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A Concise History of the Grand Lodge of Greece

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In 1993, the Grand Lodge of Greece was erroneously accused of indulging in politics. As the accusations directed previously against it and being refuted, the politics one was refuted as well. Nevertheless, the researcher or the historian of Greek Freemasonry is bound to find out that the political and national history of modern Greece is intertwined with Freemasonry. From the preparation of Greece's liberation from the Turkish yoke right up to the second world war, the National struggles walked hand in hand with the achievements of the "Sons of Light." We expect that the team of historians, who are conducting a research presently in a professional manner, will shed light on these glorious times, glorious for our Country as well as for the Craft. At this time, suffice it to say that the "Friendly Society," the composer of our National Anthem, the Independence War Lords with Brother Theodore Colocotronis in the forefront, all bear the mark of Freemasonry. The words of Theodore Colocotronis, namesake and grandson of the warlord, in the preface of his book on the Friendly Society titled "High Priests of the Elefsinians" say it all:

"Blessed be the Masonic Lodges which baptized you in the baptismal font of Liberty" – Indeed, the inspired founders of the "Society of Friends," had been nursed with the milk of Freedom by their Mother Lodges. Their memory will remain sacred to all Helenes. The heroic and tragic fall of Constantinople in 1453, marked the end of a glorious Empire, which for ten centuries stood like a rock, on which all the barbaric raids against Europe shattered, while the light of Christianity was spread to neighboring countries. Thus, a long period of darkness began for Greece, but on the other hand, prominent personalities in the fields of science, arts and philosophy who fled the invaders went to the West and contributed greatly to the Renaissance, which started as the 15th century was waning.

Throughout the dark period of foreign occupation, prominent Greeks of the diaspora, organized schools and societies, attracting a considerable number of Philellenes, with the idea of liberating Greece. During the 18th century, a number of quasi-Masonic institutions existed throughout Europe, with that aim, till the creation of the "Friendly Society" in Odessa, in 1814, which prepared and organized the revolution of 1821. The "Friendly Society" was initially created by three Masons and subsequently joined by many others. Meanwhile, in 1811, a prominent Mason, Dionyssios Romas, assisted by the Duke of Sussex, Grand Master of Masons of England, founded the "Serene Grand Orient of Greece" in the Orient of Corfu, one of the Ionian islands, which had not been occupied by the Turks. The cataclysmic events that followed, events that culminated in the liberation of Greece, naturally brought many changes to the society in general and to the Masonic movement in particular. A number of Lodges were created in the Ionian islands as well as on the mainland and although the "Serene Grand Orient" disbanded in

1843, its creation has been and is being considered as the origin of the official Greek Freemasonry and Dionyssios Romas as the first Grand Master of Masons in Greece. For a number of years, various Lodges were created in Greece and specifically in Athens, Piraeus, Chalkis, Corfu, Patras, Syros, Lamia and Argos. Since there was no central Masonic Authority in Greece at that time, these Lodges had been created under the Grand Orient of Italy. In 1864 these Lodges asked that Grand Orient for a dispensation for an independent Masonic Authority in their own Country. The Grand Orient authorized them to institute a Masonic directorate which was indeed created in 1864. Prominent members of the Government and of the scholar community became members of this directorate.

After considerable exchange of correspondence between the directorate and the Grand Orient of Italy, the latter, granted dispensation and recognized as regular, the "Grand Orient of Greece."

Masonry in Greece existed in parallel with the young Greek State and shared the joys of its evolution as well as the hardships of the turbulent years that followed. Prominent Masons, individually, as true "Sons of light," were involved in the field of education, but also in the struggle for the liberation of Macedonia and Crete. A number of them fell in those noble causes.

A milestone in Greek Masonry is December 2, 1927 when the Grand Orient of Greece, by Presidential Decree, was recognized as a Foundation, its aims being philosophical and philanthropic. This status is a justification of the aims of Freemasonry. A prominent one being a relentless struggle against illiteracy, by the institution and sponsoring of schools, especially schools for working youths. In spite of its official recognition by the State, Freemasonry was at times the target of attacks by some Church circles as well as by individual press ones. Lodges mostly felt the effect of such attacks in small communities. But the Masonic movement withstood these attacks and masonry kept growing. In 1930, after considerable efforts, financial sacrifices by its members and a contribution by the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite, Masonry had its Masonic Hall in Athens, owned by 80 per cent by the Grand Orient and by 20 per cent by the Supreme Council. By then, the Grand Orient of Greece had been renamed "Grand Lodge of Greece." Those beautiful premises were very adequate at that time. At about the same time, the city of Piraeus obtained its Masonic Hall while provincial Lodges were gradually being settled in proper housing.

As the 30s decade was drawing towards its end, the clouds of war were gathering over Europe and when the war came for Greece, many Greek Masons participated actively in the epic struggle on the Northern Epirus mountains, while the Lodges in the cities were helping in any way they could, mainly by sending parcels of woolen clothing to help the troops to face the hard wintery conditions. At the Nation's helm at the time, were two Masons: The King and the Prime Minister. Greece was then fighting for its independence and its freedom. It gave the Free World its first victory since the rest of Europe had fallen to the Nazi divisions and England stood alone awaiting a possible invasion of the British Isles. The triumphant six-month struggle against the Italian invaders had to come to an end, when German divisions invaded Greece from Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The few and gallant troops who faced the second invader, fought so bravely that when they finally capitulated, the invaders presented arms to them, a fact that – as far as we know – has never happened before or since. Within 21 days since

their invasion, the Germans reached Athens and one of their first actions was to go to the Masonic Hall, confiscate whatever records were left there and inflict serious damage to the property. This was the fate of the other Masonic properties throughout the Country as well. Then they proceeded to the residence of the then Grand Master, M.W. Brother Philotas Papageorgiou and placed him under arrest. He was taken to prison where he was kept under very harsh conditions, which caused irrevocable damage to his health and although he was released some seven months later, he never recovered and died in 1947.

After the war, the Grand Lodge of Greece embarked on the difficult task of reconstruction and recovery and it must be noted here that considerable help came from Lodges abroad. Special mention must be made here to Brother R. Caldwell who, at that time was Deputy Consul at the U.S. Embassy in Athens, who influenced the Greek Government to free the Masonic Hall from numerous families which were occupying it and to Brother G. Caldwell, Supreme Commander of the Southern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite of the United States, who upon the request of the President of the U.S., Brother Harry Truman, headed a delegation of American Brothers, who assessed the damages and invited financial assistance from across the Atlantic. Soon, the Masonic Hall of Athens was restored to its previous splendor and the harmonious sound of the gavels echoed in all the Lodge rooms. Impressive charity work was undertaken again, the most prominent activities being the sponsoring of schools for working youths and the "Anti-Cancer Society" that provided shelter and relief to victims of that illness. As travel was becoming more accessible to all social strata, communication with other Masonic Powers was on the increase and inter visitations became more frequent. An English speaking Lodge "Parthenon" No. 112 was created, which took care of the masonic needs of a number of foreign visitors and residents in this country. By the early 60s it had become evident that the Athens Masonic Hall was not adequate, among the various solutions proposed, the demolition of the existing premises and the erection of new and more spacious ones in its place was chosen. This called for considerable expenses, which were undertaken by the members and in May 1965 the demolition started. By April 1967, the new and splendid building was ready and housed the Athens Lodges again.

Three more foreign language Lodges were consecrated in the city of Athens, "Apollo" No. 98 in German, "La Tradition Francaise" No. 125 in French, and "Giuseppe Garibaldi" No.130 in Italian.

Craft Masonry in Athens, Piraeus and at the provinces kept growing, Lodges were flourishing and the number of Brethren increased steadily. Among the new Lodges that were created, there was one in the historical city of Elefsis, another one in Corinth, which for the time being meets in Athens and another in the suburb of Glyfada, thus marking the decentralization concept of the Athens metropolitan area. The Lodges in Cyprus which are under the Grand Lodge of Greece, have now become eight, with the creation of "Phoenix" No. 136. Meanwhile, in the mid eighties, in one of the constitutional General Assemblies, the Grand Lodge of Greece became A.F. and A.M., becoming this way aligned with the prevailing dogma of world Masonry. The fantastic growth of the 80s coincided with a deplorable act by a group of some fanatic members who were aiming at high posts but had not been elected to them. Nevertheless, the schism was a fact. That runaway group soon broke into four other groups. However, the effect on the Grand Lodge was minimal, as the latter has been

experiencing an unprecedented growth, while the number of World Grand Lodges in amity with it has grown considerably.

In 1993, York Rite, under the aegis of the Grand Lodge of Greece was created and its effects in terms of substance and growth were spectacular. At this time, there are 21 R.A. Chapters in Greece.

The Grand Lodge of Greece, is now numbering a membership of more than 8,000 which is increasing and exceeds the normal attrition and covers sufficiently all of the Country.

Its philanthropic achievements are indeed impressive. Its members and its leadership have relieved earthquake and flood victims, have reequipped earthquake stricken hospitals, have donated a state of the art blood donation vehicle and twice a year they donate a considerable amount of blood to a children's hospital, for children suffering from Coolie's disease. Scholarships are regularly granted to students of International Law, a vehicle was donated to the Cyprus Cancer Institute and a number of Brethren are in the list of voluntary donors of human organs.

Greek Masonry has certainly made its mark in the World Craft because it has met successfully the test of Greatness.