

The First Greek Ambassador to the American Federation 1867-1868—From the Memoirs of Alexandros Rizos Rangavis (Minneapolis, MN: Nostos Books, 2019), 173pp. Translated by Christine Gabrielides.

Nostos Books in Minneapolis has recently published a book that will be of interest to the Greek American community. The book consists of an English translation of selections from the memoirs of Alexandros Rizos Rangavis covering his service in the US. Rangavis served as the first ambassador of Greece to the United States. Rangavis' memoirs consist of a massive four volume work originally published in Greek starting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This book is number 28 in the Nostos series on Modern Greek History and Culture (nostosbooks2733@gmail.com), a publication series under the directorship of Professor Theophanis Stavrou a respected historian at the University of Minnesota.

Rangavis was born in 1809 in Constantinople. He was the son of a prominent Greek Phanariot family. Like many Greeks of the period, Rangavis spent time in Eastern Europe and attended military school in Munich. He settled in independent Greece in 1830. Throughout his life (1809-1892) Rangavis was a prominent figure in the political, cultural and social life of post-independence Greece. His four volume memoirs provide unique insights in the life, society and politics of 19<sup>th</sup> century Greece. During his career he held important government and academic positions in Athens and abroad. Those familiar with the Plaka district of Athens may have seen Rangavis' home (Kydathinaion and Gerondos streets). He is buried in the historic section of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cemetery in Athens.

In 1897, under the King's pressure and urging, Rangavis reluctantly accepted the position of Ambassador of Greece to the United States. He was the first ambassador of independent Greece to the US. Until then, only Greek consular personnel represented Greece in select US cities. His reluctance over the appointment was largely due to concerns he had about what he could achieve in the US on behalf of Greece because of the adherence of the US to the Monroe Doctrine. Unfortunately, most Greeks, let alone Greek Americans, are unaware of the career and contributions of this important Greek personality.

Rangavis' priorities in Washington included: mobilizing American public and political support for the cause of Crete; acquiring ships for the Greek Navy; seeking public and private sources for the development of the Greek economy; and defusing Ottoman/Turkish propaganda in Washington. Ironically enough, his Ottoman/Turkish counterpart in Washington was another Phanariot Greek, whose Greek wife did not speak English, something that annoyed Rangavis.

The selections from Rangavis' memoirs about his service in the US reveal his inquisitive mind and his willingness to learn about politics and society in this new federation in the "Antipodes" (the "opposite side of the world"), as he calls the American continent. Rangavis arrived in the US soon after the assassination of President Lincoln and the end of the Civil War. He witnessed with great interest the impeachment of President Johnson and attended several of the impeachment hearings. The impeachment process affirmed to him the value of democratic processes in America. He met prominent political figures like General Grant and literary greats like Charles Dickens who was in the US at the time. His inquisitive mind encouraged him to travel along the East coast and the Midwest. Rangavis' memoirs show remarkable insights and sensitivity about the plight of American Indians and their treatment by European settlers. He was troubled by the history of slavery in America and was interested in the consequences slavery had on the lives of African Americans after the end of the Civil War. Rangavis expresses great admiration for American women and the role they played in American society thanks to their education and engagement in American society. His account of life and work in the United States provides a delightful memoir about life in post-Civil War America, including the

informality of White House receptions, and the informality of meetings with the president and cabinet members. He was in the US at a very different time indeed...There are also interesting perspectives on Greeks who lived in the US and various opportunists who were interested in doing business in Greece.

I encourage Greek American readers in particular to read this important translation. They will learn a lot about the history of relations between Greece and the US, issues affecting these relations and philhellenism in 19<sup>th</sup> century America. Those of us who have been part of AHI's work will recognize the continuity of issues affecting the relations of Greece and the United States. It is a book worth reading!

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