

## Papaflessas



Papaflessas at [Maniaki](#) 1825, Greek Stamp of 1975

Papaflessas (1788-1825), born George Flessas, was a Greek patriot, priest, and government official. The word "papa" in the name "Papaflessas" indicates his status as a cleric, 'papa' being the Greek for 'priest'. He was ordained to the highest priesthood position, Archimandrites, in 1819. He served as Minister of Internal Affairs and Chief of Police in the government of [Alexander Mavrocordatos](#). Papaflessas was killed in battle May 20, 1825, fighting the forces of [Ibrahim Pasha](#) at Maniaki, Messinia.

### **Early life**

George "Papaflessas" or Gregory Dikaios was born in 1788 in the village of Poliani in [Messinia](#). His father was Demetrios G. Flessas and his mother, the second wife of Demetrios, was Constantina Andronaiou from Demetsana.

In 1809 he attended school at the renowned school of Demetsana, from whence many Greek national heroes graduated. While in school he published a satire and pinned it on the door of the Demetsana Pasha (the Turkish local governor at the time) signing it "Gregarious FOS Kalamios". Realizing he was in danger from his action he was sent in 1815 to become a priest or monk, taking the ecclesiastical name of Gregarious Flessas or Papaflessas. For a short time, he served in this capacity in the monastery of Velanidia, situated outside of the city of [Kalamata](#), Messinia.

## Clergy

Gregarious was argumentative and defiant by nature and frequently at odds with his ecclesiastical superiors. Further, he was angry toward the Ottoman Turks because of family members killed by them. He also blessed a marriage of Mr. Zervas with his niece who was engaged to another man. At the time engagement was equal to marriage and it was punishable by death if the engagement was broken. He was asked to leave the monastery of Velanidia.

In April 1816 he moved to the monastery of Regkitsa, located between [Leontari](#) and [Mystras](#). He soon argued with his superiors and the monastery's administration. He also came into conflict with a local Turkish authority over the boundaries of the monastery property and even used armed men to protect his claims. This eventually was settled by court in Trompolitsa with the court finding in Papaflessas' and the monastery's favor. This angered the Turkish official who told the authorities that Papaflessas was a revolutionary and was arming the "ragiades" (Greeks) against the Turks. The Trompolitsa authorities sentenced Papaflessas to death and sent soldiers to the monastery to arrest and execute him. Armed Poliani fighters delayed the soldiers and Papaflessas were able to leave his homeland, saying as he did so that he would return either a Bishop or a Pasha and deal with them.

Papaflessas went to the island of [Zakynthos](#), a haven for Greeks from the mainland who were under death sentence by the Turks. He obtained a reference letter from the Archbishop of Christianoupolis (Arcadia Kyparissia). While traveling by sea to [Constantinople](#), Papaflessas was shipwrecked on the "Holy Mountain", Mount Athos during which the seal

on his letter of recommendation broke. Reading the letter he was surprised to find that it called him dishonest, immoral and untrustworthy, causing him to discard the letter.

He arrived in Constantinople with the goal of studying ancient Greek and theology and to become an Archbishop in the Agia Sophia Patriarxeio. While studying Greek and the Periklis harangue, he also started meeting prominent "patriots". Because he was under death sentence by the Turks, and his reputation from [Peloponnisos](#), he used the name "Dikaios". He soon joined the secret organization of "[Filiki Eteria](#)", (Friendly Society) with the code name "Armodios" (A. M.) and the number five (5).

In 1819 Gregarious was ordained to the highest priesthood position, Archimandrites, a rank next to the Bishop, by Patriarch Gregarious E' of Constantinople and he was given the ecclesiastical "officio of Dikaios" (the Orthodox Christian Patriarch's representative), in order to be able to move freely in the Moldovlachia area and not to be bothered by the Turks. Papaflessas was sent to the northern part of the Ottoman Empire to inspire and spread hope among his countrymen for the nation's independence from the Turks.

### **Action in Resistance**

Returning to Constantinople from his successful mission Papaflessas again came to the attention of the Turkish authorities and had to flee. At the end of 1820, he sailed to Kydonia of Asia Minor and catechized all scholars of the Big School (as it was called there) while awaiting the arrival of war supplies from Smyrna. From Smyrna he received military supplies and the assurance of additional ammunition if needed.

Papaflessas traveled to several areas seeking support for a revolution against the Ottoman Empire. At the Saint George monastery he called a meeting of Greek authorities and High Priests to discuss if the time was right to start the revolution. After heated arguments the meeting was postponed for a later time in the monastery of Agia Lavra.

In January of 1821 meetings took place with Papaflessas recounting his supplies and assurances of support coming from Russia. Concerns about the practicalities of war and the uncertainty of the promises of military support lead the other participants to propose to secretly jail Flessas in the monastery of Agia Lavra in order to avoid problems for the nation.

But Papaflessas had armed supporters and no one dared arrest him. The synod decided to get further information and the opinion of neighboring countries before starting a revolution.

Flessas' problem was with the upper class (landowners) in the villages and municipalities, including the top echelon of the clergy, who did not trust Papaflessas, and his mission was received with a great deal of skepticism and fear. He felt safer to approach first farmers and peasants and the poor class of people who were easily magnetized by his speeches looked upon him as the messiah of their freedom.

After the meeting he went to Kalavryta and met with Nikolaus Souliotis and Asimakis Skaltsas in order for them to write a letter in the first 10 days of March 1821 to Oikonomos Eliopoulos. Then he retreated to Kalyvia Kalamata waiting for news from Souliotis and Skaltsas and the arrival in Almyros, a small port near Kalamata, of the boat with the war supplies. From Kalyvia secretly he went to Gardikion Amfeias near his hometown Poliani and learned that the small boat of Mexis Poriotis arrived in Almyros. Papaflessas immediately called his brothers.

In March 1821 he received news the ship with military supplies had arrived. He gathered about 400 men with mules and donkeys from the Poliani area and went to Almyros Kalamata. In order to unload the boat they had to have the authorization of the area's harbormaster, the famous Mayromichalis, who was in the pay of the Turks security force. The harbormaster demanded a large bribe to cover up what the Greeks were unloading.

Papaflessas send his brother Nikitas with 45,000 grosia to Mayromichalis who accepted it but still did not sign the proper papers. He wanted half of the supplies in the boat to have them as reserves to fight the Greeks when they start the revolution against the Turks. This was agreed to and the supplies were transported to the monastery of Velanidia, where Papaflessas served as a monk, summoning prominent "kleftes" chieftains from the area. By purpose or accident some of the gunpowder was dropped at a local well and the next day the stablemen of the local Pasha found and reported it. The Pasha summoned all the prominent Greeks and clergy from the Kalamata area and jailed them.

Papaflessas arranged his men to cover various strategic positions in the area. When a Turkish sympathizer, named Mustafas, tried to leave the city he was killed, starting the [war of Independence](#) on March 21, 1821. In Mani a gathering of the captains of the rebels had

decided to start the revolution on March 25, 1821, but received news on the 22nd that the fighting had already begun.

On March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1821, Papaflessas with Mayromichalis, Kolokotronis and other "Kleftes" invaded Kalamata. This is the first town to gain her freedom from the Turks and Mayromichalis declare the famous declaration of Independence from the Ottoman Empire.

The Greek War of Independence officially started on March 25, 1821, and brought a great change to the Church of the free kingdom. The clergy had taken a leading part in the revolution.

### **Papaflessas During The Revolution (1821-1825)**

In 1823 Papaflessas was named the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Chief of Police by the government of Alexander Mavrocordatos under the name Gregarious Dikaios, the name he had when was in Philiki Etairia. He instituted many reforms, established the mail system and built schools in various towns. He created the title of Inspector General for schools and he was the first one to establish the "Koinonika Fronimata" political convictions certificate to be given to the friends of the Government.

He took part in many battles against the Turks and he sided with the government when the civil war started in 1824. He took part in the campaign in Messinia and the rest of Peloponnisos to suppress the rebels against the Government.

Papaflessas, during the civil war, between politicians and leaders of the revolution, was on [Kolokotronis'](#) side. But, later on, due to his personal ambitions, he sided with the politicians and went against his former co-fighter, believing sincerely that by doing so he best served the interests of his country.

When Ibrahim invaded Peloponnisos in 1825, Papaflessas was still Minister of Internal Affairs. Realizing the great danger the nation was facing with the Ibrahim's invasion, he demanded the government grant amnesty to Kolokotronis and other political prisoners. This demand was refused and he appeared before the Executive Branch and Parliament to tell them he would go to Messinia alone to organize a resistance against Ibrahim, determined to return victorious or die in the battlefield.

Papaflessas gathered 2,000 poorly armed men and went to the province of Pylas searching for the best spot to face Ibrahim's army coming out of the city of Pylos. He selected the hills of Maniaki in order for him to have a better view of the enemy's movements and where Papaflessas established three lines of defense.



20 May 1825, Battle at Maniaki, Panagiotis Zografos, Papaflessas and his men against an Egyptian army of [Ibrahim Pasha](#)

On May 20, 1825, Ibrahim's forces led by well-trained French Officers attacked Papaflessas' defense lines. Most of the Greek troops lost their nerve, abandoned their positions, and fled. Papaflessas continued to fight the Egyptians with a small force of 300-600 men loyal to him and his cause.

Papaflessas knew that in choosing to face Ibrahim he would die on the battlefield. May 20, 1825 came to its end after the lines were broken by the heavy bombardment of Ibrahim's artillery and the repeated attacks of his infantry and cavalry. Fierce hand-to-hand fighting ended with the death of the last defender.

In speaking of Papaflessas after his death, it is said that Ibrahim told his officers: "If Greece had ten heroes like him, it would not have been possible for me to undertake the military campaign against Peloponnisos".



Papaflessas Monument in Athens