscape is a slow process without the help of the responsible authorities. I think, as proposed in our project SHTRESEZIM project – part of the Ph.D. workshop, 34th cycle of IDAUP when these damaging elements begin to change function and become indistinguishable, then we can begin to argue that the stage of the liminal landscape has come to an end.

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