International Journal of Science and Research Archive

eISSN: 2582-8185

Cross Ref DOI: 10.30574/ijsra

Journal homepage: https://ijsra.net/

(REVIEW ARTICLE)

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# Sailing ships and the Greek Revolution: Keys to naval success

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International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2026, 19(01), 227-231

Publication history: Received on 24 February 2026; revised on 04 April 2026; accepted on 06 April 2026

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.30574/ijsra.2026.19.1.0715

## Abstract

This study examines the role of sailing ships during the Greek Revolution of 1821, focusing on their strategic significance in naval operations. Sailing ships offered flexibility and speed, enabling control over critical sea routes, the transport of military forces, and the support of political and strategic objectives. Through the analysis of major battles and operations, the technical shipbuilding expertise and the naval experience of captains emerge as decisive factors in success. At the same time, sailing ships functioned as symbols of national identity, boosting the morale of crews and local communities. The study explores the relationship between strategy, technology, geographic factors, and social organization, highlighting the multifaceted impact of naval operations. Overall, sailing ships prove to be key to understanding naval successes and their contribution to the achievement of Greek independence.

**Keywords:** Greek Revolution 1821; Sailing ships; Naval warfare; Maritime strategy; National identity

## 1. Introduction

The Greek Revolution of 1821 was a multidimensional historical event that unfolded both on land and at sea, highlighting the importance of naval power for the success of the struggle. The geography of the Aegean, with its numerous islands, narrow passages, and complex maritime routes, made control of the sea a strategic necessity. Sailing ships served as the primary means of transporting troops, supplies, and armaments, while simultaneously acting as weapons for surprise attacks and naval engagements, allowing the Greeks to counter the larger Ottoman fleets with strategic speed and agility.

Their military significance was closely tied to the economic self-sufficiency of local communities. Revenues from commercial shipping, shipbuilding, and legally sanctioned piracy financed the outfitting and maintenance of the fleets, while also securing resources for supporting land operations. The involvement of communities such as Psara, Skyros, and Syros turned the fleet into a collective project of social organization, where technical knowledge, economic strength, and strategic action interacted.

The international dimension of the war, through the presence of European consular networks and commercial companies, added multiple layers of strategic significance. The fleet served not only military purposes but also diplomatic objectives, providing the means to exert pressure on foreign powers and strengthen international recognition of the Greek cause. Meanwhile, the monitoring of Greek fleets by foreign powers forced the revolutionaries to coordinate their operations in accordance with political and diplomatic circumstances, enhancing their capacity for strategic planning.

This introduction lays the foundation for the analysis of five main aspects of naval action: the technical and economic dimensions of sailing ships, strategic naval battles, the international and diplomatic significance, and their ultimate role

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in the success of the Revolution. In this way, the reader is prepared for a comprehensive scholarly investigation of the complex role of Greek fleets, highlighting the close interconnection of strategy, technology, society, and international politics. This approach, drawing on sources such as Pissis (2022), Frary (2022), and Kotoulas (2022), enhances understanding of the importance of sailing ships not only as military instruments but also as pillars of economic, social, and political power during the Greek Revolution.

## 2. Technical and Economic Aspects of Naval Power

The technical and economic dimensions of naval power were critical to the effectiveness of Greek fleets during the Greek Revolution. Traditional shipbuilding in Syros, as well as in other naval communities such as Psara and Skyros, produced sailing ships capable of meeting the demands of war, with durability, speed, and maneuverability, as noted by Delis (2015). These vessels were designed to carry troops and artillery, while their agility allowed for surprise attacks and rapid movements between the islands of the Aegean. Construction and maintenance were funded both by local resources and revenues from the islands' commercial activities, while sanctioned piracy also provided significant resources for fleet armament.

The technical capabilities of ships were closely linked to crew training. Sailors were trained in navigation, the use of fire ships, and naval tactics, ensuring operational effectiveness even against stronger enemy fleets. Community structures provided social support, coordination, and material assistance, creating a collective network that connected technical and economic dimensions with social participation. Experience gained from legalized piracy enhanced both crew skills and the operational capabilities of vessels, enabling the execution of strategic maneuvers with speed and efficiency.

The integration of technology, economy, and strategy makes clear that naval power was not merely a matter of fleet size or armament but the result of multidimensional planning and collective organization. Maintaining a fleet required coordination among communities, economic resources, and technical expertise, highlighting the importance of local societies in the successful operation of Greek fleets. Furthermore, the technical and economic foundation allowed sailing ships to actively participate in battles, execute strategic missions, and support the broader strategy of the revolutionaries, ensuring the effectiveness of naval action across the Aegean.

Therefore, the study of the technical and economic parameters of sailing ships provides a comprehensive understanding of their multifaceted significance—from construction and maintenance to participation in operations and strategic deployment. This section demonstrates that naval power was the product of the cooperation of technical, economic, and social forces, which combined to create an effective tool of resistance and maritime control, indispensable for the success of the Greek Revolution.

## 3. Naval Operations and Strategic Battles

The naval battles of the Greek Revolution were critical determinants for the success of revolutionary operations, as the fleets of sailing ships enabled the control of major sea routes, the protection of islands, and the execution of surprise attacks. According to Pissis (2022), the strategic use of vessels aimed to cut off Ottoman supply lines, undermine the Ottoman presence in the Aegean, and strengthen the security of Greek territories. Greek naval engagements were not limited to isolated events; they were part of broader strategic plans that combined local knowledge of geography, the maneuverability of ships, and rapid responsiveness. The involvement of communities such as Psara and Milos in fleet operations and support created a collective strategic capacity, enhancing readiness and operational effectiveness.

The experience and training of crews were decisive in confronting stronger and more numerous enemy fleets. The technical proficiency of sailing ships, combined with strategic maneuvers such as the use of fire ships and surprise night attacks, allowed significant results even with limited forces. Battles at Psara, Milos, the Cyclades, and other islands exemplified how Greek naval strategy managed to control critical points, weaken the Ottomans, and strengthen Greek presence in the Aegean.

Analysis of naval operations demonstrates that sailing ships were not merely instruments of battle; their operation was linked to political decisions, social participation, and economic support. Strategy, technology, and social organization were interwoven, creating a multidimensional framework in which maritime operations had significant political and social implications. Fleets served as tools for maintaining territorial control, boosting crew morale, and protecting revolutionary communities, while also ensuring communication and supply lines for troops on the Greek mainland.

The strategic value of naval operations extended beyond the immediate outcomes of battles; it influenced the balance of power in the Aegean, the negotiating position of the revolutionaries, and European recognition of the Greek effort. The involvement of local populations, the technical sophistication of ships, and their strategic employment illustrate the close relationship between strategy, social organization, and technology. Therefore, the analysis of naval battles and operations provides a comprehensive view of the naval dimension of the Greek Revolution, highlighting the decisive role of sailing ships for the success and survival of the struggle.

## 4. International Dimension and Diplomatic Significance of Naval Power

The international dimension of naval operations was crucial for the success of Greek fleets. The presence of foreign consular networks, the monitoring of fleets by European powers, and the commercial activity of communities created a complex framework of strategic and diplomatic influence. Fleet operations enhanced the ability to exert pressure internationally, while simultaneously safeguarding commercial activities and maintaining economic resources. The strategic importance of the fleet extended beyond immediate battles, influencing relations with European powers and enhancing international recognition of the Greek Revolution. Cooperation with consular and commercial structures underscored the interaction of military action, economics, and international relations, making the study of the naval dimension critical for understanding the overall strategy of the revolution.

The international dimension of naval operations during the Greek Revolution was decisive for the success of Greek fleets and for establishing the strategic position of the revolutionaries in the Aegean. Greek sailing ships did not operate in isolation; their monitoring by foreign powers, such as Russian, British, and French consuls, affected freedom of movement and required the Greeks to adapt their operations to an international framework (Frary, 2022; Koutzakiotis, 2017–2018). Furthermore, the existence of consular networks and the economic activity of island communities contributed to gathering intelligence, resupplying vessels, and providing diplomatic cover for operations that might otherwise have been considered piracy.

The strategic value of the fleet extended beyond immediate military action. Sailing ships protected commercial activities, preserved economic resources for revolutionary communities, and enabled the application of political pressure internationally. The interaction of military, economic, and diplomatic activity highlighted sailing ships as multifunctional strategic tools, contributing to the recognition of the Greek Revolution by foreign powers and increasing international legitimacy for the struggle (de Graaf & de Lange, 2023).

Collaboration with consular and commercial structures allowed the Greeks to exploit international contradictions and secure supplies and intelligence for strategic planning. The elevation of fleets as a political tool, combined with military effectiveness, shows that naval power was not merely a defensive means but an active element of negotiation and international strategy. Additionally, engagement with European powers strengthened crew morale and collective participation of local communities, emphasizing the importance of the social and political dimension of naval operations.

Sources indicate that studying the international dimension of naval operations is essential for a full understanding of the revolution's strategy. The presence of Greek fleets in the Aegean had multiple effects: military, economic, and diplomatic, and served as a tool for shaping national identity and international recognition. Analysis of this dimension highlights the close relationship between naval power and international relations, as well as the importance of cooperation with foreign actors for the success of the Greek Revolution. The conclusions underline that sailing ships were not only instruments of war but critical elements of strategic and diplomatic policy.

## 5. Naval Battles in the Aegean and the Economic Role of Communities

Recent studies confirm the decisive role of naval battles in the success of the Greek Revolution. Varsos (2025) highlights the evolution of Greek shipping from a commercial to a military instrument, emphasizing the importance of military training and crew experience. Karabelias (2024) focuses on naval communities such as Spetses and Psara, emphasizing their economic role in the construction, maintenance, and arming of sailing ships. Through commercial activity and sanctioned piracy, these communities contributed to fleet financing, while social participation fostered collective strategic capability.

Analysis of the Battle of Navarino (2025) shows how military action was directly linked to international intervention, influencing the outcome of the war and the international recognition of the Revolution. Contemporary academic

research emphasizes that the strategic use of fleets was not limited to immediate battles but was associated with protecting commercial activities, controlling critical sea routes, and maintaining economic stability for the communities.

Recent studies highlight the multidimensional nature of naval power: military, economic, and social dimensions interact for the successful execution of strategic operations. The technical proficiency of ships, crew training, and organized community participation were decisive factors. Furthermore, the international dimension enhanced the strategic value of the fleet, making sailing ships not only weapons of war but also instruments of diplomacy, economic support, and political influence. (Maniou,2026)

## 6. The Role of Sailing Ships in the Success of the Revolution

The role of sailing ships in the Greek Revolution of 1821 was decisive for the success of the revolutionary operations, as these vessels functioned not only as means of transporting troops but also as strategic tools that influenced the outcomes of naval battles and the control of sea routes. Sailing ships enabled the Greeks to conduct surprise attacks, disrupt Ottoman supply lines, and protect critical islands such as Psara and Milos, thereby boosting the morale and strategic position of the revolutionaries. The technical proficiency of the vessels, as analyzed by Delis (2015), combined with the crews' ability to exploit the geography of the Aegean, ensured effectiveness even against larger and better-equipped fleets.

The economic dimension was equally significant. Local communities, such as Skyros and Psara, contributed to the construction, provisioning, and maintenance of the ships, while revenues from commercial shipping and legally sanctioned piracy financed the operation of the fleets. Strategic decisions regarding the use of sailing ships were based on a combination of economic, technical, and social factors, demonstrating that naval power resulted from a collective effort and coordination between communities and military leadership.

The international dimension of naval operations added further strategic value to the fleet. The presence of foreign consular networks, the monitoring of Greek fleets by European powers, and the commercial activity of the communities enhanced opportunities for diplomatic leverage and provided means of support and supplies. The interaction of military, political, and economic factors made sailing ships crucial not only for immediate military effectiveness but also for the long-term recognition of the Greek Revolution in the international arena.

Sources ranging from Pissis (2022) and Frary (2022) to Antoniadis (1990) and Delis (2015) show that the study of sailing ships reveals the complex nature of naval power, which connects strategy, technology, social participation, and international politics. Sailing ships were not merely instruments of war but pillars of organization and autonomy for revolutionary communities. The experience and organization of the crews, the technical construction of the vessels, and economic support created a combination of capabilities that surpassed the relative strength of the Ottoman fleets, allowing the successful execution of strategic operations across the Aegean.

Concluding with a comparison with the contemporary Greek naval success which is based on navigation procedures based on GPS, Satellites, and important information streamed via the internet, we understand that the jump in the technology of sailing and navigation that was accomplished in the contemporary times has been affected and inspired by the digital technology exploitation, in all the aspects of technological development and especially in education that is the driving force of the digital transformation of every strategic development. We must be inspired and adopt methodologies, technologies, and procedures from the various forms of digital technologies exploitation in the education domain. These technologies, such as mobile devices (29), a variety of ICT applications (30), AI STEM & ROBOTICS (31-33), facilitate and enhance educational procedures such as the training for navigation and sailing abilities. Additionally, the use of ICTs in conjunction with theories and models of executive functions and self-empowering methods [25-28], accelerates and improves educational practices and outcomes, particularly in the naval education domain.

## 7. Conclusions

In conclusion, the sailing ships of the Greek Revolution of 1821 were not merely military tools but multidimensional instruments of strategic, technological, and social importance, as well as diplomatic instruments in a broader international context. The effectiveness of the fleets relied not only on the speed, maneuverability, and armament of the vessels but also on the organized participation of local communities, their economic and technical infrastructure, and their capacity to interact with international powers and consular networks. Collaboration between communities, crews,

and local administrations created a collective strategic capability that enabled the execution of complex operations throughout the Aegean, even against larger and stronger enemy fleets (Pissis, 2022; Delis, 2015).

The analysis of the technical and economic aspects of the vessels shows that sailing ships incorporated technological innovation and social participation, creating a framework where strategic action was closely linked to the daily life of revolutionary communities. Economic support from commercial activity and sanctioned piracy ensured resources for the maintenance and equipment of the ships while simultaneously enhancing the experience and professional training of the crews. This connection of strategy, technology, and social organization allowed for the sustained Greek naval power throughout the Revolution.

Furthermore, sailing ships served as essential diplomatic tools, as their presence in the Aegean influenced European powers, enhanced international recognition of the Greek struggle, and provided opportunities for political leverage. The interconnection of military power with international relations and political strategy highlights the vessels as multifunctional instruments that went beyond combat, impacting the broader historical, social, and political context.

Finally, the study of the naval history of the Greek Revolution reveals the profound relationship between sailing ships, strategy, society, and international politics. These vessels played a decisive role in shaping the modern Greek state and the national identity that emerged from the Revolution, demonstrating that the strategic value of naval power goes beyond immediate military impact and fundamentally influences the political, economic, and social development of a nation. A comprehensive analysis of the naval dimension confirms that sailing ships were pillars of resistance, autonomy, and international strategy, making them central to the success of the Greek Revolution.

## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Acknowledgments*

The Authors would like to thank the SPECIALIZATION IN ICTs AND SPECIAL EDUCATION: PSYCHOPEDAGOGY OF INCLUSION Postgraduate studies Team, for their support.

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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