

ZAHARIAS BARBITSIOTIS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE PELOPONNESOS

1759-1805



Much has been said and written about the great forerunner of 1821. The limited space of this commemorative album does not allow us to refer to his biography, even in synopsis, let alone deal with the views and evaluations of the historians who have studied him. However, there is absolutely no doubt whatsoever, that Zaharias was one of the brightest personalities of modern Greece. Nor is it hyperbole to say that he was the first in the hierarchy, the Chief Capetanios, the Leader and that most of the more famous Klepht Capetanios* of 1821 were his comrades at arms and his students. The academic Spyros Melas in his book, *O Geros tou Moria (The Old Man of Morias)*, characteristically writes: "After the loss of Zaharias there was no other personality to electrify the populace except for Kolokotronis... He had sprung out of the school of Zaharias" And later on he says, "That which Zaharias could not fulfill and see it grow, the Filikoi were able to more than accomplish".

And Thanos Vagenas (*Peloponnisiki Protohronia – Klephtes tou Malevou – Peloponisian New Year's Day – Klephts of Malevo – page 188*) writes: "Pre-eminent among everyone there appears the Great Zaharias Barbitsiotis, that immortal but so unappreciated and undervalued National and Popular fighter of Moria, who has many songs in his name in our aged Malevo. And one of them is the most characteristic for the manner in which it presents the great palikaria of Zaharias and demonstrates the popular perception and understanding that he was above everyone from the entire older Klephtouria.

The snows are shining in the mountains and the sun in the valleys,
That's how Zaharias is shining amongst all the palikaria.
The Tsankonian mountains are brimming with tears,
Was it the northwind that blew them, was it the heavy winter,
Neither the northwind blew them, nor the heavy winter,
No one even stepped on them from the old Klephts.
But Zaharias did step on them, still trampling them,
And Zaharias is enjoying them with Koulo-Mertzilios...

Capetan Zaharias, the Barbitsiotis, is the thryllic personality of Malevou, born and bred of the mountain, protector and defender of his people, with numerous customs, traditions and historical events which have been enacted on the trunk of this grand mountain of the Moria.

He was born in Barbitsa, Laconia, on the western slopes of Malevou, most probably in 1759, and he was the immortal "Eagle of Malevou" with his prowess and his support of the Hellenic people, who breathed from the tyranny, thanks to the heroic actions of this Archklepht.

His murder in 1805, by the Maniatis Koukeas, was the prologue of the eradication of the Klephts of the Moria, especially during the persecution of the winter of 1805 and 1806.

The songs of Zaharias are many, as are the many historical events which are identified with various places of the Moria. And all of them speak for the famous Capetanios of the Klephts, the Greatest National Symbol of the years of Bondage, which has not yet received its absolute vindication.

* The word "klepht" here denotes a guerrilla fighter, because of their deft tactics and not a "thief" which is the more common meaning.



ΑΔΕΛΦΟΤΗΣ
ΣΚΟΥΡΟ-ΒΑΡΒΙΤΣΙΩΤΩΝ
ΚΑΝΑΔΑ

VARVITSA†

Barbitsa is built on the western mountain approaches of Mount Parnon at an elevation of 1200 meters.

The village is not very old. It is a creation of the years of bondage. It was built, most likely, towards the end of the first period of the Turkish occupation of the Peloponnese.

Klephts were the first residents of the village. Klephts and the more liberal-minded people – those persecuted by the Turks – they too follow suit and settle in the new village.

The principles, the customs and the traditions of the village are clearly those of the Klephts, and they are preserved throughout the duration of the Turkish occupation.

In 1715, the period of the second Turkish occupation of the Peloponnese, Barbitsa is a relatively large village. In the center of the village at that time, there was located a church of St. Demetrios – part of which is still standing today, with rich internal decoration. Continuing from the Church was the village's school, which does not exist today.

In the following years and right up to the revolution of '21, the village is burned four times by the Turks. The Barbitsiotes, untamable by nature and liberal-minded are found at the vanguard of the national uprisings. Many were the battles which were fought both within the village and in its environs, especially during the period of the Archklepht Zaharias.

The whole history of the village unfolds as one continuous struggle against the Turks. All the traditions, local songs and written testimonies speak of incidents and clashes with the Turks during various times and places.

The Great Revolution of '21 finds the Barbitsiotes at the ready and the front lines. The main body of the Barbitsiotes, reinforced with other Oinountians** and under the leadership of Petros Anagnostopoulos-Barbitsiotis, forms the military base of Vervenon, and the role which it played during the revolution is well known. In all the battles of the Peloponnese the Barbitsiotes actively participate, distinguishing themselves by their bravery and prowess. After the Revolution took root in the Peloponnese, they move on Athens. More than 30 Barbitsiotes are mentioned and are praised for their contributions to the Revolution of '21.

We cannot in this brief note refer at any length to the history of Barbitsa, which will cover an entire volume, indeed a most distinguished part of our modern Greek history and a creation of the sum of all the Barbitsiotes and its outstanding children which it has given birth to. We stop with the epigrammatic words of the historian F. Koukoule, (Oinountiaka, page 45) "Barbitsa was and is on one hand small, but bountiful in brave men on the other, and in short order her brave men not only distinguished themselves and honored their birthplace, but also the entire Hellenic Universe."

The Liberation of the Nation finds Barbitsa to be smoldering in flames. Its houses rise with blackened walls while its war fortresses are demolished. "Baimis passed by" is the phrase which remained to be heard until today in the entire Moria. The last burning of the village – which also seals the resurrection of the race.

The Barbitsiote thrusts away the flint-lock gun, his mission ended. The restoration of his household, the repair of his burnt house, the peace loving struggle of life, appear before him. The boundaries of Barbitsa prove to be small and poor. Down yonder in the plains of Lakedemon, entire areas spread out – former fiefs of the Turkish aghas – all neglected. That's where he turns his attention. He descends to the lowlands. In front there goes the gloried general of '21, Petros Barbitsiotis, and there follow the powder-burned fighters. They head towards the ruined Turkish villages of Skoura-Floka. The lands are granted to them in Honor of their Glory.

They establish themselves in Skoura. They also maintain Barbitsa, but now only as their summer residence. The Barbitsiotes became Skoura-Barbitsiotes.

† The name of the village in Greek is known as "Varvitsa", with a "V". Earlier, the village was known as "Barbitsa" with the Greek letters "MP" being translated into English by the English letter "B".

** For administrative purposes, several villages, including Barbitsa, were united under the municipal (DEMOS) name of OINOUNTOS.