

The city of Ioannina - A brief history

Ioannina can trace its roots back to the 6th c. AD, as an important town on the border of the Byzantine Empire. During that period the rocky promontory of Ioannina was enclosed by walls and the south-eastern hill (later known as Itch Kale) was inhabited. In 879 Ioannina is mentioned in written records for the first time as an Episcopal See. The area remained under Byzantine rule and only in 1082 did the Normans (Bohemund I) occupy the city for a few months. Following the Fourth Crusade (1204), Ioannina was incorporated in the Despotate of Epirus (Michael I Angelus Comnenus Ducas). In 1210 the Metropolitan Church of the Taxiarches was built (at Itch Kale). In 1292 the Philanthropinon School was founded on the Isle of lake Pamvotis - the lake which bathed the foot of the city walls -, rendering Ioannina an educational centre of great importance. The city rose in power and in 1318 the Ecumenical Patriarchate promoted it to a metropolis, whereas in 1367 it was granted self-governance.

The tower of Thomas Preljubovic in the castle (constructed from 1367 to 1384) highlights the monumental form that the city had acquired. Albanian tribes raided the city in 1379, but were forced to retreat. The gradual onward march of the Turks into the Balkans and the internal crisis of the Despotate of Epirus led to the subordination of Ioannina to the sphere of influence of Carlo I Tocco (Italian ruler of Cephalonia and Lefkada), who became a despot in 1411. However, on 9 October 1430 the city was voluntarily handed over to the Ottomans. The conquest lasted 483 years. Sinan Pasha granted the people of Ioannina privileges to settle and trade freely. However, the metropolitan church of the Taxiarches was converted to a mosque (Fethiye Tzami). At the same time, the construction of the namesake monastery in 1434 on the edge of Mount Mitsikeli and on the shores of lake by the Muslim Durahan reveals the spirit of conciliation and peaceful cohabitation between the Turks and the Greeks. However, this situation changed after the failed attempt of Dionysios Philosophos, the bishop who became the leader of discontented peasants and invaded Ioannina without however managing to deal a serious blow to the Turkish rulers. From then on the city's Christians were deprived of their privileges and were expelled from the castle, while 18 churches and monasteries were demolished. The Aslan Mosque was built in 1618 on the former location of the church of Agios Ioannis Prodromos (Saint John the Baptist), so that the mosques overlooked the area of the castle. Despite the blow that they had received, the inhabitants soon regained their financial and intellectual vitality. In 1648 the School of Epiphanius Igoumenos was founded, which was followed by the Gionma School (1672 - 1800), the Maroutsi School (1742 - 1749) and the Kaplaneios School (1805 - 1820).

Ioannina functioned as the centre for the ten schools that were founded in the wider area of Epirus. These schools were supported by emigrants from Ioannina and Epirus, who had settled mainly in Venice. From the mid-17th century, trade with the Adriatic ports was ever increasing, and the fact that the three eminent publishers of Greek books during the time of the Turkish occupation, namely Glykis (1670 - 1854), Saros (1681 - 1707) and Theodosiou (1755 - 1824), were from Epirus can be viewed as indicative of the region's general growth during that period. The majority of the teachers of the pre-revolutionary period taught in Ioannina: Georgios Sougdouris, Vissarion Makris, Parthenios Katzioulis, Mihail Mitrou in the 17th c., Balanos Vasilopoulos, Konstantinos Vasilopoulos, Evgenios Voulgaris, Methodios Anthrakis in the 18th c., and Athanasios Psallidas, Ioannis Vilaras, etc. in the 19th c. The

18th century was an auspicious time for the city and the progress that was achieved was exploited by Ali Pasha, when he took over the governance in 1788. His economic and military power rendered the city a crossroad in the Balkans and foreign travellers marvelled at the court of Ali Pasha. However, he himself led the city to absolute destruction, since only one residence (today known as the "Despot's manor house") survived the fire of 25 August 1820. However, the final formation of the city walls (1815), as well as the arrangement of the settlement within the walls, is attributed to him.

Many legends originate from Ali Pasha's personality, yet the drowning of Kyra Frosini and the hanging of Katsandonis (1809) are real events. Following this period, the people of Ioannina regained strength and in 1828 the first Zosimaia Teachers School was founded, in 1833 the Metropolitan Church of Agios Athanasios opened and in 1867 the Seminary opened on the Isle. The hanging of Georgios the Neomartyr (1838) did not eliminate the harmony between the Muslims and the Christians. The Turks of Ioannina accepted Hellenic culture, in the same way the local Jewish element (whose presence in the region dates back to the early Byzantine period) was firmly bound to the area. In 1870 the seraglios of Itch Kale and part of the city, which as of then started to take on a different form due to the stone buildings, burned down. On 21 February 1913 the Greek army entered the city.

In the early 20th century the region was in turmoil twice; in 1917 with the Italian occupation and in 1944 (25th of March) when the Germans sent 1850 Jews to Auschwitz. After the Ottoman era came to an end, the city's intellectual life developed rapidly. The Teacher Training College, which later developed into the Zosimaia Academy, was founded (1913), whereas at the same time a Kindergarten Teacher Training College and later an Assistant Engineering School opened. Even before the liberation from Ottoman rule newspapers were printed, whereas during the interwar period, various types of magazines were published, of which the Epirotika Chronicles continue to survive till today. The post-war period witnessed an increase in the number of intellectual societies, the greatest one being the Society for Epirot Studies, which introduced the idea of a Folklore Museum and created a specialised Epirot library. Today, Ioannina is called on to play a dominant role in the Adriatic-Egnatia Odos axis, since, in terms of population (110,000 inhabitants of the basin), it constitutes the metropolis of Epirus as well as the economic and intellectual centre of northwestern Greece.

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