

THE MACEDONIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRUGGLE  
OF RHIGAS

The struggle that was frustrated when Rhigas was arrested at Trieste in December 1797 was not simply an attempt at armed rebellion. It was also a moral and cultural struggle. Rhigas' object was to liberate the soul of the Greeks, and not merely to break their political bonds. He was an educator as well as a revolutionary. He believed that the Greeks in the 18th century needed not only to be liberated from Turkish rule but to undergo a spiritual renaissance in order to take their proper place in Europe.

In consequence, his conception of education was not simply academic and scientific, though it included both academic and scientific studies. His conception of education was also social, moral and cultural. His revolutionary Proclamation in 1797 was a declaration of war on the Ottoman Empire; but he also wrote in it (Article 22): "From letters is born the progress with which all free nations shine".

What is more, he included among the nations who were to be freed not only the Greeks but the whole of southern Europe and the Near East, from the Ukraine to Egypt, from Albania to Georgia; Christians, Muslims and Jews, whites and blacks, and even the Turks themselves. For he regarded even the Turks as his brothers. They were just as much slaves of the Sultan as were the Greeks themselves.

"Όλα τὰ ἔθνη πολεμοῦν, he wrote in one of his poems, known as the "second Thourios". But his notion of war was cultural as well as military. This was something that his Austrian interrogators in prison could not understand. We can see the broad scope of his struggle from the list of accusations which the Austrian police presented in their report, even if they could not see it themselves. Their report, which survives in the State Archives in Vienna, contains six items of evidence to prove that Rhigas planned a revolution in Greece.

The first item was the original Thourios, which the interrogators described as a revolutionary poem. It was of course revolutionary; but it also contained a marvellously poetic picture of the free, democratic, multinational society which Rhigas wanted to see in the place of the Ottoman Empire. The

police could not be expected to know that they were reading the first masterpiece of modern Greek literature.

The second item on their charge-sheet was the Map of Hellas, drawn by Rhigas himself on twelve large sheets. An interesting feature of the map is that it extended the bounds of Hellas up to the Danube in the north, and beyond Constantinople and Nikomedeia in the East. It was said that Rhigas intended to increase his map from twelve to twenty-four sheets. In that case, it must have included practically the whole of the Ottoman Empire, and all the peoples to whom he appealed in the Thourios to rebel. But that was something which the Austrian police did not know.

It has been suggested by some modern scholars that Rhigas intended the map to be used for military purposes in his plans for rebellion. That may be so. But the map can also be seen as a kind of visual history-lesson. It includes historical notes, quotations from the classics, lists of rulers, drawings of coins, and so on. On the sheet depicting Macedonia, Rhigas identified the birth-place of Alexander the Great at Pella and that of his tutor, Aristotle, at Stageira. I shall return to the significance which Rhigas attached to Alexander, the greatest figure in Macedonian history.

The map also serves to illustrate two literary works published by Rhigas and his friends. One was a translation from French of the Abbé Barthélemy's work, *Le voyage du jeune Anacharsis*. The other was a collection of three translations from Italian, French and German, combined under the title of the *Moral Tripod*. These two publications together formed the third item in the charge-sheet against Rhigas.

Both works were published in Vienna by George Markidis Poullos, who was born at Siatista in Macedonia. Another Macedonian had a hand in the first work: George Sakellarios, born at Kozani, who translated the first three volumes of Barthélemy's *Anacharsis*. I shall have more to say about both these men.

The grounds for the suspicions of the police against these publications would be laughable if they were not so tragic in their consequences. Two of the three translations comprised in the *Moral Tripod* had settings in ancient Greece: one at Olympia during the Olympic Games, and one in the Mani and on Kythira. The *Anacharsis* told the story of a Scythian prince visiting Greece in the 4th century BC. Rhigas explicitly drew attention to the links with his Map of Hellas. The preface to the story of Olympia gave the sheet-number of the map on which it could be found; and the map itself repeatedly identified the places visited by Anacharsis. The conclusion of the interrogators of Rhigas

was that all these publications were designed to stir up rebellion by reminding the Greeks how great their history had been in the days of their ancestors.

The fourth item on the charge-sheet also involved maps—one each of Moldavia and Vallachia, which had not been included in Rhigas' Map of Hellas. He argued, however, that these two maps were a purely commercial publication, and the interrogators did not dispute it. But the same item of the charge-sheet included also the publication of a portrait of the head of Alexander the Great, copied from an engraving in a private collection at Vienna. Rhigas admitted publishing 1200 copies of this portrait, which was considered particularly sinister by the Austrian police because it was accompanied by biographical notes on Alexander's victories.

The police knew enough history to recognise that Alexander's victories were all won on territory which in their own day belonged to the Ottoman Empire; and they also knew that the Imperial Court of Vienna was on unusually friendly terms for the time being with the Sublime Porte at Constantinople, because both were equally terrified by the consequences of the French Revolution, and especially by the army of Napoleon Buonaparte in Italy, which had already reached Venice and the Ionian Islands.

Rhigas naturally was also conscious of the propagandist significance of publishing a portrait of the great Macedonian conqueror. In his "second Thourios" he even appealed to Alexander to rise from the grave and witness the heroism of the latter-day Macedonians. But for him the name of Alexander also had another significance which was equally important. Alexander was a man inspired by ideas of political and moral regeneration, which Rhigas shared. Alexander wanted to defeat the Persian Empire in order to liberate the Persians as well as the Greeks. He wanted then to fuse the races into a free and equal community, the first multinational state in human history. Rhigas had the same ecumenical aspirations. It is no exaggeration to say that of all the Macedonians who contributed to Rhigas' plans, the most influential was one who had died more than two thousand years ago.

So far all the items on the charge-sheet against Rhigas were on matters which the Austrian police simply did not understand. But they did at least understand the final two items, which were genuinely revolutionary in a military and not merely a cultural sense.

The fifth item accused Rhigas of trying to obtain French support, through the army of Napoleon in Italy, for a revolution in Greece. This was quite true: he did try to make contact with Napoleon, but he failed for several reasons. His letters never reached Napoleon, who had in fact left Italy to plan the invasion of England before Rhigas left Vienna for Trieste. Probably Napoleon

never even heard of Rhigas' name. However, the accusation of complicity with the revolutionary French has a bearing also on the sixth and last charge against Rhigas.

This was that he had published and circulated a Proclamation and a proposed Constitution based on the French *Rights of Man* and the revolutionary constitutions of the French republic. Of course, this was quite true; and Rhigas had also prepared a *Military Manual* (Στρατιωτικὸν Ἐγκόλπιον), based on a text-book by an Austrian Field-Marshal. All of these were printed secretly in Vienna by Rhigas' friend George Poullos, the publisher born at Siatista. But unfortunately no printed copies survive, and only two or three manuscript copies of the Proclamation and Constitution.

The Proclamation and Constitution were undeniably revolutionary documents. They were closely modelled on their French originals, but modified in what Rhigas called "the Greek spirit". Where they deviated from their French models, they were, in the words of Professor Svolos, "more liberal, more democratic, and more humane". Unlike the French, who were legislating for a single, homogeneous nation, Rhigas was legislating for many nations and for Greeks everywhere, even (as he put it) καὶ εἰς τοὺς ἀντίποδας, ἐπειδὴ τὸ ἑλληνικὸν προζύμι ἐξαπλώθη καὶ εἰς τὰ δύο ἡμισφαίρια.

Rhigas' innovations shocked the Austrian authorities, and even shocked not a few Greeks who came to know of them. He was the first Greek to draft a constitution since Aristotle, the Macedonian tutor of his Macedonian hero, Alexander. His constitution was the first to frame a multinational democracy without discrimination of race or religion. It was the first to prescribe demotic as the official language for all purposes; the first to forbid torture and to abolish capital punishment; the first to make equal and compulsory the education of girls and boys, and even military service by both men and women. By implication, unlike the French constitution on which it was modelled, it granted political equality to women as well.

Clearly these were revolutionary proposals. The Austrian police were right to see a connection between the last two items on their charge-sheet and the four preceding items, but they were wrong in identifying the connection. In reality, the connection was not that all six were items in a revolutionary conspiracy, but that Rhigas' aim was the social, moral and cultural as well as the political emancipation of the Greek people. It would have been too much to expect the police to go back to Rhigas' earlier works, before he became a committed rebel against tyranny; but if they had done so, they might have better understood his objects. On the other hand, they might not; they might have been confirmed in their suspicions. At any rate, these earlier works

also deserve consideration as tentative but formative elements in his great plan.

Probably Rhigas' first publication was the Φυσικῆς Ἀπάνθισμα, written to introduce young Greeks to modern science as taught in French and German textbooks. It was written in demotic Greek, and constructed in the form of questions and answers between a student and a teacher, which was probably Rhigas' own method of instruction. The book might not have worried the police very much until they came to a note at the very end, announcing that Rhigas was also engaged in translating Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois*. This would not have pleased the police at all, but in fact no more was ever heard of this work.

In the same year as the Φυσικῆς Ἀπάνθισμα Rhigas published a very different work, aimed at the cultural rather than the academic education of his compatriots. This was a collection of six romantic *novelle*, translated from French, under the title Τὸ Σχολεῖον τῶν νελικάτων ἐραστῶν. These were the first modern western romances ever translated into Greek, and they set a fashion which others followed. Rhigas' purpose was twofold: to introduce his readers to the social customs of western Europe, but at the same time to warn them against the pretentious snobbishness of pre-revolutionary France. Perhaps he was also issuing at the same time a warning to the Phanariote aristocracy of Constantinople, Bucharest and Yassy, who would also suffer the same fate as the French aristocracy if a similar revolution broke out within the Ottoman Empire.

Another publication for which Rhigas was responsible was the first printed edition of the *Prophecies of Agathangelos*. Although attributed to a 13th-century monk, they were in fact written in the middle of the 18th century by the Archimandrite Theoklitos Polyeidis on Mount Athos. It may have been because Rhigas spent some time on Mount Athos in his youth that he became interested in the *Prophecies*. They greatly excited the Greeks, because they seemed to foretell the liberation of Greece by the Russians. Presumably the Austrian censorship did not study the text, because if they had done so they might have noticed that it also foretold the downfall of the Austrian Empire.

It is impossible to say where, when and by whom the *Prophecies of Agathangelos* were printed, because the title-page bears the absurd inscription "Agathoupolis 1279". I doubt whether the Poulios brothers would have printed such a title-page. But it is certain that they were the printers of Rhigas' Σχολεῖον τῶν νελικάτων ἐραστῶν as well as most of Rhigas' later publications, both educational and revolutionary. These two brothers from Mace-

donia, George and Publius, were perhaps the closest of all Rhigas' associates during the last years of his life, from 1790 to 1798.

In addition to printing books for him, they also published the Greek *Ephimeris* at Vienna, which became essential reading for the Greek community abroad. It was read even by the Turks at Constantinople, and as far afield as Vidin, no doubt among others by the Pasha Osman Pasvanoglou, a friend and possibly an ἀδελφοποιτός of Rhigas.

Rhigas himself subscribed to the *Ephimeris* and helped to influence its policy in the direction of French republican ideas. He used it to advertise his publications, such as the Map of Hellas; and the *Ephimeris* published two poems in praise of his maps. The *Ephimeris* was thought to be so closely connected with Rhigas that when he was arrested at Trieste in December 1797, it was closed by order of the Austrian government two weeks later. George Poullos was arrested a few weeks after Rhigas, and his brother only escaped arrest because he was travelling on business in Vallachia and Moldavia. Publius Poullos' so-called business included helping dissident Poles to escape from Austria, and distributing revolutionary French books and publications of Rhigas.

It is obvious therefore that the Poullos brothers were not only very closely connected with Rhigas in sympathy, but also that they fully understood the interaction of his two guiding ideas: cultural emancipation and revolutionary action. Those whom Rhigas attracted to his cause were all men, mostly very young, who appreciated this dual purpose. Many of them were Macedonians living in the Austrian Empire. Some of their names are known, but almost certainly many more are not.

According to Christopher Perrhaivos, who was with Rhigas when he was arrested, Rhigas was carrying with him a number of letters from wealthy merchants in Vienna to their relatives in Epiros, Thessaly and Macedonia, urging them να συνδράμωσιν ἕκαστος τὸ κατὰ δύναμιν εἰς τὰς ὑπὲρ ἐλευθερίας χρηματικὰς ἀνάγκας. Fortunately Perrhaivos, who was not arrested, was able to destroy the letters and warn those who had written them.

This story tells us two things about Rhigas' struggle for Greek liberation. First, he had serious support from reputable Greek merchants, many of whom were also men of high education as well as patriotism. There are said to have been about 400,000 Greeks in the Austrian Empire, and most of the trade between southern Europe and the Levant was in their hands, so they were well able to support Rhigas. The second thing this story tells us is that Rhigas' support came chiefly from Greeks whose roots were in northern Greece—Epiros, Thessaly, and Macedonia.

Rhigas could even claim to be an honorary Macedonian himself, since as a youth he is said to have served for a time as an ἀρματολός on Mount Olympos with a relative from Litokhoros. Whether or not this experience gave him a special sympathy with the Macedonians, it is certain that Macedonians formed the largest single group among those who were implicated with Rhigas when he was arrested.

The figures are quite specific on this point. The total of those arrested shortly after Rhigas himself was sixteen. Three of these were released before long for various reasons. Three more were native-born Austrian subjects (though two of the three had Greek ancestry). If we subtract these six from the total, we are left with ten Greeks imprisoned with Rhigas. Six of these ten were Macedonians.

Of these six, three had acquired foreign nationality, and were therefore not surrendered to the Turkish authorities but sent into exile in Germany. These three were George Poullos, aged 32, born at Siatista; George Theocharis, aged 40, born at Kastoria; and Constantine Doukas, aged 45, born at Siatista. The other three, like Rhigas, were technically still Ottoman subjects, and were therefore surrendered with him to the Turks to be executed, though without any judicial process of any kind. These three were Theocharis Torountzias, aged 22, born at Siatista; and two brothers, Ioannis and Panayotis Emmanuel, aged 24 and 22, both born at Kastoria. These last three were the youngest of the Macedonian group, and therefore had had no time to free themselves from Ottoman nationality.

Most of what is known about all of them is to be found in the records of their interrogation at Vienna. Naturally they did their best not to incriminate themselves, but since they did not regard their activities as criminal, most of what they said could be accepted as true. They emphasised as much as they could the cultural side of their activities. Poullos, for instance, had plans to publish classical texts in order to enlighten the Greeks on their state of slavery. He discussed the plan with the two Emmanuel brothers, both of whom had been well educated at Kastoria. Ioannis had written a text-book on mathematics, which was published at Vienna; and Rhigas had a copy of it. Panayotis said that he approved of Rhigas' Constitution because it could be compared with that of Solon. Probably he had in mind the cancellation of debts, ("σεισάχθεια"), a measure of Solon's which was added by Rhigas to his French model of the *Rights of Man* (Art. 35).

In saying this, however, he was admitting that he had read the Constitution. One by one, they all admitted this, and much more. They had sung the *Thourios*. They realised the significance of the Map of Hellas, the *Anacharsis*,

the portrait of Alexander. They knew about Rhigas' attempts to make contact with Napoleon, and about his intention to go to Greece. Some of them admitted their intention to follow him there. At first it had all seemed innocently patriotic, but under interrogation it was made to seem suspicious and even seditious.

The interrogators put the worst construction on every item of information. Constantine Doukas, for example, had travelled widely as a merchant; he had acquired Russian nationality; he had visited London, Paris and Amsterdam; so what was he doing in Vienna? They suspected that he had been involved in secret contacts with the French even earlier than Rhigas' efforts.

But the suspicions of the interrogators were arbitrary and unpredictable. For example, they regarded the *Anacharsis* as a seditious work, but they handled it quite inconsistently. After the execution of Rhigas and his fellow-victims, the families of two of them (the Cypriot Karatzas and the Macedonian Torountzias) requested the return of their personal property. The request was granted, with the exception of copies of *Anacharsis* because it was a revolutionary publication. Yet the *Anacharsis* had been freely on sale at Vienna for years in French and German. Moreover, Rhigas' friend Sakellarios, who had translated the first three volumes of *Anacharsis* into Greek, was left unmolested.

Sakellarios, born at Kozani in 1765, was perhaps the most talented of all Rhigas' Macedonian friends. He was a doctor, a poet, a philosopher, a translator and scholar. He wrote romantic and patriotic verses, and made the first Greek adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. He published works on medicine and archaeology. He translated the great History of Greece by Louis Cousin Despréaux. One of Rhigas' fellow-prisoners, under interrogation, described him as "wholly possessed by ideas of the liberation of Greece". Nevertheless, he was not among those incriminated when Rhigas was arrested.

Since Sakellarios had translated three volumes of the *Anacharsis*, which the police regarded as a seditious work, Sakellarios' immunity seems paradoxical; all the more so when his case is compared with that of another young associate of Rhigas, Demetrios Nikolides, who did no more than begin the translation of volume VII of the *Anacharsis*, which was never finished or published. Yet Nikolides was surrendered to the Turks to be executed, while Sakellarios was immune. The basis of the paradoxical contrast is simple: the decisions of the Austrian authorities had nothing to do with justice or legality. They surrendered their victims not because they were criminals but simply because they were Ottoman subjects, whose surrender the Turks demanded.

As for those who were not Ottoman subjects, the police found it very

difficult to define any crime at all that they had committed. George Poullos and George Theocharis were therefore exiled to Leipzig because they could not possibly be put on trial. Both led very respectable lives at Leipzig, and prospered as businessmen. Both were eventually allowed to return to Vienna, but Theocharis preferred Leipzig, and lived there to the end of his life as Greek Consul. He was much helped by his marriage to a German wife. Poullos, on the other hand, never escaped entirely from the shadow of suspicion at Vienna. He was kept under surveillance because he was thought to be a Freemason.

That completes the account of Rhigas' Macedonian associates, so far as their names are known. But a few more names must be mentioned in the aftermath of Rhigas' tragedy. First, it has to be admitted with regret that the man who betrayed Rhigas to the Austrian police, Demetrios Oikonomos, was himself a Macedonian, born at Kozani. Another who cannot be forgiven is Michael Perdikaris, born at Kozani also, who knew Rhigas as a student at Bucharest. He declared, in a prolonged attack on Rhigas, that Oikonomos should not be called a traitor because by informing the police ἐστάθη τοῦ ὄλου τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἔθνους ἡ σωτηρία. But Perdikaris also showed how little respect he deserved by saying that he had no interest in the liberation of Greece, and he prayed to God ν' ἀυξάνη καὶ νὰ στερεῶνη τὸ ὑψηλὸν Κράτος τῆς ἐπιεικεστάτης Μοναρχίας—meaning the Sultanate.

I leave Perdikaris, to come to a much more attractive character, George Zaviras, who was born at Siatista and educated at Thessaloniki, but spent most of his adult life in Hungary and Germany. He compiled in about 1804 the first biographical dictionary of Greek writers, and he was the first to recognise Rhigas as an important writer, though his Νέα Ἑλλάς ἢ Ἑλληνικὸν θέατρον was not published until 1872. He described Rhigas as ἀνὴρ πεπαιδευμένος καὶ ἐξ ἄκρον ζηλωτῆς τοῦ γένους and he called Rhigas' fellow-victims πάντων ἐγκωμίων ἄξιτοι. He also lamented the closure of the Poullos press and *Ephimeris*. They would, he wrote, otherwise have published important works which would have served ὡς ἄλλαι τινὲς βαθμίδες πρὸς τὴν τοῦ πρώην ἐλικῶνος τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἀνάβασιν. That was a verdict which would have pleased both Rhigas and Poullos, and it showed that Zaviras at least understood the nature of their intended revolution.

It can be seen, however, that Rhigas was still a controversial figure. He was not yet accepted as a national hero and protomartyr. Even after independence was achieved, opinions about him were still divided. The early historians, such as Rizos Neroulos and Ioannis Philemon, still criticised him. It is not easy to say exactly when the transformation of his reputation began, but perhaps the turning-point was marked when Theodore Kolokotronis wrote in

his old age that: 'Ο Ρήγας Φεραῖος ἐστάθη ὁ μέγας εὐεργέτης τῆς φυλῆς μας· τὸ μελάνι του θά εἶναι πολύτιμον ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὅσον τὸ αἷμα τῶν ἀγίων. No one could dispute the authority of the great revolutionary *klephtis* of the Morea. But the families of Rhigas' fellow-victims in Macedonia, Epiros, Thessaly and the islands had known it all along.