

ENLIGHTENMENT, FREEMASONRY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

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As far as Freemasonry is concerned there is no prosperity for humanity if before that there was no prosperity for the family, the nation and the Motherland.

(Dimitar Vedar, *Freemasonry*, 1938, 30)

The Balkan peoples' national identity begins to take shape during the second half of the XVIII Century under the influence of the enlightenment ideals, formulated within the secret societies of the Free Masons and following the principle *"The slave struggles for freedom, and the free man – for perfection"*. As far as processes in Bulgaria are concerned, I find it difficult to determine whether, as often stated recently, a number of the activists of our Renaissance were Masons. Recently, for example, very popular became Rumen Vassilev's book *"The Masonic Lodge and Levski's Brotherhood"*, where almost all of the more eminent Bulgarian patriots were qualified as connected to the Masonic movement. I, however, still think, that there is no sufficient evidence that Botev, Levski and a number of other activists of our national liberation movement could be qualified as practicing Brethren. Supporting this opinion is the circumstance, that under the threat of death penalty Freemasonry was outlawed in Russia in 1822, and from 1824 onwards everybody, suspected in belonging to this movement, was sentenced and hanged within 24 hours. At the same time the Grand Lodge of Greece was established as late as 1868, although it was proven beyond any doubt, that the leader of the Greek revolution, Alexander Ipsilanti (1792–1828) was a Free Mason since 1812. The first Lodge in Bulgaria, according to Dimitar Vedar's evidence, was consecrated in Rousse in 1880. Of course, this does not exclude the possibility that some Bulgarians, such as Dr. Peter Beron, Nikola Piccolo, Georgi Rakovski, Angel Kanchev, Ivan Kassabov etc. may have been members of some foreign Lodges, as Rumen Vassilev claims.

In view of the above facts I think that it is more probable that most of the figures of the Bulgarian Renaissance were influenced at a purely practical level by the ideas of the Enlightenment and by their teachers in the field of revolutionary practice, as well as by some prominent Masons, such as Giuseppe Macini (1805–1872), Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–1882), Michail Bakunin (1814–1876), without having been specially initiated. It is for this reason that it is necessary to carefully read the ideological code of the European enlightenment.

Essence of the enlightenment philosophy are the following words of the Swiss Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778): *“Man was born free, but everywhere he is in chains [...] Freedom must be born under the sign of virtue.”* (Rousseau, *“The Public Contract”*, 1762 – the same year when Paissiy of Hilendar wrote *“The History Slavic–Bulgarian.”*) The XVIII Century is generally described as Century of Reason, Century of Encyclopaedia, Century of Enlightenment and at the same time Century, in which Freemasonry spread its ideas. The emphasis in the said features is on the concept of man as a thinking being, whose abilities can be developed and perfected through education. Undoubtedly, in order to understand the essence of modern Freemasonry, which formed in that Century of stormy ardour, there must be analysed **the ideas of enlightenment, which are the secular expression of the secret doctrine of the Brotherhood.** It is proven that almost all great figures of the Century of Enlightenment were tempted by the Masonic ideals.

The interest in man is naturally linked to the problem of power. At the end of the XVII Century in England, during the second half of the XVIII Century in France and America and at the end of the XVIII and the beginning of the XI Century in the German States and provinces, a public discontent swelled due to the irrational social order and the hereditary rights of the aristocrats. In the public space was voiced the necessity of implementing the principles of freedom, equality and justice in the state structure. In his *“Thoughts on education”* (1693) the English philosopher John Lock (1632–1704) wrote the following:

The natural state is a state of freedom, but not of a self-will; it is ruled by the laws of nature, which everybody must obey: the mind, discovering those laws, teaches all people, that nobody is entitled to harm the life, health, freedom and the property of others.

Rousseau is considerably more radical in his reasoning. In *“Émil or about education”* (1762) he generalises:

Our whole wisdom consists of slavish prejudice, all customs are nothing else but subjugation, slavery and compulsion. Civilised man is born, lives and dies in slavery; when he is born, he is wrapped in diapers; when he dies – he is nailed in a coffin; while he is alive he is chained by the human institutions.

The philosophers of change outlined two ways for its realisation – through revolution or through reforms, implemented by an enlightened monarch. Rousseau is adherent to the extreme action and prefers the republican form of government structure. This is easily explicable – he was born in a country, which declared itself republic back in 1523. In *“Reasoning on the origin of inequality between people”* (1754) he motivates the morality of a forceful deprivation of the King for his power as follows:

The state contract is disrupted by despotism to such extent that even the despot himself is ruler only while he is strong. If the masses succeed in dethroning him, he cannot complain about violence.

Philosophers, who define reforms and enlightened monarchy as the better way to change, are François Arouete de Voltaire (1694–1778), Charles de Seconda Montesquieu (1689–1755) and Johan Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832). Their ideal is England, where an enlightened monarchy was already established after a bloodless bourgeois revolution in 1688. There was a periodic convocation of the Parliament. Legislation was under its complete control. Taxes were also voted by the Parliament. Citizens were granted the right to deposit petitions etc. The changes in England gradually paved the road toward implementation of the prescriptions of *“About the spirit of Laws”* (1748) by Montesquieu, concerning division of the legislative, judicial and executive power.

Following their ideas, philosophers-reformers carried on correspondence with the European monarchs, visited them, and some of them even took ministerial posts in their Governments. Voltaire, for example, spent two years at the court of the Prussian King Friedrich II. In 1773 Diderot visited Empress Katherine II the Great in St. Petersburg. And in 1776 Goethe became Minister of Karl August, Duke of Weimar and directed him in his state affairs.

Changes in those years were very dynamic. In the summer of 1776 thirteen North American States broke away from England and founded the United States of America – the first ever state, founded in accordance with the ideals of Freemasonry. Colonists established a Congress and on June 4 adopted the Declaration of Independence, which was an etalon of the spirit of the XVIII Century:

We deem as obvious the following truths: all people are created and endowed by their Creator with certain irrevocable rights, among which is the right of Life, Freedom and strive for Happiness. In order to secure those rights, among people are formed governments, whose just authority is founded on the content of the ruled ones. Every time, when any form of government violates this principle, the people have right to change or destroy it, to create a new government, based on such principles and such organisation of power, which, according to the people's opinion can more than anything contribute to their safety and happiness.

Then the French bourgeois revolution followed (1789–1794). On August 26, 1789 the National Assembly, which declared itself to express the peoples will, proclaimed: *“People are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social differences can serve only the common welfare”*. The consequence from this declaration was that the only sacred sphere declared was private property. Even the radical Rousseau, who didn't live to see the events he had prepared, was of the opinion, *“that equality should not be understood as a complete and utter obliteration of the degrees of power and wealth”*.

Thus in general were accomplished the principles of good government, formulated a Century before by John Lock in his treatise *“On Civil Government”* (1690): 1) Absolute monarchy is incompatible with the civil society; 2) All people are free and equal in nature; 3) The main purpose of the people, getting united in

communities, is protection of private property; 4) The first necessary thing in a community is to establish legislative power.

Major figure of the new social community is the Citizen. Changes rely on his moral and political consciousness and perfection. According to Abbé Seyès, one of the ideologists of the French revolution, the state has no need of any "privileged classes": *"What should be done, so that a nation can exist and flourish? Private crafts and public functions [...] If the privileged class is eradicated, the nation will not become something lesser or something greater."*

The development of the idea of the energetic and industrious citizen also lead towards a praise to entrepreneurship and trade. For example, the English novelist Daniel Defoe (1660–1731), author of *"Robinson Crusoe"*, wrote:

Trade is the world's wealth. It divides nations to rich and poor. Trade feeds production, production gives rise to trade, trade distributes the world's wealth and again trade creates one new kind of wealth, which nature doesn't recognise.

In a letter to Goethe in connection to his novel *"Wilhelm Meister"* the writer Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) noted on his part: *"Apology of trade is magnificent and has a great meaning."*

Apart from the significance of labour the new era's ideologists emphasised the public role of holidays. *"If you want to make a nation energetic and industrious – Rousseau said – give it holidays, offer it entertainments, which will make it love its situation and will prevent it from wanting another, easier one. Those lost days will even more help appreciate all other days. Direct its entertainment, so that they be decent; this is the right way to inspire it to work."* Here the interest towards national identity is very strong. The whole cultural Pantheon is related to the festive tradition of a peoples, because festive culture includes both merry and sad rituals.

Enlightenment figures have rarely protested against the Catholic Church's involvement in public life. In his pamphlet *"Call for honour and justice"* (1715), Daniel Defoe professes:

From the moment, when for the first time I gained knowledge of public affairs up till now I have always been a sincere worshipper of my country's Constitution. I have always been an ardent follower of freedom and Protestants' interests[...] I have never diverged neither from the principles of the Revolution, nor from the doctrine of freedom and proprietorship, on which they are based.

These words also touch the Protestant theme. The sweeping "protest" and the appeal for reforms within the Christian Church, known as *the Reformation*, were directed against the Pope's authority and the hypocrisy of Catholicism. Typical protestant movements were *Calvinism*, named after the Swiss clergyman and reformer Jean Calvin (1509–1564), and *Lutheranism* – named after the German Church reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546).

Reformist ideas have their undercurrent manifestation in the art of classicism, too. Evidence for this is the comedy *"Tartuffe"* by Molière. These ideas, ho-

wever, became irresistible in the era of enlightenment. Almost all more famous figures of the enlightenment era were critically disposed towards the Catholic Church. A particularly fierce opponent of the Pope was Voltaire, who in 1759 publicly called for struggle against the cassocks' hypocrisy and said the famous words: "*Stamp down the brute*", directed towards the Pope in Rome. In principle he was opposed to any religious fanaticism. Significant in this respect was his pathos "*Mohamed, or Fanaticism*" (1741). His *Deism* (belief in the One Neutral God) became the major postulate of Freemasonry and defined its attitude towards various religions. In our days these ideas find expression in the movement of *Ecumenism*.

Reformers of Christianity think that man should be left free with his religion. The Church administration, including priests, high ranking clergymen and cardinals, was declared not only unnecessary, but noxious, too. Particularly emphasised was the bad example, given by corrupt and avaricious God's servants, who with their insincerity repulsed the pure souls of the believers.

For the purpose of motivating the lack on any need for mediators between laymen and God, a struggle began against the service in Latin. The Bible was translated to the spoken European languages. For example, in 1522 it was translated to German by Lutter. Rituals were simplified. The Church's monopole on education was liquidated and secular schools were established. A significant act of justice was the closure of the Church's Courts, which were connected to the most repulsive form of violence in Europe in the Middle Ages – the Inquisition.

A number of philosophers of the era of enlightenment thought that under the influence of Protestantism the creative forces of man shoot up, while Catholicism suppressed them. Goethe, for example, made the following note in front of his secretary Eckermann:

One of the happy circumstances, which enabled Shakespeare's inborn talent to develop freely and brightly, was that he was also a Protestant, otherwise he, too, like Cadilassa and calderone would have glorified nonsense.

Major principles in the sphere of religion in the XVIII Century culture became tolerance towards religion and moderation.

The era of enlightenment gave rise to the theory of natural man. "*Man is one whole – stated Rousseau – I don't deny, – but man, torn by religion, Government, laws, traditions, prejudice, environment, becomes alienated from his essence...*" If this is so, he must be placed in more special conditions, so that he returns to his natural state. In "*Emil, or about education*" Rousseau presents his brief programme for renovation of man – more labour and closer to nature. According to the XVIII Century philosophers, however, most important is cultivation of human nature through education and enlightenment. This is where the definition of their time as Century of enlightenment comes from. In his novel "*Wilhelm Meister – years of wandering, or the disavowing ones*" Goethe says:

Man, born for intelligence, needs much more education, it can be constantly displayed before him by the care of his parents and his teachers, by tacit example or by the cruel life experience.

In order to support this process of “building up the personality”, first in England (1729), and then in France sprung up the idea about the Encyclopaedia as an educational project, which was a completely Masonic act. Particularly monumental was the work “*Dictionary or Encyclopaedia of sciences, arts and crafts*” (1751–1772), realised in France under the editing of Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and Jean le Rond d’Alambaire (1717–1783). An important work from educational point of view was also “*Philosophical Dictionary*” (1764–1769) by Voltaire.

Enlighteners highly valued the decent art as a form of education. In the Introduction to his novel “*Robinson Crusoe*” Defoe, concealed behind the publisher’s mask, wrote:

The description is presented modestly, with becoming concentration and righteous interpretation of events, as wise men always do, so that others can learn from their example and pay the due respect to the wise providence, no matter how diverse our experiences, which storm us on their own accord, may be.

Rousseau, on his part, thinks that Defoe’s novel is the only suitable example of civil and moral education. Thus the novel form’s significance for the ideology of enlightenment is declared. According to XVIII Century’s ideologists art should not be bent to the readers’ taste. Goethe emphasises in “*Art and Antiquity*”:

An author shows greatest respect to his readers when he gives them not what they expect, but what he himself thinks right and useful at a certain level of his and others’ development.

Reconciliation of individual and public interests is sought through art. Art is considered a powerful means for overcoming the inborn egotism in people and transforming them into citizens. A number of theoreticians of the enlightenment devoted a considerable part of their works to this issue. The English philosopher Shaftesbury (1671–1713), for example, noted, that aesthetical and moral principles were close in their essence. Beauty, in his opinion, is also good, and ugliness is evil. The specific aesthetical category for the art of enlightenment is *simplicity*. In 1771 Diderot said: “*Oh, my friend, how beautiful is simplicity! How wrongly we have acted by having alienated ourselves from it!*”. Opposed to simplicity is luxury. “*Luxury and bad taste – concludes Rousseau – are inseparable. Wherever there is extravagance, taste becomes false.*” In this meaning nature is source of simple beauty and example for imitation. “*Completely pure can [...] be that artistic beauty – says Schiller – whose original is in nature itself.*”

The era of enlightenment is characteristic for its interest to *otherness*. Scientific expeditions are organised, established are museums with artefacts, brought from far away countries, many literary and scientific works are translated. Europe is traversed by explorers and writers in order to meet and exchange views and

thoughts. The interesting works of literature and scientific discoveries are made public as soon as possible in various countries through excellent translation. Mass distribution of books is favoured by the phenomenal advance of the printing industry, which is, on its part, result of the financial profit ensuing from this activity. Availability of solvent buyers of books and periodicals alters the whole cultural scene of Europe. Even newspapers and magazines come to existence, which present the current event in various countries. There is also reasoning on the problem of cultural dialogue between peoples. In *"On the world's literature again"* Goethe wrote:

Every nation has its peculiarities, which distinguishes it from the others and those peculiarities make nations feel separated and – or attracted, or rejected one from another. External manifestations of those internal peculiarities seem to other nations mostly unusually unpleasant and, in general, funny. It is for this reason why we always appreciate one nation less than it deserves.

The principle "Know the others, so that you know thyself" is a leading one in the new world of studiousness, tolerance and education. *"Persian Letters"* (1721) by Montesquieu, for example, is a typical book of enlightenment. It is in epistolary form and presents the foreigner's impressions of the world he found himself in and the exposition is in the spirit of humanism and demonstrates good will.

In the enlightenment era's understanding of the world and man the idea of the difference is, however, combined with the understanding of universality of the spirit. In the novel *"Wilhelm Meister – years of wandering, or the disavowing ones"* Goethe emphasised:

There is no patriotic art and patriotic science. Both, as all supreme welfare, belong to the whole world and can be developed only if there is a common free interaction between all people, living on earth at the same time as everything which had been left to us and which we know from the part, must be respected.

Thus the interest towards the unique national identity interweaves with the idea of universal human values.

In the context of the above said particularly interesting is the role of the so called "Young ones" (Vassil Levski, Hristo Botev, Ivan Kassabov etc.) in the Bulgarian Renaissance. They were followers of the enlightenment project *Young Europe*, formulated by Giuseppe Macini in 1833, who linked it to the idea, that all peoples have right of freedom, through which they could build their enlightenment, culture and national language. For him freedom and equality must manifest themselves in the moral, religious and social sphere. Idiosyncratic for the ideology of the "Young ones" in enslaved Bulgaria was the fact that they took a stand against empires – against the Ottoman empire in favour of Young Bulgaria and Young Greece, against the Russian empire in favour of Young Poland, against the Austro-Hungarian empire in favour of Young Italy and Young Hungary etc. Also interesting, for example, is the circumstance that during the revolution of Young

Turkey, which was lead by Free Masons and dethroned the Sultan, a Bulgarian detachment was also sent to Constantinople in support of the revolution.

In our Renaissance the division between young and old distinguishes mainly Russophiles from Russophobes on the principle of struggle against the Russian absolutism. This opposition is particularly strongly manifested in Hristo Botev's journalism. On many occasions in "Kettle-drum" he denounces those who had received from their masters "so many roubles and so many bravos" ("A rebuke of one Consul to the Bulgarian notables" – "Kettle-drum", year 1, issues 3, 4 and 5 of March 20 and 30 and April 10, 1869). Moscowphiles themselves are defined as "*the Old ones*", and their newspaper is accused of "*defending the Russian notables' interests*" ("The "*Motherland*" newspaper or the organ of notables" – "Kettle-drum", year 1, issue 8 of 27.07.1869) – i.e. the aristocracy's interests.

In the interpretations of "Kettle-drum" Grandfather Ivan¹ himself is not that holy figure, known to the readers of pro-Russian Renaissance stories, but a sinister manipulator, who has "*harnessed*" his political servants. ("Political conversation" – "Kettle-drum", year 1, issue 9 of 10.08.1869). At the same time the Russian Government's representatives in Romania, such as Baron Offenbergh, Consul General, are described in "Kettle-drum" as puppeteers of the national traitors Russophiles. "Kettle-drum" meets with a particular indignation the dishonourable policy of Russia in respect of the interests of the Bulgarian nation: "*The Russian Government, made of Germans, obviously wants another hog-wash, because it shamelessly sticks its nose in our business again. Today it instigates the Phenner Patriarchy² to protest against the firman, but on the other hand it saws intrigues before the Turkish Government, that Bulgarians were still not ripe for being given their own hierarchy; therefore the firman should be amended in favour of the Greek Patriarchy, which vowed to be Russia's Pan-Slavonic stooge from now on.*" ("The Ecumenical Patriarch is out of his mind" – "Kettle-drum", year I, issue 17 of 27.05.1870).

The strong influence of the ideology of enlightenment is beyond any doubt. Botev believes, that in order to destroy the kingdom of lie, its principles must also go down with it. It is for this reason that he so passionately criticised them in both his poetry and political journalism. The pedagogic recommendation to fear God and respect the King is also literally cited in his poem "*Struggle*". Solomon's words in it "*fear God, respect the King*" are characterised as a "*sacred nonsense*". They are part of the sages of "*a pack of wolves in sheepskins*". The hypocritical charlatans, preaching those "*sages*", are "*priest and Church*", "*savage teacher*", "*newspaper man*". With their pedagogy the said public figures support "*this*

¹ Colloquial for Russia (translator's note).

² Reference is made to the Ecumenical Patriarchy in the District of Phenner Bahchè in Constantinople (translator's note).

kingdom bloody and sinful,/ kingdom of villainy, lechery and tears,/ kingdom of grief – endless evil!” The poet’s worldly ideal is to find new moral stronghold for his people. He needs them himself and constantly seeks them. Very interesting in this respect is a passage of his letter to Grudov, Kavaldjiev and Stranski, sent from the board of the ship “Rasezki” on May 17, 1876: *“I am happy and my joy is boundless, when I think that “My Prayer” is coming true.*” The specific emphasis on this poem is indicative. It was written by Botev in order to show alternative to the pretended idols and the false God. Walking towards death, the poet remembered the following verses:

*Oh, my God, You rightful God,
Not You, God, in Heaven,
but You, God, within me -
in my heart and in my soul...*

*Give strength to my arm,
for when the slave revolts
in the fire of the struggle
my grave I may find!*

This rightful God is not the God *“of liars,/ of dishonest tyrants”*, He is not *“idol of the fools,/of the humans’ foes”*. He is the God of reason and protector of slaves, He is the One God of Deism, of whom speaks Voltaire.

Still, in my opinion, we can talk about some direct influence of Freemasonry on Bulgaria’s social and cultural activities only in respect of the period after the Liberation. The information about the young Prince Alexander Battenberg with the Rousse Lodge of Ivan Vedar is a common knowledge. Also strong is the influence of Zachari Stoyanov on the political life, and there is a documentary proof that he was a practicing Free Mason – his Masonic Charter is still displayed in the Rousse Museum. Apart from that even a glance at the text of the Tarnovo Constitution shows its Masonic clay. Most interesting, however, is the case of Bulgaria’s national flag. So far no discussion has been held on this issue. In my opinion this is a key issue. This is one of the concealed Masonic messages of the men of the state, who constituted the Third Bulgarian Kingdom. The act of adopting the tricolour flag as it is, is an exceptional event in our history. Firstly, it gets us closer to the tradition of the eminent Masons Macini and Garibaldi. Under their influence the colours of white, green and red were adopted in Italy’s national flag, and through their follower Lyosh Koshut – in Hungary, too. A curious fact is that the colour arrangement of independent Mexico’s national flag is the same as that of the Italian one and this is due to the circumstance, that the figures of the struggle for national liberation in that country were involved in Freemasonry since 1822. A particular role among them has played the eminent Free Mason and twice President of Mexico Benito Huares (1806–1872). At the same time it is only in Bulgaria that the arrangement of the three colours corresponds to the symbolic system of the Scottish Ritual.

In 26°, Prince of Mercy or Scottish Trinitarian, the table must be covered with a table cloth with the colours of white, green and red, where white symbolises Belief, green – Hope and red – Love (Mercy), respectively. The Prince of this Degree must himself demonstrate mercy and help for the release of the captives (enslaved people). It is clear that the choice of our national tricolour flag is not accidental. It emphasises the most significant dogma of Christianity – the idea of The Holy Trinity and at the same time shows God's mercy, spread over our people. Thus Bulgaria's national flag is connected to the universal idea of freedom and discretely reminds of our national specifics – that the predominant religion in our land is Christianity.