

Greek War of Independence (1821–32)

rebellion of the Greeks against the [Turks](#) which led to independence from the Ottoman empire and the establishment of the kingdom of Greece. Hellenism or a sense of Greek nationalism had long been fostered by the Greek Orthodox Church. This, coupled with a rediscovery of Greek culture, meant there was a common desire among Greeks of all classes for some form of independence. The Philiki Etaireia ('Friendly Brotherhood'), founded in Odessa in 1814, felt that the only way to achieve this was through violence. Therefore Alexandros Ypsilantis led a small force into Turkish Moldavia in March 1821. Although he was soon defeated, there were outbreaks of rebellion across the Peloponnese which seized a number of garrisons and key ports and the key fortress of Morea and also Athens. The Turks responded by putting down a Cretan rebellion and ravaging the whole island of Chios, massacring or enslaving the entire population, but they could not recapture Morea. The Greeks had further successes against the Turkish army which had invaded the peninsula north of the Gulf of Corinth. They were halted before the Greek fort at Missolonghi and forced to invest it. On 21 August 1822, 300 Greeks under Marco Bozzaris surprised Gen Mustai Pasha and routed 4,000 Turks at the battle of Karpenizi. In January 1823, the Turks lifted the siege of Missolonghi and withdrew. Instead of pressing their advantage, the Greeks eased their campaign against the weakened Turkish forces to set up a provisional government, but since this was fraught with difficulties a civil war erupted among the Greeks.

Taking full advantage of the respite this offered, the Turks made good use of the time to regroup. Sultan Mahmut II requested help from [Mohammed Ali](#), the pasha of Egypt. Mohammed sent his son Ibrahim with some 5,000 well-trained troops to the Morea against the much weakened Greeks. They soon captured the town and the peninsula. Meanwhile a new Turkish army under Reshid Pasha invaded from the north and took Missolonghi in 1826. The Turks moved on Athens and besieged the Acropolis the following year. The Greek cause had captured European interest. Lord Byron died at Missolonghi but his example was followed by a number of volunteer adventurers and idealists. Some of these men were experienced soldiers or sailors such as Adm Lord Cochrane and Gen Sir George Church who were placed in command of the Greek navy and army respectively. However, both were paralysed by Greek internecine intrigue. By June 1825, Reshid Pasha had captured the Acropolis and continental Greece was again under Turkish control.

Public opinion in Europe strongly supported the Greek struggle and the governments of Britain, France, and Russia signed a protocol agreeing to mediate between the Greeks and Turks. They also demanded that the Egyptians withdraw from Greece and the Turks sign an armistice; they both refused. A large Egyptian naval squadron landed reinforcements at Navarino on 8 September 1827, where a Turkish naval force also lay moored. The British, French, and Russians sent naval forces to help the Greeks and they arrived off the harbour of Navarino. On 20 October 1827, Adm Sir Edward Codrington, the senior allied commander, sailed the combined allied fleet into the harbour where the Egyptian-Turkish ships were at anchor and dropped anchor in the midst of the opposing fleet. When a Turkish ship fired on a British dispatch boat, Codrington ordered his ships to return fire and the French and Russians immediately joined in the battle. The Egyptian-Turkish fleet, which was heavily outgunned, was defeated, losing some three-quarters of its ships. Navarino essentially decided the fate of Greek independence. The Russians took advantage of Turkish difficulties and declared war on 26 April 1828, ostensibly in support of Greek independence, but mainly as an opportunity for further Russian expansion at the Ottoman empire's expense. The Russian offensives against the Turks in the Euphrates and in the Balkans further undermined Turkish power, and when a Russian army captured Adrianople and thus threatened Constantinople, the Turks sued for peace. The Treaty of Adrianople forced the Turks to give autonomy to Serbia, Wallachia, and Moldavia and resulted in considerable Russian territorial gains. Greece was also granted autonomy. The French landed an expeditionary force in Greece which supervised the evacuation of the Egyptians, which started on 9 August 1828. This was completed at the beginning of 1829 and essentially ended the war. Greece finally gained its independence from a reluctant Ottoman empire under the Treaty of London of 7 May 1832.

Mann, Chris. "Greek independence war." [*The Oxford Companion to Military History*](#). : Oxford University Press, , 2004. [Oxford Reference](#)

Ioannis Makrygiannis was a hero of the Greek Independence War. He wrote a long book of memoirs. Some excerpts relating to Athens in 1822 and 1826 are below. You can find out more about him [here](#).

Makrygiannis at Athens - 1822

In the first year, they besieged the local Turks in the castle of Athens along with the whole of guard, and they fought bravely. And they managed to contain them to the castle, and they made an effort to get into the Serpetze¹ and many were killed from both sides. And both sides fought bravely. Then came Pasha [Omer Vrioni](#) with a force and stayed in Athens for a time, and he stopped the siege. He brought many ills to the poor Athenians, with many damages and killings and enslavings.

When Vrioni left, then the people from the countryside and the villages came again together and besieged the Turks, both people and guard, and contained them again to the castle. Eventually the Turks' water run out and all food, and they surrendered under a truce. But the truce was not worth the paper was written on.

The Athenians attacked them as soon as they surrendered and they killed many of the women and children, and of the men too. Many of the Turks did escape, however. The wealth of the Turks was divided in two parts. One part was to go directly to those who had taken part in the siege, and the other to be left in the castle to be sold, and to use the monies for provisions. They moved all of the wealth to the castle.

In the first instance, the headmen went for it, specifically old-man Zacharitsas, and his nephew Nicolakes, there were also the Vlachaigoi, Vranas, and others. They had as their chief, Batzakatza with his fellow military men. The honest heads of families of Athens suffered from these even more than they suffered from the Turks. Finally, the everyday people left all the monies into the hands of these men, and left for the islands.

Amongst the headmen, there was also an honest man, his name was Hatzes Giorgantas Skouzes, and they left him in charge of the monies in the castle. But he left in secret too, leaving them behind. And hence he left them free to follow their plans regarding the wealth in the castle. After they stole as much as they could, they were suspicious of Skouzes, because he could reveal what they had stolen, as he knew what was there originally. They wanted to take most of it, and give Skouzes some, but he wanted none of it, as he was an honest man. So he left. They sent and got him from Koulouri², under the orders of their leader, Batzakatza. On the way back to Athens, they cut off Skouzes' head.

They also caught the other heads of families, and put them in jail, and gave them any other "kindnesses" their souls desired. So, then, all the honest people, and Sarres, and the Lekkaigoi family, and Meletes Chasiotes, and others, united together, and with a stratagem took over the castle, and threw all of the thieves out, and they freed those in jail.

After the headmen had been thrown from the castle, they went to Ypsilantis ([Demetrios Ypsilantis](#)) and Niketas ([Nikitaras](#)), and told them that they would give over the castle to them, as they had the keys, even if others had possession of the castle. So, Ypsilantis and Niketas went to Athens with their troops and the old headmen. They looked at the castle from the country, since others held the

¹ The Serpetze fortification was built between 1457 and 1687. It enclosed part of the western slope of the Acropolis, the Odeon of Herodes, and all of the land until the Theatre of Dionysus. It was taken down in 1878, and the building materials were used to fix part of the supporting walls of the acropolis, by the Archaeological Service.

² The island of Salamis.

castle, and they only had the keys. Then all of the heads of families and the leaders that had the castle came together, and agreed to give it to Dysseus³, and make him their master so that they would be free of their old headmen. So, Sarres and Giorgakes Lekkas and others from the villages stayed in the castle, and they sent Metros Lekkas and Basil Meletes Chasiotes to find and meet Dysseus.

After they explained to Dysseus what happened and told him that they want him as their master, and he was looking for a castle in the sky and found one on earth, he ran to it like the bird of prey to the corpse. Dysseus came to Gravia⁴, where we were along with Gouras ([Ioannis Gouras](#)), and he brought the Athenian envoys too to say we all need to go to Athens. We told them and Dysseus, that we cannot leave the Turks free to roam, and us to go to get inside a castle, and leave the people to be enslaved. We had a big fight over this. I was against the move to Athens, and all that I had with me agreed with me, as were the men from Salona. Dysseus told us to come to divide the wealth of the castle, and to take our share, as we were guarding the passes, and hence no food was sent to the Turks under siege, and hence they surrendered, so were owed a share.

So I told him: “We are barely safe for our lives and what we have on us, and you want to us to go hunting for treasure?” After we fought, they told us, both Dysseus and the envoys from Athens, about their sorry state, and the killing of the honest man, and the sufferings of the heads of families, and how this situation could end up like Achilles with the castle at Corinth. Also, we did not have any other castles in Central Greece, and hence we decided to go to Athens.

We found there Ypsilantis and Niketas. They stayed for a few more days, and then they left. So, Dysseus appointed Gouras as head of the guard and me as rotation captain. And then they tried to take the remaining castle treasure to the market, but they divided the best of the spoils between them; the best diamond to Dysseus, and the next one to Gouras.

As to the provisioning of the castle, only a bit of money was left. And hence the castle remained unprovisioned. When the envoys from Athens had come to Gravia, and Dysseus enjoined us to go to Athens, he told us that the castle was in danger, and we have no others in central Greece, and we should go to provision it. But after we came to Athens, all the best things that could be sold, whether pearls or silver, they wanted for themselves. The other things were sold at a very low price, as they were of no account. And the castle was left unprovisioned. As soon as they came and took over the castle, they put their own people in charge, and they took whatever they saw and sold it.

Then came Mamouris ([Ioannis Mamouris](#)) to Athens with a wooden pistol, and he was set up as constable over the villages, and he beat the people in the same ways as a tyrant guard of Ali Pasha,⁵ by the name of Isuf Arab, who broke people’s bones with an axe. So Mamouris beat the people of the villages, those who were not his friends. And they denuded the castle of its wealth, and so did they to the villages. Then, I tell you as an honest man, he has one old pistol, look, does he still have it now? Ask also about his tyrannies. In the Misogeia at Keratia⁶, one local headman, named Anagnostes Nydraios, how many times did he beat him, and if he was healthy afterwards this good man, and the many others who were beaten and humiliated?

³ Dysseus was how the Greeks of the time called [Odysseus Androutsos](#), one of the captains of the Greek War of Independence.

⁴ In Phocis, near Delphi. A Byzantine and Crusader castle. Major battle of the Greek War of Independence happened there.

⁵ Ottoman ruler of Ioannina and surrounding parts of Epirus. For more, see [here](#).

⁶ Keratea – village in east Attika.

Dysseus and Gouras came to these blind people, who were looking for masters and found them, then they called the heads of families, Sarres and Meletes Chasiotes, as they were honest men, and killed them. And the Lekka family and many others, they persecuted, and gave leadership to those who were like them in virtue, like the Zacharitzides and the Vlachaigoi. And Mamouris married the sister of Vlachos. With them was also Varelas, a learned man from Surmela, who had come from abroad where he was studying; he was a bad man with bad manners. These were the friends our captains made.

Siege of Athens – 1826

Kitayas ([Meshid Mehmet Pasha](#)) came with a great force, with cavalry, with canons, with all necessities for war. He took over Patisia.⁷ Most of the villages of Athens surrendered to Kitayas, as due to our “justice” they found many of the residents suffering and they unburdened them, and others they freed, where we were torturing them for money. When the Athenians found out that Kitayas was coming, they asked for me from Fabvier ([Charles Nicholas Fabvier](#)) to come as I was under his command, and he gave me permission, and I stayed, while he took the force to Methana.⁸

And they appointed me, alongside two Athenians, Symeon Zacharitzas and Neroutzos Metzelos, and we were on the walls of the city, and we fought day and night for 34 days. Kitayas was destroying the walls with canon and we were fixing them. Much we suffered by killing and wounds. One dawn, one hour before the sun came up, after he took down the walls in many places and we could not fix the walls because of the canon fire, then the Turks came into the city. He gave them rum to make them brave and they came in on three sides.

We fought all the way back to the castle in one crowd with the Turks. In the front walls, the longer ones, that faced towards Patisia, the Athenians were guarding, and the patriot Morfopoulos. From Mpoupounistra⁹ to Rizokastro, Mamouris was guarding with Gouras’ people and some villagers. From the columns, near St George, to Rizokastro, Stathes Katzikoyannies was leading. Everyone fought bravely and patriotically. The nation owes them many favours. Gouras was on the castle, and sorted out wherever there was need. And everyone fought bravely. The Turks had canons all over the country, and threw canonfire, and gunfire and bombs at us. They were a multitude, and we were fewer than 500.

We went to the castle. There was great confusion there. There were women and children, and animals. Serpentze was filled. God was with us that day, brother readers. The Turks had positions all over the country and the castle. Yet the people, women and children crying, with so many animals, passed between the lines and the Turks did not realise. The people were saved and went to Ampelaki and Koulouri¹⁰.

We held the country for 34 days, and we got stuck in the castle on 3rd August, 1826. When we got into the castle, there was a multitude of oxen. Gouras, unused to sieges, let them out, and the Turks got them. I told him: “What are you doing, brother? This is a siege”. He tells me: “It will be just for a little while.” So he was told by the Europeans, who came to the castle, and he believed them. When we did not have even bread, he was hitting his head. The oxen were eaten by the Turks, and they blessed Gouras’ stupidity. I was experienced from the castle of Arta, where I was besieged without

⁷ Neighborhood at the edge of Athens, about 4 miles from Acropolis.

⁸ Greek town in the Peloponnese.

⁹ Very recent fortification made by Ali Chasekis in the 1780s.

¹⁰ Salamis island.

food, and from Niokastro, where we did not have even water. I put the wine of my wife's relatives, and all provisions, and I bought rice and beans, and all necessities. And I salted many oxen and pigs. So, my people ate, and the wounded too, as by the time that Kritzotes came with the tactical troops, butter was 100 grosia, and there was no way to get any necessities.

When we were besieged, we had each our own post. Father Kostas, the Emorfopoulos, and I had the Golden-Cave, where the cave and the two columns are. We were killed and wounded aplenty, as it was right ahead of us Setzos and Kolonaki, where the Turkish canons were. And from inside the Serpentze to the exit of the castle, were the Athenian Symios, Neroutzos, MetroLizos and Davaris. In the rampart of Dysseus and from there on were Gouras' people. In the Lion's rampart were the Athenians, as it was the most dangerous place. And these poor souls were naked and sad, as Gouras' people had stolen all from them. And poor Ntavares Anagnostes with his people, and Gerolizos, came to die with their villagers, and brought with them all their cattle and the textiles from their houses, and they fed and clothed the poor Athenians. Gouras' people did not let the Athenians take anything from the castle, and inside the castle they sold back to them their own property.

....

Gouras made a great temple, filled it with soil, so that the bombs wouldn't penetrate, and put himself and his family in there. And he took to the castle his father-in-law, Stayros Vlachos, Karores, Varelaw, Zacharitas, all their people and friends, and gave them a good underground lair. ... They were safe in there as outside everyone was in danger from the bombs and the canons.