

# GREEK NATIONAL ANTHEM

## *LONGEST NATIONAL ANTHEM IN THE WORLD!*

It is a poem of 158 stanzas written by

**DIONYSIOS SOLOMOS**

[1798-1857] of Zakynthos with the title:

**HYMN TO LIBERTY / YMNOΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑ**

Jusdanis, Gregory

Professor of Greek Studies, OSU [jusdanis.1@osu.edu](mailto:jusdanis.1@osu.edu)

The Greek national anthem, the “Hymn to Liberty”, is listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the longest national anthem in the world, at 158 stanzas of rhymed eight and seven syllable trochaic verses. However, only the first couple of stanzas are sung. The hymn was composed by Greece’s national poet, Dionysios Solomos in **1823**, two years after the launching of the Greek War of Independence, and was put to music by his friend and distinguished musician from the island of Kerkyra, Nikolaos **Mantzaros** in **1828**. Although the monarch of Greece, **King Otto**, recognized the work, he did not accept it as the national anthem, preferring instead a translation of the Bavarian national anthem, Bavaria being the German state where Otto was born. After the overthrow of Otto the new monarch, **King George I**, enshrined Solomos’s work as the **national anthem in 1864**.

In the poem, Solomos depicts the return of Freedom to Greece after an absence of many centuries. In the first three stanzas, the poet addresses Freedom that lies in a grave. He recognizes Liberty from the “edge of her **sword**” and from her glance and appearance [οψη]. He rejoices in Liberty that will rise “**from the holy bones of the Greeks**” [απ’τα κοκαλα βγαλμενει των Ελληνων τα ιερα]. In the stanzas that follow Solomos shows how Liberty was driven away from her national home, how she sought to come back, and how she finally achieved her goal, driving out the Turks.

In writing the poem, Solomos recounted many of the achievements of the Greek struggle for independence between 1821 and 1823, the year of composition. He completed the **entire poem in one month**. It achieved fame outside Greece, having been **translated in many European languages**.

It is interesting that although Solomos wrote the poem that was to become the national hymn of his country, the language of his education was **not Greek but Italian**. He was born on the Island of Zakynthos in 1780, one of the 7 Ionian Islands, which was a Venetian

colony and which **never came under Ottoman control**. The 7 Ionian Islands were ceded to Greece in 1864.

As part of the aristocracy of the island, Solomos was raised in Italian and was sent to study in Italy, like all boys of his class. In 1815, he graduated from high school in Cremona and studied Law at the University of Padua, in Northern Italy. He acquired a broad knowledge of classical and modern literature and composed poetry in Italian and Latin.

When he returned to Zakynthos in 1818, Italian was in a sense his native tongue. But inspired by the revolutionary spirit that raged through Greece, Solomos sought to depict this struggle in poetry. So he strived to compose poetry in Greek. The results are recognized as **some of the finest lyrics ever written in Greek**.

It is said that a meeting in the legendary city of Mesolongi with Spyridon Trikoupi, the first prime minister of Greece in 1928. [*the new bridge in Rio connecting Peloponnesus with Roumeli was named Harilaos **Trikoupi Bridge**, for the son of Spyridon, who served as Premier of Greece 7 times from 1875 to 1895 and who is credited with modernizing the economy of Greece*], persuaded Solomos to write poetry in Greek. When Trikoupi heard Solomos read one of his Italian poems, he exclaimed that Greece had found its own Dante, the great Italian Renaissance poet.

In addition to the “Hymn to Liberty,” Solomos composed the sublime poem “The Free and Besieged” about the fighters in **Mesolongi who choose death to servitude**, and the “Cretan” about a young man who tries to flee the fighting in Crete and save his beloved only to have her drown at sea.

Solomos was a perfectionist, always trying to compose the absolute verse. He worked over many drafts, never really satisfied with the latest one. As a result, many of his poems are considered fragments, existing in many versions. Solomos died in 1857, bequeathing to Greece a lasting **poetic legacy**, including its national anthem.