

## MESSOLONGHI

The Sacred City of Messolonghi (Iera Poli Messolongiou) is known as the site of a dramatic siege during the Greek War of Independence and the city where the poet Lord Byron died.

According to predominant historical opinion, its name came from the combination of two Italian words, MEZZO and LAGHI which means "in the middle of lakes" or MESSO and LAGHI (Messolaghi) which means "a place surrounded by lakes".

Under Venetian domination until 1700, its inhabitants were mostly fishermen. They lived in cabins which were made of a kind of waterproof straw and reed and stood on stilts above sea water. These cabins or stilt-houses have always been called "pelades".

During the Orlov Revolt in 1770 the fleet of Messolonghi was defeated and the town passed to the Ottomans. It revolted on May 20, 1821 taking major part in the Greek War of Independence. The second siege by Ottoman and Egypt forces to take the harbor of Messolonghi, started the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 1825. The town came across a 30,000 men army. After a year of relentless enemy attacks and facing starvation, the people of Messolonghi decided to leave the beleaguered city in the "Exodus of its Guards" (The Sortie) on the night of April 10, 1826. At the time, there were 10,500 people in Messolonghi, 3,500 of whom were armed. Very few people survived the Ottoman pincer movement after the betrayal of their plan.

Due to the heroic stance of the population and the subsequent massacre of its inhabitants, the town of Messolonghi received the honorary title of Hierapolis (the Sacred City), unique among other Greek cities.

The famous British poet and philhellene Lord Byron, who supported the Greek struggle for independence, died in Messolonghi in 1824. He is commemorated by a cenotaph containing his heart and a statue located in the town.



