

Rigas Feraios and Adamantios Korais: two prominent figures of the Greek Enlightenment

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Abstract : *The aim of this study is to present a survey of the main thoughts, ideas and action of Rigas Feraios or Velestinlis and Adamantios Korais, two prominent figures of the Greek Enlightenment, as well as their contribution to the awakening of the Greek subjects of the Ottoman Empire and the outbreak of the Greek Revolution.*

Keywords: *Adamantios Korais, Greek Enlightenment, Greek Revolution, Rigas Fereos (Velestinlis).*

I. INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 18th century, one of the most eminent representatives of the new political thought in the Balkans was Rigas Feraios or Velestinlis due to his birthplace, Velestino of Thessaly. He was a Hellenized Vlach and a very well educated person. He had studied in detail the administrative framework of the Ottoman Empire and therefore he was able to recommend the political and social reform of the Greek Ottoman society which was based on the ideas of political humanism and the Enlightenment. On the other hand, Adamantios Korais was a Greek scholar, born in Smyrna in 1748. He was exceptionally passionate about philosophy, literacy and linguistics. Most of his life he stayed in Paris where he decided to translate ancient Greek authors and eventually he produced thirty volumes of translations, being one of the first modern Greek philologists and publishers of ancient Greek literature. He fervently worked on the intellectual revival of the Greeks and contributed to the transformation of the Greek society and the ultimate success of the Greek National movement.

II. Rigas Feraios' action

Rigas Feraios is considered to be the founder of the tradition of Balkan Radicalism. He became famous due to his political argumentation and revolutionary action in terms of his writing and publishing work. He embraced the ideas of Montesquieu, Rousseau and the European Enlightenment, envisioning a radical change for the Balkans which was under Ottoman rule.¹ Velestinlis raised with unequivocal political terms the most critical issue, the greatest problem that lurks in all the quests of the Modern Greek Enlightenment, that of national liberation. He envisioned the liberation of all the Balkan peoples and the creation of a single democratic state. His political proposal not only addresses the shaking of the foreign yoke and the achievement of national sovereignty, it also pictures the state regulations which were equivalent to a profound reform of the institutions of Balkan society introducing political equality for all citizens. He tried to sow the seeds of a revolution that would overthrow Ottoman despotism and achieve the liberation of the Greeks and other Balkan peoples. His publications of the years 1796-1797 constituted the final stage of an enlightening program aimed at the moral and psychological preparation of this endeavor. The concept of the Revolution that appears in the corpus of Rigas' works, matured under the influence of the French Revolution. In addition, Rigas had served at the Phanarion, the Greek quarter of Constantinople as secretary of Alexandros Ypsilantis as well as in Wallachia as secretary of the Prince N. Karatzas, therefore he knew that the liberation of the Greek nation was absolutely necessary and therefore he tried to persuade the enslaved Greeks to revolt.

¹ Π. Μ. Κιτρομηλίδης, *Το όραμα της ελευθερίας στην ελληνική κοινωνία. Από την πολιτική σκέψη στην πολιτική πράξη*, Πορεία, Αθήνα, 1992, σ. 26.

III. Rigas Feraios' publications

Rigas began his writing and publishing career in 1790 in Vienna with his first books, *School of Delicate Lovers* (*Σχολεῖον τῶν Ντελικάτων Ερασιῶν*) and *Anthology of Physics* (*Φυσικῆς Ἀπάνθισμα*). In the following years, Rigas indulged not only in his writing and publishing work but also in revolutionary action. He translated works that show his passion for freedom and at the same time he printed his monumental cartographic works, especially the *Charta (Map) of Greece* (1797) (*Χάρτα τῆς Ἑλλάδος*), in twelve large sheets, as well as maps of the two hegemonies, the *New Map of Wallachia* (1797) (*Νέα Χάρτα τῆς Βλαχίας*), and the *General Map of Moldova* (1797) *Γενικὴ Χάρτα τῆς Μολδαβίας*. These maps alongside with the Pamphlet Alexander the Great depict Rigas' national liberation and state vision. Rigas in his work *Anthology of Physics* which was written in the form of a dialogue between a student and a teacher, criticized the traditional authority and superstition, aiming at clarity in the presentation of ideas. This work promoted the emancipation of the human being both socially and morally.

The *Charta of Rigas* was printed in 1797 in Vienna. It consists of twelve independent maps, which when displayed together side by side present the entire Balkan Peninsula, its history, place names, including a number of mythological and historical references. The Charta is written in the Greek language. It is one of the most important works of the Modern Greek Enlightenment, which - as already said- embodies Rigas' vision for the liberation of the Greek Nation and emphasizes the leading role of Greece in the Balkans. The sheets of the map are about 50x70 cm each. It is considered to be the largest map of the Balkans at that time. The full title appears on the fourth page: "Map of Greece containing its islands and part of its Numerous Colonies in Europe and Asia Minor. First published by Rigas Velestinlis of Thessaly, in favor of the Greeks and Philhellenes. It was engraved in 1797 by François Müller in Vienna"².

Rigas through his publications aimed at the awakening of the enslaved Greeks reminding them the glorious past of the Greek antiquity and trying to infuse and strengthen their desire for freedom. More specifically he tried to sow the seeds of a revolution which would overthrow Ottoman despotism and achieve the liberation of the Greeks and other Balkan peoples. Rigas' printed pamphlets which were based on the principles of the French Revolution focused on the moral and psychological preparation of the Greeks for this endeavor.

Part of Rigas' enlightening project of the Greek nation was the publication of two more pamphlets: the so called revolutionary manifesto "*New Political Constitution of the Inhabitants of Rumeli, Asia Minor, the Islands of the Aegean, and the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia*", and the booklet of military tactics "*Egolpion Stratigiko*". The "*New Political Constitution*" included the "*Revolutionary Proclamation*", the "*Constitution of the Hellenic Republic*" and "*Thourios*" (*Θούριος*), a battle-hymn where Rigas wrote, "It's better to live one hour as a free man than forty years as a slave and prisoner"³.

IV. Rigas Feraios' plans and visions

The most important part of Rigas' legacy is definitely the political ideas expressed in the revolutionary manifesto *Thourios*, especially the idea of equality of all ethnic groups as well as the multicultural status of the citizens. The Hellenic Republic which Rigas aspired, would not be exclusively a state of the Greeks, but of all the peoples who were invited through the battle hymn *Thourios* to participate in that state, including the Turks and other Muslim population groups. The Hellenic Republic would be Greek in a cultural sense, whilst all Enlightenment's ideals would be incorporated into the new state.

Rigas endeavor aimed at a radical restructuring of the Greek political and social reality, which would have been possible if the then existing living conditions of the Greeks were revolutionized. Consequently, he aspired to build a society based on the principles of Freedom, Equality and Brotherhood, as he was influenced by the French Revolution. He envisioned a political and social system which would be equal in all spheres of public

² In Greek: *Χάρτα τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐν ἣ περιέχονται αἱ νῆσοι αὐτῆς καὶ μέρος τῶν εἰς τὴν Ἑυρώπην καὶ Μικρὰν Ἀσίαν Πολυάριθμον Ἀποικιῶν Αὐτῆς. Νῦν πρῶτον ἐκδοθεῖσα παρὰ τοῦ Ρήγα Βελεστινλή Θεταλλοῦ, χάριν τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ Φιλελλήνων. 1797 ἐχαράχθη παρὰ τοῦ Φρανσουὰ Μύλλερ ἐν Βιέννῃ.*

³ In Greek: «Καλύτερα μιᾶς ὥρας ἐλευθέρῃ ζωῇ παρὰ σαράντα χρόνια σκλαβιά καὶ φυλακῆ».

life, where the mass of the citizens would participate in the management of the public affairs on the one hand, and the complete exclusion of the Church from the hierarchy of the state system on the other. However, it needs to be clarified that Rigas did not aspire a new state founded on representative government and parliamentary procedures, but based on the universal participation of the citizens without any racial and religious discriminations.

The Orthodox Church had unequivocally condemned Rigas and his work because of his views as he “offended the main values of the Christian people, which the Church had for centuries maintained and guarded”. Nevertheless Rigas implemented a specific revolutionary plan for the Balkan people which meant the absolute rupture with the past and the Ottoman oppression. Rigas’ purpose was the creation of a representative Democracy with the general name, "Greek Democracy". However, his insistence on the cultural predominance of the Greeks and the use of the Greek language found little interest among other peoples of the Balkan Peninsula.

Nevertheless Rigas ambitious plans and efforts went astray because he was eventually betrayed and arrested by the Austrian authorities, a then ally of the Ottoman Empire, handed over together with his accomplices to the Ottoman Governor of Belgrade in the summer of 1787 where they were struggled.

Rigas with his written works and his way of thinking supported the creation a new social, political and moral order, which would inaugurate a new way of life. In adopting his radical political work, Rigas was influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment and the French revolutionary ideology. Undoubtedly Rigas set himself at the starting point of a long political upheaval that lasted almost three decades serving as an inspiration to future generations. The revolutionary effervescence became particularly evident through the successive uprisings of the Balkan peoples and the Greeks, which had as their final station the Revolution of 1821.

V. Adamantios Korais’ beliefs and visions

Adamantios Korais (1748-1833) was also a pioneer of the Greek Enlightenment who fought as well for the awakening of the enslaved Greeks. Influenced by the events of the French Revolution which he witnessed, decided to raise the awareness of philhellenic circles in Europe about the Greeks’ state in the Ottoman Empire. At the same time with his writings, he devoted himself in stimulating and encouraging the Greeks. Korais’ ultimate goal, which is evident in all his works, was the foundation of liberalism and the attempt to infuse it in the consciences of the Greek world.

He believed that state radicalism was an instrument of both moral and social reform. Korais’ state radicalism was based on a combination of political freedom and reorganization of education in Greek society. He also pointed out the necessity of introducing a simpler form of language, so that all Greeks would have the possibility of education.

VI. Adamantios Korais’ on the Education of the Greeks

Korais believed that the evolution of humanity was defined by the struggle between civilization and barbarism. The effects of this barbarism were evident in the behavior of both people and leaders. Studying Adamantios Korais’ writing, becomes apparent that he strongly believed that the recovery of the Greek people could only be achieved through the transmission with the "lights of Europe", while - at the same time-commercial development and shipping were a decisive factor for attaining the Greek's education and the achievement of freedom. Korais believed that the establishment of Greek schools and the return of a number of scholars from the universities of Western Europe, where they had come under the influence of the ideas of the Enlightenment, would contribute the outmost to the intellectual and cultural revival of the Ottoman Greeks. Korais stated that the Greeks could free themselves from the Ottoman yoke through education. Consequently the political emancipation of Greek society could only occur through the cultural and educational revival of the Greek Nation. Korais pointed out that cultural revival was a transitional stage leading to the ultimate goal which

was national liberation. For Korais, the rupture with tradition including the Orthodox Church played a decisive role for the Greeks' future.⁴

He believed that education would ensure not only the achievement of independence but also the establishment of a proper constitution for an independent state. Korais in his writings remained strongly attached to the belief that the panacea for the degraded condition of the Greeks was education and through education the Greeks would manage to establish a democratic state, as Korais himself had envisioned. In essence, he envisioned a community that all its members would be obedient to the laws. It seems that Korais had reached these positions by studying Rousseau -because Rousseau attached special importance to the citizen's obedience to the laws- whilst inspired by the French philosopher Montesquieu, Korais founded human society on the principle of equality between citizens. In addition, Korais showed particular interest in regulating the position of the clergy within the society of independent Greece. His enlightenment was not anti-Christian, on the contrary he hated atheists. What he really wanted was the revival of the authentic spiritual mission of the clergy.

VII. Adamantios Korais on the Greek Language

In his work "Improvised Reflections on Greek Education and Language" (*Αυτοσχέδιοι Στοχασμοί περί της Ελληνικής Παιδείας και Γλώσσης*) Korais developed a theory about the connection between education and freedom, where he underlined the importance of the essential education of children rejecting the mechanical knowledge. Through this work, Korais prepared a system of political and cultural education for the Greek society. In the greatest part of this work, the problem of the Greek language was addressed. Between the two opposing trends of the time, the exclusive use of the then spoken language-namely the contemporary vernacular Demotic Greek- and the restoration of the ancient Greek language, Korais advocated an intermediate trend, or else "the middle way". Korais in accordance to his theory of the "middle path", he recommended the dissociation of all the foreign elements that had blemished the Greek language across the centuries and furthermore he suggested that the language of education should be simpler in order to be accessible to all, because – according to his opinion- the language was also related to the ethical education of the people. Korais hoped that through the cultivation of classical education the democratic ethos, virtue and devotion to the common good, would emerge and develop among the Greeks.

According to Korais, the Greek Revolution was not primarily a matter of military preparation. He believed that the uprising had to take place when the social conditions were right for the transition of the Greek society from the Ottoman despotism to liberal democracy. During the struggle for the Greek Independence he communicated with important personalities internationally aiming at promoting the Greek cause. Korais through his dense network of correspondence and with his successive publication of political pamphlets, tried to guide and instruct the revolted Greeks.

Up to the end of his life, Korais' main goal was the national liberation of the Greek society and its foundation according to the European liberalism. Through a thorough analysis of the overall work of Adamantios Korais, it becomes apparent that his thinking was influenced by the social theory of the European Enlightenment. Besides, his vision for freedom was one of the leading political claim of the Modern Greek Enlightenment, which contributed to the preparation of the struggle for the independence.

VIII. Conclusion

Rigas Feraios and Adamantios Korais were prominent personalities of the Greek Enlightenment. They both had come under the influence of the European Enlightenment and played an important role in the shaping of a new consciousness which would lead to the creation of the Greek National movement. They both devoted their lives for the achievement of the "Hellenic Revival", inspiring their compatriots to free themselves from the yoke of the Ottoman Sultan. Their presence was of critical importance because they made a major contribution to the emerging national movement as they provided the intellectual basis for the Greek people that paved the way for the Greek war of Independence which finally lead to the foundation of a Greek State. After all, the

⁴ Psarrou, E., "The Effect of the Greek Enlightenment on the Greek Revolution and the position of the Eastern Orthodox Church", *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, vol.4, Issue 09, September 2021, pp .2537-2540, esp. p. 2538

contribution of Rigas and Korais to the Greek cause is being depicted in the painting of Theophylos, a Greek folk painter who presented Greece as a suffering woman emerging from the ruins of the ancient Greek culture supported by Rigas and Korais⁵.

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⁵ For an image of the painter see: <http://www.eikastikon.gr/zografiki/theofilos.html>, Rigas Velestinlis and Adamantios Korais help Greece to stand on its feet, a painting of the 19th century, located in the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art by Theofilos (Hatzimichail), a Greek folk painter of modern Greek art.