

Museum Walks: integrating local history in your classroom

KALAMATA HISTORY

The history of Kalamata begins with Homer, who mentions Pharai (Φαραί), an ancient city built more or less where the Kalamata Castle stands today. It was believed that during ancient times the area that the city presently occupies was covered by the sea, but the proto-Greek and archaic period remains (Poseidon temple) that were unearthed at Akovitika region prove the opposite.

Middle Ages

Pharai was rather unimportant in antiquity, and the site continued in obscurity until middle Byzantine times. Kalamata is first mentioned in the 10th-century *Life of "St. Nikon the Metanoieite"*, and experienced a period of prosperity in the 11th–12th centuries, as attested by the five surviving churches built in this period, including the Church of the Holy Apostles, as well as the comments of the Arab geographer alldrisi, who calls it a "large and populous" town.



The Byzantine-era Church of the Holy Apostles

Following the Fourth Crusade, Kalamata was conquered by Frankish feudal lords William of Champlitte and Geoffrey of Villehardouin in 1205, when its Byzantine fortress was apparently in so bad a state that it could not be defended against them. Thus the town became part of the Principality of Achaea, and after Champlitte granted its possession to Geoffrey of Villehardouin, the town was the center of the Villehardouins' patrimony in the Principality. Prince William II of Villehardouin was born and died there. After William II's death in 1278, Kalamata remained in the hands of his widow, Anna Komnene Doukaina, but when she remarried to Nicholas II of Saint Omer, King Charles of Anjou was loath to see this important castle in the hands of a vassal, and in 1282 Anna exchanged it with lands elsewhere in Messenia.

In 1292 or 1293, two local Melingoi Slavic captains managed to capture the fortress of Kalamata by a ruse and, aided by 600 of their fellow villagers, took over the entire lower town as well in the name of the Byzantine emperor, Andronikos II Palaiologos. Constable John Chauderon in vain tried to secure their surrender, and was sent to Constantinople, where Andronikos agreed to hand the town over, but then immediately ordered his governor in Mystras not to do so. In the event, the town was recovered by the Franks through the intercession of a local Greek, a certain Sgouromalles. In 1298, the town formed the dowry of Princess Matilda of Hainaut upon her marriage to Guy II de la Roche. Matilda retained Kalamata as her fief until 1322, when she was dispossessed and the territory reverted to the princely domain.[6] In 1358, Prince Robert gifted the châtelanie of Kalamata (comprising also Port-de-Jonc and Mani) to his wife, Marie de Bourbon, who kept it until her death in 1377. The town remained one of the largest in the Morea—a 1391 document places it, with 300 hearths, on par with Glarentza—but it nevertheless declined in importance throughout the 14th and 15th centuries in favour of other nearby sites like Androusa. Kalamata remained in Frankish hands until near the end of the Principality of Achaea, coming under the control of the Byzantine Despotate of the Morea only in 1428.

Ottoman period and War of Independence Kalamata was occupied by the Ottomans from 1481 to 1685, like the rest of Greece. In 1659, during the long war between Ottomans and Venetians over Crete, the Venetian commander Francesco Morosini, came into contact with the rebellious Maniots, for a joint campaign in the Morea, in the course of which he took Kalamata. He was soon after forced to return to Crete, but the Venetians returned in the Morean War.



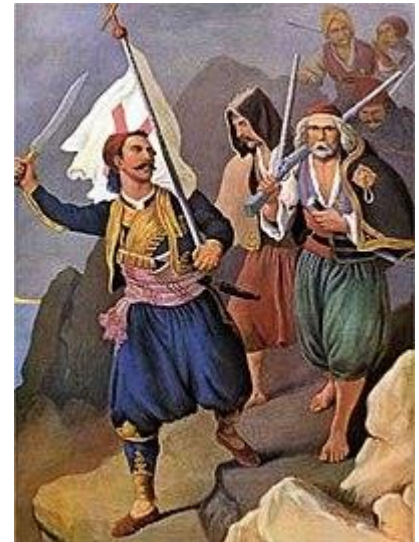
Gravour of Calamata, 1686

The Venetian Republic ruled Kalamata from 1685 as part of the "Kingdom of the Morea" (Italian: Regno di Morea). During the Venetian occupation the city was fortified, developed and thrived

economically. However, the Ottomans reoccupied Kalamata in the war of 1715 and controlled it until the Greek War of Independence.

Kalamata was the first city to be liberated as the Greeks rose in the Greek War of Independence. On 23 March 1821, it was taken over by the Greek revolutionary forces under the command of generals Theodoros Kolokotronis, Petros Mavromichalis and Papaflessas. However, in 1825, the invading Ibrahim Pasha destroyed the city.

Historic advertising for olive soap from Kalamata



Petros Mavromichalis raises Messenia in revolt, by [Peter von Hess](#).

Modern period

In independent Greece, Kalamata was rebuilt and became one of the most important ports in the Mediterranean sea. It is not surprising that the second-oldest Chamber of Commerce in the Mediterranean, after that of Marseille, exists in Kalamata.

During World War II on 29 April 1941, a battle was fought near the port between the invading German forces and the 2nd New Zealand Division, for which Jack Hinton was later awarded the Victoria Cross.

After World War II, and due to political issues, Kalamata, as well as most of the Peloponnese, was excluded from the government development plans in favour of north Greece. That was a major brake on the local economy, resulting in the decline of the port and hence the city. During the 1970s and 1980s, development and growth in Kalamata were unknown.

Kalamata was again in the news on 13 September 1986, when it was hit by an earthquake that measured 6.2 on the surface wave magnitude scale. It was described as "moderately strong" but caused heavy damage throughout the city, killed 20 people and injured 330 others. Following this severe damage, the local authorities and individuals strained their financial resources to bring a wind of change to the forgotten capital of Messinia.

Due to these efforts, Kalamata has now fully recovered and developed into a modern provincial capital. Today, Kalamata has the second largest population and mercantile activity in Peloponnese. It makes important exports, particularly of local products such as raisins, olives and olive oil. It is also the seat of the Metropolitan Bishop of Messenia. The current Metropolitan Bishop is Chrysostomus III, since 15 March 2007.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

- 1500 BC: Foundation of the ancient acropolis
- 1205: Construction of the castle by the Franks
- 1246-1278: Guillaume II de Villehardouin is the lord of the castle
- 1293: Temporary capture by Byzantine peasants
- 1382: The knights of Navarra become the overlords
- 1410: The castle belongs to the Despotate of Mystras
- 1459: Capture by the Turks
- 1464: Capture by the Venetians
- 1540: The Venetians evacuate the castle
- 1685: The Venetian Morozini occupies it and repairs the castle
- 1715: Recapture by the Turks
- 1821: Liberation of Kalamata (23 March)

Kalamata Castle

A castle with a rich history on a rocky hill at the NW side of the city of Kalamata.

An ancient acropolis existed on the hill before the Trojan war, and later a Byzantine fortress, but the ruins we observe today are the remains of the castle that was (re)built there in the beginning of the 13th century, during the Frankish occupation.

In the 6th century AD., a church was built in the castle devoted to Virgin Mary. An icon of Virgin Mary in the church became famous as '*Kalomata*' (meaning 'beautiful eyes'). This later evolved to '*Kalamata*' which became the name of the church, the castle and the city.

The ancient acropolis on the rock was founded by the figure of mythology **Faris** from Argos. The city was named *Farai* or *Fares* and is mentioned in *Iliad* as one of the seven cities that Agamemnon offered to Achilles to ease his anger.

Fares never became an important city in the ancient world unlike other neighboring cities such as Messini. Archaeological excavations have proved that the city was on the hill and not in the surrounding area.

In early and middle Byzantine periods the place was inhabited and, certainly, fortified, but nothing more is known about its history.

The growth started with the Frankish occupation. After the 4th Crusade and the Fall of Constantinople, Peloponnese and Kalamata was conquered by Frank knights. When **Geoffroi de Villehardouin I** became the ruler of the Principality of Achaia (1205-1218), he rebuilt the ruined castle and made it the seat of the feud of Kalamata. His son **Guillaume II de Villehardouin** who later became the most notable ruler of the Principality (1246-1278) was born in the castle of Kalamata.

The Franks held Kalamata until 1410 when the city became part of the Byzantine Despotate of Mystras. Before that, it was captured briefly by a band of Slav peasants in 1293 and by the Turks in 1396. From 1381 the area was under the control of the knights of the Company of Navarre who had the support of the House of Anjou and the kingdom of Napoli.

In 1459 the castle and the city were captured by the Ottoman Turks under the leadership of Mohamed the Conqueror.

In 1464 the castle was taken by the Venetians. They left in 1540.

The Venetians came back in 1685 under general Morozini. The Turks were unable to defend the castle against the Venetian artillery and evacuated it after destroying it. This time, the Venetians made some major repairs and additions to the castle. In 1715 the Turks came back.

During the 18th century, although the city of Kalamata expanded, the castle was gradually abandoned and ruined.

Kalamata was liberated in 23 March 1821, in the first act of the Greek War of Independence.