

IBRAHIM AGAINST MANI – THE BATTLE OF POLYARAVOS

The importance of the campaigns conducted by the Egyptian army in 1826 against Mani with the leadership of Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt is great.

At that time the Greek politicians, to serve their own ambitions and interests, had been (since 1824) started to intriguing against each other and the Government could not meet the expectations of the nation. The land forces were also fighting against each other while the Greek fleet lay idle. The Greek independence War which started in 1821 in Mani, was in great danger.

Ibrahim exploited the Greek weaknesses and disembarked its army in Methoni in the Messinian gulf. He first invaded and conquered Pylos and Navarino and then invaded the rest of Peloponnese heading for Mani.

Mani was the only significant area of Greece, in terms of area, population, military capacity and rural location, which was still free and had never been conquered by the Turks. Since Mani remained free, Ibrahim and Turkish diplomacy could not claim that they discomfited the Greeks and the Greek Revolution.

On June 20th 1826 the Egyptian army, organized by and equipped with French officers from the army of Napoleon, crossed the borders of Mani.

Ibrahim attacked first from Verga in Western Mani, but his army was rebutted the first day by a thousand Maniots only, who were taking cover behind a stone fence!

After two days of fruitless attack, Ibrahim ordered a footing by seven Egyptian frigates led a French admiral to sailed in and attack the center of West Mani near Dyros caves. The plan was to attack the Greeks from their backs.

But they faced all the women of the region, plus a few old men and priests, who defended not by arms but ... with reaping hooks, firstly because women were not allowed to carry weapons in Mani and on the other hand because it was the season of harvest. The Egyptian army was once again defeated.

After the pitiful failure of his second attack, Ibrahim retreated with great losses but was not disappointed. He planed to invade Mani from the East through the region before Gytheio.

So he arrived and camped in Aigies a small village before Gytheio and from there he sent all over the region small excerpts to survey the vulnerabilities of the defense of eastern Mani.

The stronger of the extracts of Ibrahim, which consisted of equestrian and pedestrian detectors, proceeded to the Straits of Kalika, where our generation had their lands. It was the only path, narrow and dangerous, to the village of Konakia where Patsourakos family resided.

The families of the village had not gone, because they considered that Ibrahim was still away and that his soldiers would not dare to pass through the narrow and dangerous strait. Nevertheless most of the inhabitants of Konakia, have engaged, by way of precaution, the foot of the gorge. When they saw the cavalcade coming, they left it to pass undisturbed, so as to set up their ambush. The cavalcade passed through the strait and beard to the gorge of the Byzantine monastery of St. George.

According to the family tradition, there, at the well that still exists today outside the church, were Anagnostis Patsourakos' brother with his wife and their newly born son to take up some water. They had left the baby on the well paved and as they heard horses coming, they rushed to hide behind a dense bush, which still exists next to the well, forgetting their baby. In their simplicity they did not think that anything evil would happen to a baby, but also they did not have the time to do anything else.

The first of the Arabs riders, who arrived at the well, seeing the baby, came down of his horse, took out his sword and killed it. The mother of the baby, seeing her child laying dead, came out of the bush and with her reaping hook, in a single move, decapitated the

Arab and hid in the bush again.

The riders that followed finding their colleague killed, but without knowing how that happened, were so afraid that they immediately retreated shooting in the air. But the cavalry was followed by a pedestrian draft which has just passed the Kalika gorge and waited. When the soldiers heard the gunshots they lost countenance, but before they realize what was happening, the people from Konakia who were hiding in the gorge, killed every one of them except one, according to the tradition, who was saved and announced the disaster to Ibrahim.

So, after Verga and Dyros, Ibrahim was once again defeated in Konakia.

Realizing that he could not pass through these territories, Ibrahim retreated to Melitini planning to invade Mani from the mountain range of Taygetos.

He chose an acclivitous mountain road, which was revealed to him by a Greek traitor, and headed towards the small village of Polytsaravos.

The name of the village comes from the Greek words "poly" which means "many" and "tsaravos" which is a sort of bush very abundant in the area ("Polytsaravos=place with many bushes"). After the Turks were defeated at that place, the name of the village changed to "Polyaravos" which means "place with many Arabs", as according to the tradition, the Arabs had more than 1.100 dead and more than 1.400 wounded soldiers.

The Greeks were informed of the move of Ibrahim's army and waited for him in Polyaravos.

During the three days long battle which followed (26-28 August, 1826), only 600 Greek soldiers and 200 women comforted and defeated an army of 7.000 men.

The Greeks were badly organized, without any leader, with varied weapons and only during the third day were reinforced by a troop of 1.000 men who came from Western Mani. Their enemies were well organized, with cavalry, artillery, staffed with French officers from the army of Great Napoleon and having as Head Officer one of the best generals of that era.

The difference was the fact that Maniots were fighting not for their freedom, as Mani had never been conquered by the Turks, but to keep their home land free from invaders as they had always done, while the Egyptian army was fighting for money.

From our family, **Anagnostis or Panagiotis Patsouris** from Konakia, was killed during the battle of Polyaravos, together with **his brother**, father of the child that was killed by the Arab rider some days before. Others from our generation who took part in the battle were **Anagnostis Patsouris or Patsourakos** from Konakia (although he was lame from another battle), **his wife, Thodorakis Patsouros or Patsourakos** from Konakia, who was wounded during the last day of the battle but did not desert his place until the end, **Ioannis Patsouros or Patsourakos** from Karyoupolis, as well as **Nikolakis Patsouris or Patsourakos** from Strotza (Prosilio).

According to the local tradition half of the population of Konakia was killed during the battle where the other half was wounded.

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Photo G. Venizeleas