

Chapter 9

Balkanizing the French Revolution: Rhigas's *New Political Constitution*

María López Villalba*

Le but de la société est le bonheur commun.

Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1793

The title of this paper refers to three important disciplines: Geography, Politics, and Translation Studies. Without going deeply into any of them individually nor theorizing their complex interrelationships, my purpose here is to present and analyse some aspects of Rhigas Velestinlis's enlightened and revolutionary project mainly from the point of view of translation. In order to do this, I will focus on what is perhaps his most politically ambitious work of translation, the *New Political Constitution*.

First of all, I think it would be helpful to establish certain criteria regarding what I understand the Balkans to be, in an attempt to offer a more precise meaning of the verb to *balkanize*, a concept to which I shall refer consistently throughout this paper.

As a methodological step towards defining the Balkans, I propose a cartographic distinction: on the one hand, the physical map of the Balkans and, on the other, the ideological map. In relation to the physical map, I will take, as my first reference, Rhigas himself, who at the end of the eighteenth century provided us with his concept of the Balkans in his *Maps*, in the patriotic hymn *Thourios* and in the work that concerns us, the *New Political Constitution of the Inhabitants of Rumeli, Asia Minor, the Mediterranean Islands, Moldavia and Wallachia*. The Greek Republic imagined by Rhigas included the European region of the Ottoman Empire and Asia Minor. Nicolae Iorga, in a conference that took place in Paris in 1933,¹ traces the frontiers of what he calls South-Eastern Europe: the whole of the Balkan

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¹ Nicolae Iorga, *La Révolution Française et le Sud-Est de l'Europe* (Bucharest 1934).

Peninsula, “purely Turkish, purely Ottoman” Turkey, the Romanian principalities and Transylvania. Much closer to our own days, Notis Botzaris² confines the Balkans to the region inhabited by the Balkan peoples: Serbians, Bosnians, Montenegrans, Albanians, Greeks, Romanians, Bulgarians, and Turks.

Regarding the ideological map, I consider that armed struggles in the Balkans throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—the nationalist uprisings, the Balkan wars, the two World Wars and the wars in former Yugoslavia—have definitely contributed to establishing an ideological cartography of the Balkans synonymous with chaos, barbarism, endemic conflict, and pre-modernity. Quoting Claudio Magris, “[b]alkan is an adjective that belongs to the lexicon of slander”. I cannot sufficiently stress the *invaluable* contribution of the mass media to the consolidation of this ideological cartography of the Balkans.³ Nevertheless, it would be unfair not to point out that not all mass media and cultural products have followed the same direction. For example, one can point to books such as *Danube* (1986) by Claudio Magris, *Mediterranean* (1987) by Predrag Matvejevic and *The Impossible Country* (1995) by Brian Hall; the films of Emir Kusturica, Theo Angelopoulos and Milcho Manchevski; or the music—made popular by big record companies under the rubric of *world music* or *ethnic music*—of Goran Bregović, Márta Sebestyén and Eleftheria Arvanitaki, among others.

Under the Influence of the French Revolution

The year 1789 marks a turning point in world history. According to Hannah Arendt, the ultimate goal of revolution—if we follow the American and French models, notwithstanding certain crucial differences between them—was the constitution of freedom, the *constitutio libertatis*, and the founding of a new political body, the Republic.⁴ According to this concept of the revolutionary process, the elaboration of a written constitution, as the foundation of a just government, was a *sine qua non* in guaranteeing the new order of things.

After the dethronement of Louis XVI, on 10 August 1792, the French Convention decided to draft a new constitution. The previous one, dating from 1791, had been in force for a year. The Constitution of 1793, or of the year 1, responded to the political and social challenges of the new

2 Notis Botzaris, *Visions balkaniques dans la préparation de la Révolution grecque 1789–1821* (Geneva 1962).

3 In particular, I would like to emphasize the handling of the war in ex-Yugoslavia (1991–1995) and the 78 days of humanitarian NATO war in Kosovo.

4 Hannah Arendt, *Sobre la revolución*, tr. Pedro Bravo (Madrid 1967) 151. I follow the Spanish edition of Hannah Arendt's *On Revolution*, 3rd ed. (New York 1963).

French Republic—the King was executed on 21 January 1793. Under the obvious influence of Rousseau's political thought, the new constitution established universal male suffrage, the preponderance of legislative power over the executive, and mechanisms of direct democracy and social rights. However, although it represented several important democratic advances, the Constitution of 1793 never came into force. The state of war and the lack of democratic maturity of French citizens made such a constitutional project unfeasible. On 22 August 1795 the new constitution of the French Republic was announced, the Constitution of year III. Preceded by a *Declaration of Rights and Duties*, the Constitution of 1795 was more precise and longer than the two previous ones, but it departed from many of the democratic premises. The goal was to reinforce the division of powers, which meant the triumph of Montesquieu's thought over Rousseau's. Legislative power was delegated to a bicameral parliament: the Council of the Five Hundred and the Council of Ancients (250 members). Executive power was reinforced by the creation of the Directory, which consisted of five members. This constitution was in force for five years until its revocation on 18th Brumaire, year VIII (9 November 1799).

Everything that was taking place in France was followed with great interest in the rest of Europe and America by both partisans and detractors of the liberal and democratic principles. French intellectuals became the ideal political and cultural interlocutors with whom Western cultural elites wished to "dialogue" on equal terms, that is to say, through books, newspapers, pamphlets, letters, social clubs, etc. For these intellectuals, translation became the most useful and widely used vehicle for carrying out this dialogue, not only with French culture but also with other cultures, including their own. Thus, the spread of enlightened and revolutionary ideas brought about a gradual democratization of culture, which, in its turn, brought about the emergence of a reading public. These socio-cultural processes coincide in time with the emergence of the nationalist movements that were to mark the nineteenth century in such a profound manner.⁵

Rhigas's Questions

The enlightened political enterprise of Rhigas Velestinlis was closely tied to translation and the publishing of books, maps and engravings. Rhigas was a prolific, versatile and explicitly political translator. In order to carry out his project he chose works and authors that were aiming at a new

⁵ Regarding the relationship between the birth of a reading public and the emergence of the modern nation at the end of the eighteenth century, see Peter Sloterdijk, *Regel für den Menschenpark* (Frankfurt 1999).

moral and cultural horizon: Rétif de la Bretonne, the Encyclopaedists, Montesquieu,⁶ Barthélemy, Marmontel, Metastasio, etc. He translated literature, essays of political thought, scientific treatises, encyclopaedia articles, maps, juridical-political texts, a manual of military tactics, and moral works. He translated from French, German and Italian into Greek, using in his works the spoken form (*aploun yfos*) of the Greek of his time.

Most importantly, however, Rhigas was also a revolutionary. For this reason, each one of his works must be understood as part of a cultural and political agenda, the main objectives of which were the revolution, the struggle against Ottoman tyranny and the *constitutio libertatis* for the different Balkan peoples through the creation of a Greek Republic based on the democratic and liberal principles of the French Revolution.

But how could one envision the desire for political and individual freedom in different Balkan peoples? How could one revolutionize the Ottoman Empire? How could one build a democratic state in the Balkans? Rhigas's translation of the French Constitution of 1793 is marked by these and other questions in such a way that the final result, the *New Political Constitution*, proposes answers to questions that the original text did not raise.

The *New Political Constitution*

In 1797, a year before his execution, Rhigas Velestinlis was in Vienna. He had decided to leave the Danubian principalities—having lived mainly in Bucharest (Wallachia) between 1786 and 1796—in order to spend all his time in frenetic publishing and propagandistic and subversive activity in the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As enlightened man, Rhigas was convinced that his hazardous venture could only succeed if people were sufficiently prepared for a revolution, and this preparation required instruction. Translation represented Rhigas's main means of carrying out this task.

In October of 1797, he published, anonymously and on single leaf paper, 3,000 copies of the *New Political Constitution of the Inhabitants of Rumeli, Asia Minor, the Mediterranean Islands, Moldavia and Wallachia*. This work contained a *sui generis* translation of the French Constitution of 1793, including several articles from the 1795 Constitution—the *Rights of Man* (35 articles), preceded by a *Preamble*, and the *Constitutional Act* (124 articles)—as well as the poem *Thourios*, his famous revolutionary song. The *New Political Constitution* was in fact a project that involved, in effect, drafting

⁶ In fact, we only have the announcement of this translation. On page 176 of *Φυσικής Απάνθισμα* [Anthology of Physics], Rhigas warns that the book "*Esprit de Loix par monsieur Montesquieu* [...]" has been half translated by me and shall be published as soon as I have finished it" (my translation), Leandros Vranousis (ed.), *Άπαντα Νεοελλήνων Κλασικών. Ρήγας Βελεστινλής-Φεράϊος*, 1 (Athens 1968) 289.

a constitution for the peoples of the Balkans—the first constitutional text of South-Eastern Europe—whereas *Thourios* embodied an explosive revolutionary agenda in the form of a song.

We do not know exactly when or where Rhigas came up with the idea of translating the French Constitution of 1793 into Greek, but it was possibly some time between 1793 and 1796 in Wallachia.⁷ However, we do know how he did so—I shall return to this later on—and we can gather why. Why did Rhigas Velestinlis translate the French Constitution of 1793 and not the one of 1795, which was the one that was in force? And, more revealing still for our analysis, why did he decide to translate the 1793 Constitution with several articles from the 1795 Constitution? Leaving aside reasons of affiliation to “Rousseau’s politics”, the answer may be found in the crucial role played by public opinion⁸ at the end of the eighteenth century. The new satellite republics that arose in Europe as a consequence of the political and territorial expansion of the French Republic, the so-called Sister Republics, were all endowed with constitutions.⁹ The wording of the constitutions themselves, although subject to debate in the respective parliaments, was dictated by Paris. All of them “reproduced the constitution of year III [1795], but reinforced their executive power”.¹⁰ The press and public opinion of Vienna—and the members of the Greek community were not an exception¹¹—echoed these political and juridical “experiments”.¹² In this sense, Rhigas did not act alone. When he decided to translate the text from 1793 introducing six articles from the 1795 text—precisely the ones which referred to the legislative [Art. 39 (1793) is replaced by Arts. 44, 73, 82, 76, 86 (1795)] and executive power [Art. 62 (1793) is replaced by Art. 132]—he

7 See Émile Legrand & Spyridon Lambros, *Ανέκδοτα έγγραφα περί Πήγη Βελεστινλή και των συν αυτώ μαρτυρησάντων*, (Athens 1996) 69.

8 Likewise, I would like to point out the crucial importance that help from the French would have had for Greek fighters in their struggle against the Porte. We should bear in mind that, following his triumphant campaign in Italy, Napoleon’s troops had arrived at Corfu on 29 June 1797 with the explicit promise of establishing a “Greek Republic” based on the French republican model. It was at this moment, and within this context, that Rhigas decided to translate the French Constitution (Leandros Vranousis, *Εφημερίς. Βιέννη 1791/1797*, v [Athens 1995] 473).

9 For the Constitutions of the Sister Republics in general, see Jacques Godechot, *Le Grand Nation* (Paris 1983) 331–56; for the Italian Constitutions specifically, see Mario d’Addio et alii, *Le Costituzioni italiane 1796–1799* (Roma 1993).

10 François Furet & Denis Richer, *La Revolución Francesa*, tr. Luis Horno Liria (Madrid 1988) 471, my translation. I follow the Spanish edition of François Furet & Denis Richer’s *La Révolution française* (Paris 1965).

11 See the Greek journal *Εφημερίς* of 16, 20 and 30 January, and 6 and 20 February 1797. *Εφημερίς* (1790–1797), published in Vienna by the Poullos brothers, both of whom were among Rhigas’s closest collaborators, was the first periodical publication to appear in Modern Greek.

12 Leandros Vranousis, *Εφημερίς. Βιέννη 1791/1797*, v, 873–4.

was following the constitutional experiments carried out in the Sister Republics. In other words, “why waste time studying another constitutional text, discussing it, approving it, when he knew it would always be inferior to the French texts, perfect and successful works of political thought and of the human spirit?”¹³

The French Constitution of 1793—a product of the work of one committee, led by Condorcet, and the parliamentary debates of the Convention—was elaborated, as C.M. Woodhouse shows, for a unitary and relatively homogenous state.¹⁴ Rhigas, however, intended to write a constitution for a multinational state, with different languages, religions and cultures. But how could the diverse Balkan peoples coexist under Greek hegemony, in a democratic, unitary and indivisible state? According to Paschalis Kitromilides, Rhigas cherished the enlightened hope that “the moral strength of democratic patriotism—based on the universal principles of the Enlightenment—would reduce religious and national antagonisms, would favour solidarity among the different nationalities and would encourage dedication to the unitary institutions of the new republic”.¹⁵ However, when Rhigas imagined, at the end of the eighteenth century, a Greek and Balkan Republic, indivisible and multinational, a constitutional state based on democratic and liberal principles, he was in fact situating himself in the realm of political utopia. A movement of xenophobic nationalism was to sweep the universalist tendencies of the Enlightenment from the face of Europe and impose its devastating logic throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: each nation would be a state, and each state, a nation.

Balkanizing the French Revolution

Leaving aside the unquestionable importance of these matters, the Greek version of the 1793 Constitution translated by Rhigas is particularly interesting because of the concept of translation that informs it and because of the use of special translating procedures, such as additions, omissions, didactic explanations, juridical contributions, appropriations, and so on. Here, I will concentrate exclusively on the analysis of this last translation strategy, appropriation, and on the concept of translation that accompanies it.

Lawrence Venuti, in *The Translator's Invisibility*,¹⁶ defines “domestication”

13 Carlo Ghisalbetti, *Le Costituzioni “giacobine”* (Rome 1973) 165, my translation.

14 C.M. Woodhouse, *Rhigas Velestinlis. The Proto-martyr of the Greek Revolution* (Limni 1995) 73.

15 Paschalis M. Kitromilides “Ο Ρήγας και τα σημερινά προβλήματα στα Βαλκάνια”, *Αντί* 652 (1998) 34, my translation.

16 Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* (London and New York 1995).

as those translation strategies that appropriate the original text, neutralizing its foreign characteristics and reinforcing the dominant values of the recipient culture. This ethnocentric translation practice reflects a concept of centre-periphery interrelations which, according to Venuti, is characterized by the centre's and, specifically, Anglo-American culture's systematic suppression of the differences of its cultural others.

Appropriation, however, does not always have the same meaning. In the specific case of the *New Political Constitution*, the aim of translating procedures is to adapt the French text to the complex political, social, and cultural reality of South-Eastern Europe in the late eighteenth century. Rhigas's appropriation of the text not only does not cancel the foreign characteristics of the original text, its strangeness, but even reinforces it by incorporating it into a new context. The result of this process is that both the dominant cultural centre, France, and the peripheral culture, the Ottoman Balkans, benefit from the interaction between their own and foreign values. In his translation, Rhigas incorporates new values into the domestic Balkan reality and promotes a new way of conceiving and carrying out the centre-periphery interrelations from which both cultures benefit. By *balkanization*, I mean Rhigas's form of understanding and practising appropriation in his translation work.

With the purpose of illustrating Rhigas's translating processes, I have chosen several articles from the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* and from the *Constitutional Act*. In order to facilitate comparison of the texts, Rhigas's Greek version of the French Constitution is preceded by the corresponding articles from the original French text and their translation into English (my own). Rhigas's text, with the exception of Article 53, is followed by Richard Clogg's English translation of the *New Political Constitution*.¹⁷

Who is the sovereign people?

Article 7 of the French *Constitutional Act* of 1793 establishes the concept of sovereign people. Rhigas translates and guarantees the validity of "sovereign people" to all inhabitants—in this article he does not use the word "citizen"—of the Greek Republic. In this example *balkanization* is produced in three ways: First, by distinguishing clearly the different sovereign Balkan peoples; second, by recalling the right to freedom of worship (Article 7 of the *Rights of Man*); and third, by extending the fundamental rights of the citizens through the constitutional recognition of the use of different languages. The French Constitution of 1793 does not mention any language or ethnicities.

¹⁷ Richard Clogg, *The Movement for Greek Independence 1770–1821* (London 1976) 149–63.

ART. 7 Le peuple souverain est l'universalité des citoyens français.

ART. 7 The sovereign people is the universality of French citizens.

ΑΡΘ. 7 Ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ λαὸς εἶναι ὅλοι οἱ κάτοικοι τοῦ βασιλείου τούτου, χωρὶς ἐξαιρέσειν θρησκείας ἢ διαλέκτου, Ἕλληνες, Βούλγαροι, Ἀλβανοί, Βλάχοι, Ἀρμένηδες, Τούρκοι καὶ κάθε ἄλλο εἶδος γενεᾶς.

ART. 7 The sovereign people consists of all the inhabitants of this Empire, without distinction of religion or speech, Greeks, Bulgarians, Albanians, Wallachians, Armenians, Turks and every other kind of race.

Article 122 of the *Constitutional Act* concerns the guaranteeing and assuring of rights. However, while the French text establishes that the Constitution guarantees the rights of all French people, in Rhigas's text this constitutional guarantee embraces all the Balkan peoples such as the Greeks, Turks or Armenians. There is another aspect, however, in which this article is significant and which I would like to highlight. Four times Rhigas uses the word *eleftheria* (freedom) in order to render in Greek the French *liberté* and the expression "le libre exercice des cultes" (freedom of religion). Three times he writes it with a small "e", the fourth time, however, the same word appears written with a capital "E", even though it has no correspondence in the French text. Rendering the French Constitution in this way, Rhigas *balkanizes* the meaning of the word *liberté*. In this case, the deliberate use of the capital first letter bestows upon the term a clearly subversive semantic load: it means republican freedom, of course, but also, and above all, it refers to the Balkan peoples' struggle for Freedom from the Ottoman yoke.¹⁸

ART. 122 La Constitution garantit à tous les Français l'égalité, la liberté, la sûreté, la propriété, la dette publique, le libre exercice des cultes, une instruction commune, des secours publics, la liberté indéfinie de la presse, le droit de pétition, le droit de se réunir en sociétés populaires, la jouissance de tous les Droits de l'homme.

ART. 122 The Constitution guarantees, for all French people, equality, freedom, security, property, public debt, freedom of religion, common education, public help, freedom of the press, the right to petition, the right of association in popular societies, the enjoyment of all the Rights of Man.

ΑΡΘ. 122 Ἡ Νομοθετικὴ Διοίκησις βεβαιοῖ εἰς ὅλους τοὺς Ἕλληνας, Τούρκους, Ἀρμένηδες, τὴν ἰσοτιμίαν, τὴν ἐλευθερίαν, τὴν σιγουρότητα, τὴν ἐξουσίαν τῶν ὑποστατικῶν ἐκάστου, τὰ δημόσια χρέη ὅπου ἔβηλε γένουν διὰ τὴν Ἐλευθερίαν, τὴν

¹⁸ This kind of spelling and typing intervention was again used by Rhigas in his translation of Metastasio's *La Olimpiade* (*Ἡθικός Τρίπους*, Vienna 1797). On pages 16 and 17 of this apparently innocuous text, the word "eleftheria" (*libertà*) appears four times printed "with the biggest letters the printing house disposed of". [Leandros Vranousis, *Ρήγας* (Athens 1954) 292.]

ἐλευθερίαν ὄλων τῶν θρησκειῶν, μίαν κοινὴν ἀνατροφήν, δημοσίους συνδρομὰς ἐκεῖ ὅπου ἀνήκουν, τὴν ἀπεριόριστον ἐλευθερίαν τῆς τυπογραφίας, τὸ δίκαιον τοῦ νὰ διδῆ ἕκαστος ἀναφορὰν καὶ νὰ προσκλαυθῆ, τὸ δίκαιον τοῦ συνάξεσθαι εἰς δημοσίους συντροφίας, καί, τελευταῖον, τὴν ἀπόλαυσιν ὄλων τῶν Δικαιῶν τοῦ Ἄνθρώπου.

ART. 122 The Legislative Administration assures to all Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Jews and all nationalities (who find themselves inhabitants in this Republic) equality, freedom, security, the control of the landed property of each, the public loans, which may be incurred for Freedom, the freedom of all religions, a common upbringing, public contributions there, where they belong, the unhampered freedom of the press, the right of each to petition and to complain, the right to gather in public companies and, lastly, the enjoyment of all the Rights of Man.¹⁹

Vertere et docere

Article 34 of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* is a good example of Rhigas's political thought and project. The French text establishes the concept of "social body" and the principle of Fraternity. By *balkanizing* the French text, the notion of "social body" is extended and applied to the different Balkan peoples. This meant—according to Rhigas's translation—that all members of this social body, although different, were equal; especially as they were the ones who were going to bring about the revolution.

ART. 34 Il y a oppression contre le corps social lorsqu'un seul de ses membres est opprimé. Il y a oppression contre chaque membre lorsque le corps social est opprimé.

ART. 34 The social body is oppressed when one of its members is oppressed. Every member is oppressed when the social body is oppressed.

ΑΡΘ. 34 "Όταν ἕνας μόνος κάτοικος τοῦ βασιλείου τούτου ἀδικηθῆ, ἀδικεῖται ὄλον τὸ βασίλειον· καὶ πάλιν, ὅταν τὸ βασίλειον ἀδικῆται ἢ πολεμῆται, ἀδικεῖται καὶ πολεμεῖται κάθε πολίτης.

Διὰ τοῦτο δὲν ἔμπορεῖ ποτὲ τινὰς νὰ εἰπῆ, ὅτι "ἡ τάδε χώρα πολεμεῖται, δὲν μὲ μέλει, διατὶ ἐγὼ ἡσυχάζω εἰς τὴν ἐδικήν μου". ἀλλ' "ἐγὼ πολεμοῦμαι, ὅταν ἡ τάδε χώρα πάσχη, ὡς μέρος τοῦ ὄλου ὅπου εἶμαι". ὁ Βούλγαρος πρέπει νὰ κινήται, ὅταν πάσχη ὁ Ἕλληνας, καὶ ἐτοῦτος πάλιν διὰ ἐκεῖνον· καὶ ἀμφοτέρωθεν διὰ τὸν Ἄλβανον καὶ Βλάχον.

ART. 34 When a single inhabitant of this Empire is wronged, the entire

19 Differences between the Greek and English texts are due to the fact that for the Greek text I follow Vranousis's edition of the *New Political Constitution* in *Άπαντα Νεοελλήνων Κλασικῶν. Ρήγας Βελεστινλής-Φεραίος*, II, 681–727, whereas for his translation Richard Clogg follows that of G. Papageorgiou, Rhigas Pheraios, *Η Ελληνική Δημοκρατία* (Athens 1971).

Empire is wronged. And again, when the Empire is wronged or attacked, each citizen is wronged or attacked.

For this reason no one can ever say such and such a country is attacked, it does not concern me because I am quiet in my own, but [he should say] I am attacked when such and such a country suffers as part of the whole that I am. The Bulgar must be moved when the Greek suffers. And the latter again for him, and both for the Albanian and the Wallachian.

Balkanizing ideas

The first article of the French Constitutional Act of 1793 establishes the unity and indivisibility of the French Republic. Rhigas's version, however, not only *balkanizes* the text, that is, adapts it to the complex multi-ethnic reality of the Balkans by amplifying the original text's enunciation, but also, once again, by insisting on the right to freedom of religion, included explicitly in Article 7 of the *Rights of Man*, it imprints on it his own republican political thinking.

ART. I La République française est une et indivisible.

ART. I The French Republic is one and indivisible.

ΑΡΘ. Ι Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Δημοκρατία εἶναι μία, μὲ ὄλον ὅπου συμπεριλαμβάνει εἰς τὸν κόλπον τῆς διάφορα γένη καὶ θρησκείας· δὲν θεωρεῖ τὰς διαφορὰς τῶν λατρευτῶν μὲ ἐχθρικὸν μάτι· εἶναι ἀδιαίρετος, μ' ὄλον ὅπου ποταμοὶ καὶ πελάγη διαχωρίζουν τὲς ἐπαρχίες τῆς, αἱ ὁποῖαι ὅλαι εἶναι ἓνα συνεσφιγμένον ἀδιάλυτον σῶμα.

ART. I The Greek Republic is one, for all that it contains within it different races and religions. It does not look on differences in worship with a hostile eye. It is indivisible, for all that rivers and seas divide its provinces, which constitute a unitary, indissoluble body.

The Greek language: prima inter pares

Article 53 of the Constitutional Act establishes the functions of the Legislative Body. Rhigas translates the whole of the article. The complex multi-lingual reality of the Balkans, however, poses an additional problem to the “writer” of the Constitution. Thus, Rhigas introduces the use of vernacular Greek²⁰ as the official language of all the Balkan peoples belonging to the

20 Towards the end of the eighteenth century, an important debate—and dilemma—concerning the ideal form of written Greek divided Greek intellectuals of the Enlightenment into supporters of the Greek language (*elliniki*), a form of ancient Greek, and supporters of simple Greek (*apli*), also called common (*koini*) and referring to the colloquial language as spoken by the people. Greek (*elliniki*) was the form of language used in all sites of power and prestige: bureaucracy, the Church, commerce, science, education. Rhigas, himself a follower of Katartzis and Moisioudax, was an unconditional supporter of

new Greek Republic. For the author of the *New Political Constitution*, the predominance of the Greek language was conceived of less as a probable source of conflict than as a link among the different inhabitants of the region; a “logical” link of interlinguistic understanding thanks to its status as a *lingua franca*.

ART. 53 Le Corps législatif propose des lois, et rend des décrets.

ART. 53 The Legislative Body proposes laws, and renders decrees.

ΑΡΘ. 53 Τὸ Νομοδοτικὸν Σῶμα προβάλλει Νόμους καὶ δίδει Ψηφίσματα, ἤτοι Προσταγὰς.

“Ὅλοι οἱ Νόμοι καὶ αἱ Προσταγαὶ γίνονται εἰς τὴν ἀπλῆν τῶν Ἑλλήνων διάλεκτον, ὡς πλέον εὐκατάληπτον καὶ εὐκόλον νὰ σπουδασθῆ ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ εἰς τὸ βασιλεῖον τοῦτο ἐμπεριεχόμενα γένη· ὁμοίως καὶ ὅλα τὰ ἐγγραφα τῶν κρίσεων καὶ ἄλλων δημοσίων πράξεων.

ART. 53 The Legislative Body proposes Laws, and renders Decrees, that is to say, Orders. All Laws and Decrees shall be in the common Greek language, the latter being easier to comprehend and study by all the peoples belonging to this kingdom. The same applies to all legal and other public documents.²¹

Rhigas's juridical contributions

As we have already seen, the French text's *balkanization* does not consist in a mere adaptation of its contents to the Balkan context. At times, Rhigas's textual interventions amount to interesting juridical contributions. Such is the case, for instance, with Article 22 of the *Rights of Man* which establishes the right to compulsory public education. Rhigas extends compulsory schooling to children of both genders and makes the teaching of languages compulsory, including that of ancient Greek (*elliniki*).

ART. 22 L'instruction est le besoin de tous. La société doit favoriser de tout son pouvoir les progrès de la raison publique, et mettre l'instruction à la portée de tous les citoyens.

ART. 22 Education is necessary for everyone. Society must encourage by every means possible the progress of public reason and make education accessible to all its citizens.

ΑΡΘ. 22 “Ὅλοι, χωρὶς ἐξαίρεσιν, ἔχουν χρέος νὰ ἠξεύρουν γράμματα. Ἡ Πατρίς ἔχει νὰ καταστήσῃ σχολεῖα εἰς ὅλα τὰ χωρία διὰ τὰ ἀρσενικὰ καὶ θηλυκὰ παιδία. Ἐκ τῶν γραμμάτων γεννᾶται ἡ προκοπή, μὲ τὴν ὁποῖαν λάμπουν τὰ

the use of the simple Greek language, going as far as to establish it as the future Greek Republic's official language. Nevertheless, that same article makes the teaching of ancient Greek obligatory. Cf. Articles 4 [7] and 53 of the *Constitution*.

²¹ English translation of Article 53 is my own.

ἐλεύθερα ἔθνη. Νὰ ἐξηγοῦνται οἱ παλαιοὶ ἱστορικοὶ συγγραφεῖς· εἰς δὲ τὰς μεγάλας πόλεις νὰ παραδίδεται ἡ γαλλικὴ καὶ ἡ ἰταλικὴ γλῶσσα· ἡ δὲ ἑλληνικὴ νὰ εἶναι ἀπαραίτητος.

ART. 22 All without exception, are obliged to know letters. The Motherland must establish schools for boys and girls in all the villages. From letters is generated progress, with which free nations shine. The ancient historical writers should be interpreted. In the big cities the French and Italian languages should be taught. The Greek language is mandatory.

Regarding Rhigas's juridical contributions, Articles 15 and 27 of the *Rights of Man* are particularly worth highlighting. In Article 27 Rhigas distances himself from capital punishment, advocated explicitly in the French text, and recalls the fundamental right to be judged and condemned according to the law.

ART. 27 Que tout individu qui usurperait la souveraineté soit à l'instant mis à mort par les hommes libres.

ART. 27 Any individual who usurps the sovereignty of the people should be immediately put to death by the free men.

ΑΡΘ. 27 Κάθε ἄνθρωπος, ὁποῦ ἤθελεν ἀρπάσει τὴν αὐτοκρατορίαν καὶ τὴν ἐξουσίαν τοῦ ἔθνους, εὐθὺς νὰ φυλακῶνεται ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐλεύθερους ἄνδρας, νὰ κρίνεται καὶ κατὰ τὸν νόμον νὰ παιδεύεται.

ART. 27 Any man who seeks to seize the Empire and the authority of the nation, should immediately be imprisoned by the free men, to be judged and punished according to the law.

In the case of Article 15, which seeks to make the punishment fit the crime, Rhigas translates its contents. However, the fact that he introduces a practical explanation of the Article's application has the effect of *balkanizing* the text and at the same time underlines what amounts to a political attitude in opposition to capital punishment.

ART. 15 La loi ne doit décerner que des peines strictement et évidemment nécessaires: les peines doivent être proportionnées au délit et utiles à la société.

ART. 15 The law should only prescribe strictly and evidently necessary punishments; punishments should be proportional to the crime and beneficial to society.

ΑΡΘ. 15 Ὁ Νόμος ἔχει νὰ προσδιορίζῃ παιδείας ἀκριβῶς καὶ ἀποδεικτικῶς ἀναγκαίας· αἱ παιδεῖαι αὗται νὰ εἶναι ἀνάλογοι κατὰ τὸ ἔγκλημα καὶ ὠφέλιμοι εἰς τὴν συγκοινωνίαν τῶν πολιτῶν.

Ἦγουν, ἂν ἔδειρε τινὰς ἕναν ἄλλον, νὰ δαρθῇ, μὰ ὄχι νὰ ἀποκεφαλισθῇ.

ART. 15 The law should prescribe punishments exactly and they should be of demonstrable necessity. These punishments should be commensurate with the crime and beneficial to the society of citizens; that is to say if someone hits someone else, he should be hit, but not beheaded.

Balkanization and revolution

Article 35 of the *Rights of Man* establishes the peoples' right and duty to rebellion. Rhigas translates the totality of the Article to which he *adds* a brief treatise on military tactics.

ART. 35 Quand le gouvernement viole les droits du peuple, l'insurrection est, pour le peuple et pour chaque portion du peuple, le plus sacré des droits et le plus indispensable des devoirs.

ART. 35 When the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection becomes, for the people and every part of the people, the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties.

ΑΡΘ. 35 "Όταν ἡ Διοίκησις βιάζῃ, ἀθετῇ, καταφρονῇ τὰ δίκαια τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ δὲν εἰσακούῃ τὰ παράπονά του, τὸ νὰ κάμῃ τότε ὁ λαός, ἢ κάθε μέρος τοῦ λαοῦ, ἐπανάστασιν, νὰ πιάσῃ τὰ ἄρματα καὶ νὰ τιμωρήσῃ τοὺς τυράννους, εἶναι τὸ πλέον ἱερὸν ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ δίκαιά του καὶ τὸ πλέον ἀπαραίτητον ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ χρέη του.

*Αν εὐρίσκωνται ὁμῶς εἰς τόπον ὅπου εἶναι περισσότεροι τύραννοι, οἱ πλέον ἀνδρεῖοι πατριῶται καὶ φιλελεύθεροι πρέπει νὰ πιάσουν τὰ περάσματα τῶν δρόμων καὶ τὰ ὕψη τῶν βουνῶν, ἐν ὧσιν νὰ ἀνταμωθοῦν πολλοί, νὰ πληθύνῃ ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν, καὶ τότε νὰ ἀρχίσουν τὴν ἐπιδρομὴν κατὰ τῶν τυράννων, κάμνοντες εἰς κάθε δέκα ἀνθρώπους ἓνα δέκαρχον, εἰς τοὺς 50 πεντηκόνταρχον, εἰς τοὺς ἑκατὸν ἑκατόνταρχον· ὁ χιλίαρχος ἔχει δέκα ἑκατόνταρχους καὶ ὁ στρατηγὸς τρεῖς χιλίαρχους, ὁ δὲ ἀρχιστράτηγος πολλοὺς στρατηγούς.

ART. 35 When the Government harasses, breaches, disdains the rights of the people and does not heed its complaints, then for the people or each part of the people to make a revolution, take up arms and punish his tyrants is the most sacred of all his rights and the most compelling of all his obligations. If they find themselves, however, in a place where there are more tyrants, the bravest patriots and lovers of freedom must seize the crossings of the roads and the tops of the mountains, until many have assembled, to increase their number, and then to begin their onslaught on the tyrants. [They should] create a leader for each group of ten, one for each group of fifty and a hundred, with a leader for each ten groups of hundred, and a general for each group of a thousand, and the commander-in-chief should have many generals.

Conclusion

To *balkanize*, in Rhigas's *New Political Constitution*, does not mean to disintegrate, barbarize or throw into the atavistic chaos of collective

pre-democratic identities and, therefore, fail in the collective effort of becoming part of Modernity. On the contrary, Rhigas's effort to *balkanize* the texts of the French Revolution implied an attempt to introduce a new level of sophistication into the liberal, democratic and constitutional movement of the eighteenth century, given that its foundations, derived from Western countries such as France, Britain and the United States, had to support a different political, cultural and religious reality. To elaborate a constitutional project for the Balkan-Ottoman peoples at the end of the eighteenth century, meant, necessarily, incorporating new challenges, new formulations and new paradoxes into the experience of Modernity.