

## THE SIEGE OF MESOLONGI (1825–1826)

In 1825, Mesolongi was besieged for a year by Egyptian and Ottoman forces. In the final months, the city's supply lines were completely cut off, forcing the soldiers and civilians to eat rats, cats, and donkeys, with even cases of cannibalism reported. On April 11, 1826, on Palm Sunday morning, the besieged Greeks stormed out of the city, shouting "Christ is Risen!"—only to be massacred.

The Greeks who perished heroically in this battle are remembered as "The Free Besieged," a phrase used by poet Dionysios Solomos as the title of his renowned work. The following song is inspired by that tragic event, reflecting the suffering of the city's defenders and residents.

### THE UTTER SILENCE OF THE DEAD

The utter silence of the dead  
Reigns over the plain.

A bird chirps, picks up a grain,  
And the mother envies it.

Hunger has darkened their eyes,  
The mother gazes into them.  
The noble Souliot stands aside,  
And weeps.

Oh, desolate, darkened rifle,  
Why do I still hold you?  
For you have grown heavy in my hands,  
And the Agarenes know it.

The utter silence of the dead  
Reigns over the plain.

A bird chirps, picks up a grain,  
And the mother envies it.



*The Exodus of Mesolongi, 1853,  
oil on canvas by Theodoros Vryzakis (1814-1878)*

GENERAL MAKRIYIANNIS wrote: *"This homeland belongs to all of us—wise and uneducated, rich and poor, civilians and soldiers, and even the humblest of people. We all fought, each in our own way. We all worked together, and we must protect it together, so that neither the strong nor the weak can say 'I alone.' Do you know when someone can say 'I'? When they fight alone and build or destroy something—then they may say 'I'. But when many fight and build, they must say 'We'. We belong to 'We' not to 'I'. From now on, we must learn this lesson, if we wish to build a village where we all live together."*



Event Coordination/Text Teaching: Argyri Mpouka, teacher of Religious studies  
Song and Dance Coordination: Styliani Lalagka, teacher of Physical Education

# Anniversary Celebration of March 25, 1821



Monday, 24th March 2025

## IF ONLY IT WERE '21

Memories of glorious years return to me one by one,  
If only '21 could come back for a moment,  
To ride like a warrior across the vast threshing floor,  
And drink wine with Kolokotronis.

To fight by day in the castles,  
With my sword blazing in fire,  
And to hold in my arms at night, under the stars,  
A beautiful maiden.

Memories of glorious years return to me one by one,  
If only '21 could come back for a night,  
To lead the dance first on the roads of Morea,  
With Maniates and Psarians following behind.

And when I fall wounded beneath the gardens,  
To be showered with violets by hands and the sky.  
To fight by day in the castles,  
With my sword blazing in fire,  
And to hold in my arms at night, under the stars,  
A beautiful maiden.

## DANCE OF ZALONGO

Farewell, sorrowful world,  
Farewell forever.  
And you, unfortunate homeland,  
Farewell forever.

Farewell, little springs,  
Forests, mountains, hills,  
Farewell, little springs,  
And you, brave Souliot women.

Fish cannot live on land,  
Nor flowers bloom in the sand.  
The Souliot women never learned  
To live in solitude.

Farewell, little springs...

Like they' re going to a festival,  
Under the blooming Easter lilac,  
They know how to die,  
Rather than endure slavery.

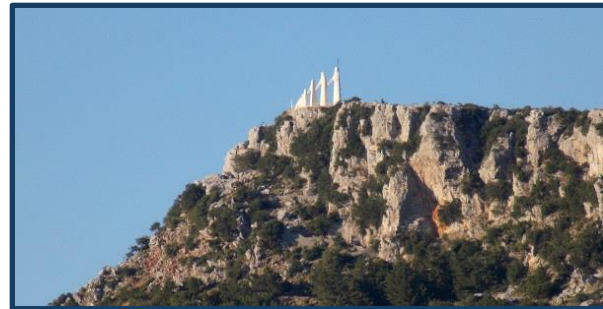
Farewell, little springs...

They descend into the underworld  
With songs, with joy.  
For Souliot women cannot live  
Without freedom.

The song was written in 1970 during the dictatorship in Greece. Some say it expressed "resistance" against the junta, drawing a parallel to the 1821 revolution against Ottoman rule. Others claim it was promoted by the junta itself for its own purposes. Its lyrics captured both the spirit of the 150-year anniversary of the revolution (which was to be completed in 1971) and allowed the regime to believe that the reference to '21 could also apply to them (alluding to April 21, 1967, the start of the dictatorship in Greece).

## DANCE: HASAPIKO

A dance performed in a straight line. The steps and movements resemble ritualistic motions, linking the dance to antiquity and the strategic formations of Alexander the Great's army or reenactments of warriors' postures. Hasapiko consists of basic steps and figures that are combined differently in each choreography. It became the basis for the Sirtaki, popularized by the film "Zorba the Greek", making it one of the most representative Greek dances internationally.



*The monument at Zalongo*

This song was likely created in 1908, 105 years after the historical event at Zalongo. In late 1803, 18 years before the Greek War of Independence, 50–60 Souliot women found themselves trapped at the peak of Mount Zalongo in Epirus. To avoid capture by the Turks, they chose to leap off the cliff along with their children and infants. This event spread across Greece and, through travelers, to Europe, leaving a deep emotional impact. Over time, the story gained various interpretations. The sacrifice of these women is reenacted through dance.

Syrtos is a traditional Greek dance with origins tracing back to ancient Greece. Its name derives from the ancient Greek word «σὺρτω», meaning "to drag" the dance.

## FREEDOM, RESISTANCE, COURAGE, SACRIFICE, JUSTICE, EDUCATION, DEMOCRACY

These are the values of Hellenism and Romiosyni, which formed the foundation of the revolution. The term «Romiosyni» encapsulates our entire history, beginning with the ancient Greeks, passing through the Byzantine era, continuing into the years of Ottoman rule, and reaching modern Greeks. Romiosyni embodies the continuous struggle of the Greek people for freedom, justice, and humanity. It is intertwined with their heroism and the hardships they endured throughout history—Ottoman rule, slavery, poverty, wars, exile from Pontus and Asia Minor, loss of territories, dictatorships, and the division of Cyprus.

Our poet Kostis Palamas wrote: "Romios and Romiosyni = Greek and Hellenism." A Romios (Greek) is, above all, an Orthodox Christian, a universal and global individual who respects all people and defends the rights of all nations. A true Greek loves their homeland and respects all others.



## TSAMIKO

On the rugged, Rocky Mountains,  
With the flute and the zurna,  
Upon the sacred stone,  
Three brave men are dancing now.  
Nikiforos and Digenis,  
And the son of Anna Komnene.

All they own is a sliver of land,  
Yet, O Christ, You bless them,  
So, they may save this sliver  
From the jackal and the bear.  
See how Nikitaras dances,  
And how the tambouras sings like a  
nightingale.

From Epirus to Morea,  
From darkness to freedom,  
The celebration lasts for years  
On death' s marble threshing floors.  
Judge and master is God,  
And His interpreter is the people.

This song speaks of Greek identity as shaped by history and tradition. The rugged mountains, symbols of freedom and struggle, were the hideouts of the «klephtes»—the guerrilla fighters during Ottoman rule. With the blessing of Christ and faith, Greeks fought to protect themselves from the "jackal"—the treacherous enemy—and the "bear"—the powerful forces seeking to subjugate them. Hellenism survived through conflicts and uprisings. A defining trait of Greeks is overcoming fear. Their struggle is a celebration; the homeland brings joy and overcomes the fear of death, no matter what happens. The bond with the homeland is a relationship of life. Greeks have always achieved the impossible, even under Ottoman rule, standing tall thanks to faith, courage, and an unyielding thirst for freedom embedded in their consciousness.

Tsamiko is a traditional Greek dance. Historically, it was performed only by men, but today women also participate. It is also called «Kleftikos» because it was danced by the «klephts»—the rebel fighters during Ottoman rule.