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Heritage and Memory of the First World War in Greece during the Interwar Period A Historical Perspective

Abstract: The memory of the First World War in Greece has suffered throughout the years a gradual decline, which is comparable to the case of many other countries, mostly in areas of Eastern and Southeastern Europe. The Great War mattered somehow for politicians, the press and public opinion in Greece only in the interwar years. During that period, discourse about the First World War included the echo of traumatic events related to Greek involvement in the war (such as the surrender of Fort Roupel to Central Powers forces and the bloody clashes of December 1916 in Athens after the landing of Entente troops) and the efforts to erect war memorials as a tribute to the sacrifice of fallen soldiers, both Greeks and foreigners. At the same time, the Greek people had the opportunity to learn a lot about the international dimension of the war through newspapers, where translated memoirs of leading wartime figures (of both alliances) were published. After the outbreak of the Second World War, interest in the previous major conflict (including the Greek role in the hostilities) significantly diminished in the country. Taking into consideration the ongoing experience of the centenary manifestations, the author proposes a codification of the main types (existing or potential) of WWI memory in Greece and suggests new ways of approaching this major historical event. The final chapter addresses some possible causes of the troublesome relation of Greeks with the First World War, which is mainly due to the very particular circumstances of Greek involvement in the war and the determining role of later historical events that overshadowed memories of the earlier conflict.

Key words: First World War memory, Greece and the First World War, National Schism, Eleftherios Venizelos, Ioannis Metaxas, Constantine, King of Greece

One hundred years after the massive catastrophe of the First World War and all the turbulent years that preceded or followed it, the whole world has turned its attention to this major milestone of world history through a lengthy list of commemorative events, publications, academic gatherings and many other types of activities. If the great interest caused by the centenary was surely to be expected in countries like France or the UK, where the Great War has always been a strong point of reference in the national memory narratives, special atten-

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tion must be paid to a number of countries where, for most of the previous century, the presence of the First World War in both public and academic dialogue had been surprisingly and disproportionately meagre. The universal focus on the First World War has constituted in such cases a unique (and perhaps unrepeatable) challenge in order to reinvigorate their overall interest in the Great War and inspire new historiographical and memorial approaches.

The case of Greece is highly indicative of the difficulties encountered in such a challenge – as the end of the quadrennium is approaching, it is difficult to arrive at a clear verdict over the real impact of this anniversary in the country. No one can claim that the First World War centenary passed unobserved; few, though, would insist that it has brought a real turnover regarding the visibility of the First World War inside Greek society. This complex reality makes it necessary to review once again the issue of the reception and thorny survival of the First World War in Greek public opinion and academic society alike, where only a very small percentage of people are aware of the full dimensions of that war and its real implications for the history of the country. This situation, as we mentioned before, is not specific to Greece; it characterizes a number of countries and nations, especially (but not exclusively) in the broader area of Eastern and Southeastern Europe. In all these cases, the impact of the First World War at social, political and academic levels does not correspond, for a variety of reasons, to the real importance of the event, which proved to be crucial even for the very existence of some of these states, created after the dissolution of old empires by the end of the war.

In the Greek case, the 1914–1918 period ranks among the most complex, controversial and decisive in the history of the modern Greek state.[1] At the military level, the direct engagement of the Greek army in the hostilities, even if materialized only in the final year of the war, is considered to have offered an important contribution to the final Allied victory on the Macedonian Front. In the diplomatic field, in the early years of the war Greece found itself in the focus of the attention of the two rival alliances, as each of them sought in multiple ways to secure Greek support for its own cause. This resulted in multiple violations of the initial neutrality of the country, in continuous threats to

[1] For the history of Greece during the First World War, see G. B. Leon (Leontaritis), *Greece and the Great Powers. 1914–1917* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1974); G. B. Leontaritis, *Η Ελλάδα στον Πρώτο Παγκόσμιο Πόλεμο. 1917–1918* [Greece in the First World War. 1917–1918] (Athens: MIET, 2000) [revised edition of the book: *Greece and the First World War: From Neutrality to Intervention, 1917–1918* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990)]; Y. Mourélos, *L'intervention de la Grèce dans la Grande Guerre (1916–1917)* (Athens: Institut Français d'Athènes, 1983); E. Lemonidou, "La Grèce vue de France pendant la Première Guerre mondiale; entre censure et propagandes" (PhD, Université Paris IV, 2007); G. Th. Mavrogordatos, *1915. Ο Εθνικός Διχασμός* [1915. The National Schism] (Athens: Patakis, 2015).

its territorial integrity,[2] as well as to a painful schism on the domestic political scene, where King Constantine was a firm supporter of Greece's (pro-German) neutrality, while Eleftherios Venizelos, Prime Minister during the first year of the war, adopted an explicit pro-Entente stance. At the culmination of the crisis, the situation in the country was pretty much similar to that of a civil war, with many incidents of violence and bloodshed. The most significant and well-known case is the bloody clashes that erupted between Greek soldiers and Allied troops in the centre of Athens on 1 and 2 December 1916,[3] followed, in the next days, by scenes of extreme violence between supporters of the two rival camps on the Greek political scene.[4] Last but not least, a further significant aspect of the war lies in the fact that many soldiers from other countries lost their lives in various military or other violent incidents inside the Greek state or in its near periphery.

Taking all the above into consideration, it becomes clear that the limited Greek interest in the First World War in no way corresponds to its real importance for the history of the country. This is not a new finding, though. In the search for the origins and causes of this phenomenon, which includes a historical overview of the issue, it is useful to concentrate on the interwar years, the last period in which the memory of the First World War still mattered somehow in Greece. This paradigm offers useful keys to understanding the typology of the memory of the war, as well as to explaining some of the factors that contributed to the aforementioned long-standing disinterest shown by the Greeks.

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[2] A. Tounda-Fergadi, "Violations de la neutralité grecque par les Puissances de l'Entente durant la Première guerre mondiale", *Balkan Studies* 26.1 (1985), 113–129. Lemonidou, *ibid*.

[3] The events are known in Greek historiography and public discourse as "Noemvriana" ("November events"), since, according to the Julian calendar then in use in Greece, they took place in the month of November 1916.

[4] For the events which took place on 1 and 2 December 1916 see SHM (Historical Service of the French Navy – France / Service historique de la Marine nationale – France), SS X f 9, Roquefeuil to Lacaze, "Rapport sur les événements qui se sont déroulés dans les premiers jours de décembre 1916", "no. 533 of 9 December 1916; L. Maccas, "Les événements d'Athènes des 1er et 2 décembre 1916", *Revue des Deux Mondes* 38 (March-April 1917), 96–135; L. Dartige du Fournet, *Souvenirs de guerre d'un amiral (1914–1916)* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1920), 210–273; G. Boussenot, « Le Drame du 1er décembre 1916 à Athènes", *Revue d'Histoire de la Guerre Mondiale* 1 (January 1938), 1–27; Y. Mourelos, *Τα «Νοεμβριανά» του 1916. Από το αρχείο της Μεικτής Επιτροπής Αποζημιώσεων των θυμάτων* [The "November Events" of 1916. From the Archive of the Mixed Commission for Indemnities to the Victims] (Athens: Patakis, 2007).

The First World War memory in the interwar period

In the first years that followed the end of the hostilities, the Great War was expectedly still present in a strong way in Greek public life, as evidenced by an overview of the Greek press of the time.

A large part of the references concerned the international post-war scene, which was about to take its definitive shape during the peace negotiations in Paris. The Greek claims, predominantly, but also the international dimensions of this process appeared regularly in Greek dailies. The contribution of Greece to the Allied victory was highlighted in many ways, in coordination with the efforts of the country's leadership to maximize gains in the ongoing diplomatic procedures. In the first months of 1919, articles and various references focused much more on the milestone of 14 July (and not on 11 November). In that year this important date acquired an additional symbolic dimension, as the National Day of France was directly related to the victory in the Great War that had ended a few months earlier. The particularly impressive celebration of 14 July 1919 in Paris, with the Greek Army participating in the great military parade, provided an excellent opportunity to promote the role of Greece as an indispensable member of the Entente alliance, as well as to stress the particular importance and good momentum of Franco-Hellenic relations in that period.[5]

Another important type of references concerned the domestic dimensions of the war in Greece and more precisely some highly disputed issues of the war period. A couple of trials that took place in 1919, concerning two traumatic pages in the Greek history of the few previous years, caught huge attention and coverage in the daily newspapers of that time. The first important trial, in May and June 1919, concerned the bloodshed of December 1916 in the city of Athens, and the second one, some months later, was related to the surrender of Fort Roupel (in northern Greece) to the Central Alliance forces in May 1916.

In both cases, but especially in the case related to the 1916 turmoil in Athens, the press provided extensive coverage, reporting on the trials on a day-to-day basis. This is proved very clearly by the example of the daily *Embros*, where news about the trial dominated its domestic news agenda for many weeks, with detailed reports of the court hearings on the front page. The verdict dramatically sealed the debate on this event, imposing the death penalty on four culprits. The penalty, however, would not be executed on any of the convicts, for several reasons. Similar attention was paid, a few months later, to the trial of the former members of the Army General Staff accused for the surrender of Fort Roupel. It is interesting to see that in this second trial, according to the daily reports in

[5] In the newspaper *Embros*, for example, a number of articles in the month of July 1919 are dedicated to the celebration of 14 July 1919 in Paris, to the preparations for the arrival of Prime Minister Venizelos in the French capital and to the participation of the Greek Army in the glorious parade on the French National Day.

the newspapers, one can also trace references to the aforementioned issue of the December 1916 clashes – in practice, the two issues are closely connected. Both are episodes related to the National Schism and the foreign interventions that plagued the country in the middle of the war period. It has to be mentioned that this rich material published in the daily press has still a lot to offer in the study of the period, as it can shed further light and clarify specific aspects of existing historical knowledge gathered from archival sources and other published evidence.

The work of justice concerning the December 1916 clashes did not finish with the big trials of 1919. In the early months of 1920 newspapers still published small pieces of news concerning accusations against more persons for the same issue. It is only after the middle of that year that things seem to change, with the appearance of news about amnesty granted to some of the accused and some debates regarding the extent of this act of lenience.

Despite the apparent calming of the spirits, however, the memory of the 1916 urban clashes in the Greek capital would remain vivid for the entire interwar period, as confirmed by sporadic, yet very characteristic mentions in the press, in published memoirs or in other types of written testimonies left by persons with a personal experience of the events.

It is very interesting to note that some of the press references are focused not on the post-war quest for heroes and villains inside Greece, but on another dimension of the events, which is their echo in France. The death of numerous French soldiers in the clashes shocked French public opinion and remained part of later discourse about these events in various ways.[6] Another interesting aspect regards the viewpoints of people who played an active role or simply witnessed the events. Towards the end of 1920 a couple of press references cover declarations of King Constantine and Ernst von Falkenhausen, former Military Attaché of Germany in Athens, each offering, among other things, his own version on this particular issue.[7] Besides the press, it is very interesting to examine the after-war memoirs or other types of testimonies left by leading figures having direct knowledge of the December 1916 events,

[6] On 18 November/1 December 1920 *Makedonia* newspaper publishes the news about a memorial ceremony for the French victims to be held at the port of Piraeus and attended by the Ambassador of France to Greece; a few weeks later, on 29 December 1920/11 January 1921, the Greek public learns through the same newspaper that a Greek shipowner decided to donate an important sum to the families of French victims; last but not least, in an article published in the *Makedonia* in the early 1930s (4 July 1931) it is claimed that the strong support of France for the Turks after 1921, to the detriment of Greek interests in Asia Minor, was directly linked to the negative repercussions of the 1916 events in French public opinion.

[7] Reference to the declarations of Falkenhausen is found in the *Makedonia* of 1/14 September 1920, while the same newspaper publishes a report about the declarations of King Constantine – who used the term "accidental" for the December 1916 events – on 23 December 1920/5 January 1921.

either as participants or as observers. References to what happened vary very much, according to each author and his/her political beliefs. Supporters of Venizelos are usually very harsh in their judgments about the role of King Constantine and his followers in the matter. For example, Georgios Ventiris devoted more than thirty pages to the events in his historiographical work, giving the title "The Slaughter of Athens" to the respective chapter and claiming that what happened in the days after 1 December 1916 was a "state revolt", which harmed seriously national aspirations in the following years.[8] On the other hand, Ioannis Metaxas, one of the closest consultants and collaborators of King Constantine, despite being very prolific and eloquent about many other aspects of the war – both in his diaries and in his exchange of newspaper articles with Eleftherios Venizelos in 1934–1935 – remains curiously silent about the 1916 riots in Athens. For his part, royalist Viktor Dousmanis, head of the Army General Staff until August 1916, makes only a brief mention of the events in his memoirs, implying in a clear way the joint responsibility of Venizelists and the Entente forces for the "attack against Athens".[9] Another fragmental, though important source of information about the echo of the events is the material left (and published posthumously some decades later) by the famous novelist Penelope Delta, a prominent figure in Greek social life at the time of the clashes with close family connections to both opposing sides in Greek politics – the introduction to a volume of her diary, as well as various entries in it testify to the long-standing traumatic memory of the events for the author and for people from her close social environment.[10]

A few years after the end of the hostilities, a new factor began to occupy the public sphere in Greece in relation to the Great War, influencing public opinion and the image Greeks had of this war. It was the issue of paying tribute to the fallen soldiers of the war and building war memorials in Greek territory. This issue concerned not only victims of Greek nationality but also soldiers of other countries who had lost their lives in Greece or in neighbouring geographical areas. It is important to remind that the construction of war memorials became quickly one

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[8] G. Ventiris, *Η Ελλάς του 1910–1920: Ιστορική μελέτη* [Greece in the years 1910–1920: A Historical Study], 2nd edition (Athens: Ikaros, 1970), vol. 2, 242–275. General Leonidas Paraskevopoulos, however, himself also a prominent supporter of Venizelos, remains almost silent about the events in his personal memoirs published in 1933 – see L. Paraskevopoulos, *Αναμνήσεις 1896–1920* [Memoirs 1896–1920] (Athens: Pyrsos 1933), 320.

[9] V. Dousmanis, *Απομνημονεύματα: ιστορικαί σελίδες τας οποίας έζησα* [Memoirs: Pages of History that I Lived] (Athens: P. Dimitrakos, 1946), 148–149. The book of Dousmanis, published in 1946, is a compilation of various texts written by the author during the interwar years.

[10] P. Delta, *Ελευθέριος Βενιζέλος: ημερολόγιο, αναμνήσεις, μαρτυρίες, αλληλογραφία* [Eleftherios Venizelos: Diary, Memoirs, Testimonies, Correspondence], ed. P. Zannas (Athens: Ermis, 1978), xx–xxi, 42, 237–238.

of the major issues of interest in several ex-belligerent countries during the after-war years, as the immense human losses suffered during the war required new ways of commemorative expression for the acts of heroism and sacrifice.[11]

In this context, the Greek state began efforts to build monuments, tombs or steles, though only after the end of the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922, in order to honour the dead not only of the First World War but of all recent wars, including the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913, the Great War and the Greco-Turkish War. Thus, after 1922 the bones of the Greek soldiers who had fallen during the Balkan Wars and had been buried in Bulgaria (in Gorna-Dzhumaya) and in Albania were transferred to Greece. A large loan was made available to the Ministry of Military Affairs for the erection of monuments, while it was ordered that each city or community should build, until the end of 1925, their own tombs or monuments at the places where Greek soldiers had fallen. Memorial columns were also erected for the Greek officers and soldiers killed in foreign territories – such as those killed during the Great War in Pirot, Serbia;[12] lastly, and only in 1932, the Greek monument to the Unknown Soldier was inaugurated in front of the Greek Parliament on Syntagma Square.[13]

At the same period, foreign governments also mobilized to build memorials to their fallen soldiers on Greek soil during the Great War. On 20 November 1918 an agreement was signed between the Governor-General of Salonica and the generals of the Allied countries on the Macedonian Front. This agreement regulated all matters concerning the military cemeteries of foreign countries in Greece. The British, French, Italian and Serbian authorities were supposed to propose the sites to be allocated as permanent burial places for the soldiers of their armies, while the Greek Government was to acquire the

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[11] In France, e.g., most of the monuments were built before 1922, mainly thanks to large state grants to local authorities. Until 1922, in France, Great Britain, Belgium and Italy monuments were also erected in honour of the Unknown Soldier, to commemorate all unidentified men fallen "for the Homeland". See F. Cochet & J.-N. Grandhomme, eds., *Les soldats inconnus de la Grande Guerre. La mort, le deuil, la mémoire* (Saint-Cloud: SOTECA - 14-18 Éditions, 2012).

[12] Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece (hereafter AYE), 1931, A/15/5, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes to Legation of Greece in Belgrade, no. 62208 of 9 December 1924; Legation of Greece in Durrës to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no. 1380 of 3 August 1925, and Legation of Greece in Sofia to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sofia, no. 1082 of 27 September 1925; Official Gazette, no. 68 of 19 March 1925; Greek Minister of Military Affairs to Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, no. 11031/430 of 14 April 1926.

[13] AYE, 1931, A/15/5, Ministry of Military Affairs to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no. 22526 of 13 February 1926. E. Lemonidou, "Le Soldat inconnu grec", in *Les soldats inconnus de la Grande Guerre. La mort, le deuil, la mémoire*, ed. François Cochet and Jean-Noël Grandhomme (Saint-Cloud: SOTECA, 14-18 Éditions, 2012), 153–169.

proposed land, in accordance with Greek laws.[14] The French government took care of the cemetery in Florina and that of Zetinlik in Thessaloniki, the Serbs of the cemeteries in Thessaloniki, Kaimakchalan and Corfu, while the Imperial War Graves Commission (created in 1917, renamed the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in 1960) took care of British cemeteries scattered in several places in Macedonia, but also in Neon Faliron (a suburb of Athens), on the islands of Lemnos and Syros, in Souda (on the island of Crete) and in Alexandroupoli.[15]

Throughout the interwar period, the press remained the main source through which Greeks could remember the war – and broaden their knowledge about it. As already mentioned, special attention must be paid to the publication – on the front page of newspapers and in instalments published over several months each time – of the memoirs of leading figures in the war from the two opposing sides and various other sources regarding further aspects of the war, either related to Greece or not. In the press of the early after-war period one can find, for example, the minutes of the sittings of the French Assembly before the Battle of Verdun or even the memoirs of the former French ambassador to Greece, Gabriel Deville,[16] both published in the newspaper *Embros*. The publication of this type of material in the Greek press would continue for most of the rest of the interwar period, offering interpretations of what the war had been for a number of leading personalities, a narrative of the Great War as seen "from the top". Thus, one could read the memoirs of Raymond Poincaré, President of the French Republic,[17] those of the German Chancellor Bernard von Bülow[18]

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[14] AYE, 1937, A/18/3, text of Law 2473 which ratifies the agreement of 7/20 November 1918 concerning the British, French, Italian and Serbian military cemeteries in Greece. AYE, 1935, A/18/3, Minister of Military Affairs to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Note no. 308294 of 22 December 1922.

[15] AYE, 1931, A/15/5, Governor of Gendarmerie in Florina to Public Security Office, Note no. 2847/8 of 21 January 1928. AYE, 1939, A/5/3, Ambassador of Greece in Belgrade to Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Undersecretariat of State for Press and Tourism), unnumbered, of 16 September 1938. AYE, 1935, A/18/3, Official Gazette of 14 April 1922 and British Embassy in Athens to Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Verbal Note no. 203 of 23 October 1928 and Note no. 81 of 14 April 1922; minutes of the 1st meeting of the Anglo-Greek Mixed Committee of the Imperial War Graves Commission.

[16] G. Deville, *L'Entente, la Grèce et la Bulgarie. Notes d'histoire et souvenirs* (Paris: Eugène Figuière, 1919).

[17] Excerpts from the first volume of Poincaré's memoirs were published from 1 March 1931 in the newspaper *Ethnos* (*Nation*), while in December the same year parts of the eighth volume were published in the same paper.

[18] In the newspaper *Ethnos*, from November 1930 to 23 July 1931; the publication of von Bulöw's memoirs was followed by that of his secret correspondence with the Kaiser in the same newspaper, from 26 July 1931.

or of German lieutenants (Max Wild and Alexander Bauermeister), who were officers of the German secret intelligence service,[19] a biography of Paul von Hindenburg, Chief of the General Staff of the German Imperial Army, written by Emil Ludwig,[20] as well as the memoirs of several other personalities. A history of the war "from below" also existed, albeit much more limited, through descriptions of life in the trenches and particularly successful short stories or novels about the underwater war, the role of pirates or the lives and actions of spies, men and women.[21] Only the *Rizospastis* (The Radical), the official newspaper of the Greek Communist Party, dared speak of peace, publishing the famous novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* as early as autumn 1929, only a few months after its publication in Germany. Through all these readings it is true that the Greeks could learn almost everything about the European version of the Great War and, conversely, almost nothing about its Greek dimension. For this to happen, one had to wait until 1934.

In October 1934 the former Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos took the initiative to publish a series of articles in the newspaper *Eleutheron Vima* (Free Tribune), in order to describe and explain the events of the National Schism of 1915. Ioannis Metaxas, Deputy Head of the General Staff during the First World War and one of the most emblematic figures of the Schism – the closest collaborator of King Constantine and the most active opponent of Venizelos – decided to reply by a series of articles published in the newspaper *Kathimerini* (The Daily). This newspaper duel lasted thirteen months, until November 1935. All the articles of Metaxas were published in 1935 in the editions of the newspaper *Kathimerini*, while twenty years later (in 1953) the Historical Archive of the newspaper *Ethnikos Kyrix* (National Herald) published the entire press correspondence of the two men.[22]

On 18 March 1936 Venizelos died; a few months later, on 4 August 1936, Ioannis Metaxas proclaimed his dictatorship, sanctioned by King George II, son

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[19] In the newspaper *Ethnos* between December 1932 and April 1933 for the memoirs of Wild and from 26 February 1934 for those of Bauermeister.

[20] In the newspaper *Eleutheron Vima* from February 1934.

[21] See in the newspaper *Ethnos* the following novels: "The Black Boat", which in March 1930 became "The Black Boats"; "Corsair. The Black Pirate. The Most Adventurous and Dramatic Narration on Espionage", whose publication began on 7 December 1933; "Spy Women. The Tragedy of their Lives", published on the front pages of the newspaper from June 1934; also, "The Spy. The Most Dramatic and Adventurous Narration of the Dark Scenes of the Great War", in June-July 1936.

[22] In 1994 a new edition was realized by the Greek publishing house Kyromanos in Thessaloniki, see Eleftherios Venizelos and Ioannis Metaxas, *Η ιστορία του Εθνικού Διχασμού κατά την αρθρογραφία του Ελευθερίου Βενιζέλου και του Ιωάννου Μεταξά* [The History of the National Schism according to the Articles of Eleftherios Venizelos and Ioannis Metaxas], 2nd edition (Thessaloniki: Kiromanos, 2003).

of King Constantine; this regime ended with the death of Metaxas in January 1941. The dictatorship of Metaxas was the last – and perhaps the only – period during which the Great War had a central role in the public sphere, becoming one of the most important issues of public life in the country. Of course, the issue at stake was not the European war – after all, November 11 meant nothing to the new regime, which had created 4 August as a new "national holiday". Metaxas tried to settle his accounts with the past by imposing his personal view of the National Schism. That is why in November 1936, four months after the establishment of his regime, Metaxas organized the transfer of the remains of King Constantine, Queen Sophia and Queen Mother Olga from Italy, to be buried in Greece, in the royal cemetery of Tatoi, location of the summer residence of the royal family. King Constantine had left Greece for Italy after his overthrow in 1922, for the second time after his first removal from the throne in June 1917. Metaxas, formerly a close collaborator of Constantine, forced the Greek capital – better said: the whole country – to live for five days (from 15 to 19 November 1936) in the rhythm of this transfer of royal remains. Everything was feverishly prepared for the reception of the remains, their lying in state at the Cathedral of Athens, the ceremony and the second burial of members of the royal family at Tatoi.[23] The press of those days hailed the burial of the venerated relics in the land of Greece as the liquidation of a debt of the nation to its kings; Greeks should henceforth be happy and satisfied "with regard to history and to themselves".[24]

Two years later, on 9 October 1938, a second episode of the series "Rehabilitation of Constantine" took place: the inauguration of an imposing statue of Constantine at the Champs de Mars in Athens. All public buildings, but also houses and shops were decorated from sunrise until sunset, parades and religious ceremonies were organized across all of Greece, followed by solemn addresses of mayors or other officials; it was an opportunity for the entire Greek people to celebrate.[25] The new statue was meant to symbolize, like the royal tombs, the brotherhood and union of Greeks under the new reign of George II and the governance of Metaxas.[26]

The Second World War and the Civil War that followed the dictatorship of Metaxas erased almost all traces of the Great War. Faced with the problems of post-war reconstruction and with the painful reality of a new ideological division in the place of the old National Schism, the country lost almost all interest in the earlier global conflict. For all the next decades, discourse about the First

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[23] *Ethnos*, 17 November 1936, 1 and 8. See also *Petit Parisien*, 23 November 1936, 5.

[24] *Ethnos*, 16 November 1936, 1.

[25] *Ethnos*, 10 October 1938, 8.

[26] *Ethnos*, 9 October 1938, 1.

World War has been confined to a number of historians, who have studied the most important – though not all – aspects of the Greek dimension of the war, and to rare references in the press, mainly occasioned by anniversary dates or major commemoration milestones, like the iconic handshake of the leaders of France and Germany at Verdun in 1984. In this way, the First World War has remained for Greeks a largely unexplored land, sealed with stereotype references to the trenches of the Western Front, as far as the international dimension is concerned, and to the National Schism that dictated the domestic front at the same time.

Defining existing or potential types of First World War memory in Greece

Taking into consideration the historically limited interest of Greeks in the First World War (and the ambiguous impact of the centenary), we are going to examine some of the reasons and explanation that lie behind this phenomenon. Before moving to this chapter, however, it would be useful to further outline the complexity and, at the same time, the importance of this issue, by distinguishing and codifying a number of existing or potential memory schemes about the First World War in Greece.

The first and most traditional form of remembrance regards the heroic national memory, that is the tribute to the Greek soldiers who lost their lives in military operations throughout the war. This memory is served by monuments to the fallen, erected either at their birthplaces or close to the war front; also, by special commemorative activities, usually on anniversary occasions. Even though this type of memory is inevitably restricted, due to the limited extent of involvement of Greek troops, there is space for greater public visibility of all related events or initiatives, as well as for an overall reassessment of the role of Greece in the war in the context of early twentieth-century Greek history.

A second memory line is linked to the memory of the soldiers of other nations fallen during the war and buried in Greece. An important number of monuments are scattered all over Greece, often ignored by Greeks themselves. Besides the great importance of these monuments for the concerned nations (one could mention, for example, the importance of Zetenlik cemetery in Thessaloniki for Serbs, or the highly symbolic participation of Australians and New Zealanders in yearly memorial activities at the Allied Cemetery in Lemnos), this type of memory can work efficiently also for the Greek public, serving as a bridge of awareness for the international dimension of the war and its links with the Greek case.

A third aspect concerns specific aspects of the Greek experience of the First World War, such as the National Schism and all traumatic experiences of the 1914–1918 period, including the surrender of Fort Roupel to Central

Alliance forces, the foreign occupation of Greek territories, the bloody riots of December 1916 in Athens and the dramatic consequences of the Allied blockade for the home front in Greece. A lot of work has still to be done in order to trace the memory of these traumatic events in interwar Greece, especially at local societies' level, while a further challenge for academic historiography and, at a later stage, public diffusion of historical knowledge lies in contextualizing these dramatic aspects of war in Greece (civil riots, blockade, famine) in the frame of contemporary wartime landscape in many places throughout Europe.

Another dimension concerns the glorious memory of the Allied victory and the participation of Greece in this commemorative process. This memory scheme was, as shown before, extensively present in the first years after the war; it has faded, however, over the following years because of the overwhelming impact of later major events at domestic and international level.

Finally, a very important type of memory covers the First World War in its universal dimension as a major catastrophe with horrible consequences at moral, ethical and humanitarian level. This viewpoint, now almost universally accepted in discourses about the war, first emerged in Greece during the interwar period, more or less at the same time as in the rest of Europe, mainly thanks to literature and cinema.[27] A special reference has to be made to the warm reception shown by the Greek public to the already mentioned classical novel of Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*.[28] It would probably not be an exaggeration to claim that the Greek public – and most likely it is not a unique case – has formed over the years its knowledge and image of the First World War much more through this literary work than through any other source of academic or public history. Concerning this last point, it is very important to highlight that, unlike other countries, in Greece the presence and impact of the First World War in the fields of cinema and television has been rather scarce, especially when compared with the audiovisual presence of the Second World War and other major events of contemporary history.

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[27] J. Winter, *Remembering War. The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2006), 118–134, 183–200; Christophe Gaultier et al. eds., *Une guerre qui n'en finit pas. 1914–2008, à l'écran et sur scène* (Paris: Éditions Complexe, 2008).

[28] A preliminary research on the Greek editions of this book has given convincing results both for its immediate reception in Greece, as for its lasting impact on the Greek public. Besides the two serialized publications of the novel in the daily press of the inter-war period (mentioned earlier in this text), there are no less than six single translated editions of the novel in book form, with numerous republications, in the later decades.

Why is the First World War a forgotten war in Greece?

In an effort to explain the reluctant attitude of Greeks towards the First World War, a number of factors have been examined, which can be summarized in the following three arguments:

a) Greece's involvement in the First World War – even the long, bloody and traumatic conflicts of the years 1914–1917 – constituted, as most historians have pointed out, only part of a series of important events for the Greek history that took place in the frame of a whole decade, from 1912 to 1922. This period was inextricably linked first to the apogee and the glory, then to the tragic failure and collapse of the "Great Idea" for the expansion of the Modern Greek state to all neighbouring territories inhabited mainly by ethnic Greek population. The events at both ends of this decade, that is the Balkan Wars in the early 1910s – that offered important territorial gains to the Greek state – and the defeat of the Greek Army in the Greco-Turkish War in 1922,[29] were marked by a particularly strong symbolic impact over the years. They almost completely overshadowed all intermediate events directly or indirectly linked with the participation of Greece in the Great War, no matter how important they may have been.

b) The role of Greece in the armed conflicts of the First World War was largely and for a long time indirect and distant. This resulted in a rather limited number of heroic or traumatic pages arising from purely military action. The successes of the Greek army on the Macedonian Front did find their place in the pages of Greek military history, but it was clear that they counted much less in the collective memory when compared to the Balkan Wars or the disastrous developments on the Asia Minor Front in 1922. Among the factors for this downgrading of Greek military successes, tensions on the domestic front caused by the National Schism should not be underestimated – for numerous supporters of ex-King Constantine, the war on the side of the Entente was considered an almost personal issue of Prime Minister Venizelos. Royalists also continued to feel rage and disapproval for the Entente tactics that had resulted in the removal of their beloved King in 1917. Moreover, in the years after the war Greece saw repeatedly its contribution to the Great War challenged not only by its enemies, but also by its allies[30] – this reality had lasting negative effects on the image and memory of the Greek military achievements even inside the country.

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[29] This event is known in Greek historiography as the "Catastrophe of Asia Minor", signifying the final phase of the Greco-Turkish war that culminated in the massacre or expulsion of Greeks from the provinces of the formet Ottoman Empire in Asia Minor.

[30] Until the end of the interwar period there were offensive comments in the French press about Greece's contribution to the Great War, which repeatedly provoked the reaction of the Greek authorities – see AYE, 1938, A/3, Greek Minister for Foreign Affairs to Greek Legation in Paris, no. 17633 of 12 August 1938. A similar attitude was observed from the part of Serbia – on many interwar occasions, when there was discussion about the Allied

c) Historical events in Greece during the following decades were so forceful and dramatic, that they almost erased remembrance of the Great War. The 1940s, in particular, are dominating until nowadays the field of contemporary Greek history, whether in academic research and historiography, or in terms of public interest and debate. The famine of the winter of 1941/2 and, more generally, the hardships suffered under the German and Italian occupation overshadowed the memories of the corresponding moments of 1916–1917. The urban clashes of December 1944 in Athens ousted the events of 1916 from the collective memory. The new dividing line between Right and Left, which took a clear form in a very painful way in the 1940s, rendered obsolete the conflict between Venizelists and Royalists, which was at the origin of the 1915 National Schism and remained active in various ways throughout the interwar period. It is very characteristic that in 2014, an anniversary year for many important moments of Greek history, debates, conferences and publications about December 1944 had clearly the upper hand in comparison to the centenary of the Great War or to the much more recent milestone of 1974, which meant the definitive transition to democratic rule in Greece after the fall of the military dictatorship. Even four years later, no signs of change to this tendency can be traced.

Conclusion

In our analysis, we have focused on two different dimensions of WWI memory in Greece. The first one regards the persistently troublesome reception of the First World War in both its national and international aspects. The second one is linked to the multifaceted presence of this war, in various forms of public discourse, in the sole case of interwar years. This latter dimension, though already studied in the past, has still a lot to offer in terms of academic studies and public knowledge – throughout our text, a number of issues were highlighted which can offer fertile ground for further research. This prospect becomes even more important by taking into consideration the recent rise in scholarly interest for the inter-war years. The other issue is surely much more complicated. The First World War, in all its dimensions, is deeply connected to Greece – it has been confirmed by the analysis of many particular aspects in this text. Hard work is required, though, in order to discover traces of the war in Greece, both material

contribution to the liberation of Serbia and the sacrifices suffered by the Allies in the Great War, references to Greek participation, when made, where full of contempt. All efforts to highlight and promote the role of Greece on the Macedonian Front provoked a controversy on the part of the Serbian press, which recalled the non-execution of the Greco-Serb alliance treaty in 1915 and the resulting disaster in Serbia – see AYE, 1931, A/15/5, Greek Legation in Belgrade to Minister of Foreign Affairs, no. 806 of 27 May 1925, and no. 1574 of 12 October 1925; Military Attaché at the Embassy of Greece in Belgrade to Army General Staff in Athens, no. 156 of 27 May 1925.

and intangible, and raise public awareness at all possible levels about its overall importance and its specific significance for Greek history. Even if the passage of time seems to be an obstacle, the path is still open and full of challenges for researchers and all interested people. Even in its final stages, the centenary – which, after all, in the wording of the renowned historian John Horne, must be regarded as an "open-ended" perspective[31] – and its legacy offer a vital opportunity for launching a series of initiatives which could contribute to building a new relation of Greeks with this major event of national and world history.

Abbreviations for archive sources

AYE: Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece – Athens, Greece

SHM: Service historique de la Marine nationale (Historical Service of the French Navy) – Vincennes, France

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[31] J. Horne, "The Great War at its Centenary", in *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. III: *Civil Society*, ed. Jay Winter (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 635.

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