

## THE LAGOON AT THE HISTORIC AND HEROIC EXIT OF THE “FREE BESIEGED” OF MESSOLONGHI

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### **Abstract**

*During the Turkish occupation of Greece, the Greeks suffered very much from the brutality and severity of the conquerors. Regarding the town of Messolonghi they tried two times to surround and conquer it. The first time was on October 25, 1822, but the Turks failed to succeed their plans because they met a very strong resistance by the Greek fighters. So they were obliged to withdraw their troops as they had many casualties.*

*On April 20, 1825 Kioutachis arrived in Messolonghi with about 35000 men in order to fulfill his plans, that is, to conquer Messolonghi. It was the second effort to siege the town. So he surrounded it with his troops and closed all the entrances to the town. The siege was planned to be accomplished in two phases. The first phase lasted between April and December of 1825. The Greek fighters were resisting all the attacks of Kioutachis troops. In spite of the successes of the turks, they were defeated in the attack of Kleisova. In the mean time the Greek fighters started to have problems with the food. The supplies started decreasing but they were giving the impression to Kioutachis that they had ample of food. Kioutachis wanted to negotiate with the Greeks and surrender the town. Obviously, the Greeks refused. . In spite of being besieged, they were actually “Free Besieged”. Due to the great pressure exerted by Kioutachis, the life of the people became very difficult. So early in April the chieftains made the big decision. They decided the heroic Exit which lifted Messolonghi to the Global History of the ideals of freedom, bravery and culture. The Exit decision was materialized on April between 10-11, 1826 at the dawn of Palm Sunday. That was the glorious end of the Messolonghi siege which moved the world.*

### **The Messolonghi Lagoon**

The town of Messolonghi, built and grown on the edge of the Lagoon, has been inseparably connected to it, in spacetime, and naturally at the peak of its history, that is “The heroic Exit of the “**Free Besieged**”, which was a deliberate and self-will sacrifice to the altar of the supreme value of freedom, and national dignity (Diamanti and Kalavrouziotis, 2012; Kalavrouziotis, I. 2009; Diamanti and Kalavrouziotis, 2013).

It was spring of 1826. The verses of Dionysios Solomos praise the liveliness of nature, the value of life and, for that reason, the size of the sacrifice of those besieged, determined not to subdue to the enemy

*Magic nature and dream in beauty and grace;  
the black stone fully golden, and the dry grass.*

*With a thousand taps poured, with a thousand tongues talk:  
"Whoever dies today a thousand times dies."*

It is important to emphasize the role played by the Lagoon in the struggle of the free besieged. It is a historical approach in the effort to highlight the value of the aquatic ecosystem during this glorious struggle, and throughout the historical course of Messolonghi.

The shallow waters prevented the Turkish warships from reaching Messolonghi, the islands of the Lagoon facilitated the food supply through the Aitolico , while the rich lagoon environment ensured the food.

Kassomoulis reports in his book that the last meal of the besieged before the exit was grated crabs with a little flour.

The Turks entered Messolonghi only when they neutralized the forces that resisted in the nearby islets.

On Feb. 25, 1826, Hussein Bey's brother-in-law, Ibrahim, managed to seize Infantry and Naval Forces, and the Basildi which was the bastion of Messolonghi.



(Agios Sostis of Vasiladi)

This was an encouragement for Ibrahim, who after three days took over Dolma and Poros.



(Aetolikos: Dolmata Monument)

After the capture of Aetolikos, the arrival of the fleet under Miaoulis was the only hope of Messolongi.

On 25 March, Kioutachis attempted to occupy Klisova, which was defended by only 130 men under Panayiotis Sotiropoulos from Kravara.

Kitsos Tzavella's direct help by sea was enough to fill the Lagoon area with more than 1200 Egyptian corpses, Turkish flags, palaces, large boats with guns and other munitions. From March 16, residents had started to eat grasshoppers, bitter greens and seaweed of the Lagoon.

Early in April, the chieftains made the big decision, a decision that eventually destined to raise Missolonghi to the Global History of the ideals of freedom, bravery, culture, and raised the warriors of the exit, to the Pantheon of history.

The exit decision was decided for the night of April 10 to 11, of Sunday palm dawn. Three of the corps of the exit under the orders of Makris, Noti Botsari, Razok0ottsika and Mitro Delegiorgi.

"We have made the entrenchments," says Nothi Botsari, Kitsou Tzavela, Fotomara, D. Makri and others. Chieftains to the government two days after the Exodus.

The writings are very touching, as the hope for help from the Lagoon was lost, and e how the historic Exit was prepared at 03 hr at dawns.

The sweet light of the Sunday Palm dawn finds Messolonghi in the hands of the Turkish conquerors. Its fall, however, was not recorded in world history as a defeat, but as a universal symbol of psychic and moral uplifting, as praised in the simple but classical verses of Dionysios Solomos:

*My eyes did not see a place more endlessly than this threshing floor.*

Messolonghi fell. However, the unsuspecting struggle and ultimately the sacrifice for freedom and national dignity continue to persist, teaches and inspires people of all ages, even today, in the contemporary decline of values. But more so, in the days of the current crisis, with a sense of pride, we must at all times remind our European partners that Greece has become the lighthouse of civilization over time and taught the greatest human ideals of freedom, solidarity and democracy.



The Mesolongi-Aetolian Lagoon

The modern Mesolongi is recorded as the "Holy City" of the "Free Boundaries" and at the same time constitutes the historic city at the heart of an internationally important aquatic ecosystem of this "Mesolongi-Aetolikos" lagoon. The protection and projection of the natural ecosystem is a national affair, at the same time a debt to the honor to the historical memory and a maximum obligation towards today's inhabitants and especially the future generations of our homeland.

### **Conclusions**

The advantage of the "free besieger" was that the Messolonghi Lagoon, which played a very important role in their struggle against the enemy. The shallow water of the Lagoon prevented the Turkish warships from reaching Messolonghi, while the rich environment of the Lagoon ensured the food for the fighters and the people of Messolonghi. Thus the Lagoon helped the small number of fighters to resist against the thousands troops of Kioutachis and to prove to the world how brave they were. Their heroic Exit has been written with golden letters in the world history.

### **References**

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