

# Review Essays

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## GREECE, 1940-1950: THE CRUCIAL DECADE

George M. Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine: British Policy in Greece, 1944-1947*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982. Pages XII plus 299.

Lawrence S. Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece, 1943-1949*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. Pages XII plus 445.

Historians recording the events of the past for the benefit and enlightenment of the present and as a caution for the future have an obligation to observe the dictum of Cicero, "Nec modus est ullus investigandi veri, nisi inveneris: et quaerendi defatigatio turpis est, quum id quod quaeritur sit pulcherrimum"<sup>1</sup>. Yet this important duty for various reasons has often been violated. This situation is especially true in the case of Greece. Indeed it was not until this century that Greek historians turned their attention to the study of the post-Byzantine epoch of their country's history, the years 1453-1821, when Greece was under the rule of the Ottoman Turks. While Greek historians avoided the study of those melancholy years of captivity, Greek archaeologists were also neglecting the preservation of the monuments of the post-Byzantine period. But cultural maturity, time and objectivity have fortunately remedied this lacuna in the history of Greece. More and more Greek-speaking scholars have joined their non-Greek colleagues in the study and investigation of the era of the *Tourco-cratia*, while Greek and non-Greek archaeologists find much interest and value in the study, conservation and preservation of the monuments, mostly churches, of the period. A plethora of books has covered the struggle for independence (1821-1829), and the different aspects of Greek history since independence. In this century modern Greek history has been told and recorded countless times from different perspectives by Greeks and non-Greeks. Numerous

1. Cicero, *De Finibus*, I., 1, 3. (There should be no end to the search for truth, other than the finding of it: it is disgraceful to grow weary of seeking when the object of your search is so beautiful).

volumes have been produced examining different aspects—social, political, economic, military and diplomatic—of Greek history during World War I and the postwar years. In the last ten years or so there have been notable contributions to the study, interpretation and evaluation of the interwar years and, more specifically, the crucial years 1940 to 1950. In this context it is a pleasure to welcome the books of Dr. George M. Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine: British Policy in Greece, 1944-1947*, and of Professor Lawrence S. Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece, 1943-1949*, both of which have much original and important material to offer for the study of that tragic decade. These two scholarly and revealing books analyze important policies affecting Greece. Because of the foundations which the 1940s established in both the internal world of Greece and its relationships with others during the later years, the 1940s deserve, and are increasingly receiving, attention by Greek and non-Greek scholars.

The parallels between the Alexander and Wittner books are significant and they should be read together. In order to comprehend better the different dimensions of the decade of the 1940s the reader is also urged to begin his study of the period with the recently published excellent study of Dr. George Th. Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic: Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece, 1922-1936*<sup>2</sup>.

*The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine: British Policy in Greece, 1944-1947* is divided into seven chapters, with notes, bibliography and index. The seven chapters are "In Search of National Unity", "The Road to Revolution", "Hope and Disillusion", "A Choice of Evils", "Sovereignty Restored", "A Revulsion against All Things Greek", and "Full Circle". *American Intervention in Greece, 1943-1949* is divided into ten chapters, with notes, bibliography and index. The ten chapters are "Containing the Wartime Resistance", "The Gathering Crisis", "The Truman Doctrine", "Controlling Greek Politics", "Defending Freedom", "The Economic Aid Program", "Taming the Greek Labor Movement", "The Military Solution", "The International Dimension", and "Aftermath". Both authors have used original accounts and confidential diplomatic documents recently made available to scholars. In the United States Wittner obtained his materials through the Freedom of Information Act; in his preface Alexander tells the reader that his work is based on "over 40,000 documents, an invaluable collection of telegrams, minutes, reports, and memoranda". A key problem in the study of the period under investiga-

2. George Th. Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic: Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece, 1922-1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

tion is, according to Alexander, the inaccessibility of the archives of the Greek state, which are restricted until 1995. Yet he writes, "The Foreign Office papers are [an] utterly reliable source for British perception of events in Greece and the manner in which British policy was formulated". In the preface of his book Wittner makes reference to his difficulties in obtaining and examining American materials relevant to his investigation. Wittner writes that "some of the most vital sources are simply not available. Important U.S. government records still remain classified (e.g., most materials originating with the CIA)". In the case of the Greek state papers, Wittner concurs with Alexander: "Virtually all Greek records—with the exception of Greek diplomatic correspondence located in British and American archives—are also closed to researchers". Both books provide an essential analysis and exegesis of the policy of two major powers—Britain and the United States—toward Greece. *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine: British Policy in Greece, 1944-1947*, and *American Intervention in Greece, 1943-1949* are very well researched books which should be compulsory reading for anyone with an interest in modern Greek history. The books contain some notable discoveries, the most interesting of which relates to the role of Greece in the grand strategy of the major Western powers in the event of a conflict with Russia.

Misunderstanding of the present", wrote Marc Bloch, "is the inevitable consequence of ignorance of the past. But a man may wear himself out just as fruitlessly in seeking to understand the past, if he is totally ignorant of the present"<sup>3</sup>. For the Greeks the years 1940 to 1950 are an unforgettable decade: years of trial and error, cooperation and confrontation, a decade that saw the Italian adventure, the German invasion, the Civil War, and the arrival of the Americans. But, following Bloch's dictum, to understand the tragic decade of the 1940s and the way in which it affected developments in Greece during the succeeding years, it is necessary to know developments in Greece during the interwar years. Thus a brief survey of the interwar years would serve to provide both background and an element of continuity.

The years that followed World War I were melancholy ones for Greece, characteristic of the mercurial nature of the Greeks and their politics. Greece emerged from the war with a considerable increase in its territory (51,000 square miles), but the gains were rather minimal and far short of the realization of the Greek nationalistic ambition, the *Megali Idea* or Great Idea, the liberation of all unredeemed Greek lands. In the political arena, although there were many political parties, two were most important: the republican

3. Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 43.

Venizelist Liberal Party, and the royalist Populist Party. After the catastrophic war with Turkey and humiliating military defeat of the Greek forces in Asia Minor (1922), King Constantine was forced to abdicate. His son, George II, reigned briefly, and then the monarchy collapsed (1923). The disaster in Asia Minor practically brought an end to the *Megali Idea* and resulted in the formal abolition of the monarchy. A republic was proclaimed on 25 March 1925 by a National Assembly resolution, and a democratic constitution modeled on that of France was adopted. From 1924 until 1932 weak coalition governments, liberal in orientation and policy, administered the affairs of the country. A plethora of problems confronted the governments, the most demanding of which was that of resettling some 1.4 million Greek refugees from Turkey, Bulgaria, and Russia. The social and economic dimensions of the problem far exceeded the tried and limited resources of the country. Yet, with generous loans arranged by the League of Nations, and their own determination, the Greeks succeeded in absorbing the refugees and in finding accommodation for them in northern Greece and in the Athens-Piraeus regions of the country. Thus, although the military defeats were followed by serious social and economic misfortunes, *Fere fit malum malo aptissimum*<sup>4</sup>, and the Greeks were able to adjust to the obstacles which had hit their nation, *Habet has vices conditio mortalium, ut adversa ex secundis, ex adversis secunda nascantur*<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, the refugees with their skills, confidence in their own ability, determination, energy and enthusiasm in time became a great asset to the economic development of Greece, *Alia initia e fine*<sup>6</sup>.

The population of Greece increased to over 7,000,000, and, despite economic demands and pressures, Greece and the Greeks enjoyed higher economic, social and political standards than did their Asiatic and Balkan neighbors. In November 1932 the Populists came to power and in 1935 restored the monarchy. Following a referendum on 25 November 1935, King George II returned to Greece. On 4 August 1936, General Ioannis Metaxas carried out a *coup d'état*, abolished the constitutional regime (but not the monarchy), and established a fascist dictatorship with the acquiescence of the king. In the diplomatic sphere the Greco-Turkish convention of 1930 and a series of bilateral pacts with the Balkan states paved the way to the Balkan Alliance of 1934<sup>7</sup>.

4. Livy, *Histories*, I., 46. (One misfortune is generally followed closely by another).

5. Pliny the Younger, *Panegyric*, V. (The vicissitudes of human existence are such that misfortune has its origin in prosperity, and good fortune in adversity).

6. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, IX., 65. (From the end spring new beginnings).

7. See Yiannis P. Pikros, *O Venizelos kai to Kypriko* (Athens, 1980); Marjorie House-

In April 1939 Mussolini annexed Albania and in October 1940 the Italian leader invaded Greece. At 3 a.m., on 28 October 1940, the Italian ambassador to Athens delivered an ultimatum to General Metaxas demanding to "occupy with its own armed forces several strategic points in Greek territory". The ultimatum was rejected by the Greek leader. The Italian leadership underestimated the force of nationalism and the determination of the Greeks. The adventure in Greece went badly for the Italian forces, which were halted by the Greeks within three weeks, and then even pushed back into Albania. By December 1940 the humiliated Mussolini found it necessary to turn to Hitler and ask for assistance. Raging against the Italian *Duce*, the German *Führer* ordered preparations for operation *Marita*, the invasion of the Balkans<sup>8</sup>. On 6 April 1941, two months after Metaxas's death (29 January 1941), German forces invaded Greece. Thus while the "Battle of Britain" was still raging, a second front was opened in Greece in the spring of 1941. The Greek forces put up a heroic resistance against the superior German forces. Professor George H. Chase wrote in 1943 that "The great tradition still lives in Greece [as] the events of the past three years have clearly shown. The significance of the valiant struggle of the Greeks against Axis aggression can hardly be overestimated. On the material side Greek resistance delayed the extension of Axis rule to the Eastern Mediterranean; it exploded the myth of the military might of Italy; and above all, it forced the Germans to waste precious months in the Spring of 1941, thus holding up the attack on Russia and contributing materially to the failure of that attack"<sup>9</sup>.

The three-and-a-half-year-long German occupation of Greece was a crucial period in the country's history. It was a period when new political orientations in internal policy and foreign intervention and dependence were established. For the Greek people the years 1941 to 1944 were "a time of starvation, terror, and death"<sup>10</sup>. This melancholy description of the situation

pian, *Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of a City* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972); and John T. A. Koumoulides, ed., *Greece in Transition: Essays in the History of Modern Greece, 1821-1974* (London: Zeno Publishers, 1977).

8. See Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982); Joseph Goebbels, *The Goebbels Diaries, 1939-1941* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1982); Martin van Creveld, *Hitler's Strategy, 1940-1941: The Balkan Clue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); and, Christopher Buckley, *Greece and Crete, 1941* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1977).

9. George H. Chase, ed., *Greece of Tomorrow* (New York: American Friends of Greece, 1943), p. 15.

10. John O. Iatrides, ed., *Greece in the 1940s: A Nation in Crisis* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1981), p. xiii.

of the Greeks is paralleled, alas, by the equally melancholy policy of the “friends” of Greece towards the Greek people and their desperate country. “During the early 1940s and up to the 1950s”, Professor Nicolas Svoronos writes, “foreign intervention loomed so large in Greek politics that its immediacy and violence recall the political crudities of Great Britain and France during the first half of the nineteenth century. In addition, the political situation in Greece during the 1940s reflected even more the tensions between the Soviet Union, as the leading power of the socialist world, and, originally, Great Britain and later, the United States, representing the capitalist powers of the West”<sup>11</sup>. Geopolitical considerations guided the policies of Britain and the United States towards Greece. “In their treatment of significant events during the 1940-1950 period in Greece”, Svoronos points out, “researchers have limited themselves mainly to two factors: the internal political and foreign”<sup>12</sup>. Greek and non-Greek historians have dealt with the different aspects—social, political, and economic—which the German occupation and the Civil War had on Greece. Yet there is much to be done in this area, for the foreign factor during this period leaves a serious vacuum, and it certainly demands closer scrutiny by scholars. The various dimensions of the foreign factor in the history of Greece in the decade of the 1940s and the succeeding years are now under investigation by scholars. It is in the foreign sphere that the scholarly books by Alexander and Wittner make their major contribution and join the list of revisionist histories of that period.

British interest in the affairs of Greece is traced from the early years of the struggle of the Greeks to liberate their land from the control of the Ottoman Turk. The Great Powers—Great Britain, France and Russia—took up the cause of the Greeks. After Independence the Great Powers actively interfered in the affairs of the sovereign state of Greece. This foreign interference was made possible, alas, by the nature of the Greek political leaders. Thus the active cooperation of the Great Powers in the Greek struggle for independence (1821-1829) turned into an equally active competition for control of the affairs of the newly liberated state. The protecting powers became the sponsors and patrons of Greek political parties, in an apparent effort to protect and promote their own strategic interests through control of Greek party politics. Following liberation the political parties in Greece competing for power were the

11. Nicolas Svoronos, “Greek History, 1940-1950” in John O. Iatrides, ed., *Greece in the 1940s: A Nation in Crisis* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1981), p. 1.

12. *Ibid.*

“English”, the “Russian”, and the “French”<sup>13</sup>. In this struggle among the Great Powers to dominate situations in Greece the British prevailed and their influence over both internal and external politics and policies in Greece continued to 1947<sup>14</sup>. In the introduction of *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine: British Policy in Greece, 1944-1947*, the author gives a good summary of British interests in Greece. According to Alexander, “Greece was to be non-communist in order to safeguard Britain’s vital lines of communication through the eastern Mediterranean to Suez and the Petroleum of the Middle East”. British policy in Greece had always been strategic in orientation and emphasis rather than one guided by the strength of a British sense of Philhellenism, the romanticism of the intellectuals versus the *Realpolitik* of the political, military, and diplomatic establishment of Great Britain. Keeping the Russians out of Greece, considered a British sphere of influence, was the aim of London. Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, in a memorandum to the Cabinet on 9 August 1944, wrote, “the traditional connection between Britain and Greece was indispensable to Britain’s strategic position in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean”. Great Britain became more and more involved in the affairs of Greece in the 1940s, but by 1945 it became clear that its own economic limitations meant it had either to curtail drastically its activities in Greece, a risk to its strategic interests in the region, or find some other solution: “The only available course of action” left for Britain “was to approach the United States for assistance in Greece, and this the Foreign Office did on 4 December 1945”. Early in the summer of 1946 the Greek embassy in Washington reported that “the Americans were ready to accord massive economic assistance to Greece”. The United States entered the world of Greece through the Truman Doctrine. “American aid”, writes Alexander, “began to flow into Athens in the autumn of 1947”. The fate of the Greeks and the fortunes of their exhausted country rested with the United States<sup>15</sup>.

13. John A. Petropoulos, *Politics and Statecraft in the Kingdom of Greece, 1833-1843* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 246-47. See also, T. A. Couloumbis, J. A. Petropoulos, H. J. Psomiades, *Foreign Interference in Greek Politics: An Historical Perspective* (New York: Pella Publishing Co., 1976).

14. See John S. Koliopoulos, *Greece and the British Connection, 1935-1941* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

15. See John O. Iatrides, ed., *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports: Greece 1933-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Bruce R. Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey and Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Ronnie Dugger, *The Politician: The Life and Times of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1982), p. 304; and, George F. Kennan,

The United States replaced Britain as the great friend and patron of Greece and defender of the Greeks from Russia and Greece's communist neighbors. Greece was in the sphere of influence of the United States. The entry of Greece into NATO (1951), completed its full association with the anti-communist world<sup>16</sup>. With the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan came Greece's economic and military dependency on the United States. Economic and military assistance turned Greece into the status of a client state of the United States with specific obligations towards America. Military and economic assistance to Greece served vital American strategic and geopolitical interests in the region. "Security assistance" according to Harry J. Shaw, "is especially suitable as a quid pro quo for military base rights abroad"<sup>17</sup>. To former United States Senator and Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, William Fulbright, "all the American mistakes committed abroad since 1947 stem from the Truman Doctrine". According to Senator Fulbright, "if it be granted that Stalin started the Cold War, it must also be recognized that the Truman Administration seemed to welcome it"<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, revisionist historians of the late 1940s and early 1950s see American involvement in the affairs of Greece, as well as other countries, in a new perspective<sup>19</sup>. They see reasons given in the past to explain American policy in Greece as being misleading and fear that errors of the past might be repeated in the present, mistakes in attitude, approach, formulation and application of policy towards Greece and America's European allies in general. Alas, situations which contributed to the formulation of the Truman Doctrine in 1947, in the context of Greece, have not changed from that date to this<sup>20</sup>. The entry

*Memoirs, 1925-1950* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1967), pp. 313-324 and p. 411; and John L. Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press 1972).

16. *Texts of NATO Final Communiqués, 1949-1974* (Brussels: NATO Information Service, 1974), pp. 63-70; See also Sir Edward Peck, "The United Nations and the Problem of Greece and its Neighbors, 1946-1951" in John T. A. Koumoulides, ed., *Hellenic Perspectives: Essays in the History of Greece* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1980), pp. 181-203.

17. Harry J. Shaw, "U.S. Security Assistance: Debts and Dependency", *Foreign Policy* (Spring 1983), pp. 105-123.

18. "How the Devil Theory has Bedevilled US Foreign Policies", *The Times*, London, 17 January 1972.

19. *The New York Times*, 8 February 1980.

20. In his recently published memoirs, Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Adviser to President Carter, writes, "The Carter Doctrine was modeled on the Truman Doctrine, enunciated in response to the Soviet threat to Greece and Turkey.... The point of both the Truman Doctrine and of what later came to be called the Carter Doctrine was



of the United States in the world of Greece was established between a politically unstable, socially exhausted, and economically desperate Greece and a strategically and geopolitically oriented United States, an unequal relationship between a patron nation and a client state. It was a situation in which policies and decisions affecting the fortunes of Greece were made in Washington and carried out in Greece without much serious consultation with the Greeks. The loyalty of the Greeks was praised and the strategic importance of Greece to the alliance was emphasized. In time, and by abuse of local circumstances, a rather disagreeable attitude towards Greece and the Greeks was formulated in the United States during the decade of the 1940s and was unfortunately allowed to continue during the succeeding decades with negative results for Greek-American relations and the alliance in general. An attitude arose that in Greece the Americans had all the answers and knew how to deal better and more effectively with the problems of the Greeks. Greeks were expected to be agreeable and cooperative.

The connection between economic aid, military assistance and "intervention" by the United States in the affairs of Greece is argued by Wittner in *American Intervention in Greece, 1943-1949*. With access to an extraordinary number of documents, Wittner reassesses the various phases of American involvement in the affairs of Greece during the decade of crisis. In this book we have a most exhaustive and revealing examination of American policy towards Greece. "Intervention" by an American government in the affairs of another state has in the past and continues in the present to produce active controversy and debate. With the fall of the junta (1967-1974), and the return, under tragic circumstances, of democracy in Greece (1974), the role of the United States in the affairs of Greece is subject to considerable reevaluation, academic interest, and political debate. United States' policy towards Greece has been argued before, but in the last ten years that policy is subject to considerable revisionist interpretation. The Truman Doctrine, to Wittner, "provided the United States with a window on the Balkans, the Mediterranean, and the Near East". In the concluding chapter of his interesting study Wittner writes, "In short, the U.S. government treated Greece much as the Soviet

to make the Soviet Union aware of the fact that the intrusion of Soviet armed forces into an area of vital importance to the United States would precipitate an engagement with the United States...", *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* (New York: Straus, Giroux, 1983), pp. 444-45; see also, Peter Duignan and L. H. Gann, "Middle East", in Peter Duignan and Alvin Rabushka, editors, *The United States in the 1980s* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1980), p. 788.

Union treated its Eastern European satellites—as a piece of Cold War real estate. Little wonder, then, that American policy toward Greece ended in shambles. In the long run, subject peoples revolt against such treatment, and powers which play an imperial role should expect to inherit the consequences”. This is indeed a melancholy assessment. Greek-American relationships are recently experiencing certain tensions, or, I should say, signs of maturity<sup>21</sup>. A positive change has taken place in the world of Greece since the tragic summer of 1974, a change in both internal politics and foreign policy<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, a social maturity and growth are characteristic in all aspects of Greek society. Membership in the European Economic Community has provided Greece with a greater sense of political and economic security, but also responsibility in domestic and foreign policy. Allies, *symmachoi*, are partners united by common interests and strengthened by respect for each other’s sovereignty and independence as well as institutions. The errors of the era of the Cold War must be recognized and avoided in the formulation and application of policy in the world of the present. The reservoir of admiration and friendship of the Greeks for the United States is fundamentally deep and strong, but caution is needed. The fundamentally firm friendship and partnership should not be taken for granted or become emotionally drained and abused by either the United States or Greece, nor negatively influenced by periodic tensions which are a normal future among friends and allies. A rethinking of relations between Greece and the United States is perhaps long overdue. In the need for study of the errors of the past, no matter how painful it might be, to reopen such questions, the books by Alexander and Wittner make a major contribution and present a challenge to all historians. Finally in recording the events of the past historians should use as their

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21. See Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), pp. 136-140; Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Brown and Co., 1982), pp. 1187-1193; and, John O. Iatrides, “To Meet Greek Needs”, *The New York Times*, 2 March 1983.

22. It is important not to allow the troubles of the past twenty or so years to distort appreciation and recognition of the changes that have been achieved in Greece since 1974. Historians must approach the subject with great sense of responsibility and avoid hasty judgments. See F. Stephen Larrabee, “Greece-Papandreou: National Interests are the Key”, *The Atlantic* (March, 1983), pp. 24-32; F. Stephen Larrabee, “Dateline Athens: Greece for the Greeks”, *Foreign Policy* (Winter 1981-82), pp. 158-174; and William H. McNeill, *The Metamorphosis of Greece since World War II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1978).

guide the advice of Cicero, “Quis nescit primam esse historiae legem ne quid falsi dicere audeat? deinde ne quid veri non audeat? ne quae suspicio gratiae sit in scribendo? ne quae simultatis?”<sup>23</sup>.

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23. Cicero, *De Oratore*, II., 15, 62. (Who does not recognise that the first law of history is that we shall never dare to say what is false; the second that we shall never fear to say what is true; that everything we write shall be free from any suspicion of favoritism or flattery?).