

THE PHILIKE HETAIRIA OF RHIGAS AND THE GREEKS OF PEST

The spread of the ideas of the Enlightenment into the middle Danube basin was not limited to the Magyar inhabitants alone. The Greeks of Hungary, too, especially those residing in Pest, were exposed to the same wind of liberalism that had swept across that part of Europe. They received the first sparks of knowledge of this intellectual movement primarily from two sources: the Hungarian intelligentsia of the Enlightenment, and their own countrymen who resided in the neighbouring countries. Already in the latter half of the 18th century, there existed a considerable number of individuals who had been fired by this spirit of Enlightenment. Of these, many had centred their activities in the early 1770s in two lodges of Freemasons that had proclaimed the brotherhood of men.

But the Greeks of Pest who were for the most part merchants were in constant communication with their compatriots in the nearby countries with whom, understandably, the exchanges were not solely of a business nature, but included a cultivation of ideas.

The question will arise as to whether the Greeks of Pest embraced these new ideas.

It appears certain that the great majority of the Greeks, especially those of the older generation, was unreceptive to any influences that came from the Enlightenment. And in fact they looked upon the indifference to religious tradition displayed by the more cultured younger men with certain misgivings.

Georgios Zaviras, one of the intellectual leaders of the Greek community of Hungary,¹ in an exercise in translation² which he had composed for a student, was struck by the fact that many of the youth of the community frequented the cafés rather than attended church services and wasted their money and precious time in such pastimes rather than investing in edifying religious texts. He adds that they read all kinds of trash including erotic literature and other such

1. E. Horváth, *Georgios Zaviras, His Life and Works*, Budapest, 1937.

2. Ö. Füves, "Zaviras.... Übersetzer Cornelius Nepos," in *Erانيتis* 2 (1964) pp. 60-63.

corrupting books and, indeed, that a few even delved in Deistic (the liberal urban philosophic current), in atheistic and in antireligious works. These few comments by Zaviras, reflecting his deep concern for the relatively few young Greek intellectuals, is but a reflection of the ideas of the large majority of the Greeks.

The Enlightenment found few supporters in the Greek circles of Pest, firstly because the greater number of Greek families began to settle permanently in Pest only after the "Oath of Faith" had been introduced in the latter decades of the 18th century. Secondly, the majority of the Greek youth carried on the professions of their fathers, and very few of those were cultured. The number of young men who pursued the path of intellectual movements was relatively very small. And thirdly, the Orthodox faith for the Greeks of the diaspora constituted a cohesive power, and therefore any liberal movement such as the Deistic would run counter to this traditional force. It is not surprising therefore that I could not uncover any information concerning the active participation of Greeks in the lodges of Freemasons, even though Prince Alexander,³ the youngest brother of Constantine Mourouzis Mavrogordatos, to surmount his financial difficulties, had tried to establish a lodge in Pest which due to his own skulduggery attracted only a few members and was almost stillborn.⁴ We also know that a priest of the Serbian church of Pest, one George Milivoin, who served as spiritual leader of the Greeks as well, since the latter had not yet acquired a church of their own, played a leading role in the lodge of Pest under the name of Photius, which lodge was known as the "Megalocardia."⁵ But it can be ascertained that none of these leaders had any influence over the Greeks of Pest.

A far greater stir was caused in Greek circles, not to mention other nationalities, by the ideals of the French Revolution because these aroused among them the hope for a free Greece, especially following the proclamation of the French Convention of November 19, 1792, by which France declared that she was prepared to support all peoples struggling for their freedom. It was under this influence that the revolutionary movement of the radical Magyar Jacobins⁶ was founded at whose head in the early part of 1794 was Ignác Martinovics. The Hapsburg Emperor Francis I had already on May 20, 1795 crushed this

3. Concerning his life and involvement in the lodge of Nangsemben, and other information on Prince Alexander Mourouzis, see L. Abafi, *Geschichte der Freimaurerei*, Budapest, 1893, Vol. III, pp. 225, 227, 232 and 242. The lodge of Nangsemben had besides Mourouzis several other Greek members. See above work, p. 226.

4. Concerning the founding of a lodge by Mourouzis in Pest, see E. Jancsó, *The literary and historical role of the Hungarian lodge of Freemasons in the 18th Century*, Cluj, 1936, pp. 205-207, and 243.

5. L. Abafi, *op. cit.*, p. 387 and E. Jancsó, *op. cit.* pp. 202, 211.

6. K. Benda, *The Magyar Jacobins*, Budapest, 1957.

organization which had as its aim national recognition, freedom and equality. The leaders of the movement were executed. We read in the documents covering the trial of the Jacobins that one of the accused, a law student László Erdélyi had testified to the effect that a copy of the statutes of the secret society established by Martinovics had been given him by a fellow student of law, Angelakis⁷ by name, who had invited him to join the organization. The young Angelakis was the son of Angelakis Laskaris, a Greek merchant of Pest, and a man of weight in the community.⁸ When it was discovered by the police that the said young Greek had been dead for about a year,⁹ Erdélyi confessed that the entire story concerning the young Angelakis was his own fabrication to cover up for Szolártsik. With this confession, the involvement of the young Greek in the Martinovics plot was confuted. But it is probable that Erdélyi by using the name of Angelakis, wished to throw the blame on someone else whose ties with the secret society could not have been altogether negative, otherwise it would have become very obvious that his confession was false.

In the year following the suppression of the Martinovics plot, a more serious organization, the Society of Friends, which had as its purpose the freedom of the Greek race and which had been founded earlier, already in 1780, in Bucharest, began to take hold in the scattered communities of the Greeks. The poet Rhigas Pheraeus of Velestino arrived in Vienna in August of 1796. Once having formed the organization there, he assumed leadership over the entire secret society¹⁰ which had branches throughout Europe. Its aim was to join the peoples of the Balkans in the common cause in conjunction with the help of France to overthrow Ottoman rule, and at the same time to secure freedom for the Greeks in their own country. This society attracted a wide circle of the Greeks of Pest since the desire for the reconstitution of a Greek nation was not

7. *The documents of the Magyar Jacobins*, Budapest, 1952, Vol. II, pp. 513, 649, and Vol. III, pp. 32-33, 35.

8. Angelakis Laskaris had been living in Pest since 1746. In 1773 he became a member of the League of Merchants in Pest and died in 1798 at the age of 90.

9. In his will drawn up before his death, dated March 8, 1798, Angelakis Laskaris senior left to his son George a stipend of 100 florins annually to complete his studies. In accordance with this evidence it appears that Angelakis Laskaris had a younger son who was a student (Archives of Budapest, Testamenta et Inventaria a.m. 807).

10. Documents relating to Rhigas were first filed and arranged by Giori, who is of Magyar descent, in the Viennese archives. For the main bibliography of Rhigas, see S. Lambros, *Unpublished material on Rhigas Velesstinlis*, Athens, 1891; C. Amantos, *Unpublished material on Rhigas Velesstinlis*, Athens, 1930; A. Daskalakis, *Rhigas Velesstinlis* Paris, 1937; and L. Vranoussis, *Rhigas Velesstinlis*, Athens, 1963.

limited to the small group of intelligentsia alone but included the merchants as well. Mention is made in the history of Greek literature that in the wide network of lodges established throughout Europe, one was also formed in Pest.¹¹ The movement in Pest had already begun before Rhigas took up residence in Vienna. This is indicated by the fact that Rizos Dormoussis, whose name was included in the list of addresses of Rhigas' correspondents which had been confiscated by the authorities and was used as evidence against him, had died in March, 1794.¹²

Concerning the establishment of a branch of the Society of Friends in Pest, no evidence could be found, and this because of the secret nature of the movement. But on the activities of this secret revolutionary movement in Pest which became very energetic beginning in 1796, certain conclusions can be drawn.

As appears from the register of the community of Greeks and Macedonian Vlachs, recorded in Greek,¹³ which has been discovered recently, after the arrest of Rhigas on December 19, an entry dated December 31, 1797 in the records explicitly prohibits teachers and students to pay visits to homes and to perform a certain "innovation" which does not involve church and school, without the express approval of the elders of the community, and this to guard the interests of the Greek nation. Such decision by the church community makes apparent that a restriction was necessary because the Greeks would as a custom congregate in the private homes on holidays when inevitably new ideas and plans concerning the fate of the Greek race were discussed. The leaders of the Greek community, very disturbed by the arrest of Rhigas, thought it wise to restrain both teachers and students from involvement in any revolutionary activity. We do not know precisely who of the Greeks belonged to the movement, since it was a secret organization, but certain facts do emerge.

In the address book of Rhigas, referred to above, besides the name of Rizos Dormoussis, another is recorded, that of one John Tsoukas. The prosecutor considered these two individuals as agents of the secret society in Pest.

Six of those accused with Rhigas were expelled from the Empire on April 28, 1798 on grounds of involvement in the plot. Among these was a young man of Pest by name Constantine Toullio.¹⁴

11. John Cordatos, *History of Modern Greece*, Athens, 1957. Vol. I, p. 343.

12. Vranousis, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

13. The register is found in the archives of the Hungarian Orthodox Church Community of Budapest.

14. Vranousis, *op. cit.*, p. 128. Besides Pest, the Toullio family resided in Vatz.

Of those seven colleagues of Rhigas who were executed on June 24, 1798, John Karatzas,¹⁵ originally from Nicosia in Cyprus, was the sexton and bell-ringer of the Greek church of Pest. This cultivated Greek, aged 31, began to serve as the sexton on June 18, 1797, since it gave him ample opportunity to meet with many of his compatriots. The greatest crime of Karatzas for which he had to pay the ultimate penalty of death was that he attempted to reprint the manifesto of Rhigas. I managed to find two rulings of the church community, the contract and a supplementary contract¹⁶ of this candle-lighter as well as two personally autographed receipts.

The writings of Rhigas, and among these the most important manifesto, reached the hands of the revolutionary society of the Greeks of Pest in a very short time. This emerges from the testimony of another victim,¹⁷ originally from Siatista, the merchant Theocharis Tourountzias, 22 years old, according to which he distributed several works of Rhigas in Pest and other cities to be copied. When he referred to the manifesto at Leter's café, he discovered that the Greeks of Pest were already aware of the pamphlets. This would indicate that the Greeks of Pest were in direct touch with the central lodge in Vienna and that Tourountzias was not the major contact between the cities. The printed works which they received from Vienna were copied and distributed in their own community. The revolutionary hymn of Rhigas, the "Thourios" or War Hymn, was also sung in Pest. When Rhigas was executed, the Society of Friends in Pest was disbanded, as had been the Martinovics movement before it, but the ideas of Rhigas continued to live strongly in the minds of the Greeks.

Contemporary Greek scholars, including Professor Daskalakis, believe that there existed a link between the Martinovics conspiracy and the Rhigas movement.¹⁸ It is most unlikely that the two leaders had any personal relationships. It is known that Rhigas was in Vienna between June 1790 and January 1791 when Martinovics was a secret agent and informer of the Emperor. And then, only after the execution of the latter, in 1796, do we meet Rhigas

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 120, 130.

16. Decisions of the church community of June 18, 1797 and October 11, 1797. See Ö. Füves, "Joannes Karatzas als Küster der griechischen Kirchengemeinde zu Pest," in *Eranistis*, 5 (1967), pp. 201-204.

17. E. Horvath, "Relationships between the Greeks of Hungary and the national Greek movements," *EPHK*, 1942, pp. 118-119. Also Ö. Füves, "Hungarian aspects of the Greek materials in the Austrian archives," *Antik Tanulmányok*, 9 (1962), p. 230.

18. J. Cordatos refers to the Martinovics conspiracy in his book, *Rhigas Pheraeus and his Age*, Athens, 1931, p. 37. In his lecture in Budapest in 1964, Professor Daskalakis dealt with the possible links between the two conspiracies.

in the Austrian capital. But because the origins of both revolutionary movements and their aims were identical, that is, to transplant the proclamations of the French urban revolution concerning human rights and to adapt them to their own peoples and reality, and moreover, since the organizations of both the Hungarians and the Greeks aimed at obtaining their liberty with French assistance were strikingly similar, we should not expect any direct links between the two. And, moreover, there is a gap of several years between the final formation of the two secret societies. All this naturally does not preclude the possibility that through the Greeks of Pest, such as Dormoussis and Tsoukas, that Rhigas had become aware of the movement of the Magyar Jacobins, was familiar with their aims and perhaps drew certain lessons from them for his own movement.¹⁹

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19. Ö. Fűves, A *Rigas-féle Baráti Társaság és a pesti gönögük*, *Századok*, 104 (1970) 75-77.