

= Siege of Patras (805 or 807) =

The Siege of Patras in 805 or 807 was undertaken by the local Slavic tribes of the Peloponnese , reportedly with aid from an Arab fleet . The siege 's failure , attributed to the miraculous intervention of the city 's patron , Saint Andrew , marked the consolidation of Byzantine control over the Peloponnese peninsula after two centuries of Slavic rule over its western half . It also marked the beginning of the ascendancy of the Metropolis of Patras in the peninsula 's ecclesiastical affairs .

= = Background = =

The Byzantine Empire 's military position in the Balkans collapsed in the early 7th century as a result of disastrous military ventures against the Persians and then the Arabs in the East , which forced the effective abandonment of the Danube limes and opened the way for large @-@ scale penetration and settlement of the Balkan hinterland by various Slavic tribes . The Slavs raided as far as southern Greece and the coasts of Asia Minor . Most of the region 's cities were sacked or abandoned and only a few , including Thessalonica , remained occupied and in imperial hands .

In Greece , the eastern coasts of the Peloponnese and Central Greece remained in Byzantine hands as the theme of Hellas , while in the interior , various Slavic groups established themselves . A large native Greek population probably also remained in the land , either mixed with the Slavs or in its own autonomous communities . As elsewhere , a mostly peaceful *modus vivendi* soon emerged between the Slavs and the remaining Byzantine strongholds , with the mainly agricultural Slavs trading with the Byzantine @-@ held coastal towns . Further north , in the Greek mainland , by the turn of the 7th to 8th century smaller Slavic districts or *sclaviniae* emerged around the fringes of imperial territory , ruled by their own archons , who received Byzantine titles and recognized some form of imperial suzerainty . Imperial authority across Greece was greatly strengthened by the 783 campaign of the logothete Staurakios , who ventured from Constantinople overland to Thessalonica and from there south to the Peloponnese , subduing the Slavs of those regions .

Patras , on the northwestern coast of the Peloponnese , is claimed by the Chronicle of Monemvasia ? a work of highly disputed accuracy and chronology , but an essential source for the period ? to have been one of the cities abandoned c . 587 / 8 as a result of the Slavic depredations , its population fleeing to Rhegion in Calabria . This was followed by 218 years of independent Slavic rule in the Peloponnese , until around 804 / 5 . The archaeological record on the other hand shows Patras to have remained in Byzantine control throughout the period , although it is possible that part of the population indeed emigrated to Italy .

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According to Chapter 49 of the *De administrando imperio* of Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (r . 913 ? 959) , in the reign of Emperor Nikephoros I (r . 802 ? 811) the Slavs of the Peloponnese made war on the Greek population with the aid of " African Saracens " , looted the countryside and laid siege to Patras . The city held out for a while , but as food began growing short , the inhabitants gave thought to surrendering . First , however , they dispatched a rider to the direction of Corinth , the seat of the military governor (*strategos*) , to find out whether he was coming to their aid or not . The envoy had been instructed on his return to give a signal through a flag he carried : if help was on its way , he was to dip the flag , otherwise to hold it erect . The rider found out that the *strategos* was not coming or was delayed ? Constantine VII writes that he arrived three days after the siege had ended ? but on his return to the city , his horse slipped and both he and the flag fell down . The inhabitants of Patras interpreted this as a sign that aid was near , and sallied forth against the besieging Slavs , allegedly led by the city 's patron Saint Andrew himself on horseback . The Slavs panicked at the sudden assault and fled , abandoning the siege . As a punishment , Constantine VII records that the Slavs were thereafter obligated to maintain at their own cost all officials or envoys passing through Patras , relieving the local see of this burden .

Constantine VII gives no precise date for the attack , but it has been usually dated to around 805 ,

when the city of Patras was " re @-@ founded " , according to the Chronicle of Monemvasia , or to 807 , when an Arab (" Saracen ") fleet is known to have reached southern Greece , although the Arab participation may well be the result of a later interpolation , mixing the real Slavic revolt with subsequent Arab raids . The Chronicle of Monemvasia on the other hand does not mention any siege of the city . Instead it records that an Armenian strategos at Corinth named Skleros defeated the Peloponnesian Slavs , and that this victory , in the year 804 / 5 or 805 / 6 , marked the end of " 218 years " of Slavic rule in the Peloponnese . Emperor Nikephoros I is then said to have rebuilt Patras by bringing back the descendants of its original inhabitants from Rhegion , and to have engaged in a large @-@ scale resettlement and Christianization program for the peninsula , bringing in Greek colonists from Italy and Asia Minor . Nikephoros ' resettlement program at least is also confirmed by the chronicler Theophanes the Confessor , who puts it slightly later , in 810 / 1 .

Some scholars have tried to reconcile the conflicting accounts of the Chronicle and the *De administrando imperio* as implying a first recovery of Patras c . 805 as the result of Skleros ' campaign , which was probably concurrent with the establishment of the Peloponnese as a separate theme from Hellas , if this had not been done slightly earlier . According to this interpretation , the Slavic revolt and attack on Patras followed as a reaction a few years later , between 807 and 811 .

= = Aftermath = =

Whatever the exact course of events of the early 9th century , the failure of the Slavic attack on Patras consolidated the recently re @-@ established Byzantine control over the Peloponnese , and Nikephoros I 's policies led to the successful re @-@ Christianization and Hellenization of the peninsula . The defence of Patras also secured the Byzantine Empire 's main maritime road of communication with Italy and the West , as it opened up the shorter route through the Corinthian Gulf , instead of the longer , more dangerous route around the Peloponnese that was exposed to Arab attacks .

According to Constantine VII , the Slavs rose up again in the early 840s , but were defeated by strategos Theoktistos Bryennios . In the south , the two tribes of the Ezeritai and Melingoi held out longer . They were eventually subdued and forced to pay heavy tribute , but retained their autonomy . These two tribes rose up again a century later , in 921 . Again they were quickly subdued , this time by the strategos Krenites Arotas , but managed to remain autonomous and retain their distinct identity until well into Frankish times .

The successful repulsion of the siege through the " intervention " of Saint Andrew also marked the abrupt rise of the see of Patras to prominence : formerly a suffragan of the Metropolis of Corinth , it was raised to a separate metropolis and came to enjoy great political and financial influence . Henceforth the metropolitan of Patras rivalled with his former superior in Corinth over control of the other sees of the Peloponnese .