

Robin Higham and Thanos Veremis, eds, *The Metaxas Dictatorship. Aspects of Greece 1936–1940*, Athens, ELIAMEP-Vryonis Center, ISBN 960-7061-14-4, 1993; 241 pp.; paperback.

Almost a decade ago, John Koliopoulos had deplored that Jon Kofas in his work *Authoritarianism in Greece. The Metaxas Regime* (1983) sided with 'those who have saddled [Metaxas] with crimes he did not commit' ('Book review', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 2 [1]: 126–32). Such statements justify J. Joachim's succinct observation that news of any new study of Metaxas and his regime seems to evoke 'surprise [and/or] downright concern' ('Writing the Biography of John Metaxas: An Historiographical Essay', *New Trends in Modern Greek Historiography*, 1982: 135). Although a significant number of scholarly publications, mostly in Greek have appeared since then, the present volume is the only product of *Metaxomania* in English and as such deserves special attention.

The title of this collection of essays reveals the editors' wish to circumvent an apparently insurmountable problem and avoid characterizing the Metaxas regime as authoritarian, totalitarian, fascist, etc.; the choice of the neutral noun 'dictatorship', so familiar to every student of modern Greek history, seems to serve their purpose well. Similarly the subtitle 'Aspects of Greece 1936–1940' encompasses all the issues examined in great detail in most of the essays that follow. Its very breadth, however, creates a fresh problem because many of the contributors have found it necessary to expand the chronological framework of their chosen topic. In the end, the date '1936–1940' is merely indicative as the essays of Kitroeff, Mazower and Veremis, and Vlavianos illustrate. The editors' and contributors' seeming discomfort with dates is exemplified in a number of factual errors. For example, the Metaxas dictatorship did not last from 1935 to 1941, but from 1936 to 1941 (1). The Entente expeditionary force to Salonika arrived in 1915, not 1916 (41). The Asia Minor campaign did not last from 1922 to 1923, but from 1919 to 1922 (41). General Kondylis assumed the government of the country in October 1935, not following the June elections (134). Venizelos could not possibly have criticized the Jews of Greece on 6 September 1936 as he had died in April (148), while the EEE, a notorious antisemitic and anticommunist organization was founded in 1927, rather than 1933–4 (148).

It is, of course, exceedingly difficult to impart thematic uniformity and structural cohesion upon a collection of essays without imposing constraints on contributors—and this is often undesirable. However, the generous laissez-faire policy of the editors seems to have backfired with each contributor writing in the context of his own specialist knowledge and interests, or in conformity with a specific school of historiography. Surprisingly, the editors themselves have contributed to this imbalance; particularly Higham, whose two essays ('Preparation for War', 41–61 and

'The Metaxas Years in Perspective', 227–40) are reminiscent of journalistic 'stories' and riddled with uninformative stereotypes (Greece 'being in 1935/36 what would today be considered a Third World state' [41], 'Metaxas . . . a leader standing stubbornly at the pass of Thermopylae' [240]).

P. Vatikiotis, in 'Metaxas—the Man' (179–92), presents us with an assortment of largely disjointed paragraphs pertaining to the so-called personality factor in the study of Metaxas' political career, intermingled with an examination of the pertinent methodological problems (179). And although 'a closer examination of the earlier period of [Metaxas'] career' indeed contributes to the understanding of 'his personality and "ideological baggage"' (180), the author's interpretative emphasis on the personality factor and the fact that Metaxas was a 'loner' (190) places him firmly within the considerable confines of the 'Great Men' school of history. On the other hand, Vlavianos ('The Metaxas Dictatorship: The Greek Communist Party under Siege', 193–225) in his detailed essay subscribes to the cause and effect school, where 'factors that contributed to . . .' are neatly enumerated and duly examined. His essay, which bears a striking resemblance to an earlier article of his ('The Greek Communist Party: In Search of a Revolution', in Tony Judt, ed., *Resistance and Revolution in Mediterranean Europe 1939–1948*, 1989, esp. 157–172), undoubtedly conforms to what one of the editors describes as 'straight-forward form history' (13). A 'straightforward' approach however need not, and should not, be pursued at the expense of originality and synthesis.

Fortunately, these qualities are illustrated in the majority of the remaining essays. D. Close, in an admirably precise piece of scholarly work ('The Power-Base of the Metaxas Dictatorship', 15–39), examines how the regime stood precariously on pillars of the pre-August 1936 period (the king, the armed and security forces, economically powerful institutions). These instrumental legacies were too deeply entrenched in civic polity, and Metaxas, aware of the social narrowness of his 'personal creation' (35), attached great importance to EON (National Organization of Youth) in an attempt to mobilize popular support. Close's essay, particularly in conjunction with his monograph *The Character of Metaxas Dictatorship. An International Perspective* (1990), ably dismantles popular myths of the fascist nature of the regime, and offers instead a balanced account of Metaxas as a 'chief' with few disciples and even fewer followers.

The issue of the regime's frantic efforts to acquire popular support is also examined by A. Kitroeff ('The Greek Peasantry: From Dictatorship to Occupation', 63–84). Comprising over 60 per cent of the Greek population at the time, the peasantry was a prime candidate—if only numerically—for becoming the mainstay of the dictatorship. The peasants' traditional apathy and conservatism had appealed to prospective reformers

of Greece from the late 1820s onwards, and Metaxas was no exception in seeing in them the potential 'pillars' of his 'New State'. By a series of measures, largely of an economic nature (deferment of debts, extension of social security to major provincial centres and a substantial increase in the award of agricultural loans), Metaxas sought to elicit peasant support. In the context, however, of existing patronage networks, the substitution of party with state clientelism (67) did not produce the anticipated results. On the contrary, Greek peasants of what Marx has called the 'sack of potatoes type' were further alienated during the Metaxas dictatorship. Following a comparative approach with the Italian peasantry, Kitroeff convincingly argues that their involvement in a nationwide political movement occurred in the wake of the demise of the regime and the Axis occupation of Greece, when 'the "apathetic" peasantry seized the political initiative and rallied to the call of the leftist-led resistance movement' (81).

In their detailed and highly informative essay on 'The Greek Economy 1922–1941' (111–30), Mazower and Veremis trace its main features in the interwar period in juxtaposition to the gradual demise of parliamentarism. The authors offer a comprehensive account of the problems facing the economy and emphasize the politicians' insistence on seeing them as the result of the so-called 'Red peril' (123). As the drive towards autarky, occasioned by the collapse of international trade and finance in the early 1930s, began to run out of steam, the need to tackle economic and social problems through a 'coordinated action of the social body' (123) became increasingly urgent. The Metaxas regime responded to the crisis by embarking on a comprehensive, albeit conventional, plan of sound economic measures, wherein paternalistic and corporatist practices accentuated state intervention in, and regulation of, the economy. In effect, the regime's economic policies did not alter the basic structural features of the economy (unequal distribution of wealth, quantitative rather than qualitative increase of output). Eventually, their success was severely tested when hostilities commenced in Europe, before finally being overshadowed by Greece's entry into the war.

That the regime's overall policies ran along well trodden paths is also illustrated in the contributions of Pikramenos ('The Independence of the Judiciary', 131–46) and Koliopoulos ('Metaxas and Greek Foreign Relations 1936–1941', 85–110). The former examines how Metaxas manipulated and gradually, but steadily, curtailed the independence of the judiciary. The author poignantly demonstrates that, although the political bias of the judiciary was a constant feature of post-1915 Greece, the Metaxas regime left an intelligible mark 'on the organization and function of the judicature' (141). The dictator's legacy provided a sort of institutional blueprint which postwar governments were only too keen to appropriate and accommodate accordingly. In his own essay, Koliopoulos

dismisses the notion that Metaxas followed a pro-German policy, a myth promoted by apologists and critics of the regime alike. Describing Greece's international position as 'unenviable' (86), the author persuasively demonstrates that Metaxas did not waver from 'Greece's British connection' (103). In this respect, the regime's foreign policy did not constitute a departure 'from the main premises of traditional Greek foreign relations' (88), but firmly endorsed the axiom of Pax Britannica.

In what is probably the most interesting synopsis of the ideological basis of the regime to date, Sarandis ('The Ideology and Character of the Metaxas Regime', 147–77) addresses the burning question of whether the Metaxas dictatorship should be considered a fascist regime. Drawing upon a wide array of contemporary sources (Metaxas' diaries, speeches and thoughts, the regime's official publication *Neon Kratos* [New State]), the author maintains that the regime's ideology 'was never formulated into a fully comprehensive system', nor were any 'concrete steps taken' to translate theory into practice (163). A thorough content analysis of the sources leads him to conclude that the Metaxas regime was a 'paternalistic benevolent dictatorship of the New Right, which never reached the stage of becoming fascist' (167). However, his argument would have been greatly strengthened by a consideration of the typologies offered by J. L. Hondros (*Occupation and Resistance*, 1983, 23–6) and G. M. Luebbert (*Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy*, 1991, 258–66), 'royal bureaucratic dictatorship' and 'traditional dictatorship', respectively.

Overall, and notwithstanding the lack of thematic uniformity and structural cohesion, this collection of essays, rather than evoking 'surprise or downright concern', ushers the reader in an engaging debate. Within the framework of their chosen subject matter, most of the contributors have written solid scholarly essays, some mainly empirical, others mostly synthetic. More importantly, they raise a number of important issues which future students of the period will certainly have to address in their quest for discussing and assessing what Close (*The Character of the Metaxas Dictatorship*, 1990, 1) has called 'a fascinating if repugnant phenomenon'. However, it is worth pointing out that in comparing this 'repugnant phenomenon' with its contemporary fascist counterparts elsewhere in Europe one should avoid falling prey to the notion of an ideal prototype to which the Metaxas regime should correspond. And even those who seek prototypes, should look for them in the Balkans and Turkey, rather than Germany and Italy, Portugal or Spain. After all, when the British Minister to Greece Sir Sydney Waterlow witnessed 'a certain amount of *Giovinazza* business (fancy uniforms and arms outstretched in salute)' there in 1937, it was of a Greek rather than European nature.

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