



Summary :

The 'Rempelio of Smyrna' or 'Rempelio of the Janissaries' or 'Great Rempelio' was one of the most violent events that happened during the co-existence of the different ethnic-religious groups of Smyrna in the 18th century. The murder of a janissary by a Christian on 4 March 1797 led to the savage looting of the 'Frangomachalas' (Frenk mahalasi), the quarter of the European merchants, and the massacre of thousands of Orthodox Christians by groups of janissaries.

Date

1797

Geographical Location

Smyrna

1. The Multinational Character of Smyrna

The above events belong to a period, the last quarter of the 18th century, which is marked by deterioration in the relations between the religious groups, the so-called **millet**. Those communities, the Orthodox, Armenians, the Jews and the Muslims enjoyed a status of religious freedom and a relative autonomy. The European entrepreneurs who lived on the coast enjoyed special administrative, commercial and tax privileges. It is worth mentioning that these religious groups were settled in separate quarters – the Europeans in the centre of the city and the Armenians by the commercial and banking centre by contrast to the Muslim houses that were far from the markets. There were few contacts and marriages between Christians and Muslims by contrast to the close social contacts between Orthodox and European merchants, which often resulted in mixed marriages.

2. The Orthodox and The Europeans Become Targets

Because the Europeans and the Orthodox were wealthy classes they started to be attacked by bandits and invaders in the 18th century. In 1730 a group of people from Zakynthos, who had been exiled from the island because of their violent temper, attacked and robbed some people from [Smyrna](#). The European consuls asked from the ambassador of Venice, as Zakynthos was under his jurisdiction, to send away the 'undesirables', which finally happened in the subsequent years. Riots or intracommunity disputes were always possible in Smyrna especially after 1760. The destruction of the Ottoman fleet by the Russians in the [sea battle of Çesme](#) in July 1770 and the uprising of the Orthodox inhabitants in the Peloponnese, followed by the Ottoman defeat, triggered uncontrollable tension. On 8 July the Ottoman customs officer Ibrahim Aga killed all the Orthodox being in the custom house at that moment. Then dense groups of Muslims scattered in the streets of Smyrna and within a few hours five thousand Orthodox, two Europeans and the Dutch dragoman were massacred. The events stopped thanks to the intervention of the janissary guard, which the Christians considered the only military force that could efficiently protect them from the 'mob of the city' and, thus, asked their permanent presence in the city.

3. Socio-economic Contrasts between Smyrna Communities

Such violent uproars were considered more possible in periods of serious economic crisis and degradation of the lower classes, which coexisted with the elite of merchants, manufacturers and squires of Smyrna, the majority of whom were Christians. On the Asia Minor coast and, particularly, in Smyrna the despotism of the authorities, usury and the increasing poverty of Muslim, mainly, populations formed the social base on which the 'Rempelio of Smyrna' took place.¹ Those dramatic events resulted from particular actions taken by both sides.

4. The Onset of Rempelio



The events started on 3 March 1797 during a performance by Austrian acrobats, attended by lots of Europeans and Orthodox. On the evening of the performance some people from Zakynthos and Kefallonia, who were Venetian subjects, attempted to jump over the wooden enclosure of the circus and enter without paying. The janissary guards stopped them and, what is more, one of them, who is reported to have been there as an office boy of the Venetian Consulate, appears to have beaten with a stick one of the deadheads. Then one of the people from Zakynthos that had been held off, the so-called Panas, who, according to a metrical lament, was a 'yasakçı' (guard for an ambassador or concul) in the Consulate of Venice, returned to the theatre again possibly with a group of compatriots and killed a janissary. The performance was interrupted because of the disorder and the gunshots. The next day some Muslims and a group of janissaries asked from the Consul of Venice Loukas Chortatzes, an Orthodox Cretan, to give them the killer, who had already found shelter on a Venetian ship. The Consul refused to give the culprit to the Muslim groups and the official police authorities, thus activating the privilege of political asylum enjoyed by the Venetian subjects against the Ottoman authorities. The Muslims were upset and held subsequent meetings for many days. On 13 March, during the Ramadan, the city council convened an extraordinary meeting at night following pressure exercised by the janissaries to give the culprit. The local authorities informed the western consuls that the Muslim people were infuriated and they would not be responsible for any extreme reactions in case the culprit was not given to be interrogated however, the request was rejected.

5. The Passionate Outbreak and Collective Violent Actions

On the morning of the 15 March groups of janissaries and infuriated, armed Muslims arrived at the centre of Francomachalas and stopped outside the Consulate of Venice and, after they discussed, they sent twenty representatives to demand that the culprit should be given. The representatives found a deserted consulate and a closed door. They then started to shoot blindly and, although they seemed likely to invade the consulate, they were shot possibly by Sklavounoi (Dalmatian), who worked as kavas (messenger of an embassy or consulat) of the Consulate of Venice and were standing in the window at the time. When the mob saw an Emir and two more Muslims being shot to death, they exploded with anger and started screaming 'fire, fire'.² They first set on fire the Chaniotiko Chani (inn) and then houses and shops on Frank Street, the main street of the European quarter. When the fire broke out the French Consul Jean Charles Haumont was leading a fire group and was struggling to control the fire, but without success. The Muslims started to shoot at the group and killed two Orthodox firemen. The fire, aided by strong southern winds, spread very quickly over all the Christian quarters of Francomachalas (Frenk mahalasi), and for 17 hours (from 10 in the morning until 3 on the following night) thousands of houses and shops were burning and being sacked in the wider area of Francomachalas. The fire spread easily because the houses in Smyrna were made of wood for antiseismic protection. Many schools were burnt and 60 inmates were tragically lost in one of them. The consulates of England, France and Holland, the Catholic Church of Santa Maria, the chapel of the Dutch community, a part of St Fotini, the Orthodox hospital and several Christian establishments were completely destroyed after the fire. Rich libraries and invaluable archives belonging to citizens were also burnt. It is worth mentioning that historical sources report that some Sklavounoi, some people from Zakynthos and some non-Muslims took part in the pillage and robbed houses and shops, taking advantage of the fact that the Ottoman authorities could not punish them because they were European citizens. While some Sklavounoi seamen were leaving the city after they had fought the Muslims at Xocastro, they were made to return to Smyrna and unload the stolen, mainly Orthodox, goods.

6. The Numerous Victims of the Orthodox Community

The Muslim mob was particularly aggressive towards the Orthodox of Francomachalas. According to conservative estimates, over 1000 Orthodox were killed within a few hours by the enraged crowds, while, according to other sources, there were 3000 people killed. Newspapers of that period reported that the Orthodox men, women and children were forced out of their houses and shops, which were then set on fire and sacked. In Geraniou Street there were 40 Orthodox children between 10 and 12, who lived in the monastery and did not manage to get out, as a result, they were burnt together with the principal of the establishment. Even the imam of Smyrna Nâsir Zabet was unable to moderate the massacre of the Orthodox; he called them 'brothers' and asked the enraged crowds to stop their violent actions, while he was threatening them with the wrath of the Prophet. The massacre ceased mainly thanks to the cannonade from a Russian ship anchored in the harbour of Smyrna.

7. No European Victims during the 'Rempelio of Smyrna'



The Europeans were much luckier during these violent riots. Despite the extensive material damages they suffered, there is no information about Europeans killed in these dramatic events. Many Europeans managed to survive at the last moment, when at noon of 15 March two groups of Muslims attempted to intercept their withdrawal to the sea and the cannonade from European ships anchored in the harbour made the pursuers run away. A lot of Orthodox and Europeans were saved when they resorted to European ships anchored in the harbour, such as the Spanish frigate *Experienza* and other, mainly French, ships.

8. Tempests and Earthquakes Complete the Destruction

The extreme natural phenomena that lasted only two days (15-16 March) destroyed what had remained intact after the looting. Torrential rains and a tempest crashed a big number of ships in the harbour, while a lot of the people who had dived into the sea to be saved were tragically shot to death by Muslims who were shooting from a nearby minaret and a dock. Then a severe earthquake – something not unusual in that region – destroyed a large number of houses that had remained undamaged in *Francomachalas*.³

9. The Climate after the Destruction and Actions of the Authorities

When those violent riots came to an end, the Europeans accused the Ottoman authorities of their tolerance towards the troublemakers, while, on the other hand, the Porte placed responsibility on the culprits from the Ionian Islands and avoided punishing any Muslims fearing a possible revolt by janissaries. The **Kadi** of Smyrna Hasi (Haci) Osman was certain about the attitude the Porte would adopt and continued threatening the Europeans and non-Muslim communities of Smyrna. The British Consul himself reported that one month later a climate of rage and disorder was created in the city streets. Then the Sublime Porte sent a military force to the city under the commander of Aydin Hussein Karaosmanoğlu in order to calm down the people; he entered the city on 8 April and imposed order in the city. Another measure preventing new riots was the firman issued by the Porte, which banned citizens of Venice, Croatia and the Ionian Islands from approaching the Ottoman coasts.

The insecurity that prevailed in the region even after Karaosmanoğlu came is typical of the climate at the time. Indemnities demanded by the Europeans were never given and lots of Christians abandoned their houses and businesses, which had a negative effect on commerce and handicraft as well as on the social life of the city. Such riots were quite common in the next decades in Smyrna, as they were part of a general climate of disorder that prevailed in the big cities of the Ottoman Empire, where economic conditions were similar to those of Smyrna. A typical example is Egypt, where new riots broke out against Europeans in the summer of 1797, when the news about Rempelio arrived there.⁴

1. Frangakis-Syrette, Elena, *The Commerce of Smyrna in the eighteenth century (1700-1820)* (Athens 1992), pp. 32-37, 57-65; Sugar, P., *H Νοτιοανατολική Ευρώπη κάτω από Οθωμανική κυριαρχία 1354-1804 2* (τρ. Μπαλουξή Παυλίνα Χρ.) (Athens 1994), pp. 297-308; Αναγνωστοπούλου, Σία, *Μικρά Ασία 19ος αιώνας -1919: από το Μιλλιέτ των Ρωμιών στο Ελληνικό έθνος* (Athens 1997), pp. 140-141, 201-202; Κορδάτος Γιάννης, 'Η σφαγή της Σμύρνης του 1797', *Περιοδικό Επιθεώρηση Τέχνης Γ'* (1956), p. 171.

2. In the study of I. Papagiannopoulos in *Μικρασιατικά Χρονικά Α'* (1938), pp. 261-267, there is a 'lament for Smyrna' of an unknown writer. The verses referring to the early events of 'Rempelio' riots are indicative (see Quotation).

3. Σολομωνίδης, Χρίστος Σ., *Το θέατρο στην Σμύρνη* (Athens 1954), p. 27; Σολομωνίδης, Σωκράτης, *Μικρασιατικά Χρονικά Α'* (1938), pp. 246-258; Σολομωνίδης, Χρίστος Σ., *Υμνος και θρήνος της Σμύρνης* (Athens 1956), pp. 183-199; Frangakis-Syrette, Elena, *The Commerce of Smyrna in the eighteenth century (1700-1820)* (Athens 1992), pp. 62-63; Φάλλμπος, Φίλιππος Κ., *Ο Φραγκομαχαλάς της Σμύρνης* (Athens 1970), p. 108; Κλεάνθης, Φ., *Η Ελληνική Σμύρνη* (Athens 1996), pp. 42-45.

4. Frangakis-Syrette, Elena, *The Commerce of Smyrna in the eighteenth century (1700-1820)* (Athens 1992), pp. 64-65; Βέης, Ν., *Μικρασιατικά Χρονικά Δ'* (1948), p. 420.



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	Σολομωνίδης Χ. , <i>Το θέατρο στη Σμύρνη</i> , Αθήνα 1954
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Glossary :

	kadi Office that combined judicial, notarial and administrative duties. The kadi, who held court at the kaza's seat, registered all legal acts and documents in the court's codices (sicil). The kadi passed judgement based on the saria (the holy law of Islam), taking also into consideration the kanun (sultanic law) and the customary law (örf). Resort to his court had all the subjects of the Empire. The kadi had also administrative duties, which he performed in collaboration with the officials of the kaza., and he had to supervise tax collection.
	millet The millet system was based on the division of the Ottoman subjects according to religion. The millets were the central communal institutions for the members of the respective ethno-religious groups, in particular for the non-Muslim subjects of the Empire. The millets had its own institutions and functions concerning self-administration, religion, education, justice, and social coherence. Although the division of the subjects according to their religion had always been fundamental in the Empire, the millets in their fully organized form originate in the end of the 18th century. In the 19th century, in particular during the period of the tanzimat reforms, the millets became the main institutions through which the non-Muslim subjects were incorporated in the Ottoman Empire.

Sources