

"The Contribution of the Orthodox Church and the Clergy to the Greek War of Independence (1821): The Case of the Monasteries of Boeotia"

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Abstract: The Greek War of Independence in 1821 represents not only a pivotal milestone in the history of the Greek nation but also the most significant event in the era of Modern Hellenism. Through this struggle, the long-desired freedom and national independence of the Greek people were finally achieved after four centuries of harsh subjugation.

The Greek Orthodox Church played an invaluable role both before and during the revolution, contributing decisively to the creation of favorable conditions for the emergence of the modern Greek nation. Faith and the longing for national freedom were the two unifying elements of the enslaved Romioi. The Christian faith, which bound the people together, also forged their national consciousness. The revolutionary cry "For the holy faith of Christ and the freedom of the homeland!" vividly reflects this unity of religious and national identity. The Church stood as a militant force: monasteries became centers of revolutionary activity, and clergy of all ranks actively participated in the uprising of the enslaved nation.

This study aims to highlight the decisive role of the Orthodox Church—particularly the monasteries and clergy—in the struggle for liberation in 1821, with a special focus on the region of Boeotia.

Keywords: Ecclesiastical History, War of Independence, Holy Monasteries, Clergy, Martyrdom, Hesychastic Tradition, Greek Orthodox Tradition

The diverse and multifaceted contribution of the monasteries and the Clergy in general to the national liberation fight of 1821 is a subject that has repeatedly occupied researchers

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of various scientific disciplines. Our intention with the present study is not to repeat known facts, but to present firstly a form of this contribution - unknown to the general public - which has a local character and concerns the role of the Holy Monasteries and the Clergy of Boeotia in the Revolution of 1821 and secondly to trace the ecclesiastical dimension of their participation in the Fight of the Slave Nation.

The historical course of Hellenism is connected with Christianity, the Church, as the body of Christ, especially after the destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD), when the Greeks will take over the leadership of the Church. Many factors contributed to this direction. The blessed George Metallinos aptly notes that: "The ecclesial transformation of Hellenism was accomplished through its self-transcendence — an ascent from the created *logos* to the uncreated *Logos*, Jesus Christ; and from the virtuous human being to the person in Christ, deified by grace (*theosis*), the Saint, as a 'new creation' (*B'Kop.5, 17*).²" Hellenism, therefore, also went through the process of baptism in order to join the ecclesiastical body. The interconnection of Hellenism and Christianity was beneficial for the Greek Nation, although many people question it. The nation is saved in the Church-Orthodoxy. In difficult historical periods, the Church is the refuge of the indomitable Nation. The monasteries, functioning as the swimming pools of the nation's continuous rebaptism, were a source of national cohesion, consolation and spiritual uplift. Thus, it is in this context that the presence of the Rassos (superior and inferior Clergy) in the Nation's fights to regain freedom is understood.³ The Greek Revolution of 1821 was largely the spiritual and political work of the Church.

To the foregoing, one could raise the following question: *Why should the Church take on such a role?* The answer is clear. The primary goal of the Orthodox Church is not the preservation of the historical dimension of the nation, but the ecclesiastical

² Georgios Metallinos, "Orthodoxy and Modern Greek Identity," in *Proceedings of the "Popular University" of the Church of Greece: The Contribution of the Church and the Holy Clergy in the Formation of Modern Greek Identity* (Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, 2005), 38-9.

³ Ibid, 44.

dimension, i.e. its integration into the Lyrical Body with the ultimate goal of its individual and collective spiritual fulfilment in Christ and its inner freedom, which means the liberation of the heart from the bondage of passions that is connected with outer freedom. Through the Church from 1453 to 1922, Professor Ath. Karathanasis, the local geographical boundaries were abolished, since Christians were united by faith, which also forged national consciousness. It was the Church that maintained the spiritual freedom of the free Greeks, revived the national tradition and secretly or openly reinforced the vision of freedom.⁴ In the Orthodox Church, therefore, a theology of freedom is preserved throughout time, a fact that legitimizes the presence of the Clergy and the Monasteries in the defensive and liberating fights of the aching Romanity and justifies the characterization of our Church as the Church of the Resurrection according to the late Gerasimos Konidaris.⁵

Studying the revolutionary movements of this period, one is surprised by the exuberant participation of the Clergy and the Monasteries in the Fight, which testifies to their unquenchable passion for freedom as they and their flock suffered the evils of slavery. The work of the parishes, which strengthened the spiritual dynamism of the enslaved and kept their courage strong, was complemented by the monasteries, which also became centers of spiritual life and consolation for the Greeks.⁶

Monasteries and Clerics become sacred carcasses of the Nation. In order to save time, we will list below as a narrative account the role played by the monasteries of Boeotia during the Revolution of 1821 and the Clergy in raising the Greek population of their episcopal region, acting as a "model" for the decisive final

⁴ Ath. Karathanasis, "The Orthodox Church during the Nation's Struggles," in *Proceedings of the "Popular University" of the Church of Greece: The Contribution of the Church and the Holy Clergy in the Formation of Modern Greek Identity* (Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, 2005), 99.

⁵ Metallinos, "Orthodoxy and Modern Greek Identity," 45.

⁶ Georgios Metallinos, *Turkish Rule: The Greeks in the Ottoman Empire* (Athens: Akritas, 2008), 106-10.

resistance expression of the Nation.⁷ The monasteries of the Boeotian Church and its clergy took part in the fight for freedom that was being set up throughout Roumeli "For the holy faith of Christ and the freedom of the homeland... ." The monasteries of Boeotia were where those who were hunted by the Turks fled and the women and children found shelter. The monasteries supplied food, ammunition and money to the troops of the chieftains, who camped in the monasteries, treated the wounded from the battles, and the monks fought alongside the chieftains, giving their lives for the freedom of their homeland, and for this reason they suffered looting, destruction, robbery and desolation.

The chief generals and chieftains of Rumeli, such as Athanasios Diakos, Odysseus Androutsos, Georgios Karaiskakis, Athanasios Skourtaniotis set up their barracks and camped in the monasteries of Boeotia. The present article explores the pivotal contribution of Boeotia's monasteries to the Greek Revolution of 1821, analyzing the specific role played by each monastery separately.

Monastery of Saint Luke

The declaration of the revolution in Roumeli is described by the historian of the Monastery of Saint Luke, George Cremos. At the end of 1820, Patriarch Gregory V summoned the Bishop of Salona, Isaias, for an alleged affair of the Monastery of Saint Luke, in Constantinople, where he went together with his brother Theodosius, a monk of the Monastery, and the abbot Joseph Hatzis. There, after holding a meeting with Patriarch Gregory V, who provided them with the necessary directives, they departed once again for the Monastery of Hosios Loukas.

Upon their arrival at the monastery, Diakos Athanasios Zarefis, the envoy of the Society, along with the abbots and elders of the monks, gathered inside the monastery church behind closed doors. After a brief deliberation, they unanimously voted for the

⁷ Athena Kontali, "The ecclesiastical dimension of the liberation uprisings," in *Proceedings of the 3rd Conference Orthodox Church and Preservation of National Identity- New martyrs, Saint Kosmas of Aetolia; Revolutionary Movements* (Athens: Archontariki, 2015), 229-46.

revolution; each one swore upon the Holy Gospel to carry out their duties effectively. And from March 12, when the meeting took place in the Monastery of Saint Luke, everyone was preparing for the revolution.

Georgios Kremos vividly recounts the pivotal role of the Hosios Loukas monastery in the 1821 Revolution. The monks actively supported the uprising by relocating livestock, preparing weapons, and fortifying the monastery. By late March, revolutionaries in Boeotia, including Filiki Eteria envoy Athanasios Zarefis, gathered at the monastery, awaiting signals from the Peloponnese. At dawn on March 27th, a doxology led by Bishop Hesaias of Amfissa solemnized their commitment. Following the service, the assembly exchanged the Christian kiss of brotherhood and departed to assume their revolutionary duties... »⁸

Along with Isaias of Salona, the Abbot of the monastery Isaias Dalianis from Steri, who distinguished himself by fighting at Styliida, Domvraina, Distomo and the Battle of Arachova, fought alongside Isaias of Salona.

G. Kremos mentions that when King Otto visited the monastery, Isaiah Dalianis, after telling the king about the declaration of the revolution, told him: «The revolutionaries expressed their valor in the fight for freedom but lamented their suffering and hunger. Despite their hardships, they affirmed their loyalty to the nation and the monarch, accepting the possibility of death for their ... » Otto was moved and promised them much, but in vain they waited until their death for the decorations and salaries he promised them.

Other Fathers of the Monastery were Paisios Margelos from Distomo who fought under Odysseus Androutsos, Gouras, Io. He was awarded the Order of the Saviour by King Otto, Nektarios Kamvinenos from Arachova, who fought in the Battle of Prophet Elias under Gouras, as well as in the Battle of Arachova in 1826 and in the Battle of Athens in 1827 under Gouras. Simeon

⁸ Georgios Kremos, *History of the Monastery of Hosios Loukas in Phocis, Volume II: The History of the Monastery from 955 to 1879 with Illustrations* (Athens: Printing House of the Journal of Discussions, Philokalia and G. Karyofyllis, 1880), 97.

Mastrogeorgis, who was a surgeon of the troops of Andritsa, father of Odysseus Androutsos. The later Bishop of Amfissa Joseph Koutumanis.

Finally, indicatively we mention the monks Makarios from Agia Marini, Joachim Baltouchos from Desfinas, Nikolaos Baltouchos, Paisios from Davlia, Jeremiah Nikolaos, Trifilio from Anemoria, Dionysios from Zeriki, PagratiosDrokos from Ambrysos, Matthew from Kyriaki, Ambrosios from Levadeia who participated in the Fight.⁹

In concluding the presentation of the monastery's contribution to the struggle, it is deemed appropriate to mention that, according to surviving documents, it supplied food and funds to the revolution and its military leaders. Specifically, it provided: Between March 27 and April 6, 1821, the Monastery of Hosios Loukas provisioned the entirety of Diakos's forces and contributed 300 grosia to the Levadeia treasury for the revolution's preparation. According to archival records, the monastery continued to provide substantial material support in subsequent years. In 1823, it supplied 191 okades of oil. In 1824, it disbursed significant quantities of foodstuffs and livestock—including wheat, barley, bread, cheese, wine, olives, and 1,450 animals—to the revolutionary administration and the army of Odysseas Androutsos. Additional provisions were directed to units stationed in Distomo. Contributions continued through 1826, 1828, and 1829, comprising grain, legumes, wine, oil, corn, goats, and financial aid, thereby indicating the monastery's sustained logistical and financial involvement in the revolutionary effort. The historian of the monastery, George Cremos, rightly states about the contribution of the monastery that: «The sacrifices made by the monastery during the Revolution—of blood, resources, and provisions—were immense and immeasurable, leading both the institution and its monastic community to a state of impoverishment.»¹⁰

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. The information comes from the work of Georgios Cremos, *History of the Monastery of Saint Loukas*.

Moni Lycouresi

Athanasios Diakos established his headquarters in the monastery from where he set out to liberate Livadia. Diakos, after the beginning of the Revolution at Hosios Loukas, passed through Dafleia and Chaeronea and gathered as many men as he could and camped at the Monastery of Lycouresis. From there he sent a letter to the Arachovites to send him men, food and ammunition. And on the evening of 28ης March morning of 29ης he set off for Livadia. In close cooperation with the precrites and chieftains he succeeded in capturing the Castle of Livadia, the "Tower of Time" and other topical positions, and liberated Livadia on 31th of March.

On April 1, 1821, Livadia, the most important city of Eastern Rumeli, was free thanks to the courage of Diakos, the responsibility of the chiefs and the bravery of its inhabitants. All together they head to the Church of Agia Paraskevi, where the Bishop of Athens Dionysios and the Bishops of Salona Isaias and Talantion Neophytos, in the presence of Athanasios Diakos and the envoy of the Society of Friends, Athanasios Zareifi, perform a solemn doxology. In the general excitement Diakos raises the flag of the Revolution with the icon of Saint George and the words embroidered with blue silk: «Freedom or Death». The motto "Freedom or Death" ("Elefthería í thánatos") encapsulated the ideological core of the Greek War of Independence.

Monastery of Jerusalem

The contemporary historian of the region, Takis Lappas, notes: «...This monastery was so closely intertwined with the Revolution... » The monastery was used as a supply center for the first revolutionary corps of Eastern Rumeli. In addition to their many incomes, the monks collected another twenty thousand ounces of calves. It was plundered and burned by the Turks in June 1823, after the fierce resistance of the monks and Odysseus Androutsos' boys.

The most important contribution of the monastery was in the victorious battle of Arachova in November 1826, with a message sent to the commander in chief of Rumeli, Georgios Karaiskakis.

The historian describes the event as follows During the winter of 1826, the Ottoman army camped between Davleia and the: «Monastery, with high-ranking pashas spending the night within the monastic grounds to plan their next moves. A novice monk, fluent in Turkish and instructed by the abbot, discreetly reported their conversations. The abbot then entrusted monk Paphnoutios Charitos to inform Karaiskakis, who was encamped in Distomo. The intelligence revealed that Ottoman forces—numbering approximately 2,500–3,000 under Kehayabey and Mustafabey—planned to march through Arachova to relieve the besieged garrison in Amfissa. This act of monastic resistance played a key role in the lead-up to Karaiskakis's decisive victory at the Battle of Arachova.»¹¹

Monastery of St. Seraphim of Dombus

Because of its remote position, the boys were being prepared and trained for the Revolution. From the monastery many times passed the Commander-in Chief of Rumeli, Georgios Karaiskakis, as well as in November 1826, when he was on his way to Arachova. As soon as Karaiskakis left for Arachova, the Turks attacked the monastery, which was defended by Karaiskakis' soldiers. While, in October 1828, Turcalians barricaded themselves in the monastery, however, the men of Demetrios Ypsilantis besieged the monastery and forced the Turks to surrender.

Monastery of Makariotissis

There was a passage for the transport of ammunition and troops between the Peloponnese and Central Greece due to its geographical position. In November 1826, the Turcalans, under Mustafabei Kiafezes, occupied the monastery and set the church on fire, but they did not manage to defeat the army of Karaiskakis, who was besieging the Turks of Domvraina¹².

¹¹ Liapis, *Christian Boeotia*, Volume I (Livadia: Center for Archaeological, Historical and Theological Studies, 2005), 364-65.

¹² The information about the Holy Monasteries of Domvos and Makariotissa and the other monasteries comes from the Calendar of the

The Share of the Sagmata Monastery "Saint Saviour"

It became a symbol of heroism with the holocaust of Skourtaniotis, who sacrificed himself and his 70 men fighting the Turks. Athanasios Skourtaniotis 12 from Dervenochoria arrived at NeochoriThespia and on 26 October 1825 he faced the Turks who were destroying and plundering the whole surrounding area from Chalkida. Skourtaniotis and his lads, after finishing the ammunition, were locked up in AgiaSotira. Then the Turks threw burning branches of sulphur and resin into the Church, setting the Church on fire. Only a monk named Panaretos escaped.

Monasteries of Evangelistria – Pelagia – Skripus and Saint Frida of Koronia

The monastery of Evagelistria in Helicon was a camp where the warriors of the fight were trained, and the monks helped with all their strength in the battles that took place in the area. According to a document of the General State Archives in 1822, the monastery gave 100 groats for the fight.

In Akraifnio, in *the monastery of Pelagia*, because of its strategic position, Ypsilantis had camped in May 1829, and from there he started to go to Thebes to face the Turks who occupied AgioiTheodoroi and Pyri. In the same monastery, in October 1821, Odysseus Androutsos had placed men from Atalanti to warn with torches, from the top of Mount Ptoeus, of the march of the troops of Omer Vryonis and Kiose Mehmet, intending to attack them as they left Boeotia and headed for Lamia.

The Monastery of Panagia Skripous in Orchomenos also tasted the fury of the Turkish conqueror, and today only the church survives. In 1821, the Turks killed most of the 60 monks in the monastery and set the monastery on fire when they learned that the monks were helping the chieftains of Roumeli.

Salvific Year 2021 of the Holy Metropolis of Thebes, Levadeia and Avlidos, edited by Miss Areti Moulara, Theologian, holder of an M.Div. in Theology on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the proclamation of the Revolution of 1821.

The same fate as that of Skripou also befell *the monastery of Agia Paraskevi* Koroneia, which was set on fire by the enemies and its monks were killed.

Monastery of St. Nicholas Ipsilantis

In this monastery the end of the nine-year fight against the Turks was signed. Dimitrios Ypsilantis on August 28, 1829 set up his headquarters in the Monastery of St. Nicholas to face the Turkish army, which was heading from Athens to Larissa, because the Gate was facing a serious problem due to the Russo-Turkish war. The Greeks occupied the Straits of Petra, where on 12^η September they confronted Aslan Bey with 5,000 Turks. Aslan Bey was defeated and asked for peace with the Greeks. The capitulation was signed on 13 September 1829 in a cell of the Holy Monastery of St. Nicholas. The Turks were forced to leave Central Greece.

Thus ended the Greek revolution against centuries of Turkish slavery. From the above it is clear that the contribution of the monasteries was immeasurable during the period of the National War of Independence. We detect in this attitude of the Holy Monasteries a dimension, which we have already mentioned, and it is worth noting at this point, the ecclesiological one. We note that the concept of freedom in the Orthodox conscience is interwoven, as we have said, with the natural state of man's existence. It is a state that is "God-given" and genuine, which is realized in communion with God.¹³ It is the «μένειν ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ»¹⁴ of Christ. Christ offers man the essential and true freedom, which is a gift of the grace of the Triune God and is an ontological, existential and ecclesial fact.¹⁵

It is conceived and realized only through freedom in Christ, that is, as freedom from sin, death, and time and space constraints. It is through this God centered relationship that the possibility of man's self-determination springs, which presupposes his freedom

¹³ Athena Kontali, "The ecclesiastical dimension of the liberation revolts," 230.

¹⁴ Io. 15, 10.

¹⁵ Konstantinos Delikonstantis, "The Apostle Paul as a theologian of freedom -today," *Apostolos Titus* 10 (2008): 133-39.

from every kind of coercion and dependence that limits man's autonomy.¹⁶ In the Greek Orthodox tradition, then, freedom is understood within the context of God's will, not only as personal, but also as national and social. For the enslaved Christians the cause of their national freedom took on a religious character,¹⁷ i.e. soteriological and at the same time ecclesiological, as the basis of salvation in Christ and an essential element of the catholicity of the Church,¹⁸ which gives everyone the possibility of personal perfection in the truth of the new life in Christ.

This is why Christ identifies man's liberation with the knowledge of the truth¹⁹. The role of Bishop Isaías of Salona—an often-overlooked hierarch—is closely connected to the broader historical and theological framework of the Greek Revolution. A figure emblematic of the clergy who actively engaged in the national struggle, Isaías, together with Athanasios Diakos and others, exemplifies a generation of ecclesiastics who embodied the Helleno-Orthodox tradition and became carriers of the emerging Helleno-Christian consciousness. Drawing on the theological concept of *freedom in Christ* (*ἐνΧριστῷἐλευθερία*), as expressed through the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, these clergy offered both spiritual leadership and tangible support to the cause of liberation. Their contribution reflects a lived theology of freedom (*θεολογίατηςἐλευθερίας*), wherein national independence was perceived as inseparable from the salvific vision of the Church. In moments of collective hardship, they served as both moral anchors and active agents of resistance.²⁰

By participating in the Fight, the Clergy acted as shepherds, children and brothers of the flock they served. Their attitude was dictated by the words of the Lord:

¹⁶ Konstantinos Delikonstantis, *Human Rights: Western Ideology or Universal Ethos?* (Thessaloniki: Kyriakidis Brothers, 1995), 60.

¹⁷ M. Siotou "The religious value of national freedom," *Epeteris of the Faculty of Theology, University of Athens*, Vol. 20 (1973): 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁹ John 8:32: "Know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

²⁰ Chr. Krikonis, "The Contribution of the Church Clergy to the Liberation Struggles of the Greek Nation," in *Memory: 1821 - Tribute to the National Rebirth on its 150th Anniversary*, 143-70.

«Οποιμὴν ὀκλὸς τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ τίθει οἰνὸν ἐρτὸν προβάτων» (Ιω. 10,11) and in the case of Isaiah of Salona it was practically applied in the case of Isaiah of Salona, who was a pure patriot, a warrior clergyman and a national preacher of the 1821 Revolution.

To sum up, we can say that the Clergy contributed to the fight for liberation as bearers of the Greek Orthodox tradition, supporting morally, psychologically and spiritually the enslaved Greeks, even sacrificing their own lives. This was a unique and multi-level sacrifice that reveals their dedication to the liberation effort of the Greek people.

The Orthodox Church fought for the preservation of the faith, the purity and defense of Orthodoxy against Islam and Catholicism, the containment of Islamism and the preservation of the national consciousness of the rayans, which is why it was placed at the head of the forces that, in difficult circumstances, organized the defense of Hellenism.²¹

Summarizing the above, we can undeniably conclude the following: the great contribution of the Church to the preservation of the unity and unanimity of the Greeks lies in its hesychastic tradition, namely, mental prayer, enlightenment of the mind, purification and theosis, as experienced and expressed among others in the teachings of the great Father of our Church, Gregory Palamas.

Let us therefore bear in mind that this contemplative tradition was expressed both through the sacrifice of the Clergy and the contribution of the Monasteries and through *the lives of the new martyrs*. Faith in this tradition made them strong enough to endure martyrdom, while revealing that the Orthodox faith is true, because it purifies and enlightens man and makes him able to endure all martyrdom.

Conclusion

This study clearly demonstrates the pivotal role played by the Orthodox Church and the monastic communities of Boeotia in

²¹ Nikos G. Svoronos, *The Greek Nation, Genesis and Formation of Modern Hellenism* (Athens: Polis, 2004), 84-7.

supporting the Greek War of Independence of 1821. Far from remaining passive or conciliatory toward the Ottoman rulers, the Church actively provided both moral encouragement and substantial material assistance to the insurgent nation. The monastic institutions were crucial centers of resistance, facilitating logistics, shelter, and supplies for the fighters. While modern critiques occasionally portray the Church as complicit or ambivalent during the occupation, the historical evidence decisively reveals its unwavering commitment to the liberation of the Greek people and its integral role as a bastion of Hellenic-Christian identity and national resilience.

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