

Seeking Greek Independence in the Aegean: an Unsuccessful Venture in 1822



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ABSTRACT: The aim of the present study is to discuss one of the first episodes of the Greek War of Independence that took place in the Aegean Sea in 1822, which ended at the devastation of Chios Island and the defeat of its inhabitants. In this framework the organization of the campaign is examined, the course of the military operations and the final outcome. The importance of the study lies in the fact that it examines the events not in the light of the local history of Chios island but in the broader context of the Greek Revolution and the impact the events had on European public opinion.

Keywords: Greek War of Independence, Ottoman Empire, Aegean Sea, Greek fleet, Chios Island .

INTRODUCTION

In 1566 Chios came under the Ottoman rule. The Sultans were favourable disposed towards their subjects granting them special privileges relevant to religion, taxation, regulation of trade and litigation. Five reputable Christian administrators were responsible for the common affairs of the people and also served as mediators between the Ottoman officers of the island and the Chiot. The Chiot community was well organised and the public affairs well managed by these administrators who were called Demogerontes

THE GREEK EXPEDITION TO CHIOS, THE WRONG DECISIONS AND THE GREAT LOSSES

In the first years of the Greek War of Independence the Greeks tried to involve the Chiots in the Revolutionary movement hoping that the wealthy Chiots living in the island and abroad would join the revolution and contribute financially in the maintenance expenses of the Greek fleet.¹ In July 1821 I. Rallis, a Chiot merchant alongside with Lykourgos Logothetis, a Samian fighter, were charged by Prince Ypsilantis to organise the revolution in Chios.² However, the Chiots were not prepared to join the revolution and two of the most eminent Chiot citizens travelled to Psara where they met the admiral of the Greek fleet Tompazes and tried to dissuade him from his plans to involve Chios in the Greek uprising. However their efforts were not successful. On 27th April 1821, Tompazes with 25 Greek ships arrived in a small port, called Vrysi Pasha, and immediately he sent a message to the Demogerontes urging them to spread the idea of rebellion amongst the Chiots. The Chiot elders expressed their contrast to Tompazes' plans, explaining the reasons and fears of their unwillingness to participate.

In December 1821 Prince Ypsilantis after being informed by Rallis about the Chiots' reactions and having foreseen that the central authority would not be able to support the expedition, he recalled it and he advised Logothetis to postpone his venture to Chios.³ However, three months later, on the night of 22-3 March 1822, fifteen hundred Samians under the Command of Lycourgos Logothetis and the Chiot Bournias landed in Chios. Shortly after Logothetis started quarrelling with Bournias over the office of the commander-in-chief. Shortly it was revealed that the whole expedition was completely disorganized. There was no unified plan of action and the ammunition the Samians brought with them was very limited.

Although there was an initial success of the Samians who managed to trap the Ottomans in the forte, when the Ottoman fleet arrived with reinforcements, the Samians and the Chiot villagers, a great number of whom had joined the Greek arm forces, retreated from the town followed by the Ottomans who were fighting them. When the ammunition was finished and Lukourgos reckoned that there was not much he can do with his soldiers, the Samians boarded on the ships again and departed on the 8th of

¹ Tompazis, I. N., *Symvoli stin Istoría tis Ethnikis Paliggenesias*, Athens, 1902, pp. 36-38.

² Ypsilantis' correspondence with Rallis and Logothetis is cited in Vlachogiannis I., *Chiakon Archeion*, v. 1, Athens, 1924.

³ Ypsilantis in a letter dated 21st December 1821 addressed to Rallis notes: "As the present situation does not favour the venture, you acted well in postponing it an waiting for a better opportunity", Vlachogiannis, I., *Chiakon Archeion*, v. 1, p. 18.

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April, leaving the Chiots to face the Ottomans without any help. Even worse, the Samians on their departure carried with them jewellery, money, golden objects expensive cloths, and many other valuable things that the Chiots kept in their homes.⁴

By the beginning of April 1822, the Sultan had shipped around 4,000 men to Chios. Alongside with the Sultan's troops, a crowd of Ottoman volunteers travelled to Chios. It is beyond the scope of this study to present a detailed account of the atrocities that took place in Chios, but it must be underlined that the executions, the robberies, the pillage and the assaults which occurred in the island during the spring of 1822 was outrageous and appalling.⁵

The Ottomans destructed the island whilst the Greek Revolutionary Government remained ineffectual to react. Some people found refuge in the Consulates. Others tried to flee from the island. They were reaching the coasts hoping to find boats to transfer them to Psara. A. Vlastos supports that the Psarians sent eight ships to take away the fugitives without charge.⁶ On the other hand, K. Simopoulos argues that some of the owners of the aforementioned boats refused the Chiots to come on board unless they were very well paid by them.⁷

The Consuls who were at the time in the island were trapped by Vachet Pasha, the civil governor of the island, and unintentionally assisted the Ottomans. Vachet Pasha approached the British, Austrian and French Vice-consuls and asked them to announce to the villagers that he would grant mercy to all the Chiots who would return from the mountains where they were hiding and would laid down their arms. Over a thousand fugitives came out from their hiding places, whom eventually the Ottomans killed, together with the 70 members of a deputation who had appeared in front of Vachet Pasha, in order to thank him for his benevolence.⁸ The following day, on the 28th of April 1822 the Ottomans hanged all the hostages whom they were keeping in the Fort together with the Metropolitan Bishop of Chios Plato and his deacon.⁹

The Catholics, who survived and witnessed the tragedy, testify that the British consul in Chios was hostile to the Chiots and whilst he had promised them in exchange of great payments, to make arrangements for them to depart from the island, he betrayed and abandoned them to be killed. In contrast the Danish Consul in his effort to assist some of the Chiots was captured by the Ottomans, was eventually hanged. The British ambassador in Constantinople in his report noted that the Ottoman expedition against Chios was successful.¹⁰

De Coulanges who visited the island in 1854, almost 32 years after the massacres, writes that Chios was in such an awful condition that somebody would assume that the catastrophe occurred just a few days before.¹¹

Much criticism was levied against the then president Mavrogordatos and the Greek government, because they had not urgently sent the Greek fleet to assist Chios. The rescue operation arrived too late to save the island; it started with a delay of 13 days whilst the ships because of the unfavourable windy weather reached Psara 8 days later. Thus the Greek fleet reached Chios with a delay of 21 days; by that time Chios was completely ruined.

In June 1822, Konstantine Kanaris, the Greek admiral, performed a personal daring as he managed to set fire on the Ottoman Admiral's flagship which was anchored in the port of Chios and eventually the High Admiral of the Ottoman fleet was

⁴ The local historiographers and the eyewitnesses who survived the massacres have unanimously supported this aspect.

The Chiots laid the blame for the disaster of their island on the Samians whom they called fortune hunters, and the Samians in turn accused the Chiots of demonstrating indifference towards the Greek Revolution and of being pro-ottoman.

See also: Simopoulos, K., *Pos eidan oi ksenoi tin Ellada tou '21*, 1822-1823, Athena, 1980, p. 132.

⁵ Giatrakou, M., "Analytikh bibliografiva peri ths Epanastaseos kai ths katastrofhs ths Chiou", *Deltion ths Istorikhs kai Ethnologikhs Etaireias ths Ellados*, v. 21, Athena, 1978, pp. 273-316. Vikelas, D., *Loukhs Laras*, Athena, 1991. Syggros, A., *Apomnhmonevmata*, vol.1-5, Athena, Dhmiourgia, 1995.

⁶ Vlastos A., *History of the island of Chios, A.D. 70-1822*, London 1913, p. 161.

⁷ Simopoulos, K., *Pos eidan oi ksenoi tin Ellada tou '21*, p. 132

⁸ Vachit Pasha, *Apomnemoneumata Politika tou Vachit Pasha*, Athena 1975. Mitses, N., *Ta symvanta sti Chio apo to cheri tou Vachit Pasha*, alfa – pi publishers, 2007.

⁹ The precise number of the hostages is not known, as the sources do not provide exact information. However, the number should be counted from 63 to 80 persons. The hostages were noble men of the island, honourable persons of good repute and large fortunes. They were put in prison as early as the rumours for a Chiot revolt were spread in 1821. At the same period the Ottoman authorities of the island demanded from the Chiots to hand over to them all the rifles and weapons which they had in their possession.

¹⁰ Long, H., *Greek Fire*, p. 97; Zolotas, G., *Istoria tes Chiou*, v. 3, p. 103.

¹¹ De Coulanges F., *Nesos Chios, Mémoire sur L' Ile de Chio (1856)*, Athena: Ekdoseis Karavia, 1977, p. 223. See also: p. 219. De Coulanges narrates that when he visited Chios in 1854, certain reputable inhabitants revealed to him that in 1822 when the Chiots realised that they could not avoid to get involved in the Revolution, a conspiracy was organised by them in order to hand over the island to France, and they had even approached the French King.

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killed. Kanaris became the hero of the Greek Revolution because his act was courageous and full of self-sacrifice. The deed encouraged the revolted Greeks, boosted their revolutionary spirit and satisfied them by way of compensation for the Chiots' suffering. As part of a concerted plan this would have been fully justified, and would have assured the destruction of the Ottoman fleet, but alone and without the co-ordination of the Greek fleet, Kanaris's deed did not serve any purpose in the cause of the island itself.¹²

After June 1822, the Greek naval forces continually raided different parts of Chios. In November 1823 the Greek forces effected a landing in the north of Chios. Another raid was carried out in January 1823 and in October 1823 a landing occurred at Lagkada and Kardamyla supported by 18 Greek ships. Between November 1822 and October 1824, seven or eight raids took place. C. David, the Vice-consul of France at Smyrna and Chios commenting on these naval-landing operations in one of his reports to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs dated 1st December 1822 notes: "their (the Greeks') continual descents on this island do so much harm to their compatriots".¹³ This strategy could not serve any useful purpose at that moment, since this policy could cause only more problems to the inhabitants of the island. The Greeks at this period could not have aspired of retaining permanently Chios, because they had neither the forces nor an organised plan for their expeditions. The Ottomans definitely were decisive in maintaining the island under their dominion, because of its wealth and important geographical position.

It is difficult to say how many people were killed or were sold as slaves in the markets of Smyrna, Constantinople and Asia Minor, because there is a considerable variance between the scholars as to the number of the victims. However Dr. K. Frankomichalos in a detailed study brought into light new evidence as far as the population of the island before the events of 1822, the number of the victims, the number of the hostages who were sold as slaves and the number of those who eventually remained in the island.¹⁴ He supports that around 120.000 inhabitants were living in Chios before the massacre, 3.000 of them being Ottomans, 2.000 Catholics and 70-100 being Jews. He raises the citizens of the capital up to 30.000 souls. During the disaster that lasted almost four months, 42.000 were killed, died of hardships, fatal wounds, drowning, epidemic diseases, hunger and suicide; 52.000 were captured and enslaved whilst 23.000 managed to escape from the island and were saved. Frankomichalos estimates that 1800 people remained in the island, 800-900 of whom perished of infections and starvation.¹⁵

THE LIABILITY AND THE ACCUSATIONS FOR THE DEFEAT

The Chiots have been accused of being cowardice, of showing selfishness, of having considered only their own interests and of having shown unwillingness to take a share in the struggle for the liberty of the rest of the Greeks.¹⁶ However, this might be truthful in a measure, but on the other hand, it became evident that the Chiots had good reasons not to participate from the very first beginning in the Greek Revolution.¹⁷ It was not only the Chiots who denied to participate in the Revolutionary movement as in the mainland of Greece and the Peloponnese many great landowners were opposed to the war of independence for they hesitated to put in risk their own interests. Quite similar was the reaction of the islanders, who were even more justified, as they were exposed to the direct Ottoman threat from the fleet and in such case their defence would be difficult or impossible.¹⁸

Furthermore, many Chiots were living and working in Constantinople and many of their children were sent there to be taught and trained in trade business. If the Chiots were allied with the other Greeks, the lives of these people in Constantinople would be exposed to an imminent danger.

¹² The French vice counsel in Chios who was pro-Ottoman in his report to the French Minister of Affairs noted: "had the Greek fleet arrived that crucial moment the triumph over the half defeated enemy would have been complete", translated from the Greek cited in Simopoulos, K., *Pos eidan oi ksenoi tin Ellada tou '21*, p. 147.

¹³ Argenti P., *Diplomatic Archives of Chios*, Cambridge University Press, 1954, vol. I, Doc. 152, pp.41-2, translated by P. Argenti.

¹⁴ Frankomichalos, K., *Oi Sfages ths Chiou to 1822. Poios o akrivhs arithmos ton thimaton tous*, Chios, 1999.

¹⁵ For a detailed and extensive bibliography on the massacres of Chios in 1822, see: Psarrou, E., *The Administration of Chios 1822-1868: An Aegean island under Ottoman rule*, Ph.D. dissertation, Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies, University of Birmingham, 2003, footnote 89, pp. 47-48.

¹⁶ J. Genaddios in the introduction of T.E. Dowling's book, *Hellenism in England*, speaks about the "effeminate behaviour" of the Chiots.

¹⁷ The notables in Hydra initially appeared to be very skeptical about the uprising and they had many hesitations in rising the standard of revolt.

¹⁸ Perris, N., *H Chios stin Ethnegersia*, Chios, 1973, p. 91.

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Additionally Chios was entirely depended upon Asia Minor for food supplies,¹⁹ and if the inhabitants would get involved in the revolution, the imports from the opposite coast would be banned and the people would have to face all the sequential problems. Thus, when the outrages began and all the shops closed, the boats ceased to bring provisions from Asia and soon starvation was spread within the island. Furthermore, as Chios was separated from the mainland of Asia only by a narrow strait, the island was exposed to an immediate danger, long before any help by the Greeks could reach them. Once again, this assumption was proved to be true; the Greek navy reached the island after a tremendous delay, which resulted in the death of thousands Chiois. The Greek leaders, with a very little reflection and with any knowledge of the arts of war, should have realised that if the insurrection was to succeed, rigorous action of naval and military forces would be crucial, especially considering the particular situation of Chios. Additionally, the distance from Hydra, the main base of the Greek fleet's operations, is roughly 160 miles, a considerable voyage before the days of steam. Consequently, not only a landing on the island should have been previously effected with the full support of the fleet, but also previous provisions should have been made to ensure a continual line of communication for protecting the island against the raids of the enemy fleet as well as maintaining a garrison and land forces sufficient to repel any invasion from Asia Minor. However, all these strategical planning and requirements were completely ignored.

The Chiois were not aware of the use of rifles, in contrast to their neighbours, the Psarians who were well trained in the manual exercises, as they had already equipped their ships with guns in order to protect themselves and their merchandise from the pirates of the Aegean and Mediterranean.²⁰ The Chiois were trading with Ottoman cities and ports, like Alexandria, Smyrna, and Constantinople, and they were not in contact neither with the islands of the Aegean, nor with the mainland, which later constituted the Greek kingdom. Even if the Chiois were indeed willing to join the Revolution, yet they might have considered the economic losses they would have, since their activities within the Ottoman Empire would be banned after their rebellion.

THE IMPACT OF THE EVENTS IN EUROPE AND THE REACTION OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The massacres of Chios were of great influence in enlisting European sympathy, for the cause of the Greek Independence and in securing at last military help for the revolted Greeks. These events may have been the decisive factor that impelled several of the powers to adopt a pro-Hellenic policy.

As it appears from an interview that the Austrian ambassador at Constantinople, Franz Havier, had with the Ottoman High Admiral, Chosrew Pasha, the Porte was able to appreciate the consequences of Philhellenism throughout the Western world which resulted from the massacre of 1822. Chosrew Pasha when referring to the events of 1822 said to the Austrian envoy "No one knows better than I the irreparable harm we did to ourselves by the catastrophe of Chios... I know that the eyes of Europe are fixed on us..."²¹

After 1822 the Ottomans changed their policy towards the inhabitants of Chios. Thus the High Porte advised the new governor of the island to follow a practice of clemency.²² The Vice-consul of France at Smyrna who was acting as vice consul at Chios as well, in his report to French Foreign Minister of Affairs, recorded Yusuf Pasha's intentions who was willing to attract the Chiois to return back to their island. "I should like to repopulate this desert"²³ was his saying. Therefore, in 1824 the period of reconstruction began with the Porte's initiative.²⁴ It is said that the new governor of Chios Yussuf Pasha by official proclamation invited the inhabitants to return.²⁵

THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE ISLAND

The massacre of 1822 extremely diminished the importance of the island, reduced the number of its inhabitants, ruined its trade, destroyed the buildings of the town and the country houses in the area of Kampos, and resulted in the emigration of many people, the majority of which never return back to the island. Chios' previous wealth, industries, and social institutions temporarily disappeared at any rate.

¹⁹ De Coulanges F., *Nesos Chios* p. 202. Papanikolaou, G., *Skinis apo tin Kathimerini Zoe stin Tourkokratia*, Athena, 1995, p. 285. Because Tsesme was the main food supplier of Chios, between the island and the opposite coast of Asia Minor the import duties had been abolished.

²⁰ The Psarians and the Hydriots had a merchant marine as well as a navy at the same time.

²¹ Translated by P. Argenti, *Diplomatic Archives of Chios*, p. xxiii. The original document, Havier's report to Metternich, Minister of Austria's Foreign Affairs, is cited in the same book, vol. I, Doc.156, p. 499.

²² See also: Pasqua, A., *Diary of the events in Chios sent monthly by the vice-council for the Netherlands in Chios, Antonio Pasqua to the Netherlands Minister to the Sublime Porte, Gaspar Testa, 6 May 1821-30 November 1828*, 2 vols, manuscript cited in Public Central Library of Chios "O Koraes".

²³ Argenti, P., *Diplomatic Archives of Chios*, p. xxiv. The original text is cited in the same book, vol. I, Doc. 149, pp.436-7.

²⁴ Kanellakis, K., *Chiaka Analekta*, Athena 1983, p. 516

²⁵ Argenti, P., *Chios Vincta*, p. cxv, see also p. ccxxxv, pp. cxxvi-cxxvii.

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The financial situation of the Chiot community during the period following the massacres was extremely weak. The trade had been interrupted for many years and many important connections were lost to the advantage of Smyrna, which had always been a keen competitor. The economic decline of Chios meant the decrease of the individual wealth and the consequent decrease of the receipts in the property tax and the decline of the custom duties whilst the Demogerontes faced extreme difficulties in collecting the taxes.

After the events of 1822 the social structure in the town of Chios changed, as many of the wealthiest citizens fled, together with the most significant families of the island while many reputable families were wiped out in the catastrophe. The Chiot diaspora from 1822 onwards started to contribute in the rebuilding and maintenance of the churches, schools, hospitals and all the philanthropic institutions which came once more under the direct jurisdiction of the Demogerontes.²⁶ After 1822 within the general economic decline, the Demogerontes who had the management of the communal finances were forced to ask for internal loans from certain “wealthy” inhabitants in order the economic difficulties to be surpassed.²⁷ It appears that there were times when certain organisations, like monasteries, donated money to the public treasury in order the island to meet its expenses.²⁸ The Europeans helped the Chiot refugees. Especially they were welcome in England where some of their relatives having depart from the island before 1822, had already established their business and commercial firms.

CONCLUSION

After the Chiot's return back to their island the issue of the massacres was closed. The events of 1822 passed over in silence as the inhabitants decided quietly not to revive distressing memories whilst they started reorganizing their lives within the framework of the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, once the Greek military forces left Chios, continued the struggle for the Greek independence and the formation of an independent Greek state, but Chios only became part ninety years later.

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²⁶ About the significant sums of moneys which were presented to the island from subscriptions raised among the Chiot's of the Diaspora, there is a manuscript cited in “Koraes” Library (MS.1559, fol. 94)

²⁷Zolotas, G., *Istoria tes Chiou*, v. 3, i, p. 97.

²⁸ For example, from a manuscript cited in “Koraes” Library (MS 1559, fol. 37), we are informed that in 1842 the monastery of Nea Mone made a generous donation in assistance of the public education.