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**Scottish Literature in the South
Eastern Balkans and Alexandria:
1863-69 the Poems of Ossian by
James Macpherson**

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**Scottish Literature in the South Eastern Balkans and
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Abstract

Why have nineteenth century translations into Greek and Rumanian of Scottish literature through *The Poems of Ossian* written by James Macpherson, been neglected? Three scholars, two from Kephallonia (Gerassimus E. Mavroyiannis and Gerassimus Voltairos) and one from Bucharest, the Greek-Rumanian Hellenist, I. Heliade Radulescu, translated the epic 'Fingal' into Greek and Rumanian respectively in the 1860s. Fingal, the magnanimous hero and father of Ossian, gave support to his defeated allies against the Danes. The epic 'Temora' which was a place where the tyrant Cairbar had murdered Cormac, the rightful ruler and usurped his throne, was translated by the Kephallonian scholar and radical journalist Panayiotis Panas.

Panas was the main translator of *The Poems of Ossian*. He resided in both Rumania and Alexandria in the 1860s. In 1868, he set up a Democratic Eastern Federation in both Bucharest and Athens. He was the successor to Rigas Velestinlis (Pheraios), the Greek-Rumanian scholar and pro-martyr of the Greek Revolution who attempted to form a Balkan Confederation in Bucharest in 1780 to include Turks and Egyptians under threat of encroaching Western monarchy as the Ottoman Empire was falling into decline.

In order to demonstrate how the symbolism of this Scottish romantic poetry was used this presentation will give an account of events which took place in particular zones where translations were published and distributed while Western monarchy gradually forced its way onto the scene.

The evidence arising from this study indicates the extent to which Scottish culture, through this secular Celtic work of great literary and moral worth, penetrated and significantly influenced the zone, which has been ignored up until now.

Keywords:

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Scottish literature sowed the first seeds of Romanticism through *The Poems of Ossian* by James Macpherson. Intellectuals of the Scottish Enlightenment were aware of the value of sentiment and passion, developed through literature, which produced a more humane and benevolent attitude towards life: Macpherson preserved the Gaelic way of life transcribing and translating oral poetry from the time when Scotland was conquered by England in 1746. The English did not want the oral tradition of the Celtic people to survive because its unpropertied values were alien to those that had been introduced and assimilated by foreign invaders from the Romans onwards. For centuries no foreigner had penetrated the Highlands of Scotland. The Romans never conquered it and the Normans had small influence. Highland Scots spoke Gaelic and belonged to clans.

Macpherson's heroes defend to protect in the name of a different kind of ethical justice than was popular at the time of the formation of the British Empire. Unlike other heroes, Ossian and his followers do not act from greed. Sometime enemies are caught and freed and suffer nothing more than a rebuke. Macpherson's heroes show a depth of feeling that elevates them to a far more magnanimous position than any other previous heroes, because of the respect they show to the defeated.¹

'Fingal, the main hero is great without effort, valiant without being ferocious and sensitive without being weak. He represents the hero of Nature as opposed to the hero of society. Fingal does not fight to conquer but to avenge victims and defend the oppressed: he fights the sadness of the heart, intervenes to stop massacres or to pardon the vanquished. He has a loving passion of his own people, as well as towards foreigners. A tender friend, a generous enemy, he has pity for the unhappy and he feels the evil of humanity.'²

The songs of the heroes describe the era from Trenmor to Fingal to Ossian and to Oscar, the latter's son. They serve as a model of virtue and inspiration. *The Poems of Ossian* are an ideal choice in uniting a diffuse people of different faiths because there is no reference to religion in them. Those seeking to liberate themselves from foreign domination evoke the Ossianic warriors who fight tyranny to the death.

Modern Greek and Wallachian scholars chose the same myths from *The Poems of Ossian* not only to uplift their impoverished languages but also to instil moral virtues of the highest calibre and to expose and combat tyranny.

The Wallachian and Kephalonian radicals were veterans of the 1848 French Revolution which spread throughout Europe. There had been uprisings in both Kephalonian³ and Bucharest¹ in support of Utopian Socialists whose

¹O'Donnell-Kassimatis, Kathleen A. (2005). *The Poems of Ossian and the Quest for Unity in the South-Eastern Balkans and Asia Minor in the Nineteenth Century*. Dissertation at Department of English, National University of Ireland, Galway. M.A. [Unpublished].

²Gaskill, Howard. (1994) 'Ossian in Europe': *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*. Vol. XXI No.4 Toronto: University Press 644-678.

³Moschopoulos, George N. (1988). *History of Kephalonian (1797-1940)*. Vol.2. Athens: Kephalos. [in Greek].

works were given prominence in Paris in 1848 including those of Saint-Simon, Pierre Leroux, Charles Fourier and J. P. Proudhon.² Fourier saw Istanbul as the free capital of a federation, based on cooperation rather than competition, through the setting up of phalanges,³ the first one of which had opened in Ploesti, near Bucharest in 1833.⁴ Proudhon believed that:

‘the earth is not a prize to be won in a race’

and claimed that Christianity had regenerated the world but not ecclesiasticism.⁵

Both Wallachia and Kephallonia were under the yoke of foreign monarchy at that time which had been prophesied by the Greek- Wallachian, Rigas Velestinlis, scholar and revolutionary, who had sought to set up a Balkan Confederation in order to overthrow tyranny of the Sultan and unite against encroaching Western monarchy in Bucharest in 1780.⁶ His War Song included the lines:

‘to kindle the flame throughout Turkey that shall
Blaze from the mountains of Bosnia to the wilds
Of Arabia.⁷

Byron had translated the first few lines of his Battle Cry in 1812.⁸ The signification was that the dream of Rigas, which represented a democratically-run country based on federalism under a constitution written by the people, lay dormant.

Rigas’s direct successor was Panayiotis Panas, a Kephallonian scholar and itinerant journalist who plied the Mediterranean visiting both what is now Rumania and Alexandria in order to revive Rigas’s vision.⁹ Although he spent his whole life under a foreign monarch, he used *The Poems of Ossian* to promote the Democratic Eastern Federation.

¹Otetea, Andrea. (1970). *History of the Romanian People*, translated. by Eugenia Farca. Bucharest: Scientific Publishing House.

²Aprile, Sylvie. (2010). *La Revolution Inachevee 1815-1870*. Paris: Belin.

³Wanlass, Lawrence C. (1970). *Gettel’s History of Political Thought*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

⁴Russ, Jacqueline. (1987). *Pour Connaitre le Socialisme Utopique francais*. Paris : Bordas.

⁵Proudhon, P-J. (1970). *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*. Translated from the French by Benj. R. Tucker (1890), with a new introduction by George Woodcock.. New York: Dover Publications Inc.

⁶Korthatos, Giannis. (1983). *Rigas Pheraios and the Balkan Confederation*. Athens: Epikairota. [in Greek].

⁷Kara, Simonos I. (1998). *The Thourios of Rigas and his Music*. Athens: The Association towards the Dissemination of National Music. Phoenix. [in Greek].

⁸Byron, Lord. (1866). *The Works of*. Tauchnitz edition. Vol.IV. Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz.

⁹Stavropoulou, Erasmia-Louiza. (1987). *Panayiotis Panas. A Romantic Radical*. Athens : Epikairota. [in Greek].

The two epics ‘Fingal’ and ‘Temora’ from *The Poems of Ossian* describe battles against usurpers which combat treachery and injustice.¹ Were these myths selected not only to unite diffuse people in the zone but also as an exhortation to fight for justice in exposing the policy of divide and rule, so popular in the ignoble acts of the Great Powers in the nineteenth century?

In June 1863, there was a civil war in Athens following the Cycladic Revolution of March, 1862, not only as a result of disunity between Catholics and Orthodox Greeks but also because a new foreign king had been chosen following the abdication of King Othon.² Certain Greeks had fought to instal a republic with greater constitutional rights for the working class. *The Poems of Ossian* were translated in July. The first part is a dissertation about Ossian while the second one has a long extract from ‘Fingal’ Book I, which is translated from Cesarotti’s Italian version by the Kephalonian Gerasimus Mavroyiannis, radical scholar and journalist³ whom Panas dedicated his first book of poetry to in 1855.⁴ Mavroyiannis resided in Athens in self-imposed exile. The enemy which Fingal faces is a Dane, appropriately chosen as the new King was a Gluxsbourg of the Danish monarchy. The Kephalonian radicals who had experienced nearly fifty years of English colonial rule saw the transfer of the Seven Islands to Modern Greece as being merely an extension of a protectorate from the Seven Islands to Modern Greece under a Danish monarch.⁵ In fact Greece is then referred to as a Protectorate.⁶ When England ceded the Seven Islands to Greece in 1864, with a new monarch, the proviso was to stop the Greek state from expanding into Epirus, Thessaly and Crete.⁷

In Mavroyiannis’s long article entitled ‘On Ossian’, in his thesis he states that *The Poems of Ossian* be they authentic or spurious, greatly influenced the poetry of all Europe and not even Modern Greece remained free from its influences.⁸ This was true as the vast distribution through the media rather than than book form of *The Poems of Ossian* in the Greek-speaking world began with Byron, an Anglo-Scot in 1850. A translation of Byron’s imitation ‘Calmar

¹Macpherson, James. (1996). *The Poems of Ossian*. H. Gaskill (ed): With an Introduction by Fiona Stafford. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

²Finlay, George. (1863). A Handwritten Observation. Archives A.14. Athens: British School at Athens.

³Mavroyiannis, Gerassimus E. (1863). ‘Ossian and the Poems Attributed to Him’. *Chrysalis*. Vol. 1. 15-22 July 417-420, 525-531. [in Greek]. *Chrysalis* was distributed to Greece, Turkey, Dacia, Austria, Germany, Italy, England and France.

⁴See Stavropoulou. Panayiotis Panas.

⁵Theodoratos, Christos. (1964). ‘Panayiotis Panas (Theoretician of Radicalism – Journalist – Scholar – Poet)’. *New Estia*. Athens: Petros Haris.[in Greek].

⁶Hussey, Joan. (1973). *The Finlay Papers A Catalogue*. London: The British School of Archaeology at Athens: Thames and Hudson.

⁷Korthatos, Giannis (1973) *English Intervention in Greece*. Athens: Epikairotitia. [in Greek]

⁸See Mavroyiannis. On Ossian.

and Orla' based on Fingal Book I, appeared in the columns of *Evterpe* and was circulated in the south eastern Balkans and Anatolia in 1850.¹

Mavroyiannis's publication of *The Poems of Ossian* in the periodical *Chrysalis* in July, 1863 coincided with the June uprisings in Athens. The dissertation describes how bards enjoyed privileges that were established by law until 1284 when Edward I of England reigned. Kings felt threatened by their increasing power.² Interestingly, Victor Hugo in his long poem 'The Last Last Bards' also refers to the cruelty of Edward and his unjust power in Scotland and how the names of Fingal and Ossian represent ancient peace and fraternity.³

The extract from 'Fingal Book I' by Mavroyiannis is a call for peace and not war:

“But tho' my hand is bent on war, my heart is for the peace of Erin”.⁴

It was also a call for unity as it was the time when the third constitution would be ratified which would take into account the conflict between conservatives and people with radical ideas in the Seven Islands, which were to be ceded to Modern Greece in 1864. Provision was made for 'The Start of Working Class Domination'.⁵

The next epic to be translated was by Panayiotis Panas. After the Cycladic Revolution and the installation of yet another foreign monarch in Greece, Panas went to Alexandria in 1865. He set up a Greek newspaper *The Egyptian Eagle* with fellow Kephalonians Ferdinand Oddi and Spiro Pherentinos.⁶ Pherentinos wrote and published an epic poem dedicated to Mohammad Ali, the Balkan Macedonian of Albanian extraction and founder of Modern Egypt.⁷

Panas's book of poetry was published and distributed to Mansura, Tanta, Zifta, Zagazig, Cairo and Samalut in Egypt, including Ramleh in Palestine, by the publisher, Ferdinand Oddi, of Nile Press. Entitled *Memnon*, with an epigraph dedicated to Byron, Panas included a translation from 'Temora' Book IV. It is an extract describing the merits of Cairbar's brother, Cathmor.⁸ Cairbar, the tyrant, had usurped the Irish throne of Cormac whom he murdered. Ossianic warriors will fight the injustice.⁹ There were uprisings in Crete which Egyptians were reluctant to have to fight under the Sultan in 1865.¹⁰ Muhamid

¹Georgantopoulos, I. (1850) 'The Death of Calmar and Orla by Lord Byron'. Athens: *Evterpe*. 127-9. [in Greek]. *Evterpe* was distributed to Bucharest, Odessa, Jassy, Istanbul, Smyrna (Izmir) and The Seven Islands.

²See Mavroyiannis. *On Ossian*.

³Hugo, Victor-M. (1822) *Odes et Poesies Diverses* <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k70350s.r=Odes+et+Poesies+Diverses+1822+par+Victor+Hugo.langENswf> [11 /2 /2013]

⁴ See Mavroyiannis. *On Ossian*.

⁵O'Donnell, Kathleen Ann. (2012) *Nineteenth Century Cycladic Warriors: Celtic Heroes*. www.atinergr/.../MDT2012-0025.pdf

⁶See Stavropoulou. *Panayiotis Panas*.

⁷Pherendinos, S.P. (1872) *Ode to Muhammad Ali*. Alexandria: Mavrou.[in Greek].

⁸See Stavropoulou. *Panayiotis Panas*.

⁹See Macpherson. *The Poems of Ossian*

¹⁰Gordon Duff, Lucie. (1963) *Letters from Egypt*. London: Virago Press Ltd.

Ali had governed Crete from 1824-1840, when a great deal of Cretans changed their religion to Islam. By 1841, Crete was returned to the Ottoman Empire.¹ There had also been unrest in Egypt itself in the same year, with a revolt in Luxor that was put down by the rapacious Viceroy, Ismail, himself.² Halim Pasha, the grandson of Mohammed Ali, a Freemason³ and a contender to the throne, was being persecuted. Mohammed Ali's heir Ahmad and brother of Halim, had drowned mysteriously in a train crash on the Nile in 1858, although Halim escaped. Ahmad's death was possibly instigated by the mother of his half-brother Ismail, who became ruler.⁴ Oddi helped Halim Pasha to flee for his life to Istanbul.⁵ The comparison of brothers Halim with Cathmor and Ismail with Cairbar, described in 'Dar-thula' in Panas's first translation in 1862, is implicit.⁶

The idealism of Ossian's poetry had captured the imagination of other Hellenist poets, most notably the Greek-Rumanian, I. Heliade Radulescu. Radulescu came to Ossian through Macpherson's French translator, Le Tourneur. His introduction to *The Poems of Ossian*, published in November-December 1867, was followed by his translation of 'Fingal' Book III, which was serialised weekly in the newspaper *Trumpetta Carpitilor*, edited by Cezar Bolliac. 'Fingal' Book III contains the message of hope and is written in their own language of freedom. Radulescu's translation coincided with many volunteers from Rumania joining in the 1866-69 Cretan uprising in their quest for unity with Greece. As the first two principates to unite in the Balkans, there was a desire to create the ancient place name of Dacia, which included Transylvania under Decabel.⁷ This was not the first time that Greeks and Dacians had fought together to face the threat of an encroaching empire as Greeks of the Black Sea had united with Dacians, under their leader Decabel, in their fight against Trajan, leader of the Roman Empire.⁸ The circulation of this translation of 'Fingal' into Rumanian helped to uplift and spread the language now written in Latin script. Moldavia and Wallachia had united in 1859, under a local prince. Its new name was Rumania. Therefore, the translation of 'Fingal' into the Rumanian language was used as a unifying force in the state. In 1866, however, their own prince was replaced by a foreign king. The manifesto of Dacia to include Transylvania was crushed when the Austro-Hungarian Empire imposed the Hungarian language on the Rumanian-speaking

¹Stavrianos, L.S. (2000) *The Balkans since 1453: with a new introduction by Traian Stoianovich*. London: Hurst & Company. After the 1821 Greek Revolution, Britain refused to allow Crete to unite with Greece.

²See Gordon Duff. *Letters from Egypt*.

³Layiktez, Celil. The History of Freemasonry in Turkey. <http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/layiktez.html> [30/11/2006]

⁴Raafat, Samir (1994) The Much Debated Royal Death on the Nile. <http://www.egy.com/historica/94-06-11.shtml> [30/11/2006]

⁵Hatziphotis, I.M. (1999) *Alexandria: Two Centuries of Modern Hellenism (19th & 20th)*. Athens: Ellinika Grammata. [in Greek].

⁶See O'Donnell: *Nineteenth Century Cycladic Warriors*.

⁷See O'Donnell-Kassimatis *The Poems of Ossian and the Quest for Unity*.

⁸Phoka Spiridons G. (1975) 'Greeks in a Riverboat under the Danube', translated by Maria I. Markopoulou. Munich: Congress of Balkan Studies. [in Greek].

people of Transylvania in 1867. The existence of an indexed copy of Radulescu's translation of 'Fingal' in the Benakio Library, Athens, suggests that his influence stretched well beyond his own territory, into the heart of the Greek-speaking world.¹

In 1868, Abdul Aziz, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire showed cooperative initiative as many fine buildings were constructed including a Christian church and a teaching college for women in Istanbul. He also created a Franco-Ottoman High School in which education was conducted in both French and Turkish. His right hand man was Midhad Pasha, a Freemason and Bulgaria Muslim who wished to implement the Tanzimat reforms to bring equality to both Christians and Muslims.²

Panas, who was also a Freemason, set up the Democratic Eastern Federation in Athens in 1868 under the guise of the Rigas Association. Founded on Rigas's vision,³ the DEF had a common ethical code which was propagated by *The Poems of Ossian* while its framework was based on Utopian Socialist ideas of both Proudhon and Saint-Simon. It was to be made up of Balkan peoples including the Turks and would abolish monarchy.⁴ Panas's friend and colleague in Bucharest, Thomas Paschides, Epirot scholar and journalist was head of the DEF in Bucharest where he resided.⁵ In the same year, the periodical *Byron* was created in Athens. In the following decade Paschides published 'The Eastern people under Hellenism or the Israelites, Armenians and Muslims under Hellenism' and 'The History of Literature and Language of Albania' in this magazine.⁶ He would also publish a newspaper 'Decabel' written in French and Greek, and distributed in Anatolia from Bucharest. As an adherent of Rigas Velestinis, he reprinted his famous 'Great Map of Anatolia', including Dacia. This Epirot Bucharest-resident donated all his inheritance to the Cretan cause. Paschides later wrote that all enmity between Greeks and Muslims and among Christians, Jews and Islam must cease in order for fraternal empathy to flourish.⁷

When Constantine, son of the Greek King George, was christened in 1868, it was announced with prophetic exaltation that the future king of the entire Greek nation was destined to realise the 'Megali Idea', which included recapturing territory under the Byzantine Empire:

'The Glorious banner of Constantine the Great on the

¹See O'Donnell-Kassimatis. *The Poems of Ossian and the Quest for Unity*.

²Mamboury, Ernest. (1951) *Istanbul Touristique* ed. française. Istanbul: Gituri Biraderler Basimevi Galat.

³See Stavropoulou. Panayiotis Panas.

⁴See Loukatos, S. 'The Ideological Assessment.

⁵Hasiotis, Loukianos. (2001) *The Eastern Federation: Two Greek Federalist Movements in the 19th Century*. Salonica: Vantias.[in Greek].

⁶Koupitourus, P. [Thomas Paschides] (1879) 'The History of Literature of the Albanians and their Language'. Athens: *Byron*, April 76-77. [in Greek]

⁷Hatziphotis, I. M. (1974) *T. A. Paschides (1836-1890): Scholar-Teacher-Fighter-Journalist-Greek Martyr: His Life and Work: Symbol of History of Hellenism in the Rumanian and Greek Press*. Athens: Critical Pages.[in Greek].

Dome of Saint Sophia in eighteen years' time.'

was published in the newspaper *Elpis* in 1868.¹

This was in sharp contrast to the ideals of Seven Island Radicals and that of the Utopian Socialists. They sought unity and peace, not war. Heliade Radulescu saw St. Sophia as:

A temple where Jew, Christian and Muslim could
Form a choir of fraternity and sing to the angels of
'peace and great harmony among human beings.'²

In 1868, Gustave Flourens, a French philhellene who had fought in the Cretan Uprising was chosen as president of the Cretan delegation, elected by Crete in the same year, to sit in the Hellenic Parliament. The Greek government kidnapped him, sending him back to France while returning delegates to Crete. In the same year, Flourens published 'The Eastern Question and the Cretan Uprising' in which he calls for peace and harmony among peoples of all faiths under a Federation as the only solution. This work was translated by Panayiotis Panas and circulated all over Anatolia in the newspaper 'Iris for the people of the East', edited by Thomas Paschides.³

The theme of unity found in 'Fingal' had a particular grip on popular imagination, offering a transcendent vision of a republic through peaceful unity and brotherhood. The Kephalonian scholar Gerassimus Voltairos translated the whole of Macpherson's 1773 edition of 'Fingal' in 1869. The epic is preceded by a dissertation about the poetry and history of the people.⁴ There are examples of ethics, gallantry and magnanimity in 'Fingal'. There can be no doubt that the reconciliation of former enemies at the end of 'Fingal', enemies that were in fact related to each other, was a judicious reminder to the Balkan peoples. Thus, *The Poems of Ossian* were a blueprint on how to bring unity to fruition among peoples of different faith so that the implementation of the D.E.F. might flourish.

This publication of 'Fingal' in 1869 occurred at the height of diplomatic machinations when the British were the only power to disagree to cede Crete to Modern Greece. Instead they imposed yet another blockade.⁵ It was also in 1869 that the Suez Canal was opened.⁶ It is apt that the publication of 'Fingal'

¹Moullas, P. (1989) *Les Concours Poétiques de l'Université d'Athènes 1851-1877*. Athens : Historiques de la Jeunesse Grecque.

²Drimba, Vladimir. (1968) *I. Heliade Radulescu* 3 vols. Ed. by II Poezi 1 (Tradiceri) Scriitori Romani. Bucharesti: Pentru Literatura.

³See O'Donnell-Kassimatis. *The Poems of Ossian and the Quest for Unity*.

⁴Voltairos, Gerassimus (1869) *Fingal, Epic Poems of Ossian*. Athens: Moraitini.[in Greek]

⁵Markopoulos, George J. 'King George I and the Expansion of Greece 1875-1881' *Salonica: Balkan Studies* Vol. 9 No. 1 21-40.

⁶The Nuttall Encyclopaedia (1946) edited by Lawrence H. Dawson based on original work by James Wood. London: Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd. The canal shortened the voyage to India by 7,600 miles. In 1875 the net profit made from the canal was seven million pounds sterling which went mostly to the British after Ismail sold Egyptian shares to the value of 100 million

also coincided with the International Peace Conference held in Lausanne, headed by Victor Hugo,¹ and this was a timely message to the Balkan people. It also accorded with the pacifist intentions of the D.E.F. Interestingly, Karl Marx declared himself against this organisation and its aims.²

In conclusion, the use of certain myths were translated from Scottish literature, through James Macpherson's *The Poems of Ossian* to expose how foreign monarchy and its diplomatic machinations had taken over territory as the Ottoman Empire fell into decline, resulting in further subjugation of Balkan people. The freedom they sought was that outlined by Rigas Velestinlis, who was an opponent of monarchy and any further foreign domination of the area. This poetry was used as a call for harmony, peace and brotherhood of peoples who had lived for eons under different empires. Let us hope that future scholarship will realise the important yet neglected role that Scottish literature played, through *The Poems of Ossian* by James Macpherson, in the cultural history of Greece in the nineteenth century.

francs to Lord Rothschild, who in turn sold them, with interest, to the British Government under Disraeli (see Jean Bouvier (1967) *les Rothschild*. Paris: Fayard.

¹Todorov, Varban N. (1995) *Greek Federalism during the Nineteenth Century. Ideas and Projects*. New York: Boulder, Columbia University Press.

²Robert, Anne Cecile (2005) 'Tourment sur la Constitution europeenne. La gauche dans son labrynthé'. Paris: Le Monde diplomatique : May.