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THE ITALIAN VIEW OF THE 1940-41 WAR
COMPARISONS AND PROBLEMS

*Quae sit libertas, quaeris? Nulli rei
servire, nulli necessitati, nullis casibus,
fortunam in aequum deducere.*

Sen. Ep. 51,9

The Argument

The intention of this article is to examine the Italian historical sources, to compare them with the Greek viewpoints and thus arrive at an understanding of the truth. The period concerned, as far as I am aware, has yet to be properly researched¹. Using scientific evidence as accurate as possible and by a comparative examination of the relevant testimonies, it is, I think, a worthwhile exercise to assess the attitude of Fascist Italy's political leaders towards Greece before and during the hostilities; how the Italian generals and soldiers viewed the Greek soldier; how Italian historians view these events today, to whom they attribute responsibility for the war, and how generally they justify Italy's wrongful actions against Greece. Do they distort the truth, do they recognise it or simply adapt it to accommodate their shortcomings, thereby obscuring or belittling the Greek victory?

It must first be said, however, that numerous Italian sources on the war against Greece have been published, and to study, classify and evaluate them all is a task which requires an enormous amount of time. Such sources include diplomatic documents published by the national printing-house of Italy, diaries of political and military leaders, memoirs of diplomatic officials, attempts at reconstructing events by chroniclers, journalists, and other people who took part in the war, letters from ordinary soldiers, dispatches from the various military units, operational plans and documents of the Italian General Army Staff, and even the songs sung by the soldiers (though not, of course, those imposed by the Fascist party). On the basis of all this material, it is possible to observe not only the official activities of the State, but also the unknown reactions of the people and the army.

1. I did myself make a preliminary study a few years ago; Zacharias N. Tsirpanlis, *Πώς είδαν οι Ίταλοι τον πόλεμο του 1940-41* (The Italian View of the 1940-41 War), Ioannina 1974, 80, pp. 56 (panegyric; ed. University of Ioannina).

Before I go on to deal with the relevant information, I feel I should mention a slight problem which, I think, bears directly on this matter. How is it possible for a nation which was defeated, and not simply and heroically in a defensive war, to take such a lively interest in examining its defeat?

Again I must emphasise that Italian literary output concerning the Greco-Italian war is considerable. Suffice it to say that in the bibliography of works on the Second World War published by the Italian General Staff in 1955, there are more than thirty publications (independent books and articles) dealing specifically with the Greek front of 1940-41². One of these books — and I mention it particularly for its interest to Italians — is the Italian translation of Alexander Papagos' famous *The Greek War. 1940-1941*. It was first published in Greece in 1945 and the Italian translation came out in 1948³. I should

2. Cf. Stato Maggiore Esercito-Ufficio Storico, *Saggio bibliografico sulla seconda guerra mondiale*, Roma 1955, p. 11, for the numerical details about the *Guerra sul fronte greco-albanese*. Detailed though this bibliography is, I must point out the omission of the Fascist Riccardo Crespi's book, *Squadristi in Albania*, Milano 1941. Cf. excerpts and comments in Mario Cervi, *Storia della guerra di Grecia*, Milano 1965, p. 311-312.

3. In the *Saggio bibliografico*, op. cit., p. 381-382, the year of the publication in Greek of A. Papagos' book is given as 1947. I mention the 1945 edition, but I do not know whether or not it was republished in 1947. According to *Saggio* the Italian translation, *La Grecia in guerra*, was published in 1948 by the publishing firm of Garzanti (Milano). Cervi's book, however, (op. cit., p. 53 and 508) mentions the publication of a translation of Papagos' book in 1950 (Milano), a translation by Cervi himself. I do not know if two Italian translations really were published within so short a period, nor do I possess either of them in order to ascertain the truth of the matter. It should be noted, however, that Papagos' book was translated into other European languages too, e.g. English (*The Battle of Greece. 1940-41*, Athens 1949, or *The Greek War. 1940-41*, New York 1946), French (*La Grèce en guerre. 1940-41*, Athènes 1951), German (*Griechenland im Kriege. 1940-41*, Bonn 1951). The book's circulation was extremely wide, owing chiefly to the valuable historical documents it contains. In Italy, though, it aroused strong objections; the most important of which were expressed in General Carlo Geloso's article, «La Grecia in guerra», *Rivista Militare*, giugno 1950, p. 579-587. Geloso was the Commander of the Eleventh Italian Army in Albania from 16 November 1940 onwards. His article acknowledges the numerical superiority of the Italian forces at the start of the war and confesses that the Greek victory was truly admirable. Nevertheless, he compares the opposing forces and reaches different conclusions from Papagos. He too finally agrees (p. 582) that further archive material will have to be published before history can reach definite conclusions. As I was assured (in a letter dated 1.4.1974) by Mr. John Ghikas, head of the Press Office of the Greek Embassy in Rome

also point out that since 1955 Italian books dealing specifically with the war against Greece have continued to be published in impressive numbers.

Why, then, all this literary activity? There are many reasons, of which two, in my opinion, are the most important: a) To place the responsibility for the declaration of the war squarely on the shoulders of the Fascist party, indeed exclusively on Mussolini and Ciano, thereby clearing the Italian people of the dreadful accusation that they struck the first blow. b) To exonerate the unknown Italian soldier, who in obedience to his superiors' orders fought, with no ideals to support him, and sacrificed himself to his duty.

It is easy to see that both these reasons, which, as we shall see, pervade almost all the Italian books, form a kind of counter-balance to the defeat and thereby safeguard the morale and the historical survival of a nation whose military forces and whose human dignity too were so soundly shaken in the mountains of Epirus. But does history justify these opinions? It may be too early to give an unequivocal answer⁴. For all the great bulk of published material, public and private archives still hold many unpublished documents, and it is only when they have all come to light that the opinions expressed above will be able to be fully assessed.

For the present, we do have the means at our disposal to understand how the Italians viewed their relations with the Greeks right from the eve of the war until its end. Chronologically, then, I intend to start with the back-stage diplomatic activities, move on to the period of hostilities, and finally look at subsequent historical writings.

1. *Diplomats' Testimonies*

With regard to the period immediately preceding the start of the

both before and after the 1940 war, Papagos wrote a reply to Geloso's article. It was published in the *Military News* and Mr. Ghikas ensured that it appeared in Italian in the newspaper *Momento* and in the monthly review *Illustrazione Italiana* (published by Garzanti). I have been unable to obtain copies of these publications, nor can I recall the precise relevant details.

4. Kostas N. Triantaphyllou, *Ἀπόρρητα τοῦ πολέμου 1940* (Secrets of the 1940 War), Patras 1981, p. 40-44, points out, on the basis of authentic information in historical writings, the Italian political parties' approbation of the colonialist foreign policy both of Mussolini and of the governments which preceded him. For a concise account of the relations between Italy and the Balkans during the XIXth and XXth centuries, cf. Mario Pacor, *Italia e Balcani dal Risorgimento alla Resistenza*, Milano (Feltrinelli Editore) 1968, p. 7-52 (:Italiani in Balcania). Cf. also below.

war, authentic and interesting sources are available to us, such as the memoirs of the Italian minister in Athens, Emanuele Grazzi, and the military attaché to the Italian embassy in Athens, Colonel Luigi Mondini, the diary of the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Galeazzo Ciano (Mussolini's son-in-law), and a series of Italian diplomatic documents, chiefly from the archives of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Let us take a brief look at each of these historical sources.

First, Grazzi's memoirs, which he published immediately after the war in 1945, under the title *The Beginning of the End*, and with the sub-title *The Campaign Against Greece*. The first few lines of the foreword reveal his feelings towards Greece and explain why he chose such a title. He believes that his own country's attack on a small country like Greece had no moral justification whatsoever, and that it was instigated from the most spurious and contemptible motives. Grazzi even acknowledges that "the Greco-Italian conflict was far more than a glorious stanza of the national epopee of a small nation ...", and that the Greek victory "signalled the beginning of the end not only with regard to the repercussions, whether immediate or delayed, in the military sector, but also with regard to the consequences in the psychological and political condition of the Italian people"⁵.

These words denote a man of sound sense and honesty, very rare qualities in the Fascist environment of the time. In his memoirs Grazzi reveals himself as an honourable diplomat who made every effort to alleviate the tension and the coolness which had developed in Greco-Italian relations after the seizure of the Greek Dodecanese islands (in April-May 1912) by the Italian forces⁶, the bombing of and landing

5. Emanuele Grazzi, *Il principio della fine. (L'impresa di Grecia)*, Roma 1945 (7 November), p. 5. Chryso Ghika's Greek translation of this work has recently been published: 'Εμμανουέλε Γκρατσί, 'Η ἀρχή τοῦ τέλους. ('Η ἐπιχείρηση κατὰ τῆς Ἑλλάδος) [Emanuele Grazzi, *The Beginning of the End. (The Campaign Against Greece)*], Athens ("Estia") 1980, 80, pp. 307. A brief evaluation of the book is to be found in John Ghikas' article, «Τὰ ἀπομνημονεύματα Γκρατσί μετὰ 35 χρόνια» (The Grazzi Memoirs 35 Years Later), in the newspaper *Τὸ Βήμα* 1.1.1981, which gives information about Grazzi's activities after the war. Our references concern the original work.

6. A great deal has been written in Italian on the Dodecanese Question. I shall mention only — of the older writings and with a Fascist leaning — the book by Renzo Sertoli Salis, *Le isole italiane dell'Egeo dall'occupazione alla sovranità*, Roma 1939, and of the more recent works, Cesare Marongiu Buonaiuti's interesting monograph, *La politica religiosa del Fascismo nel Dodecaneso*, Napoli 1979.

on Corfu (31 August - 28 September 1923)⁷, and the final annexation of Albania to the kingdom of Italy (April 1939), to mention only the most important episodes in Italy's imperialistic policy against Greece. The Italian ambassador left Rome on 15 April 1939 and went to Athens without receiving the slightest instruction from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as to Italy's political line with regard to Greece.

Nevertheless, he himself believed that Italy had every interest in maintaining friendly relations with her neighbour, since, were the tables ever to be turned, Greece would be a veritable thorn in the Italian peninsula's flesh⁸. Grazzi supports this opinion of his clearly and realistically as he describes the Metaxas regime, Greece's internal situation, her position in the Balkans and in the Mediterranean, the Greeks' anglophile sentiments and their justifiable hatred for the Italians on the eve of the war, and he ends with the sound observation that whereas violation of her neutrality by the English would arouse vociferous protest from Greece, such violation by the Italians would be met with armed resistance⁹. Events were to prove him correct.

And yet, from the very first a mutual liking had bound Grazzi and Metaxas, who, the Italian ambassador himself affirms, had nurtured a deep love for Italy from the time of his exile in Siena, and was the only real friend Italy could claim in Greece¹⁰.

Grazzi struggled to create a friendly atmosphere and cordial relations between the Greeks and the Italians, but his own country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs left him in total ignorance of its foreign policy. He was not informed about a single matter and frequently received no reply to his reports and telegrams¹¹. Consequently, in his talks with Metaxas or with the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Ma-

7. Of all the well-known writings on this event I should like to mention only the brief, but comprehensive, account of the military and diplomatic episode by an Italian historian of the period, who was "outlawed" by the Fascist party, Gaetano Salvemini, *Mussolini diplomate*, Paris 1932, p. 32-45.

8. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 18-19. Cf. also *ibid.* (p. 20) the Greek government's endeavour in 1938 to revive relations with Italy. For Greece's irreproachable attitude towards Italy from 1936 onwards, cf. also P. Pipinelis, *Ἱστορία τῆς ἐξωτερικῆς πολιτικῆς τῆς Ἑλλάδος, 1923-1941* (History of Greece's Foreign Policy. 1923-1941), Athens 1948, p. 283.

9. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 31-44 (particularly p. 43).

10. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 27, 29, 33.

11. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 57, 60, 103 (instances of lack of co-ordination in the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), p. 107-108, 123, 145-148, 156, 158, 198.

vroudis, he often felt, as he himself puts it, "like a barrister compelled to plead a case about which he has not been given all the relevant papers, and feeling quite certain, in fact, that it is the other party who is in the right rather than his own client"¹². Despite these difficulties the Italian diplomat was sincerely working towards a peaceful co-existence between Italy and Greece, and openly declared his belief, as did the Greeks, that the war would go against Germany and Britain would win (indeed he said this to both Mussolini and Ciano)¹³. At any rate, he successfully called forth repeated assurances from the Italian leadership that Greece's territorial integrity would be respected, and he adroitly negotiated the, albeit temporary, renewal of the Greco-Italian friendship agreement, when it came to an end on 30 September 1939¹⁴. The crowning success of his pacifist activities was the document which Mussolini himself dictated to him on 11 September 1939, according to which Italy was to withdraw her troops 20 kms away from the Greek-Albanian border, and declared her friendship with Greece and her willingness even to provide Greece with war equipment. The Greek people received Mussolini's promises with joy and relief and with declarations of friendship towards Italy¹⁵.

But it was all proved short-lived a year later, in 1940. Italy declared war on France on 10 June and the first clashes took place on 20-21 June, when the French had already, on the 17th, called for a truce with the Germans, who had occupied Paris. Mussolini's action, in the words of the French ambassador in Rome (académicien) André-François Poncet, was tantamount to knifing a man when he was already on the ground¹⁶. The hostilities between Italy and France lasted

12. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

13. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 67, 101.

14. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 47, 48-49, 62, 74-77, 79, 80-85 (Greece's difficulties on an international level increase, before she is able to go ahead and sign a definitive friendship agreement with Italy), 99, 101. For the general political situation cf. also P. Pipinelis, *Ἱστορία τῆς ἐξωτερικῆς πολιτικῆς* (History of Greece's Foreign Policy), p. 288-289, 291-294 (concerning Greece's circumspection and her position with regard to England).

15. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 65-73. Greece too, though the Italian document did not demand it, withdrew her forces from the border.

16. Cf. the scene between the French ambassador and Ciano, as described in the latter's diary: Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario, 1939-1943*, vol. 1 (1939-1940), edizione economica, Milano 1963, p. 314. Poncet's actual words were: «È un colpo di pugnale ad un uomo in terra. Vi ringrazio comunque di usare un guanto di velluto».

just four days. The Italians were victorious, of course, but the losses they suffered in the Alps were so grievous that Mussolini's campaign was described as a spectacular failure¹⁷.

On 11 June Greece assured Grazzi, and through him the Italian government, that she was determined to preserve her neutrality at all costs¹⁸. But from June 1940 onwards a ceaseless barrage of Italian provocations was steadily leading the two countries into war. It was Grazzi who suffered most dramatically from the development of events, as his superiors in Rome sent him no information, while he himself retained an implicit faith in the Greek-Italian friendship. In his book he describes vividly and accurately, in chronological order, his country's provocative actions, such as the accusations about British bases in Greece, about British ships in Greek ports, about British warships flying the Greek flag, about the notorious business of the murder of the common criminal Daut Hoggia, whom the romanticised reports in the Albanian and Italian newspapers made out to be Albania's most illustrious hero, etc. etc. In each of these cases, and with the most convincing arguments, such as I have never yet encountered in any Greek writing, Grazzi demonstrates the Greeks' innocence and the purity of their feelings towards Italy¹⁹. Indeed, his impartial objectivity compels him openly to condemn his government for the endless violations of Greek air-space, the bombing of Greek ships, the senseless acts and fantastic plans for occupying Greece devised by the inimitable governor of the Dodecanese, Cesare Maria de Vecchi, whom Grazzi considered amongst the foremost responsible for the war²⁰.

But it was the torpedoing of the *Helle* in the harbour of the sacred island of Tinos on 15 August 1940 that delivered the coup-de-grâce to the dying friendship between the Greeks and the Italians. The enraged Italian ambassador rigorously denounced it as a contemptible and piratical action. He had no doubts as to the nationality of the

17. *Tà 'Υπὲρ καὶ τὰ Κατὰ Μουσσολίνι. (Οἱ φάκελοι Mondadori)* [The Pros and Cons. Mussolini. (The Mondadori Files)], Athens 1972, p. 138-140.

18. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 108-109. Grazzi here expresses his anxiety and his opposition to his country's participation in the war.

19. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 110-111, 115, 122, 124-125, 128, 130-131, 132, 139, 141-143, 149, 165, 169-171. Cf. also Luigi Mondini, *Prologo del conflitto italo-greco*, Roma 1945, p. 203, 206-208. Mondini's account of the Daut Hoggia affair is lacking in details and greatly inferior to Grazzi's version.

20. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 125-127, 133, 134, 135-140.

submarine²¹; he saw the abyss yawning ahead of him, his post a bed of nails. On several occasions he was on the verge of resigning or asking to be recalled, while on the other hand believing that his continuing presence might yet help to ameliorate the situation. Later he was to realise that, in most Machiavellian style, he was being retained at his post deliberately in order to allay the suspicions of the Greek government and so that the aggressive plans against Greece might remain concealed in Rome²². And so it came about that a strange game of misunderstandings was being played in the diplomatic sector at that time. Grazzi thought, wrongly, that he was interpreting Ciano's thoughts; Ciano, however, was dancing now in step with the Duce and now quite out of rhythm; and Metaxas, for his part, believed Grazzi to be the faithful executor of Rome's orders and so swung constantly between moments of optimism and crises of prudent rationalism²³.

21. Ciano, too, *Diario*, vol. 1, p. 337 (under the date 15 August 1940), confidently states the view that the torpedoing of the *Helle* was the result of the "intemperance" of the impulsive de Vecchi, Governor of the Italian-occupied Dodecanese. Strangely enough, Mussolini's attitude to de Vecchi was one of scornful indifference (cf. Ciano, *Diario*, p. 129); and yet in Rome de Vecchi's information about Greece's situation was taken into account, while no notice was taken of Grazzi's reports. After the end of the war and the recent publication (in 1960) of de Vecchi's memoirs and the views of Giuseppe Aicardi, captain of the submarine which sank the *Helle*, it was quite clearly proved that it was de Vecchi who instigated the torpedoing (cf. M. Cervi, *Storia della guerra di Grecia*, p. 49-52, and A. I. Korandis, *Διπλωματική Ιστορία της Ευρώπης (1919-1956)* [Diplomatic History of Europe (1919-1956)], vol. 3, part 1, Thessaloniki 1979, p. 381-383. Cf. also the interview between Aicardi and the Italian sailor Gianelloni Antonio, who actually fired the torpedo, and the Greek journalist Yannis Tsenis: «Δυὸ ἰταλικά ὑποβρύχια τορπίλισαν τὴν "Ἑλλη"» (The Torpedoing of the *Helle* by Two Italian Submarines), in the periodical *Ταχυδρόμος* no 42 (1381) 30.10.1980, p. 51-66. — «Ὁ τορπιλλισμὸς τῆς "Ἑλλης" ἀπὸ τὸ περισκόπιο τοῦ ἰταλικοῦ ὑποβρυχίου» (The Torpedoing of the *Helle* Through The Italian Submarine's Periscope), *ibid.*, no 43 (1382) 6.11.1980, p. 51-66, with further interesting evidence and, above all, unpublished photographs from the Italian archives.

22. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 172-182. L. Mondini, in *Prologo*, p. 209-210, describes the torpedoing of the *Helle*, without foreseeing any repercussions it might have on Greco-Italian relations. He gives only a bare description of the event and clearly wishes to avoid attributing responsibility.

23. Cf. M. Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 16. Mondini too, *op. cit.*, p. 145, seems to have been of the view that the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs used ambassador Grazzi's activities for its own ends, "to keep the way clear until the right moment should arrive". He wonders, however, whether all the good intentions have been thwarted by events, or whether Grazzi has been taking the initiative over the Greco-Italian

At all events, one thing was certain, and that, according to later sources gathered by Grazzi, was that in the summer of 1940 Count Ciano decided to attack Greece. To be precise, during a dinner given in his honour in Tirana, Ciano proposed to General Carlo Geloso, commander of the Italian forces in Albania, that he make ready for an offensive against Greece. Since the general objected, on the grounds that the forces at his disposal in Albania would be quite unable to undertake such a venture successfully, he was replaced a few days later by Visconti Prasca²⁴. Prasca, after assuming his duties in June 1940, was summoned to Rome on 13 August, where he was informed that in accordance with the proposals of the leader of the government (i.e. Mussolini), he was to carry out a kind of coup d'état in Epirus, using the existing forces in Albania and at a time of total peace (*in piena pace*). On 23 August, however, it was decided to postpone the plan until 10 October²⁵. In October Ciano conveyed the following message to Grazzi via a journalist: "Tell Grazzi he can write what he likes, I'm going to make war with Greece"²⁶.

The anguish of the Italian ambassador in Athens steadily increased as, day by day, more and more news was heard of the impending offensive, and yet he still received no official notification from Rome. But the most tragic period of Grazzi's life was undoubtedly between 26 and 28 October. He had invited the most important members of Athenian society to an official reception at the embassy after a special performance of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* on the evening of 26 October. That very evening the coded parts of the famous ultimatum began to arrive from Rome. Grazzi was afraid that the offensive would be announced that night. "I imagine", he wrote, "that condemned prisoners in the death cell cannot feel very differently from the way

friendship beyond the bounds outlined by his country's foreign policy. It is my own opinion that these thoughts of Mondini's do not really hold water. The Minister for Foreign Affairs has not only the right, but also the duty, immediately to recall any of his ambassadors who might be overstepping the limits of his diplomatic duty. But Ciano did not do so in Grazzi's case.

24. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 80. Cf. details in Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 53-54. (The event is placed at the beginning of May 1940).

25. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 158. Cf. details from Sebastiano Visconti Prasca himself in his book, *Io ho aggredito la Grecia*, Milano 1946, p. 31-36. Prasca's information tallies with what Grazzi has to say.

26. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 225. Ciano considered the war against Greece to be particularly his own (*la mia guerra*, as he called it); *ibid.*, p. 185, 243.

I do myself at this moment". On the morning of 27 October the ultimatum was decoded and, in accordance with his orders from Rome, he was to deliver it, with no prior warning, to the Prime Minister of Greece at 3 a.m. on the 28th. "The whole day was like a nightmare ... and the minutes between midnight and three o'clock crawled by like hours; assuredly the cruellest hours of my life". His account of the delivery of the ultimatum at Metaxas' house is very moving. With a few clipped words the Greek Head of State rejected Rome's hypocritical proposals and, as he accompanied Grazzi to the door, said to him: "Vous êtes les plus forts...". "I simply did not know what to say... In all my long career as a government official, I have never felt such an overwhelming disgust for my profession as I did at that moment; my duty was like a cross I had to bear, not only tormenting, but also humiliating; because these sorrowful words were spoken by a venerable old man who had spent his life fighting and suffering for his country ... and because even at that supreme moment he chose the way of sacrifice for his homeland and not the path of dishonour. I bowed to him with the deepest respect and left his house"²⁷.

I have rather insisted on evaluating the information provided by Grazzi's memoirs for the following reasons:

a) Because it is provided by the most competent representative in Athens of Italy's foreign policy from April 1939 to 28 October 1940. He describes events through which he lived and in which he played, for the most part, a leading role; he describes them, moreover, in chronological order, without contradicting himself, clearly and with historical accuracy.

b) Because, since their publication in 1945, these memoirs have not been contested by anyone, neither by Italians nor, naturally enough, by Greeks. The various sources which have been published since 1945 have never controverted even the slightest detail of what Grazzi reports; on the contrary, they reinforce his views and consolidate his arguments. Consequently, the book's veracity, the authenticity of the appended documents and the cogency of his arguments are quite unimpeachable²⁸.

27. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 239, 242-243, 245. Cf. also the same information (clearly inferior as regards accuracy, detail and descriptiveness) in Mondini, *Prologo*, p. 231-233, 237-245.

28. Mondini, *op. cit.*, p. 143-145, gives an interesting description of Grazzi. He presents him as a likeable person who was indubitably working for his coun-

c) Because no historical monograph, either Italian or Greek²⁹, has yet made exhaustive use of Grazzi's evidence in order to demonstrate on the one hand the pure intentions of Greece, as a strictly neutral country, and on the other the deceit and perfidy of Italy, as a great power which called forth great terror by its, albeit Pyrrhic, victories in France, Africa and Albania. Such evidence is of exceptional importance for the Greeks, coming as it does from the enemy camp, and indeed Grazzi himself repeated it all, with more precise clarifications, to a Greek journalist who met him and had an extensive discussion with him³⁰.

try's interests. The accusations made against Grazzi, in that case — i.e. that he was pro-Greek (cf. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 121-122, 126 [de Vecchi's accusation], 181, 242), do not hold water. As far as Grazzi's reliability is concerned there is a slight problem, however. Ciano, *Diario*, p. 360, reports that Grazzi visited him on 8 November 1940 and assured him that Greece's domestic situation was very serious indeed and that her resistance would be virtually nil. He also told him that Metaxas had been prepared to give way to the Italian demands, but following a talk with the king, and after the intervention of the British ambassador, he had changed course. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 256-257, gives a report, though without many details, of his meeting with Ciano, and mentions nothing of the above. But he does stress the fact that what he told Ciano was not always what Ciano conveyed to Mussolini over the telephone. I personally tend towards the view that Ciano does not give an accurate account of his conversation with Grazzi.

29. Various writers have undoubtedly taken Grazzi's memoirs into account, but I do not think that they have made satisfactory use of his information, nor linked it up with other sources. At all events, it should be noted, as far as the Greeks are concerned, that extracts from Grazzi's work are to be found in translation in the books produced by the Army History Division of the Greek General Staff: 'Ο ελληνικός στρατός κατά τόν Δεύτερον Παγκόσμιον Πόλεμον. Αίτια και άφορμαί ελληνο-ιταλικού πολέμου 1940-1941 (The Greek Army During the Second World War. Grounds and Motives for the Greco-Italian War 1940-41), Athens 1959, p. 122, 164, 168; 'Ο ελληνοιταλικός πόλεμος 1940-1941. 'Η ιταλική εισβολή (28 'Οκτωβρίου μέχρι 13 Νοεμβρίου 1940) [The Greco-Italian War 1940-41. The Italian Invasion (28 October to 13 November 1940)], Athens 1960, p. 28-31. Cf. also Angelos Terzakis, 'Ελληνική Έποποιία 1940-1941 (Greek Epopee 1940-41), Athens 1964, p. 18, 25, 37-38; Th. Ph. Papakonstantinos, 'Η μάχη τής 'Ελλάδος 1940-1941 (The Battle of Greece 1940-41), Athens 1966, p. 19-21, 33. Of the Italian books cf. M. Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 15-16, 19, 23-25, 27, 32, 33, 34 etc., and the recent official publication of the Italian General Staff: Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito-Ufficio Storico (hereafter referred to as S.M.E.), *La Campagna di Grecia*, tomo I: Testo, Roma 1980, p. 11-96, in which Grazzi's memoirs are used here and there with reference to events preceding the hostilities; no reservations are expressed with regard to their authenticity, but nor, on the other hand, are they used sufficiently.

30. Cf. D. K. Svolopoulos' interview, «'Ο Γκράτσι άποκαλύπτει» (Grazzi Discloses), in the newspaper *Μακεδονία* 28.10.1971.

d) Finally, because Grazzi's memoirs point out Greece's great contribution after her victory, not only to the free world fighting against the Axis, but also to Italy herself. "That unfortunate and ignominious campaign against Greece", the Italian diplomat writes, "is a page of prime importance in the recent history of Italy", because the defeat of the Italian armed forces destroyed the Fascist prestige and opened the eyes of the Italian people, who had been so hypnotised by the Duce's arrogant bluster; and so soon afterwards they were able to react and to crush the Fascist régime³¹. I think there can be no greater moral satisfaction for Greece than for it to be acknowledged that in 1940-41 not only did she fight for home and religion, not only did she battle for the freedom of the western world, but she also offered inestimable service to her very enemies.

The memoirs of the military attaché to the Italian embassy in Athens, Colonel Luigi Mondini, are on a somewhat inferior level. They were published in Rome in March 1945 under the title *Prologue to the Greco-Italian Conflict*³². Mondini, who after the war wrote other studies of the military events of his time, and rose to the position of commandant of the Military Academy of Modena and in charge of the Publication's Office of the Military History of the Italian General Staff and attained the rank of general³³, was posted in Athens from August 1938 to 28 October 1940. As he himself affirms, he never kept a diary, and shortly before leaving Athens deemed it expedient to burn his office archive. He thus admits that his book was written on the basis of his memory alone³⁴. This makes me circumspect in accept-

31. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 257-259. These are possibly the loveliest pages in the whole book.

32. L. Mondini, *Prologo del conflitto italo-greco*, F.lli Treves Editori, Roma 1945, 80, pp. 283.

33. Cf. Saggio bibliografico, *op. cit.*, p. 348-349, for an account of Mondini's published works. As a writer he is known in Greece from articles of his which were translated into Greek and published in six instalments in the newspaper 'Εμπρός, «Ο Ιταλο-ελληνικός πόλεμος όπως τὸν εἶδαν οἱ Ἴταλοι. Ἐκστρατεία κατὰ τῆς Ἑλλάδος: Μία τραγωδία» (The Greco-Italian War as the Italians Saw It. The Campaign Against Greece: A Tragedy. Four Articles by the Italian general Luigi Mondini who was serving on 28 October 1940 as military attaché in Athens), 'Εμπρός 26.10.1974, p. 1, 9, 16; 2.11.1974, p. 9, 13; 9.11.1974, p. 9; 16.11.1974, p. 9; 23.11.1974, p. 9; 30.11.1974, p. 9. These articles examine the opposing forces and justify the Italian defeat with the argument that the Italian army was not fully armed and prepared for the attack (cf. below).

34. Mondini, *op. cit.*, p. 7, 9-10.

ing his version of events as accurate. As far as the structure of the book is concerned, one soon realises that approximately half of it is devoted to pointless digressions on the mentality and customs of the Greek people, the country's internal conditions, its position in international terms and its relations with the other Balkan countries and with Italy. All this is backed up by a most inadequate bibliography, while not only is the narrative characterised by a dryness of style exacerbated by the absence of any historical background, but the book also contains gross errors, if not outright lies, concerning situations and events on the Balkan peninsula, the truth of which is known from more authoritative works³⁵.

Mondini's entire book demonstrates a general absence of any critical facility for evaluating the information he discusses, it is full of puerile contradictions and untenable arguments³⁶ and reveals a general indifference towards apportioning any blame to Italy for her provocations against Greece³⁷. His basic error, however, is that he quite unjustifiably accuses Metaxas and Papagos of "playing a double game" — that is, of negotiating with Britain and France for the use of Greek territory while pretending strict neutrality to Italy³⁸.

35. Cf. e.g. his sophistry when he supports the Italians' occupation of the Dodecanese (Mondini, *op. cit.*, p. 62-63, with no mention whatever of de Vecchi's inconsistent activities, which worked to the detriment of the Italians also); his nonsensical, if not downright ridiculous, attempts to account for the Greeks' hatred of the Italians (p. 71-72); the unfounded accusations he levels at the Balkan countries with the charge that they were unjust to the Bulgarians during the Balkan Wars (p. 83-84, 87); his complete ignorance of historical facts, demonstrated when he maintains that the Greek language began to be spoken only after the 1821 Revolution! (p. 105). Also typical of this writer's mentality is the great pride he takes in the Italian conquests in Libya and Abyssinia (p. 72). His perception must have been too limited for him to realise the situations that lay behind events, which may have been due to the lack of an historical and classical education.

36. Cf. such instances on p. 161-162 (false arguments about the Italians' violations of Greek air-space and about the military songs); p. 212-214 (where Mondini complains that the system of mobilisation in Greece was so well organised that he did not realise what was going on. He concludes therefore that it is very difficult to come by the truth in Greece. Perhaps Mondini would have liked the Greek General Staff to send him the plans and explain the mobilisation system to him... It is amazing that an ambassadorial military attaché should think and write such things; he shows no trace of Grazzi's subtlety, dignity, sincerity and diplomatic tact).

37. This is noticeable when he writes about the murder of Daut Hoggia (p. 206-208) or the torpedoing of the *Helle* (p. 209-210), as I pointed out earlier.

38. Mondini, *op. cit.*, p. 134-135, 253-255.

This grave accusation, according to Mondini, is based on the famous French documents discovered by the Germans in an abandoned wagon in June 1940 in the station of the small French town of Vitry La Charité, and published exactly a year later³⁹. But the contents of these documents — and their authenticity was in doubt from the very first — do not substantiate in any way an accusation of violation of Greece's neutrality. The relevant evidence, which is absolutely irrefutable, may be read in the memoirs not of a Greek, but of an Italian writer, Grazzi, who censures his former subordinate's views as absolutely groundless⁴⁰. It is significant indeed that throughout the war neither Germany nor Italy voiced any protest against Greece as a result of the information contained in the Charité documents⁴¹, and nor did historians consider them afterwards⁴².

Mondini's book, then, written with the aim of uncovering the supposed deceitfulness of the Greek government, is crushed by the weight of historical fact. Its usefulness is limited solely to its author's account of events he personally witnessed⁴³.

39. Mondini, *op. cit.*, p. 267-279.

40. Cf. Grazzi, *Il principio della fine*, p. 115-122. Cf. also p. 50 (where Grazzi corrects Mondini on another point) and p. 80 (where he rejects the allegations of the Greek government's "double game"). It should be noted that Mondini's book came out in March 1945, and Grazzi's in November 1945, which explains how the latter was able to take the former into account.

41. Mondini, too, admits this, *op. cit.*, p. 278. Cf. also Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

42. It should be noted that M. Cervi, *Storia*, p. 26, refers to the Charité documents without attaching much importance to them. Nevertheless, he does not make use of Grazzi's very correct views. In the Greek translation of Cervi's book (*Ἡ ἑλληνο-ιταλικὴ πόλεμος*, Athens 1967, vol. 1, p. 38) no remarks are included about these documents from the Greek point of view. Later, in his speech on 18 November 1940, Mussolini was to invoke the Charité documents (cf. Cervi, p. 194, 460) in justification of the war against Greece. Twenty days previously, however, (on 28 October) nothing of this had been mentioned in the Italian ultimatum. The strangest thing is that on 19 October 1940 Mussolini vilified Greece in a letter to Hitler, mentioning the Charité documents, which, he said, had been sent to him by von Ribbentrop (cf. *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, 9th series, vol. 5, Roma 1965, p. 721, no 753; Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 428). Cf. too what the Greek General Staff has to say on the subject of these documents in *Αἷτια καὶ ἀφορμαὶ τοῦ ἑλληνο-ιταλικοῦ πολέμου 1940-1941* (Grounds and Motives for the Greco-Italian War 1940-41), Athens 1959, p. 163-164. Cf. also the complaints about the Charité documents expressed in the communication sent by Germany to the Greek embassy in Berlin (6 April 1941): Papakonstantinos, *Ἡ μάχη τῆς Ἑλλάδος* (The Battle of Greece), p. 373.

43. This sort of information has recently been drawn on by the Italian writer Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 511 (index).

Ciano's diary, which covers the period from 10 June 1936 to 8 February 1943, is of incomparably greater value regarding the Second World War⁴⁴. It provides quite apocalyptic information about Italy's diplomatic machinations against Greece both before and after 28 October 1940: the preparations for the offensive, the changeable psychological condition of Mussolini, Ciano himself and the military leaders, the Fascist world's general evaluation of the situation — all is described concisely but vividly⁴⁵. The diary's essential evidence with regard to Greece before 28 October 1940 relates to two fundamental aspects:

a) Mussolini's displeasure, expressed on 11 May 1939, that Greece had accepted the Anglo-French guarantee⁴⁶. As we know, the Italians occupied Albania on 7 April 1939, which aroused lively concern in Greece. Then, on 13 April, the British and the French announced that they would guarantee Greece's territorial integrity. This was not at Greece's own request, though she could not reject this friendly gesture, which aroused suspicion in Italy nevertheless⁴⁷. And so Ciano justifies the coolness with which the Greek ambassador was received in Rome on 5 July 1939⁴⁸. On the other hand, however, it seems that

44. Ciano's diary aroused international interest both from a political and from an historical point of view. The Germans tried in vain to obtain the original from Ciano's wife, promising her her husband's release from Verona jail in exchange [cf. *Τὰ Ὑπὲρ καὶ τὰ Κατὰ Μουσσολίνι* (The Pros and Cons. Mussolini), p. 169]. The Americans were the first to publish the diary (New York 1946), followed by the Italians (Milano 1946), the French (*Journal politique*, vol. 1-2, Neuchâtel 1948), the Swiss (*Tagebücher 1939-1943*, second edition, Bern 1947). The most recent edition of the *Diario* came out in May 1980: Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario 1937-1943*, a cura di Renzo de Felice, Milano 1980 (Rizzoli Editore), 80, pp. 751. I refer here to the *edizione economica* (Rizzoli), vol. 1-2, second edition, Milano 1963.

45. The Greek reading public is familiar, through translations, with some extracts from Ciano's diary which concern Greece. Cf. e.g. extensive use of information provided by the diary in Th. Papakonstantinos, *Ἡ μάχη τῆς Ἑλλάδος* (The Battle of Greece), p. 29, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41-42, 42, 43, 67. Cf. also A. Terzakis, *Ἑλληνική Ἐποποιία* (Greek Epopee), p. 19, 25, 27, 29, and also G. Roussos, «Τὸ τραγικὸ πέρασμα τοῦ Μουσσολίνι ἀπὸ τὴν ἀλαζονεία στὴν ἀπόγνωση» (Mussolini's Tragical Passage from Arrogance to Despair), in the periodical *Ὁ Ταχυδρόμος* 27.10.1967, p. 32-33.

46. Ciano, *Diario*, vol. 1, p. 110.

47. Cf. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 17, 52, for relevant details. Cf. also Pipinelis, *Ἱστορία τῆς ἑξωτερικῆς πολιτικῆς* (History of Greece's Foreign Policy), p. 294-295.

48. Ciano, *op. cit.*, p. 146. Cf. also the report by the Greek ambassador in Rome, dated 6.7.1939, in the Greek *Λευκὴ Βίβλος* (White Book), doc. n°. 44: republished

the rekindling of Greco-Italian relations in September 1939 stemmed from this very displeasure. On the 19th of that month Ciano wrote: "The talks between Grazzi and Metaxas, as I expected, have given good results. Tomorrow a preliminary announcement is to be made, which will arouse further censure for France and Britain. In fact, in the next few days a good many similar announcements are going to be given out"⁴⁹. In other words, Italy used her friendly overtures towards Greece, with Machiavellian cynicism, to detach her from the two great powers. And yet, both Grazzi and Metaxas sincerely believed in this Greco-Italian friendship⁵⁰.

b) Italy's military preparations near the Albanian-Greek border. Just one month after the occupation of Albania, on May 12 1939, Ciano wrote that "the entire road-building programme has been directed towards the Greek border. And this is by order of the Duce, who is thinking more and more of attacking Greece at the first opportunity"⁵¹. The events in Europe arising from the extension of the war occupy the Italian dictator's son-in-law more between May 1939 and August 1940. But in the summer of 1940 Mussolini's eyes were fixed unblinkingly on the Balkan peninsula; he thought of it as his own particular fief and was very much afraid that the Germans would take it from him. On 6 August he talked of nothing but an offensive against Yugoslavia⁵², and between 10 and 12 August we see him menacing the Greeks, with whom he has had some unfinished business ever since 1923 (the matter of Corfu), and making a detailed plan for a surprise attack on Epirus⁵³. He postponed this plan after pressure from the Germans, according to Ciano⁵⁴.

in the recent work, *Σαράντα χρόνια αργότερα* (Forty Years Later), Athens ("Estia") 1980, p. 42-43.

49. Ciano, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

50. Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 70-73.

51. Ciano, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

52. Ciano, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

53. Ciano, *op. cit.*, p. 336-337.

54. Ciano, *op. cit.*, p. 339. The offensive against Greece was postponed owing to the impending Italian operation against the British in Egypt, and to the German campaign against Great Britain. In the instructions he gave on 22 August 1940 Mussolini proposed the deceleration of preparations in the Yugoslavian and Greek theatres of war and set new dates for the start of hostilities, i.e. 20 October, instead of 20 September, for the Yugoslavian front, and the end of September, instead of the end of August, for the Greek front. Cf. the document published in the series: *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (ed. Ministero degli Affari Esteri), 9th series, vol.

On 8 October 1940 he was looking for a way of sending Italian forces to Romania⁵⁵, and when four days later, with no prior warning, he was informed that the Germans had established themselves in Romania, his fury was uncontrollable. He turned chiefly against his implacable ally Hitler, and in Ciano's diary we read his actual words: "Hitler is always presenting me with *faits accomplis*. This time I shall pay him back in his own coin, and he'll find out from the newspapers that I've occupied Greece. That will restore the balance". And further on he says emphatically: "I shall hand in my resignation as an Italian if anyone finds it difficult to fight the Greeks". And Ciano agrees: "Actually, I believe the operation to be useful and easy"⁵⁶. On 22 October he himself drew up the ultimatum. "Of course", he writes, "it's a document that cuts off all escape routes. They have to choose between occupation and attack. Grazzi is to deliver it to Metaxas at 2 a.m. on 28 October"⁵⁷. Ciano's words sound like the epitaph of the Fascist burlesque to our modern ears. Thousands of Italians were to pay with their lives for Mussolini's outburst of rage⁵⁸ and Ciano's amoral diplomacy.

Interesting details about Italy's policy towards Greece are also to be found in a collection of documents published in a weighty volume in 1965 by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The documents cover the period between 11 June and 28 October 1940⁵⁹, that is, from the day after Italy declared war on France and Britain up to the day the offensive was launched against Greece. Concerning these documents' significance with regard to Greece, I shall quote from the foreword the remarks of Mario Toscano, president of the publishing committee and former professor of International Relations at the University of Rome:

5, Roma 1965, p. 452-453, no 467. Cf. also *ibid.*, p. 454, no 469, the document in which Ciano, on the same day (22.8.40), announced Mussolini's decisions to the Governor of Albania, Fr. Jacomoni. Both documents have been re-published by M. Cervi, *Storia*, p. 397-398 (no 23, 24).

55. Ciano, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

56. Ciano, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

57. Ciano, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

58. The Italian General Staff's recent publication about the Greco-Italian war also attributes Italy's entry into the Second World War to the Duce's impetuous character, his efforts to exploit the situations arising out of Germany's victories, and his admiration for the impressive power of the German war machine: S.M.E., *La Campagna di Grecia*, v. 1, p. 30.

59. The next volume in the series, which will continue the documents from 28 October 1940 onwards, has not yet been published. See above for the exact details.

"As we all know, the campaign against Greece ended in total failure. This was due, as the published material confirms, to Mussolini's conviction, based on indications he received from his colleagues, that the campaign would be decided in the political rather than the military sector. The consequences of this error were so serious as to bring about Italy's complete subjection to Germany as far as the political and military direction of the war was concerned. But in addition to this, there is the enormous moral stigma left by having unjustly attacked a neighbouring country, which, though small, is rich in the noblest of political traditions. The publication of this material, apart from the usual historical aims, is intended particularly to emphasise the general condemnation of the offensive ..."⁶⁰.

When one studies these documents, which directly or indirectly concern the Italian preparations for war against Greece⁶¹, one does indeed feel a genuine repugnance. The plans for the supposed uprising of the Tsamourian Albanians⁶², the instructions for the anti-Greek propaganda in the Albanian, and later in the Italian press⁶³, Mussolini's invitation to the King of Bulgaria to participate in the war against Greece, offering him in exchange right of access to the Aegean⁶⁴, fabrications invented by the Italians themselves to incriminate the Greek government and so justify the offensive⁶⁵ — all these typify a situation from which every trace of moral principles has quite vanished.

The best-known and most revelatory document is undoubtedly

60. *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, p. X. On the same page one finds the assertion that this published material, too, is unable to answer fully the questions arising out of the problems of the Greco-Italian war.

61. There are approximately 50 documents altogether. Almost all of them have been re-published in Cervi's book, *op. cit.*, p. 377 et seq.

62. *I Documenti*, p. 424-425 (doc. 442 dated 17 August 1940) = Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 392-394 (no 18). The Italian diplomatic documents form the chief basis for Hryssa Vayena's article, «'Η Ιταλική πολιτική στην 'Αλβανία πριν από την έναρξη του έλληνο-ιταλικού πολέμου σε σχέση με το θέμα της Τσαμουριάς» (Italian Policy in Albania before the Start of the Greco-Italian War, in Connection with the Subject of Tsamouria), *Παγκόσμιος* 19 (1977) 556-563.

63. *I Documenti*, *op. cit.*, p. 427 (doc. 445 dated 18 August 1940) = Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 395 (no 20).

64. *I Documenti*, p. 712-713 (doc. 738 dated 16 October 1940) = Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 424-425 (no 42). Cf. also the relevant document dated 17 October 1940 (*I Documenti*, p. 713), and the Bulgarian king's negative answer: *Ibid.*, p. 716-717 (doc. 746 dated 18 October 1940) = Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 426-427 (no 44). For the Bulgarian point of view, cf. Pantelej Šterev's account of the political situation in Bulgaria at that time, in *Obšti Borbi na bălkarskija i grăckija narod srestu hitlerofašistkata okupacija*, Sofija 1966, p. 40-50.

65. *I Documenti*, p. 747-748 (doc. 779 dated 23 October 1940) = Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 442-443 (no 53).

the minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 1940 in Mussolini's office and involving the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ciano, the Chief of the General Staff, Badoglio, the Under-Secretary for War, Soddu, the Governor-General in Tirana, Jacomoni, the Deputy Chief of the Army General Staff, Roatta and the military commander in Albania, Visconti Prasca. In a euphoric atmosphere and with the confidence of the strong and undefeated, Mussolini decided on war with Greece and fixed the opening of hostilities for 26 October (later it was to be postponed to the 28th). "This campaign," he said, "has been maturing in my mind for a long time, for months now; since before we entered the war, even before the war was declared". His colleagues, with the exception of the prudent Badoglio, spoke with unrestrained optimism of success. Jacomoni averred that the Greek morale was very low. Visconti Prasca maintained that his soldiers' enthusiasm was unrestrained, their only sign of indiscipline stemming from their eagerness to hurl themselves into the fray at the first opportunity. The Greeks had no desire to fight, they had no arms nor suitable war-planes; the numerical ratio at the time was 70,000 Italians, not including the special divisions and the Albanians, to a mere 30,000 Greeks. Satisfied, the Duce summed up: "Offensive in Epirus, pressure on Thessaloniki, and then the march on Athens"⁶⁶.

66. The minutes of this famous meeting held on 15 October 1940 have been published repeatedly and were later commented on by the men who were present. Each attempted to clarify and mitigate his own position and to place responsibility on other shoulders. It is possibly the most widely discussed Italian historical document concerning the Albanian war. An initial publication of the document, though changed in various subtle details regarding the responsibility borne by Badoglio in particular, was undertaken by Mussolini himself (from June to August 1944): Benito Mussolini, *Il tempo del bastone e della carota. Storia di un anno (ottobre 1942 - settembre 1943)*, Milano 1966 (re-publication), p. 151-159. The minutes were published in full by the newspaper *Il Tempo* on 18 July 1944. After this, they were also published by Grazzi, *Il principio della fine*, p. 206-224 (together with an extensive commentary). Cf. also their publication in *Documenti*, op. cit., p. 699-705 (no 728) = Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 417-424 (no 41). Comments on the text are to be found in Pietro Badoglio, *L'Italia nella seconda guerra mondiale*, Verona 1946, p. 52-57. Mario Roatta, *Otto milioni di baionette*, Verona 1946, p. 122-130. Visconti Prasca, *Io ho aggredito la Grecia*, p. 61-70. Francesco Jacomoni, *La politica dell'Italia in Albania*, Rocca San Casciano 1965, p. 254-258. S.M.E., *La Campagna di Grecia*, vol. 1, p. 71-85 (including useful cross-references), vol. 2, p. 159-167. For a Greek translation of the document, see Th. Papakonstantinos, *Ἡ μάχη τῆς Ἑλλάδος* (The Battle of Greece), p. 343-349, and Mario Cervi, *Ὁ ἑλληνο-ιταλικὸς πόλεμος* (The Greco-Italian War), vol. 2, Athens 1967, p. 203-211.

These documents also give further proof of the credibility of Grazzi's memoirs⁶⁷. Francesco Jacomoni di San Savino, the Italian Governor-General in Tirana, would seem not to have been so honest. He devotes two chapters of his book, *Italy's Policy in Albania*, to Mussolini's policy towards Greece and the outbreak of the war⁶⁸. He is undoubtedly attempting to vindicate himself with regard to the intentions behind the information he provided. Moreover, he claims to believe that Italy was aiming at the annexation of Tsamouria only, which would include Preveza and Ioannina. In neither case is it likely that he is telling the truth. His information, as expressed in these documents, about Greece's political and military situation, does not correspond to the true facts; the most charitable view would consider it groundless, misleading and consequently dangerous⁶⁹. It is my opinion, then, that Jacomoni too contributed to the decision to go to war against Greece. And his notion that Italy intended only to annex Tsamouria and not to occupy the whole of Greece does not fit in with the reasoning behind Fascist policy and is quite unconvincing, as Mario Cervi has shown⁷⁰.

2. Testimonies of the Military

The information available about both the Greek and the Italian military operations is both plentiful and valuable⁷¹, and it is impos-

67. Cf. e.g. documents published by Grazzi and comprised, without changes, in *I Documenti*, p. 1-2 (doc. 3) = Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 109. *I Documenti*, p. 362 (n° 374). Cf. also Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 144-147. *I Documenti*, p. 394 (n° 410). Cf. also Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 171-172. *I Documenti*, p. 448 (n° 462). Cf. also Grazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 190-191, et al. In particular, cf. the document dated 25.10.1940: *I Documenti*, p. 751 (n° 785), which proves that Grazzi did in fact know nothing of the intrigue in Rome against Greece.

68. Cf. Francesco Jacomoni di San Savino, *La politica dell'Italia in Albania*, Rocca San Casciano 1965, p. 249-275.

69. Cf. e.g. the documents sent by Jacomoni to Ciano and Zenone Benini: *I Documenti*, p. 424-425 (doc. 442 dated 17 August 1940), p. 468-469 (doc. 483 dated 24.8.1940), p. 493-495 (doc. 509 dated 27.8.40), p. 616-617 (doc. 639 dated 24.9.40), p. 725-727 (doc. 755 dated 19.10.40), p. 734-736 (doc. 764 dated 21.10.40), p. 747-748 (doc. 779 dated 23.10.40). This evidence shows that Jacomoni's justifications, *op. cit.*, p. 253, 256, and claims that he bore no responsibility for the war in Albania must be considered quite untenable.

70. Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 45-47. Cf. also Quirino Armellini, *Diario di guerra*, Cernusco sul Naviglio 1946, p. 106, 113 (= General Staff: *Αίτια και άφορμαί έλληνο-ιταλικού πολέμου* (Grounds and Motives for the Greco-Italian War), p. 175-176).

71. For a brief account of the views of Italian soldiers about the events from

sible for me to quote all the sources. I shall simply confine myself to describing the attitude of the Italian officers and soldiers towards their adversary.

Let us begin with the higher Italian officers, and the highest-ranking of all, Pietro Badoglio, the Chief of the General Staff. On 16 October 1940, before the outbreak of the war, he assured Jacomoni that "the Greeks are good fighters. They proved it even in the last war with Turkey; they were beaten, but they fought very gallantly"⁷². Later, in his memoirs, he maintained that the Greek soldiers had made no friendly gestures, as Rome had vainly hoped they would. "And indeed," he writes, "rather than collaborating with us, the Greek forces in Epirus put up valiant resistance at Kalamas, unlike the Albanian soldiers, battalions of whom were amalgamated into some of our divisions and either proved disloyal and treacherous through acts of sabotage against us, or simply went over to the ranks of the Greeks. We were then obliged to withdraw the Albanian forces and partially disarm them"⁷³. Nevertheless, Jacomoni endeavoured to justify the Albanian desertions, without, however, convincing anyone⁷⁴.

The evidence provided by the commander of the Italian armed forces in Albania, General Sebastiano Visconti Prasca, is much more authentic. He held this position from June until 10 November 1940, and so it was he who organised the military manoeuvres in Albania and launched the offensive against Greece. His memoirs bear the characteristic title *I Attacked Greece* and were published immediately after the war in 1946⁷⁵. The book's content is for the most part accurate and supported by a rich volume of documents and statistical tables. The historical section of the Greek General Staff made good use of this information, using a strictly scientific methodology and the essential cross-references for its objective report of the events of the Italian invasion⁷⁶.

28.10. to 4.12.1940, cf. George Katsimitros, «Πῶς εἶδαν οἱ Ἴταλοι τὸν πόλεμο μὲ τὴν Ἑλλάδα» (How the Italians Saw the War with Greece), *Ἱστορία Εἰκονογραφημένη* n° 77 (November 1974) 54-63.

72. Jacomoni, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

73. P. Badoglio, *L'Italia nella seconda guerra mondiale*, p. 54.

74. Jacomoni, *op. cit.*, p. 269-270.

75. Sebastiano Visconti Prasca, *Io ho aggredito la Grecia*, Milano 1946 (Rizzoli Editore), 80, pp. 249.

76. General Staff, *Ἡ ἰταλικὴ εἰσβολή* (The Italian Invasion), Athens 1960, p. 6, 7, 64, 65, 68-69, 71, 76-77, 81, 85, 89-91, 95, 260-261, 267 et seq. On pp. 278-

However, with regard to the way in which the Italian general reports the facts, let me quote the following very sound comments from a recent Italian work: «Like many of the worst Italian generals, Visconti Prasca too was an effective writer of memoirs ... They make fascinating reading, packed as they are with malicious observations, controversial sallies, petty or scandalous background revelations, accusations and denigrations. No civilian could so effectively have demolished the General Staff and its environment, the men at the top of the Italian military machine. However, certainly without intending to do so and perhaps without even suspecting it, he also demolished himself. The book, though written in self-defence, does not succeed in covering up its author's colossal errors and irresponsibility”⁷⁷.

He harshly accuses Field-Marshal Badoglio, the Army Deputy Chief of Staff General Mario Roatta, the Under-Secretary for War and Deputy Leader of the Armed Forces General Ubaldo Soddu and the Air Chief of Staff General Francesco Pricolo of intriguing behind his back, of trying to ruin him, of showing indifference to the speedy dispatch of reinforcements, of not providing air-support in time and even of not having had the courage to contradict Mussolini and make him realise the disastrous deficiencies of the Italian army⁷⁸. In support solely of himself, he even goes so far as to maintain that in his battle plan against Epirus he would not change a single syllable, and that he would take on the whole operation again, if it were necessary of course, if only he could be sure that dark and treacherous deeds were not being hatched in the background, as was the case in October 1940⁷⁹. But this egoistic and dangerously optimistic⁸⁰ general speaks of his adversaries, the Greeks, with sincere admiration.

First of all, he mentions the excellent impression made upon him

281, 286-289, 302-305 interesting documents from Prasca's book are to be found in translation. Cf. also the recent re-publication in Greek of excerpts from them from the same book: Sebastiano Visconti Prasca, «Io ho aggredito la Grecia» (I attacked Greece), *Ἡπειρωτική Ἐταιρεία*. Information bulletin, year 8, issue n° 62 (November 1981), p. 3-15.

77. Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

78. Visconti Prasca, *op. cit.*, p. VIII note 1, p. 16, 20, 47-52, 67, 68-69, 70, 151-153, 155-159, 162-163, 164-165.

79. Visconti Prasca, *op. cit.*, p. 170. Concerning the weaknesses of Prasca's plan cf. Terzakis, *Ἑλληνική Ἐποποιία* (Greek Epopee), p. 34-35.

80. Cf. opinions expressed in General Staff, *Ἡ ἰταλική εἰσβολή* (The Italian Invasion), p. 2-3.

by the Greek officials he had come into contact with⁸¹. During the 1940 war, "concerning the Greeks' morale," he writes, "I was frequently asked, when I returned to Italy, if there were any truth in the rumour that some of the Greek generals had been 'bought', seduced by the jingle of coins like professional footballers, so that our enemies should put up no resistance to our advance. I cannot vouch for the truth of this, especially the bribery ... But if I had been told this before the war I should not have believed it. The Greek people, like all people, have their virtues and their vices, which correspond to the spirit and temperament of the Nation. However, it is a fact never to be doubted by anyone who knows Greece that 'a Greek never betrays either his country or his guest' "⁸².

Visconti Prasca goes on to compare, quite perceptively, the morale of the Greek and of the Italian soldiers, and I think he hits on the fundamental difference when he says: "The preparation of the combatants' morale is one of the duties of the leaders, as vital and proper as the duty of marshalling equipment and food. The soldiers should be led into battle to the beat of martial music and not to the sound of a funeral march. The Greeks' moral obligation to perform this moral action was of course easier than ours. We were fighting for a political matter which few understood or sympathised with, and we were impelled chiefly by a sense of duty. But our enemies were fighting in defence of their own homeland, and consequently their duty was the noblest and simplest a soldier could ever have; a duty to which not even the most indifferent fighters could raise objection"⁸³.

It should be noted that the lack of morale of the Italian soldiers in Albania did, in fact, particularly occupy the attention of the Fascist activists. On 22 February 1941 Piero Parini, the leader of the Albanian Fascist party in Tirana, attempted to investigate the causes

81. Visconti Prasca, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

82. Visconti Prasca, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

83. Visconti Prasca, *op. cit.*, p. 68. It should also be noted that immediately after the Greco-Italian war ended the Fascist organs attempted to minimise the morale of the Greek soldiers. In July 1941 a journalist somewhat lacking in critical ability published an article expressing completely untenable views, with no details or possible interpretation of the situations considered, and with the sole intention of serving the political line of the moment. This is why it ought to have no place in the Italians' serious and responsible bibliography. The article was written by G(ino) V(illa) S(anta), «Ricordi personali della Campagna Italo-Greca. Qualità militari del soldato ellenico e psicologia di massa», *Nazione Militare*, luglio 1941, p. 520-525.

of the Italians' fear and terror when they were propelled in the direction of the front line:

"It was true, unfortunately, that both large and small units seemed to have been struck by an unhealthy kind of melancholy fatalism and submission, which slowly increased as they approached the line of fire. This psychological state was largely due to the harsh and hostile environment and to the weather, for the Albanian landscape in winter is one of the most oppressive in the world, owing to the ceaseless rain, the inordinate amount of mud, the rivers, the overflowing torrents and the deserted roads. The country has few centres of habitation; the conditions of life are barely supportable; the people are little short of primitive; the mountains, valleys and plains, which our soldiers had to cross after they had disembarked in order to reach the front, arouse such a feeling of depression as to cause even the strongest character to despair. In this psychological state, a few days after landing, our soldiers were flung into bloody battle against an enemy transported by a sort of religious frenzy, ready to die without the slightest hesitation" (!)⁸⁴.

This sort of diagnosis and interpretation of his fear proves the Fascist world's inability to perceive the inner crisis of the ordinary Italian soldier, who was going into battle completely devoid of ideals.

It is a well-known fact that the Italians were fighting for an arrogant and extravagant notion, the creation of the Roman Empire of the Caesars; for an idea, that is, dating back to distant antiquity or the Middle Ages, an idea which was totally unrealistic in the middle of the XXth century. The Italian soldiers, with the exception of the praetorian Blackshirts, did not consider this idea to be worth sacrificing their lives for. They saw that they were soldiers in an unjust and ill-matched affair which verged on cowardice. Undoubtedly they fought for the simple reason that in battle, when life is in jeopardy, the blind, primitive urge for self-preservation is automatically aroused⁸⁵.

In a report sent from the front by a Greek journalist in February 1941, we read the following interesting account of the delicate subject of the Greeks' attitude to the Italian soldiers: "It would be a lie and an insult to the indomitable children of the Greek race who are fighting up here, to say that they are facing a non-combatant army. There is, of course, no lack of incidents witnessing to the enemy's cowardice and demonstrating his evasion tactics. But they are no more than incidents. Each one of our victories up to now has been the fruit of

84. S.M.E., *La Campagna di Grecia*, vol. 1, p. 611, vol. 2, p. 790-791, doc. n° 282.

85. Terzakis, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

superhuman efforts"⁸⁶. And General Katsimitros, commander of the 8th Division and winner of the Battle of Kalpaki, sincerely reports in his book *Ἡ Ἡπειρος Προμαχοῦσα (Epirus the Champion)* that "the Italian infantry, under able command, fought well, and the Italian soldier, particularly in defence and in good hands, was a very good fighter"⁸⁷. It was a fault on the part of the Greek authorities that they cultivated the impression at the time that the Italians were cowardly, ridiculous and insignificant adversaries. They fought doggedly to the limits of their endurance. But when the struggle demanded that they go beyond this, then the difference became plain between them and the Greek soldier with his moral supremacy⁸⁸. This, I think, is what Visconti Prasca means in the passage quoted above.

This explains the dispatches from Italian division commanders accusing their soldiers of desertion from the line of fire and unwarranted panic; the following circumstance was characteristic: "whenever patrols or enemy formations approach our lines exaggerated significance is attached to the event, the front is thrown into a state of confusion, and resistance (on the part of infantry and artillery) is passive, a fact which denotes an undeniable lack of initiative" (extract from a dispatch from the Siena Division dated 12 November 1940)⁸⁹. Even during the Italians' famous spring offensive (9-15 March 1941), when careful preparation and Mussolini's presence at the theatre of operations had raised the troops' morale, there were still serious instances of faint-heartedness, if not downright cowardice, on the part of the attackers: "On 9 and 10 of March," Camillo Mercalli, Commanding General of the 4th Army Corps, wrote bitterly on 14 March 1941, "I saw units — whole battalions even — for hours and even for days, despite con-

86. Papakonstantinos, *Ἡ μάχη τῆς Ἑλλάδος* (The Battle of Greece), p. 92.

87. Ch. Katsimitros, *Ἡ Ἡπειρος προμαχοῦσα. Ἡ δράσις τῆς VIII Μεραρχίας κατὰ τὸν πόλεμον 1940-1941* (Epirus the Champion. The Action of the VIII Division during the 1940-41 War), Athens 1954, p. 136. The objective report by the General Staff, *Χειμεριναὶ ἐπιχειρήσεις. Ἱταλικὴ ἐπίθεσις Μαρτίου* (Winter Operations. The Italian March Offensive), Athens 1966, p. 156-158, acknowledges the combative attitude of the Italian infantry, which, however, left much to be desired in its use of the territory and in its formations (which were usually compact) during the offensive. For the Italians' fighting condition, cf. also further Greek evidence in K. Triantaphyllou, *Ἀπόρρητα τοῦ πολέμου 1940* (Secrets of the 1940 War), p. 44-46.

88. Papakonstantinos, *op. cit.*, p. 89-91.

89. For the complete text see General Staff, *Ἡ ἱταλικὴ εἰσβολή* (The Italian Invasion), p. 110.

stant and furious fire from our own artillery and infantry, advancing no more than a few metres and then being pinned to the ground. One particular infantry battalion preferred to stay under the deadly fire of the enemy mortars and to suffer extremely heavy losses, rather than take the single step forward which would not only have ensured the capture of the objective, but also have delivered them from such grievous and futile sacrifices. One is forced to the conclusion that *the will* is simply not there, or, even worse, that their *heart* is not in it. I cannot believe it, I do not want to believe it!..."⁹⁰. This, I think, is a profoundly disturbing testimony, given in an outburst of possibly involuntary self-criticism and frankness. These were not the first days of the conflict, nor yet was it the time of the Greek counter-offensive of November 1940. Some five months had passed since the start of the Greco-Italian war, and yet the Italian soldiers' conviction had remained almost at the same level as before.

But the attackers lacked something more: they were unable to identify religious feeling with nationalistic sentiments. This is a harmonious fusion of psychological states which has been particularly strong in the Greek people ever since the Turkish occupation. For the Greek, Homeland, Race, Nation and Orthodoxy are inseparable concepts, an insoluble compound. Which explains the vision the Greek army saw at night at the front: "a female form walking along, tall and slender, stepping lightly, her veil thrown back from her head onto her shoulders. He knew her, had always known her, they had sung about her to him when he was tiny and dreaming in the cradle. She was the Mother, noble in pain and in glory, the wounded woman of Tinos, the champion General"⁹¹.

The Greeks' first victories gave rise to a wave of international philhellenism, a fact which Visconti Prasca perceived very well and explained with candour in his memoirs: "This resistance (on the part of the Greek army) was greeted, as was only right, with demonstrations of enthusiasm in many countries, for Greece holds the fascination of her brilliant culture, the mother as she is of modern civilisation. As the war went on there was always the idea that it was a battle between the small and the large, and the spectators always take David's part and turn against Goliath"⁹².

90. S.M.E., *La Campagna di Grecia*, vol. 1, p. 683, vol. 2, p. 854-855, doc. n° 301.

91. Terzakis, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

92. Visconti Prasca, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

Besides Prasca, other Italian officials of the time also wrote and published memoirs. In 1946 Mario Roatta, the Army Deputy Chief of Staff, published a book entitled *Eight Million Bayonets. The Italian Army in the War from 1940 to 1944*. His self-confessed intention was to prove, amongst other things, that "the Italian army was forced to fight a war which the Nation did not want ..." ⁹³. More specific is the Air Chief of Staff Francesco Pricolo's book *Indolence Against Heroism. The Greco-Italian Episode. October 1940 - April 1941* ⁹⁴. Here he attempts to vindicate and to make known those responsible for the Italian air force's wretched performance during the Greco-Italian war.

Another very useful volume is the diary of General Quirino Armellini, who was attached to the High Command of the Armed Forces for nine months. His diary covers the period between 11 March 1940 and 26 January 1941, i.e. the time which particularly concerns the Greek affair ⁹⁵. This source permits us easily to observe the back-stage developments of the campaign against Greece in the military circles of Rome. Armellini shows himself to have been well-disposed towards Badoglio, but he deals severely with Ciano, Jacomoni, Visconti Prasca and Soddu, whom he holds responsible for the Italian failures in Albania, and whom he castigates for their optimism, their lack of seriousness and their failure to comprehend the reality of the situation. But the greatest responsibility is attributed to Mussolini, whom Armellini sees as a poker-player whose bluff has failed, as far as Greece is concerned ⁹⁶. His insistence on carrying out in Greece the *Blitzkrieg* which the Germans had brought off in Poland showed him to be not only ridiculous but also dangerous. He would brook no opposition. "Everyone is right, everyone can see the problem", wrote Armellini on 9 No-

93. Mario Roatta, *Otto milioni di baionette. (L'esercito italiano in guerra dal 1940 al 1944)*, Verona 1946. Chapters six (p. 117-139) concerns the war against Greece. Very few events are described and in a heavy-handed fashion, and Roatta also attempts to justify the defeat — on the grounds that the Italian army was not fully prepared. Cf. also the Greek translation of an interesting report by Roatta in the General Staff's, *Αἷτια καὶ ἀφορμαὶ τοῦ ἑλληνο-ιταλικοῦ πολέμου 1940-1941* (Grounds and Motives for the Greco-Italian War 1940-1941), p. 180-188.

94. Francesco Pricolo, *Ignavia contro eroismo. (L'avventura italo-greca. Ottobre 1940 - Aprile 1941)*, Roma 1946, pp. 144. Cf. also excerpts from Pricolo's book translated into Greek: General Staff, *Αἷτια καὶ ἀφορμαὶ* (Grounds and Motives), p. 177-180.

95. Quirino Armellini, *Diario di guerra. Nove mesi al Comando Supremo*, Cernusco sul Naviglio 1946 (ed. Garzanti), pp. 308.

96. Armellini, *op. cit.*, p. 138 (7 November 1940).

vember 1940, "but no-one is able to change things. All we can do is hope that God will get him out of the way, since no mortal is prepared to take on the task"⁹⁷.

The Greek army's initial successes were sufficient to make the Duce's immediate colleagues devoutly wish for his death. Moreover, the intellectuals⁹⁸ and the industrial and the merchant classes' disapproval of the war with Greece began to make itself felt and to increase throughout Italy⁹⁹. The Duce was to vilify Jacomoni and Visconti Prasca openly¹⁰⁰, to replace the latter with Soddu, even to turn against his son-in-law Ciano, because "he gave him inaccurate information"¹⁰¹. On December 4 Soddu telephoned from Albania to say that military action was now impossible on the Greek front and that the only solution was political intervention. It was as though the general had thrown down his arms before his soldiers had, commented Ciano¹⁰². But what sort of successes could a general like Soddu achieve, a man who even in Albania spent his evenings composing music for films? (This information from Ciano's diary)¹⁰³. In the final analysis, Armellini concludes,

97. Armellini, *op. cit.*, p. 145-146 (9 November 1940).

98. Compare Petros Haris's account of the Greek intellectuals' united consciousness and their activities in «'Η 28η 'Οκτωβρίου 1940 και ὁ κόσμος τοῦ πνεύματος» (The 28 October 1940 and the Intellectual World) (a speech), *Athenian Academy Records* 44 (1969), p. 42*-65*. Cf. also the speeches made by various academicians in the volume of collected works entitled *Πανηγυρικοὶ λόγοι ἀκαδημαϊκῶν γιὰ τὴν 28η 'Οκτωβρίου 1940* (Panegyric Speeches for the 28 October 1940), collected by Petros Haris, Athens 1978 (ed. Athenian Academy, Kostas and Eleni Ouranis Foundation, n° 5), 80, pp. 608 (P. Haris's speech on pp. 460-484). One may also evaluate the contribution made by Greek literary writings by reading Glykeria Protopapa-Bouboulidou's detailed work, *Πεζογραφικὰ κείμενα τοῦ πολέμου καὶ τῆς κατοχῆς* (Literary Texts of the War and the Occupation), Ioannina (University ed.) 1974, 8°, pp. 216.

99. Armellini, *op. cit.*, p. 169 (24 November 1940).

100. Ciano, *Diario*, vol. 1, p. 360 (9 November 1940).

101. Ciano, *op. cit.*, p. 363 (14 November 1940). Cf. also Armellini, *op. cit.*, p. 188 (4 December 1940).

102. Ciano, *op. cit.*, p. 371 (4 December 1940).

103. Ciano, *op. cit.*, p. 381 (30 December 1940). An extract from a letter from an Alpini lieutenant to a colleague chiefly concerns Soddu: "You know, one day they sent one of the top brass from Rome to see if he could do the job better; well, do you know what he did? In the evenings he'd sit at the piano composing little songs, while everything went to pieces around him. The guards and the waiters saw and heard him and they told us. It soon got around. You can imagine what sort of thing a reputation like that led to": B. Bellomo, *Lettere censurate*, Milano 1975, p. 146 (concerning this book see below).

the war had been reduced to the level of an operetta¹⁰⁴.

Soddu was also to be replaced, on 30 December 1940, by Marshal Ugo Cavallero, Chief of the General Staff, successor to Badoglio after the latter's resignation. It was the penultimate day of 1940, when Mussolini was giving serious thought to a remark from a speech by Roosevelt: peace will not be imposed by the Axis. Meaning that an acceptable peace would not be imposed by force but would be the result of negotiations. And Mussolini was to conclude, addressing himself to his Minister for Education, Giuseppe Bottai: "When all's said and done, we shan't be beaten. And do you know why? Because neither Germany nor Italy can be invaded". And Bottai's moral: «The year is ending with the password for imminent failure: we've moved from 'we shall win' (vinceremo) to 'we shan't be beaten' "¹⁰⁵.

Cavallero, then, took great pains to keep a really quite detailed diary, which is of great help to historians today. The events it covers begin in December 1940 and end on 31 January 1943¹⁰⁶. The first part deals with the Greco-Italian war and comprises what he remembers of the events between 1 December 1940 and 30 April 1941¹⁰⁷. Cavallero's narrative is simple and dry, without lengthy comments and criticisms. It certainly contains a great many of his conversations with the leaders of the military units and gives a satisfactorily detailed account of the atmosphere created by the Duce's presence at the spring offensive in March 1941. But it is worth noting that Cavallero makes a considerable attempt to mitigate the impression left by the failure of the offensive. Not so Mussolini, who, enraged by the Greeks' spirited defence, railed long against his generals. "... I perceive", he told them, "with what clear foresight Napoleon chose his generals from amongst

104. Armellini, *op. cit.*, p. 228 (21 December 1940).

105. Giuseppe Bottai, *Vent'anni e un giorno (24 luglio 1943)*, Cernusco sul Naviglio 1949 (ed. Garzanti), p. 198.

106. Ugo Cavallero, *Comando Supremo. Diario 1940-43 del Capo de S.M.G.*, Rocca S. Casciano 1948 (Editore Cappelli), 80, pp. XXVIII+464. Satisfactory use has been made of this source too on the Greek side; cf. General Staff, *Χειμερινά επιχειρήσεις. Ἱταλική ἐπίθεσις Μαγτίου (7 Ἰανουαρίου - 26 Μαγτίου 1941)* [Winter Operations. The Italian March Offensive (7 January - 26 March 1941)], Athens 1966, p. 44, 45, 46, 64, 90, 95, 110 (where use is made of U. Cavallero's Archivio Segreto, which was published in the periodical *L'Europeo* on 17 February 1957; cf. also p. 213-215).

107. Cavallero, *op. cit.*, p. 7-91. Cavallero's evidence about the Italians' spring offensive are more valuable, because Ciano's diary has no entries between 27 January and 23 April 1941 (cf. Ciano, *Diario*, vol. 2, p. 20).

the corporals and the sergeants. A general's job is not just like any job. It is an art, a vocation. I should have got the soldiers to elect their generals vocally, as they used to do in the Roman Empire. A good many generals, these days, clinging limpet-like to their career, bear their sabres like desk-clerks, buried in their warm offices with their sleeves rolled up"¹⁰⁸. In a further outburst of rage the Italian dictator was also to rail against his army in general: "The Greek campaign was organised in the political sector in a masterly fashion. It was the army that was entirely at fault"¹⁰⁹.

But undoubtedly the most important source for the subject that concerns us was published recently in Italy; it is the monumental three - volume work produced by the Italian General Staff, entitled *The War Against Greece*¹¹⁰. I have already made intermittent use of it, but I shall now point out its importance with particular emphasis on its most valuable aspects in combination with other sources of information.

a) It ensures the possibility of an objective comparison and contrast between Greek and Italian sources of evidence. It is a well - known fact that the Greek General Staff has publicised its position with regard to the Greco-Italian war by producing five volumes since 1959¹¹¹, in the form of an historical account accompanied by documents and making use too of the available Italian books on the subject. The official Italian publication now comes to fill a great gap which neither specialist historians nor military experts had previously been able to bridge. The military experts especially, and with some ease, will now be

108. Cf. the extract in Gian Carlo Fusco, *Guerra d'Albania*, Milano 1961, p. 82. Cf. also Mussolini's speech in Rome on 23.2.1941, concerning the full responsibility borne by the generals: S.M.E., *La Campagna di Grecia*, vol. 1, p. 613 and 907 (here Carlo Geloso's criticism of the shortcomings of the military command units).

109. Paolo Monelli, *Mussolini piccolo borghese*, 3rd edition, Milano 1972 (Aldo Garzanti Ed.), p. 218-219.

110. S.M.E., *La Campagna di Grecia*, tomo I. Testo, Roma 1980, 8^o, pp. 967. Tomo II. *Documenti*, Roma 1980, 8^o, pp. 1027. Tomo III. *Schizzi e fotografie*, Roma 1980, 8^o, pp. 269 (with 176 sketches and 51 photographs of the period).

111. General Staff, *Αίτια και άφορμαί έλληνο-ιταλικού πολέμου 1940-1941* (Grounds and Motives of the Greco-Italian War 1940-1941), Athens 1959. *Ή ιταλική εισβολή* (The Italian Invasion), Athens 1960. *Ή ελληνική άντεπίθεση* (The Greek Counter-offensive), Athens 1966. *Χειμεριναί έπιχειρήσεις και ιταλική έπίθεση Μαρτίου* (Winter Operations and the Italian March Offensive), Athens 1966. *Τό τέλος μιάς Έποποιίας* (The End of an Epopée), Athens 1959.

able to reach a much clearer interpretation of the specific events and errors in the theatre of operations. I must also emphasise that the compiler of the first volume, General Mario Montanari, in his notable endeavour to give a composite account of the Greco-Italian war, made use not only of the five volumes produced by the Greek General Staff, but also of the Greek White Book (in its French translation), and of A. Papagos' book *The Greek War* (in its Italian translation). So we have to acknowledge that the Italians did not ignore the Greek evidence, which is a noteworthy indication of their objectivity.

b) The Italian sources which are published in full or are used in part should be considered authentic and of vital importance. They are taken from the Italian General Staff's historical archives. Of particular interest are the 336 documents published in the second volume, not in chronological order but according to the order in which they are referred to in the first fourteen chapters of the first volume (the fifteenth and final chapter comprising the conclusions). This particular order is something of a drawback, as is the more serious absence of a table of abbreviations and an index of names and places in the first and second volumes. Most of the above-mentioned documents were hitherto unknown. They include reports by higher military officials on the situation in Albania, various plans of action for the operations on the Greek-Albanian front, the minutes of military meetings, dispatches concerning the disposition of the units, letters or instructions from Jacomoni, Ciano, Zenone Benini (the Under-Secretary of State for Albanian Affairs), Visconti Prasca, Soddu, Cavallero, Pricolo and other generals and commanders of the various divisions, estimates and calculations from the Commissariat, etc. The historical diaries of the Supreme Command of the Army, the High Command of the Armed Forces of Italy and Albania, the Military Commissariat, the 9th and 11th Armies and their dependent large units, the 14th and 17th Army Corps, and the reports from the commanders of large units were all utilised in the course of the compilation. In other words, we have here a rich mine of information ready to be excavated, which will provide plentiful material for future specialised studies.

c) Volume 1 (the compilatory section of the work) is distinguished by a scientific exactness upon which the interpretation of facts hinges; facts being Italy's inadequate political preparation for the war against Greece, accompanied by military inadequacy in terms of both men and equipment, while Albania's unpleasant climatological conditions

(mud, cold, snow) multiplied all the problems¹¹². The reasons for the defeat are investigated systematically. Badoglio's serious misgivings about the chances for the success of an offensive against Greece are mentioned¹¹³; the disintegration of the Italian army, with the constant dismissals and short-lived recruitments of 1940 are put forward¹¹⁴; the trials and tribulations of bureaucracy¹¹⁵, the lack of experienced junior and senior officers¹¹⁶, the disorganisation of the units by the enforcement of the so-called double division (comprising two, rather than three, infantry regiments)¹¹⁷, the brief period of service and the soldiers' inadequate training¹¹⁸, the imperfect system of producing officers and supplementary staff¹¹⁹, the deficient organisation of transportation and of the Commissariat¹²⁰ — all these aspects are underlined. The work also points out the great responsibility attributable to the three supreme commanders of the Italian units in Albania, Visconti Prasca, Soddu and Cavallero, who had all led brilliant military careers¹²¹.

Even the shortcomings of the Italian soldier are contrasted with relative frankness with the qualities of the Greek soldier during the critical time of the offensive: "When our artillery fire slowly withdrew and the response of the enemy fire began, the infantry, instead of de-

112. S.M.E., *La Campagna di Grecia*, vol. 1, p. 7 (with a foreword by the Director of the Army History Department of the Italian General Staff).

113. *Ibid.*, p. 21-23, 32, 86-88, 92 (concerning Badoglio's passive attitude towards Mussolini). The objections of Badoglio and the generals commanding the various arms to the opening of hostilities, as expressed on 17-18.10.1940, brought down thunderbolts from Mussolini at the Great Fascist Council of 19.10.1940: "In 1940 we've got the soldiers we want. But not the generals. The soldiers are aggressive, they're in the mood for fighting. But the same cannot be said of the generals, who are intent on making the enemy seem more significant than he really is. Of course, we mustn't underestimate the enemy — but nor should we exaggerate his real worth. The generals do not want war. They always wait for everything to be solved — and this is the formula they use — 'in the political sector'. Well, *we'll* think about the politics; *they* can fight the war" (from Giuseppe Bottai's diary, *Vent'anni e un giorno* (24 luglio 1943), p. 192).

114. S.M.E., *op. cit.*, p. 63-70, 925-928.

115. *Ibid.*, p. 909-910.

116. *Ibid.*, p. 67, 908, 909.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 911-925.

118. *Ibid.*, p. 929-931, 935.

119. *Ibid.*, p. 934-935.

120. *Ibid.*, p. 937-938.

121. *Ibid.*, p. 900-904.

ploying, advancing and exploiting all the possibilities of its weapons, clustered together and submitted to an extremely dangerous state of mind: the mentality of fatalism, weakness and mass submission. On the contrary, the Greek soldier, aggressive, bold, persistent, strong in his own ideology and certainly no richer in means than ourselves, very quickly asserted himself over our self-esteem, which unfortunately, on occasion, turned to fear"¹²².

This official publication of the Italian General Staff is particularly concerned with attempting to determine the ideals and the morale of the Italian soldier. Though I have already referred to this important matter above, I think it is worthwhile to give the authentic view of the historical section of the Italian army:

"Finally, it is not out of place to mention the feelings which reigned in the military sections. The fact that they had not really become fully conscious of the war can be attributed to general underestimation of the event, to the suddenness of the decision to commence hostilities and to the absence of any national differences which might have touched popular feeling or imagination. No doubt protest movements were aroused in Albania of some significance for the well-known irredentist question, but this was certainly not the case in Italy, and nor did the Fascist propaganda ever succeed in drumming up hatred for the Greeks. The great majority of the unit commanders, if not all of them, in invoking certain moral and psychological values were not impelled to do so by Mussolini's orders, but through a sense of 'duty' they attempted to explain as best they could the motives behind the conflict; during the course of the conflict itself they based their hopes decisively upon the (glorious) traditions of the corps or the regiment. It would perhaps be foolhardy to assert that such attempts were undertaken with exceptional eloquence. Re-reading dispatches or directives from some of the highest officials, one is faced with a jarring rhetoric, which, though characteristic of the situation, it must be confessed is still one of our most widely known traits. It would be unjust, however, to deny the brave conviction of the commanders, particularly those of the small units, under exceptionally difficult circumstances; the ordinary soldier always responded positively to his officer's orders, as long as he felt that his 'leader' was sharing in his own trials and tribulations. Nevertheless, an officer did not always turn out to be technically prepared to carry out his duties properly; and when it becomes clear that such an officer is not up to his rank, owing to psychological or physical weakness, the blame does not rest solely on his shoulders; the original fault is attributable to those who made the mistake of selecting him in the first place"¹²³.

But let us leave this work now, for to continue could lead to lengthy discussions of many of the areas it covers. The general conclusion one

122. *Ibid.*, p. 935-936.

123. *Ibid.*, p. 910-911.

reaches after examining the first, compilatory, volume is that the Italians, to a great extent quite unprepared with regard to both men and materials, were in too great a hurry to go to war to take into account the unfavourable geography and the wretched climatic conditions of the theatre of operations. Let me simply remind the reader that on 7 April 1939 the Greeks had not elaborated staff defence plans for the Albanian border and could not easily, without the fear of Italian misinterpretation, organise themselves on the Albanian side; that the road network in Northern, Albanian-occupied, Epirus was incomparably better than that of Southern, Greek Epirus; that the natural disposition of the mountains and the general geographical structure of the theatre of operations favoured the Italian offensive; that the Greeks' supplies were provided by most primitive means; that by the time the ordinary Greek soldier reached the front he had already walked 200-400 kms¹²⁴. But the Italian double division was as well supplied as the Greek treble division with mortars, divisional artillery and 75 and 100 mm guns¹²⁵. This information is not refuted in the Italian General Staff's official publication. Later on I shall use this source again to make a quantitative comparison of the opposing forces. However, I am bound to add here that serious staff errors were observed on the Greek side too, both before and after the start of hostilities; that there were shortages and unforgivable delays in the arming of the soldiers and the fortification of the Pindus and of the Epirus front; that there were tragic gaps in the disposition of the forces, particularly in the Pindus; that valuable time was lost in the exploitation of opportunities, thereby causing unjustifiable losses in human terms¹²⁶.

In addition to the official Italian views, there are also the *unofficial ones*, which sometimes give a more vivid and realistic impression

124. See Bernard Vernier's brief but comprehensive article, «Les opérations gréco-italiennes du 28 octobre 1940 au 20 avril 1941», *Revue d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale*, vol. 10, n° 38 (avril 1960) 15-36. The article is written according to the Greek point of view and is based on information given to the author by A. Papagos.

125. Alexandros Papagos, *Ο πόλεμος της Ελλάδος 1940-1941* (The Greek War 1940-1941), Athens 1945, p. 149 (comparative table).

126. Cf. details in General D. Katheriotis's (former Head of the General Staff) book, *Αι κυριώτεραι στρατηγικαί φάσεις του πολέμου 1940-41. Μελέτη επιτελική* (The Principal Strategic Phases of the 1940-41 War. Staff study), Athens 1946, pp. 186. Cf. also further evidence in K. N. Triantaphyllou, *Απόρρητα του Πολέμου 1940* (Secrets of the 1940 War), p. 64-69.

of the facts and help one to a truer interpretation of events. This is why I turned my research in the direction of the ordinary Italian conscript, the unknown soldier, the man who vainly fought against his fellow man. There is a collection of letters written by the Italian soldiers on the western front (in France), on the Greek-Albanian front and on the Russian front¹²⁷. Most of the letters are from Russia, where the Italians lived through frightful experiences; very few are from Albania. If we take into account that these letters were strictly censored, to the extent that before reaching their destination words and whole phrases had frequently been effaced¹²⁸, then of course we cannot maintain that they are an incontestable source from which to comprehend the opinions of the Italian soldiers¹²⁹. Still, certain facts can be gleaned from them. For instance, on 28 December 1940 a sergeant in the First Alpine Regiment wrote that rumours were flying around of a probable truce with Greece; "we're praying and hoping the rumours will turn out to be true"¹³⁰. Some are waiting for victory so that they can quietly go home¹³¹, others complain of the fleas¹³², some are expecting German assistance¹³³, others devote their whole letter to what they have to eat and what they dream of eating¹³⁴, and one, finally, asks his parents if their cow has calved yet, if it's a nice calf¹³⁵, etc.

But the letters which possibly never reached their destination through being held back by the censor are undoubtedly the most revelatory of the Italians' feelings about Mussolini and the war with Greece. The Italian postal censor has now decided, after so many years, to deal with the contents of thousands of letters from the war years and thereby make an enormous material contribution to history and social science. The censor, Bino Bellomo, was a university professor

127. Nuto Revelli, *L'ultimo fronte. Lettere di soldati caduti o dispersi nella seconda guerra mondiale*, Torino 1971, pp. 534 (Einaudi Editore).

128. N. Revelli, *op. cit.*, p. 77, 107, 108, 115 (here the writer of the letter asks the addressees not to write about politics or about anything else which might be subject to censorship).

129. Cf. also M. Cervi, *Storia*, p. 297-313, where soldiers' evidence has been collected in the form of memories, letters and diaries.

130. Revelli, *op. cit.*, p. 31, 32 (3 February 1941).

131. Revelli, *op. cit.*, p. 36, 49.

132. Revelli, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

133. Revelli, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

134. Revelli, *op. cit.*, p. 48, 49.

135. Revelli, *op. cit.*, p. 74, 75.

of political economics, and on 10 July 1940 was assigned to the military postal censorship office, and transferred in March 1942 to the military information service. During his time in the postal service he recorded the contents of some 100,000 letters, without noting the names of the senders, but keeping a note of only their function or their rank. Of the importance of his job, Bellomo writes: "My collection is the only one of its kind in Italy and will be of service to sociologists and psychologists and to all those who are interested in acquiring more information about the Second World War".

With particular regard to the war against Greece, after the Italians' first bloody defeats 26 out of every 100 letters were pessimistic. Here are some extracts, which give the general range of this pessimism:

"Now they're calling up more age - groups. We don't understand anything any more and what we hear is pretty bad. For the time being, while they're just handing us empty chatter, all we can do is trust in God" (from a letter to a soldier from relatives).

"At times like this you have to do what you can and not what you want. These are hard times. He (i.e. Mussolini) is up to his tricks again and seems so positive, but all we want is to go home" (from a letter from a soldier of the 23rd infantry regiment to a relative).

"To the Duce everything seems simple, but people are saying that this is a hard war and likely to go on for years and years. Let's hope not" (from a letter from a civilian to a soldier).

"For some time now actions have been speaking louder than words. Meanwhile, they've reduced our wages from three liras a day to one, and everyone's fed up about it. But that doesn't bother us all that much. All the men who come back off leave say the villages seem dead, there are no people. Let's hope things will be as the Duce promised us; he's made us a lot of promises and so far everything's gone wrong" (from a letter from an artillery soldier to a relative).

Following the Greeks' aggressive invasion of Albania, the letters expressing optimism about the situation and the outcome of the war number no more than five in every thousand (0.5%). This optimism is quite emphatic, however. Even when Mussolini declared on 18 November 1940 that he was going to break Greece's back, still there were optimists in the Party. But the Italians' reactions were growing more serious. The Italian dictator's authority continued to decrease. Visconti Prasca reports that even Mussolini himself was seized by feelings of pessimism, and to him is attributed the descriptive phrase, "the boat's

leaking"¹³⁶. British propaganda in Rome put about disquieting announcements, in which, however, the Italian General Staff played a part. Someone wrote that the Greeks were fishing Italian soldiers' bodies out of the rivers with nets, at which point precautionary censorship was imposed on the news and articles transmitted from abroad.

From the Italians' letters we are able to understand the feelings aroused in them by Mussolini's declaration that he would break Greece's back. "I believe," we read in a letter addressed to a captain in the 26th machine-gun battalion, "that you didn't manage to hear the Duce's speech. He's absolutely certain of victory and seems to think time of no consequence, two months or two years, it's all the same... It's nice, after the blows we've suffered, that such certitude can exist. Meanwhile, our own back's been broken. If we can hope in anything now it's in Divine Intervention". "And he talks about breaking backs" (a relative writes to a man in the artillery). "Meanwhile, even the bare necessities aren't to be found in the warehouses. The upper classes live on exorbitant words, on plenty of illusions and on the ostentatious medals they wear on their proud unsullied chests. They see victory, they see empire, glory, and they dream of riches, which some of them are grabbing in advance". "Who reads the newspapers?" (writes a civilian in a letter to a cavalry officer of the Savoia Cavalleria). "And it's better not to listen to the radio if you don't want your blood poisoned. And as for the Duce whom we once idolised, he seems outside reality now. They've had to call up men from the 1915 age-group. They drew lots and set off weeping for Albania. Everything's hasty and ill-considered. Everything's useless. And then what? The 1914 age-group discharged. Our thoughts are black. We feel humiliated knowing the war won't end unless the Germans come and help us. But then it'll be Hitler who wins the war. And so, whether we win or lose, either way we're beaten already".

The soldiers' impressions of Mussolini's visit to Albania in March 1941, to observe the famous spring offensive, are disconcerting. Here a gunner writes to his family about his feelings: "The Duce has come to visit the front. 'Are you proud to be fighting?' he asked us. 'Yes, Duce', we answered. And he added, 'Bear up, spring will soon be here and the Greeks are going to feel awful'. At the moment it's us who are feeling awful". And another testimony: "When he got out of his car they told us to shout 'Long live the Duce'; and so we did, some

136. Visconti Prasca, *op. cit.*, p. 127, note 1. Cf. also Bottai's evidence above.

from the heart and others to avoid getting into trouble. We could see our superiors watching us out of the corners of their eyes... Some of the chaps gave us a wink and shouted, 'We're going to win, Duce'. And he shouted loudly back, 'We certainly are'. We gave back a hearty 'Hooray', but later on we found out that the little group who had shouted 'We're going to win, Duce' had only been being sarcastic. The Duce never realised..." (from a letter from an Engineer serving in the 13th Army Corps, to his family)¹³⁷.

During Mussolini's visit to Albania General Pricolo managed to discern the Italian soldiers' reaction amidst the applause and cheering they had been directed to perform. His information is, I think, credible. The incident he describes is as follows:

"Amongst the hundreds of cheering soldiers one caught my attention who had been left behind alone half-way down the road and was calmly carrying on eating. He did not strike me as being particularly young; he was quite heavily built and with a neglected beard. As he brought his spoon to his mouth he would raise his eyes to his excited fellow-soldiers, and now and then his hand would hover over his mess-tin as he watched dumbfounded the scene which was clearly meaningless to him. At one moment he realised that I was sitting watching him with some curiosity. He carried on eating for a while, then began moving slowly backwards and I lost sight of him as he disappeared into the bushes"¹³⁸.

137. All the above information and the extracts from letters are taken from a forerunner of Bino Bellomo's book by a journalist named Aldo Santini. The latter's article, entitled "Letters and Censorship" was translated into Greek and appeared in the newspaper *Θεσσαλονίκη* on 28.6.1972. Bellomo's book came out in 1975: Bino Bellomo, *Lettere censurate. 1940-42: l'ottusità del potere si scatena sulla corrispondenza tra soldati e civili*, Milano (Longanesi e C.) 1975, 16°, pp. 201. For the Italian originals of the extracts quoted, see pp. 60-61, 63-64, 65-66. A great many more letters (e.g. p. 56, 57, 58, 59, 71, 76-78, 84-87, 92-96, 133-137) provide shocking information about the tragic times endured by the Italian people, both military and civilian. The civilians, because of the senseless war, suffered from hunger, poor clothing, frostbite and the arrogant attitude of the Fascist Party officials. Rage, indignation, irony and sarcasm are frequent characteristics of these letters written by soldiers and civilians alike. It should be noted, however, that Bellomo's classification of the letters in his notable book — various groups being, e.g. relations between soldiers and officers, Fascist propaganda, love for the homeland and hatred of the enemy, adoration of and faith in Mussolini, corruption and disorganisation within the army, the civilians' trials and tribulations, difficulties on the Libyan front, blows from the Greek front, the Fascist leaders' quarrels, the resistance in the Balkans, deceptions from the Russian front — is more of a hindrance than a help to our particular subject. One has to flick through a great deal of the book in order to pinpoint the various testimonies from soldiers serving on the Greek front.

138. Francesco Pricolo, *Ignavia contro eroismo*, p. 122. Cf. also Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

In view of the above evidence, it seems to me that the large number of Italians taken prisoner can easily be explained. And so, what Ciano wrote in his diary on 11 January 1941 is not inexplicable: "Our forces, even the newcomers, bear up as long as the Greeks apply no pressure. But in conflict they give way, and very quickly at that. Why? Mussolini finds the whole situation an inexplicable tragedy, and all the more serious for being inexplicable"¹³⁹.

By the end of the war more than 23,000 Italian soldiers had been taken prisoner, and the majority of these POWs had friendly feelings towards their enemies. Indeed, it frequently happened that, having been settled in POW camps, their spirits would quickly rise again, and they would soon be singing, laughing and joking. No case of an Italian POW escaping was ever recorded, nor were there any instances of indiscipline. In any event, the Greeks treated the captured Italians with every display of humanity¹⁴⁰. Eleftherios Eimarmenos (pseudonym of John Vorres) gives a moving account in this respect in his book *Greece in the Albanian Mountains*¹⁴¹. And even today many Italians who were taken prisoner in Greece still retain the fondest memories of the country, as I have myself ascertained in conversations with them; and many, if they have not already done so, express the desire to return to the same places and spend their holidays here (cf. below).

The Italian soldiers paid the Greek soldiers back in the same coin of their own humane behaviour when, later, with the help of their German allies, they became the occupiers of the country which had beaten them. It is worth noting the incident recounted in an Italian book¹⁴², in which, rather splendidly I think, the humane attitude of an ordinary Italian soldier is contrasted with the inhuman discipline of the German Nazi in the face of the misery and hunger of two little Epirot children.

When, after the surrender of the Greek army, the Italians crossed the Greek - Albanian border and were confronted with the letter E scratched on the rock in token of the fact that from that point onwards the ground belonged to Greece (Ἑλλάδα), they realised what

139. Ciano, *Diario*, vol. 2, p. 13.

140. Papakonstantinos, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

141. Eleftherios Eimarmenos, *Ἡ Ἑλλάς στὰ βουνὰ τῆς Ἀλβανίας. (Ἀφήγησις, συζητήσεις καὶ σκέψεις)* [Greece in the Albanian Mountains. (Narrative, conversations and thoughts)], Athens 1945, p. 134-142.

142. Gian Carlo Fusco, *Guerra d'Albania*, p. 93-95.

sort of a people they were fighting. "Greece," writes one Alpini, "a name which we have always had within us, bound with that ancient civilisation in which we feel ourselves to be participants even today. Perhaps the Romans felt the same way the day they first set foot there. Which is why it may be that in this war we are not confronting enemies but simply warriors". Another Alpini stopped in the middle of the road and in a stentorian voice addressed the ground on which he was treading: "Hail, O land of Homer, Pindar, Sophocles, Aristotle. Hail, motherland of eternal beauty, of beautiful temples, of marble columns. Hail thou who bore those noble spirits, creators of a great civilisation! Forgive us who dare to violate thee with our iron - shod feet and disturb the sleep of those immortal souls"¹⁴³.

It is worth noting at this point that some three months after the German - Italian occupation of Greece, the Greeks' admiration for the German discipline and military supremacy, on the one hand, and their scorn and abhorrence for the Italians, on the other, gave place to precisely the opposite sentiments. The discreet behaviour of the Italian officers, and the ordinary Italian soldier's generosity, forbearance and benevolent disposition aroused the esteem of common Greek opinion. As Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, the Vatican's apostolic vicar in Greece (and later Pope John XXIII, †1963) stated in his report dated 24.7. 1941 (Athens), in both Thessaloniki and the Greek capital people were hoping that the authority of the occupying forces would fall into Italian hands. There was widespread fear not only of German cruelty but also of the rumoured Bulgarian occupation of Thessaloniki¹⁴⁴.

But let us return to the early hours of 28 October 1940. The two armies fell to, with centuries of culture and civilisation behind them. The one side were obliged to carry out their duty; and their material superiority made them arrogant. The others were fewer in number, had fewer means, and consequently their victory was looked upon as nothing less than a miracle. But I, for one, must disagree with such a view. History in general, and Greek history in particular, is principally an applied science. It is not founded on metaphysics, but on one positive element which creates it: and that is the ideal. And this was precisely what the Italians lacked.

143. Giovanni Zanette, *Tempesta sulle alpi albanesi*, Milano 1967, p. 245-246.

144. See Roncalli's interesting document containing his impressions of Thessaloniki and Athens, in *Actes et Documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, volume 5: *Le Saint Siège et la Guerre Mondiale, juillet 1941-octobre 1942*, Città del Vaticano 1969, p. 99-103, n° 19.

The general absence of ideals is indicated by the popular Italian songs which sprang spontaneously to the lips of the army in those days, expressing their feelings and desires. Here are the words of one of these songs, entitled *For Greece*:

"On 16 September — no-one was expecting it — the red notification [= call-up papers] — compelled us to leave. We set off from Udine — called in at Bari — and stepped ashore at Durazzo — Greece our destination. We must go — with sadness in our hearts — leaving our sweethearts — to fall in love with others. Marching along — a feather in his cap — a stout kit-bag on his back — that's the Alpini. The day will come — when we'll be singing like this — the tour of duty will be over — and we'll go rejoicing home"¹⁴⁵.

There is no sign of battle fury nor of a passionate desire for revenge, no trace of any ideal nor any notion of justice on behalf of which these Alpini are marching against Greece. Nor is there so much as a mention of *mare nostrum* or the Empire of the Caesars the Duce was dreaming of. Nothing recalls the romanticism and the sweet lyricism of the Fascist hymn "giovinezza, giovinezza, primavera di bellezza" (youth, youth, springtime of beauty). The young people in question were to be lamented in simple and inconsolable words by the very same Alpini of the hand-picked Julia Division, which was pitifully decimated in the Pindus¹⁴⁶. A mournful song about the Perati bridge gathers all their sorrow together: "On the Perati bridge — a black flag — it's in mourning for the Julia Division — going to war. It's in mourning for the Julia Division — going to war — the flower of youth — buried in the ground. Those who went — never came back — in the mountains of Greece — there they stayed ...". This song was later to be banned by Mussolini¹⁴⁷.

145. See the text in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *La poesia popolare italiana*, Milano 1960, p. 242. Cf. also Z. N. Tsirpanlis, «Ένα ιταλικό βιβλίο για τον πόλεμο του 1940-41» (An Italian Book about the 1940-41 War), *Έποχές* issue n° 41 (September 1966), p. 273 (for the Italian text). Compare the derisive songs and the cartoons in particular, from the Greek point of view: D. Lazoyorgou-Ellinikou, *Κορόιδο Μουσολίνι* (Ridiculous Mussolini), Athens 1972.

146. For the activity of the Alpini in Albania, Greece and the Balkans in general, see Manlio Barilli, *Con gli Alpini del 6° in tutte le guerre*, Udine 1966, p. 243-400. For scenes from the everyday life of the soldiers of the Julia regiment, see Manlio Cecovini, *Ponte Perati. La Julia in Grecia*, Milano (Longanesi e C.) 1973, 160, pp. 283.

147. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *op. cit.*, p. 244. See also the periodical *Domenica del*

It would be an excellent idea, I think, to collect the Greek as well as the Italian military and civilian songs¹⁴⁸, and to make a comparative study of them all. The demotic Greek songs of 1940, to the best of my knowledge, are fairly numerous and preserve the structure and rhythm of the Klephtic songs of the Turkish occupation¹⁴⁹. But this field demands specialised research.

3. *Journalistic evidence, chronicles, historical essays*

The Italian works which appeared immediately after the war for the Greek-Albanian front naturally varied in style and approach from journalistic impressions and narratives in chronicle form to strictly documented treatises. To the first group belong those writers who, either from a distance or actually on the spot, in one way or another lived through the events.

In this category I might classify the brief chronicle of a young Alpini dispatch rider, Mario Rigoni Stern¹⁵⁰. His narrative is elegant and charming. He portrays the wretchedness of war as being due more to the difficulties caused by Albania's physical environment and climate than to the inhuman cruelty of the conflict in the front line. The book is also imbued with a scorn for the worthless Blackshirts and the fanatical representatives of the Fascist party in general. At one point one also comes across a brief, un-triumphant description of captured Greek prisoners: "They too were thin, their clothes in tatters;

Corriere of 15.5.1969. Cf. also the newspaper *Tò Bḡma* of 31.10.1973, p. 2, and 28.10.1973, p. 2 (Ἀντάλοι τοῦ Ἀκροατῆ column).

148. Of considerable interest is a recent book by Pietro Cavallo and Pasquale Iaccio, *Vincere! Vincere! Vincere! Fascismo e società italiana nelle canzoni e nelle riviste di varietà. 1935-1943*, Roma (Editrice Iannua) 1981, 80, pp. 208.

149. For the Greek demotic songs of 28 October 1940 see K. S. Konstas, «Ἡ 28ῃ Ὀκτωβρίου στὴν αἰτωλικὴ δημοτικὴ ποίηση» (The 28 October in Aetolian Demotic Poetry), *Νέα Ἑστία*, 46 (1949) 1400-1404. Yeoryios Mihailidis-Nouaros, *Οἱ ἐθνικοὶ ἀγῶνες τοῦ 1912 καὶ τοῦ 1940 καὶ ἡ λαϊκὴ ποιητικὴ ψυχὴ* (The National Struggles of 1912 and 1940 and the Popular Poetic Spirit) (panegyric), Thessaloniki 1956, p. 16-20, 25-26. Cf. also Yannis Andrikopoulos, «Ἡ 28ῃ Ὀκτωβρίου στὴν ποίησή μας» (The 28 October in our Poetry), *Ἑλληνικὴ Δημοκρατία*, 6 (1950) 657-662. For songs from Chios concerning 1940 see S. Kavvadas, «Τραγούδια Χιώτικα» (Chiot Songs), *Περιοδικὸν τοῦ ἐν Χίῳ Συλλόγου Ἀργέντη*, 4 (1951), issue no 1-2, p. 117-118.

150. Mario Rigoni Stern, *Quota Albania*, Torino (ed. Einaudi) 1981 (2nd edition; the first edition came out in 1971), 160, pp. 153 (for the war in Albania see pp. 43-146).

they were covered in fleas and had long thick beards. But in their deep dark eyes, inside their silence, they had dignity"¹⁵¹.

Another little book, probably the best-written in this category, is by a journalist named Gian Carlo Fusco, *The Albanian War*¹⁵². Though the pages are few, they portray the trembling reality of the sorrowful and tragic days of the Greco-Italian war, bringing people and gestures to life with all their harshness in time of battle and all their humanity in time of the brotherhood of the nations. This little book certainly has not the completeness of later writings, but it nevertheless remains unsurpassed as an authentic testimony. In many respects it resembles a report by a special correspondent at the front. In its author's view, the Greco-Italian war for the Italians was a time of "stupidity, incompetence, senseless cruelty and pointless sacrifices"¹⁵³.

Another notable source lies in the testimonies to be found in articles published in various Italian newspapers or weekly periodicals dating from 1944 to 1949. They are articles by or interviews with ordinary soldiers who fought on the Greek front and stayed in Greece, either as POWs or as conquerors, and also the impressions and opinions of Italian statesmen or eminent Italian hellenists (such as the university professors Filippo Maria Pontani and Bruno Lavagnini), all dealing with Greek and Italian sentiments both during and after the war. These publications are positively imbued with a strong repugnance for the unjust war and an affinity for everything Greek¹⁵⁴.

The various writers of general works devote a good many pages to the offensive against Greece; Amedeo Tosti, in his book *The War Which Ought Not to Have Happened (June 1940 - September 1943)*¹⁵⁵; Edoardo Scala, in the tenth volume of the history of the Italian infantry¹⁵⁶; Giorgio Bocca, in his book *The Story of Italy in the Fascist War*

151. *Ibid.*, p. 98-99.

152. Gian Carlo Fusco, *Guerra d'Albania*, Milano 1961 (Editore Feltrinelli), 16°, pp. 122. This is chiefly a chronicle rather than a literary work. It was translated into Greek and published in 15 instalments in the newspaper *Θεσσαλονίκη*, on 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 October and 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 November 1969.

153. Fusco, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

154. See the book entitled: *Grecia Moderna. Come sono i Greci. (Testimonianze e giudizi italiani)*, Roma aprile 1949 (stab. tip. de «Il Giornale d'Italia»), 80, pp. 80. It was published a cura dell'Ufficio Stampa della R. Legazione di Grecia in Italia (under J. Ghikas).

155. See Amedeo Tosti, *La guerra che non si doveva fare (giugno 1940 - settembre 1943)*, Roma 1945, p. 109-127.

156. Edoardo Scala, *Storia delle fanterie italiane*, vol. 10: *Le fanterie nella Se-*

1940-1943¹⁵⁷; Franco Catalano, in his comprehensive account of events in Italy from the first signs of the Fascist dictatorship up to the foundation of the Republic (1919-1948)¹⁵⁸ *et al.*

Of all the works in this category, Aldo Lualdi's book *Naked Before the Target*¹⁵⁹ deserves our attention most. It describes the heroism and the tragedy of the Italian soldiers at the various battle fronts of the Second World War and is based on the private diaries and letters of soldiers and on interviews Lualdi conducted with survivors. He gives particular significance to the Greco-Italian conflict (pp. 115-205), because he believes that Italy's great tragedy took place in the Albanian mountains, even more so than on the Russian front: "The war against Greece," he declares emphatically, "left a bloody reminder etched on the breast of every soldier who took part in it..."¹⁶⁰. Smoothly he takes us into the ranks of the first Italians to cross the Greek border on the morning of 28 October 1940 and outlines their agonising quest for the enemy. He follows the fortunes of every Italian section, not with heavy war terminology, but in a light literary tenor which does not seem to falsify the events. It seemed to me as I read this book that I could actually hear the breathless panting of the soldier in the front line. All the same, the author does not abstain from over-emphasising the fact that the Greek soldiers were better armed and more warmly dressed than the Italians¹⁶¹. Elsewhere, though, he frankly acknowledges that "the Greeks defend their land passionately, fight with super-human tenacity, though they are in no better circumstances than we are as far as the quantity and quality of weapons, ammunition, food and supplies are concerned. And yet they show no hatred; they fight humanely..."¹⁶².

conda Guerra Mondiale (ed. Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito-Ispettorato dell'Arma di Fanteria), Roma (offprint s.d.), p. 432-452 (the military events are described in a fairly summary fashion, no fresh information is supplied and the author shows himself most anxious to justify the defeat).

157. Giorgio Bocca, *Storia d'Italia nella guerra fascista 1940-1943*, Roma-Bari 1973 (Editori Laterza), vol. 1, p. 245-269, 286-302, vol. 2, p. 337-355.

158. Franco Catalano, *L'Italia dalla dittatura alla democrazia 1919-1948. Nuova edizione accresciuta*, vol. 1, Milano 1975 (Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore), p. 258-261 (for the war against Greece).

159. Aldo Lualdi, *Nudi alla meta*, Milano (Sugar Editore) 1965, 8°, pp. 387.

160. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

161. *Ibid.*, p. 129-130, 138.

162. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

There are also the books which are devoted exclusively to the Greco-Italian war and are based on memoirs, diaries, documents and other sources. In other words, we are moving gradually away from the personal aspect of the war in the direction of disinterested and objective historical research¹⁶³. Furthermore, most, if not all, of the protagonists on both sides are no longer alive. Mussolini, Ciano, Visconti Prasca, Soddu, Cavallero on the one hand, and Metaxas and Papagos on the other, are all dead. Every one of them left us his manuscripts, and the burden falls upon the historian, whether of the older or the younger generation, to use these papers and reconstruct the back-stage activities, the battles and the outcome of the war. It was from this perspective that the following books were written. One by Carlo Baudino, entitled *A Senseless War. The Campaign Against Greece*, was published in April 1965¹⁶⁴. The second is by the Milanese journalist and lawyer Mario Cervi and is entitled *Storia della Guerra di Grecia* (English title: *The Hollow Legions*). It was first published in August 1965, a second edition followed within five months (December 1965) and a third, paperback, edition came out in 1969. It has also been translated into Greek with a commentary by the Greek General Army Staff¹⁶⁵. Cervi's book is undoubtedly the most thorough

163. Valuable information, together with detailed tables and graphical representations of the Italian convoys and the transportation of the soldiers both before and during the hostilities in Albania, are to be found in the weighty tome of the Ufficio Storico della Marina Militare, *La Marina italiana nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale*, Volume IX. *La difesa del traffico con l'Albania, la Grecia e l'Egeo*, Roma 1965 (particularly pp. 13-96).

164. Carlo Baudino, *Una guerra assurda. La Campagna di Grecia*, Milano-Varese 1965 (ed. Cisalpino), 8°, pp. 287. For a review of this work see Z. N. Tsirpanlis, «Ένα Ιταλικό βιβλίο για τον πόλεμο του 1940-41» (An Italian Book About the 1940-41 War), *Εποχές* 41 (September 1966), p. 271-273.

165. Mario Cervi, *Storia della guerra di Grecia*, Milano 1965 (Sugar Editore), pp. 519. The same book was re-published in Varese 1969 (Edit. Arnoldo Mondadori) pp. 384 with only seven of the 84 documents published in the first edition. A Greek translation (of the first Italian edition) was made by Yoryos Bolas in two volumes (pp. 301 + 295) with a foreword by N. K. Paparrodos, Athens 1967 (ed. Alvin Redman Hellas). I am compelled to point out that the Greek translation is not strictly faithful in many places. The book has also been translated into English: Mario Cervi, *The Hollow Legions. Mussolini's blunder in Greece, 1940-1941*. Translated from the Italian by Eric Mosbacher, London 1972 (Chatto and Windus), 8°, pp. XIV + 336 (of the documents only the report of the meeting held on 15.10.1940 is included). The Italian author has written other works in which he expresses the same views: Mario Cervi, «L'attacco alla Grecia apre un nuovo fronte», in the

and is written in a good-natured style, with no fanaticism, notwithstanding his barbs against Papagos and his severe criticism of Metaxas¹⁶⁶. Of course, the problem of objectivity is a difficult one¹⁶⁷ even today. It is impossible for the Greek or Italian historian not to be influenced by his feelings, even if he took no part in the war. The scars on the soldiers' bodies are ineradicable, memories live on, the wounded, now grey-haired, still relate their exploits. Cervi himself was an infantry officer in occupied Greece, and his wife is Greek.

A third historical work, *How we did not win the war against Greece, Facts and Coulisses*, is written by Jeanne Baghiou. Her book is addressed to the general public, and it is written with an understanding of Greek affairs, but with the proper critical view of the behavior of the Fascist leadership^{167a}.

4. Conclusions and comparisons

I do not think that there is anything to be achieved by my going

periodical *Storia illustrata* n° 147, vol. 24 (febbraio 1970), p. 149-162. Cf. also id., *Dove va la Grecia?*, Milano 1968, p. 83-87.

166. Cervi, *Storia* (ed. 1965), p. 9, 53, 132, 263, 266-267, 327, 330, 331, 332 (for Papagos), p. 14-15, 268-269 (for Metaxas). Compare what an opponent of the Metaxas dictatorship has to report about Papagos' military activities and Metaxas' policies: Panayotis Kanellopoulos, *Tà chrónia tou Megálon Poléμου 1939-1944. 'Iστορική ἀναδρομή και κείμενα* (The Years of the Great War 1939-1944. Historical retrospection and texts), second edition, Athens 1964, p. 19-24.

167. A characteristic example of subjectivism is to be found in an article by G(ino) V(illa) S(anta), «La fine della guerra e il convegno dei plenipotenziari», *Nazione Militare*, luglio 1941, p. 525-527, in which, with none of the essential details and with a certain measure of romanticism and narcissism, the author describes the first meeting between Greek and Italian officers in order to sign the armistice. It is quite typical, indeed, that nothing whatsoever is said in the article about the reasons for the end of the war (i.e. the Germans' salutary intervention on behalf of the Italians).

167a. Jeanne Baghiou, *Come non vincemmo la campagna di Grecia. Fatti e retroscena*, Milano 1971 (Giovanni De Vecchi editore), 80, pp. 224. It is informative and written in popular style. There is no mention of sources and nor is a bibliography provided. The author makes use of *Grazzi*, *Jacomoni*, the *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, and also *Cervi*. Part of the book deals with Greek history since 1821, in some cases inadequately (p. 7-88). The assumptions as far as the responsibility of the political and the military leadership of Italy is concerned and the outbreak of the war are correct (see pp. 107, 121-128, 163, 168). The author gives a personal touch to her narrative since she refers to her memories of the Italian occupation of Greece (pp. 214-217, 219).

into extensive and detailed criticisms. I shall confine myself simply to the basic conclusions I have reached through studying general and specialised historical works:

a) The Italian writers acknowledge that the war against Greece was unjust, futile and had no moral foundation whatsoever. This self-knowledge is undoubtedly most creditable.

b) Everyone acknowledges that the Greeks fought gallantly, honourably and humanely, and won the war by their own valour and their passionate desire for freedom. Even Mussolini, on the first anniversary of Italy's entry into the war (10 June 1941), while underlining the positive aspects of Italy's state of war, admitted, amidst the confusion of his arrogant thoughts, that "I must honestly say that many of the Greek sections have fought very bravely... The Greek 'Case' shows that armies cannot be assessed by immutable criteria and that the surprises, though by no means frequent, are nevertheless possible"¹⁶⁸.

c) The Italians maintain that their soldiers fought in obedience to their superiors. As soldiers they performed their duty. Irrespective of what they were fighting for, the Italians honour them today for the sacrifice they made.

d) All are unanimous in casting the blame for the declaration of war on the senior Fascist Party leaders, and above all on Mussolini¹⁶⁹, Ciano, Badoglio¹⁷⁰, Visconti Prasca and Jacomoni. But if I may express an opinion at this point, it seems to me that history has a serious problem here: how is it that the responsibility was confined to such

168. S.M.E., *La Campagna di Grecia*, vol. 1, p. 829.

169. After the Italian army's significant defeats in the mountains of Epirus, in January 1941 Mussolini declared: "If anyone on 15 October (referring to the meeting held on 15.10.40) had forecast what was really going to happen later on, I'd have shot him" (Ciano, *Diario*, vol. 2, p. 16). These words prove beyond doubt his responsibility for the war. None of the military leaders, however, was prepared to risk his position and his life, all preferring to accept the slaughter of the Italian people.

170. By mid-November 1940 the journalistic organ *Il Regime Fascista* (22.11.40) run by the powerful Fascist agent Roberto Farinacci had already made known Mussolini's displeasure with Badoglio and the Italian General Staff, because of the Italians' humiliation in Albania. Badoglio replied in the newspaper *La Tribuna*, which was immediately confiscated; the text of the reply was circulated illegally amongst the military units and soldiers and officers alike expressed their moral condemnation of the leaders of the State and the Army. For the relevant texts see Bellomo, *Lettere censurate*, p. 138-147. S.M.E., *La Campagna di Grecia*, vol. 1, p. 324-345, vol. 2, p. 515-518 (the texts themselves).

a small circle at a time when the Italian people, from 1922 to 1943, had been living under the Fascist regime¹⁷¹? In all those years was the responsibility for the leadership's actions not distributed amongst more people?

e) The Italian writers have made a systematic endeavour to prove that their country entered the war at a time when its military preparations were still incomplete, and neither men nor materials were ready to face the Greeks. Indeed, Cervi goes so far as to say that "the Albanian war was not a battle between David and Goliath but between two Davids, one of whom had right on his side"¹⁷². It is quite natural, I suppose, for the losers to employ striking metaphors to reduce the significance of their defeat.

Forty years later a serious Italian newspaper reminded its readers of the Duce's foolish decision to declare war on Greece. The relevant articles discuss Italy's unpreparedness for war and emphasise the numerical superiority of the Greek army. The blame is cast upon Ciano's and Mussolini's evil and corrupt informers and social circles; cf. *Corriere della Sera* (edizione Romana) of 27.10.1980, p. 7. The writers of the two articles: Francesco Metrangolo and Arrigo Petacco. I mention this in order to give some idea of how public opinion may be informed about this sort of incident.

History, however, requires evidence. How large were the enemy forces, then, on the morning of 28 October 1940? The numbers are well known.

According to Italian sources the Italian soldiers numbered 100,000 altogether and the Greeks 40,000¹⁷³. Other sources, again Italian, say

171. I should like to remind the reader at this point of Italy's expansionist policy with regard to Albania and the Balkans in general from 1920 onwards, and indeed ever since the end of the last century. See Giovanni Zamboni's well-documented work, *Mussolinis Expansionspolitik auf dem Balkan. Italiens Albanienpolitik vom I. bis zum II. Tiranapakt im Rahmen des italienisch-jugoslawischen Interessenkonflikts und der italienischen 'imperialen' Bestrebungen in Südosteuropa*, Hamburg 1970 (*Hamburger Historische Studien*, n° 2), 8°, pp. 514 (in photo-offset). See also S. Smirnova's interesting monograph (based on Yugoslavian and Albanian archives), *Balkanskaja politika fašistkoj Italii*, Moskva 1969, 8°, pp. 281 (cf. also a brief review of the book in the *Δελτίον Πρωσικής Βιβλιογραφίας* (Bulletin of Russian Bibliography), year 8 - fascicle 1, Thessaloniki July 1971, p. 67-68). A brief account is to be found in Hugh Seton-Watson's book, *Eastern Europe between the Wars 1918-1941*, 3rd edition, New York, Evanston and London 1967, p. 366-378. Cf. also above.

172. Cervi, *Storia*, p. 10. Cf. also the Greek translation vol. 1, p. 20-21 (note with asterisk).

173. Visconti Prasca, *Io ho aggredito la Grecia*, p. 90, 95.

that by the middle of August 1940 the Italians in Albania numbered 104,000¹⁷⁴.

The numbers quoted in the recent official publication of the Italian General Staff are undoubtedly more accurate and better documented. We can accept with certainty, then, that on 18 October 1940 the Italian active forces in Albania comprised: 163,000 men, 22,000 pack animals, 3,400 vehicles of various kinds and 1,500 motorcycles¹⁷⁵. Moreover, at the end of October these numbers were increased by 11,200 men, 3,200 pack animals and 600 vehicles¹⁷⁶. There is nothing to be gained here by giving the detailed tables of the distribution of men and materials¹⁷⁷. Let me simply note, in broad terms, that on 28 October 1940 the Italian infantry (comprising the usual units of fusiliers, Bersaglieri, Granatieri, Alpini, the special units of Italian and Albanian Blackshirts, the Albanian volunteers, the militia, the armoured units, the accompanying mortar units etc.) was divided into 83 battalions; there were three cavalry regiments; the artillery (divisional units, Army corps, special position units, anti-aircraft and anti-tank units) was divided into forty units with 164 batteries and 686 guns of various calibres; the engineers formed one battalion and 19 special units (of various technicians, electricians etc.). These numbers are higher than the Greek General Staff's historical research had estimated¹⁷⁸.

In contrast with the Italian forces, the Greek army, thanks to the premobilisation measures taken between August and 27 October 1940 on the Albanian border, numbered some 35,000 men, divided into 39 infantry battalions and 40½ batteries of various calibres¹⁷⁹.

174. Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

175. S.M.E., *La Campagna di Grecia*, vol. 1, p. 831. These details are provided by the Commissariat of the Italian army. In other places the same source reports that the Italian army numbered 150,000 (document of Soddu dated 18.10.1940: *ibid.*, p. 88, and vol. 2, p. 171, doc. n° 56), or 140,000 men (*ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 139). The difference in numbers may be due to a different evaluation of the soldiers' duties (fighting, auxiliary, or civilians on military service). Of course, the correct number is that given by the Commissariat, since daily provisions had to be supplied for this number of men.

176. S.M.E., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 832.

177. S.M.E., *op. cit.*, p. 142-144.

178. General Staff, *Ἡ ἰταλικὴ εἰσβολὴ (28 Ὀκτωβρίου μέχρι 13 Νοεμβρίου 1940)* [The Italian Invasion (28 October to 13 November 1940)], p. 2-5.

179. General Staff, *op. cit.*, p. 8-18 (including information about war equipment and fortifications).

These details are not contradicted in the Italian General Staff's publication; however, one remains sceptical of the 'conjectural' comparisons of the opposing forces in October 1940, which attempt to arrive at a numerical balance¹⁸⁰ without reference to sources and without giving the facts from the Greek point of view, which might possibly refute their figures. The exorbitant claim has even been made that Greece employed her entire military machine against the Italian offensive and mobilised some 700,000 men¹⁸¹, which is of course without any basis whatsoever. Since no sources are mentioned, I cannot possibly accept such assertions nor even discuss them. One would expect a categorical rejection¹⁸² of the by now well-known Greek position and an attempt to refute it. Nevertheless, the Italians acknowledge their own superiority in two areas: their air force and their armoured units. Not that these two superior weapons achieved any positive or spectacular results¹⁸³. Moreover, the Greeks frankly admit that the Italian forces were fewer in number than the Greek in the area of north-west Macedonia and towards Korytsa¹⁸⁴.

The final conclusion which follows from the above investigation is that the Greek General Staff's assertion remains uncontested that on the Pindus front the ratio of Greeks to Italians on 28 October 1940 was 1:3 for the infantry and 1:5 for the artillery; on the Epirus front the 8th Greek Division was confronted by a considerably greater number of Italians, as far as the infantry was concerned; and as for the artillery, the Italians overwhelmingly outnumbered the Greeks¹⁸⁵. Nor

180. S.M.E., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 134, 137-139, 148.

181. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

182. And yet the comparative statistics (*ibid.*, p. 169) for the forces on the Epirus, Pindus and north-western Macedonian fronts are quoted without refutation just as they appear in the General Staff's *Αἷτια καὶ ἀφορμαὶ ἐλληνο-ιταλικῷ πολέμῳ 1940-1941* (Grounds and Motives for the Greco-Italian War 1940-1941), p. 158-159 [= General Staff, *Ἡ ἰταλικὴ εἰσβολή* (The Italian Invasion), p. 13]. And the comparisons between the fighting sections and the armaments of the Greeks and the Italians, as reported in Papagos' book *Ὁ πόλεμος τῆς Ἑλλάδος* (The Greek War), p. 239-241, 251-252, 319-320), arouse no comment or counter-argument in the Italian publication.

183. S.M.E., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 140-141. Cf. also M. Cervi, *Storia della guerra di Grecia*, p. 137, 139-141.

184. General Staff, *Ἡ ἰταλικὴ εἰσβολή* (The Italian Invasion), p. 13.

185. General Staff, *Αἷτια καὶ ἀφορμαὶ* (Grounds and Motives), p. 158-159. Cf. also Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 135-136.

should we forget that such numerical differences play a definitive part, particularly in the beginning; a successful manoeuvre within the first few days of the war has a decisive effect on the subsequent trend of developments¹⁸⁶.

But when the front stabilises and the enemy has already brought great forces to the front line, comparisons are no less useful. On 13 November 1940, the eve of the Greek counter-offensive, the Greek forces in the Albanian theatre of operations are estimated as having totalled 232,000 men and 556 guns¹⁸⁷. The Italian sources determine the number of Italian soldiers as being 185,000 (+ 25,000 civilian workers) on 10 November 1940, 200,000 during the latter half of November, 300,000 in December, 350,000 on 30 December 1940 and 400,000 at the end of February 1941¹⁸⁸. Clearly a comparison of numbers which changed from day to day cannot lead to positive conclusions. There seems to have been numerical equality only around mid-November 1940¹⁸⁹. And consequently, particular significance can be attributed to the failure of the Italian offensive on 28 October 1940, the success of the Greek counter-offensive on 14 November 1940 and the failure of the Italian spring offensive in March 1941.

An investigation of the mistakes made by the losing side, in a historical examination of its defeat, is a legitimate and commendable proceeding. Exaggeration, however, of its organisational shortcomings or of the adversary's low numbers has no place in historical research. And so, if it so happens that the Italian air force missed its targets in repeated raids¹⁹⁰, if it so happens that the Italians mis-estimated

186. General Staff, *'H ἰταλική εισβολή* (The Italian Invasion), p. 13.

187. General Staff, *op. cit.*, p. 247-248. The Greek combatants then totalled 300,000, of whom 68,000 were at the Greek-Bulgarian border.

188. S.M.E., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 836, 838, 843, 857, 878 (corresponding to the numbers quoted). Cf. the comparison of Greek and Italian forces in Albania at the beginning of April 1941, in Papakonstantinos, *'H μάχη τῆς Ἑλλάδος* (The Battle of Greece), p. 215-216. He clearly proves the Italians' superiority in both men and armaments.

189. The opposing forces' total losses were roughly equal. Specifically, the Italian dead were estimated at 13,755, the Greek dead at 13,408; the Italian wounded 50,874, Greek wounded 42,485; Italian missing 25,067 (most killed in action), Greek missing 4,253; Italians suffering from frostbite 12,368, Greeks more than 10,000; Italian sick 52,108, the number of Greeks is not mentioned. For the collected evidence see S.M.E., *op. cit.*, p. 943 (where Greek sources are also used).

190. For relevant instances see Papakonstantinos, *op. cit.*, p. 168-172. Cf.

the nature of the ground and drove their tanks into swamps and mud (as they did at Kalpaki), if it so happens that the Greek soldiers were better trained, more skilful and more accurate in the firing of the few mortars they had¹⁹¹, this does not mean that Goliath went unarmed into the battle. He was disarmed by David¹⁹², who used not only his poor weapons but also his ingenuity, every undulation of his territory and his ability to make correct decisions quickly and carry them out bravely and boldly.

There is another factor which clearly proves the Italian superiority, and which the Italian writers do not usually mention. When we examine historical events without placing them in their universal context, then there is a great danger of reaching quite arbitrary conclusions. To be more specific — what were the relative positions of Italy and Greece in the world on the morning of 28 October 1940?

To begin with, Italy was considered to be a Great Power. She had held Libya since 1911, the Dodecanese since 1912, Ethiopia since 1935, Albania since 1939, and the Italian army's importance had been considerably increased by its successful participation in the Spanish Civil War. That year (1939) she signed the 'Iron Agreement' with Germany, in which Japan was to interfere in September 1940. In June 1940 Italy was considered, albeit only nominally, to have conquered France. In August-September 1940 Italian forces had occupied British Somalia and Djibouti. Italy's great ally, Germany, had had amazing successes. Czechoslovakia (15 March 1939), Denmark (9 April 1940) and Luxembourg (10 May 1940) had given way before her demands without armed resistance, and she had subjugated Poland in 30 days (1 September - 1 October 1939), Norway in 81 days (9 April - 30 June 1940), Holland in 4 days (10-14 May 1940), Belgium in 8 days (10-18 May 1940) and France in 42 days (10 May - 22 June 1940)¹⁹³. There

also the ironic German reaction to the Italians' first air failures: Mondini, *Prologo del conflitto italo-greco*, p. 247, 250.

191. For acknowledgement of the success of the Greek fire see Cervi, *op. cit.*, p. 138. Cf. also the Italian soldiers' amazement when they heard the first shots from the Greek side: «Tenente, ma i Greci sparano» (But Lieutenant, the Greeks are firing): Bocca, *Storia d'Italia nella guerra fascista*, vol. 1, p. 263. The essential mistake of the Italian military and political leadership was to give the soldiers the impression that the enemy was incompetent and unwilling to fight.

192. See e.g. the Italian plunder in the hands of the Greeks four months after operations commenced: Papakonstantinos, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

193. See a brief account in Stephanos Zotos, *Greece: the Struggle for Freedom*, New York 1967, p. 3.

was only England left to fight Germany. The USA had not yet entered the war. The USSR had already, on 23 August 1939, signed a friendship agreement with Hitler and was seeking friendship with Italy too both before and after 28 October 1940. Italian troops had not suffered a single defeat in Africa.

In the face of the overwhelming supremacy of the Berlin-Rome Axis, Greece was a small country, strictly neutral and with no powerful ally behind her. She had nothing but Britain's vague promises, and economically and even culturally she was under German influence¹⁹⁴. Greece could place no hopes in her Balkan neighbours or allies, either. Neither Yugoslavia nor Turkey was interested in co-ordinating their efforts with Greece in the face of the Italian danger. The Germans had occupied Romanian territory without bloodshed since 12 October 1940. Bulgaria was flirting with Hitler. When the Greco-Italian war began each of the other Balkan countries took care to negotiate with Germany in order to obtain assurances that Greek territory would be ceded to each of them at the end of the war¹⁹⁵.

And so, on 28 October 1940 we were forced to rely exclusively on our own powers, and our moral rather than our material power, at that. Greece had enjoyed no great military success until then. On the contrary, since the Asia Minor Disaster she had been struggling to get both her army and her society organised¹⁹⁶. Consequently, the war in the Epirot mountains was not a war between two poor nations — it was a war between a wealthy feudal lord and an improverished serf.

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194. Dušan Lukač, «Germanija i strany jugo-vostočnoj Evropy v period podgotovki i načala ital'janskoj agresii na Greciju v 1940 godu», *Balkanica* 4 (Beograd 1973) 381-404.

195. Papakonstantinos, *op. cit.*, p. 192-200. For quite revelatory details see P. Pipinelis, *Ἱστορία τῆς ἐξωτερικῆς πολιτικῆς τῆς Ἑλλάδος* (History of Greece's Foreign Policy), p. 299 et seq. For Turkey's position, the British underestimation of Greece's critical moment, and the Soviet Union's pro-Fascist policy, cf. A. I. Korandis, *Διπλωματικὴ ἱστορία τῆς Εὐρώπης* (Diplomatic History of Europe), vol. 3, part 1, p. 420-434. For Yugoslavia's position of neutrality and her bargaining with Germany over the annexation of Thessaloniki, see Alfredo Breccia's monograph, *Jugoslavia 1939-1941. Diplomazia della neutralità*, Roma 1978, p. 341-379.

196. For Greece's military organisation see Alexandros Papagos' monograph, *Ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς στρατὸς καὶ ἡ πρὸς πόλεμον προπαρασκευὴ τοῦ ἀπὸ Αὐγούστου 1923 μέχρι Ὀκτωβρίου 1940* (The Greek Army and its Preparations for War from August 1923 until October 1940), Athens 1945. The country's military preparations began essentially in 1936 and continued from then onwards.