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The Three-way Mirror: Photography as Record, Mirror and Model of Greek National Identity

John Stathatos

Classical landscape with columns

From its earliest appearance, photography in Greece participated, perhaps to a greater extent and certainly more directly than any medium other than the written word, in the never-ending enterprise of nation building. This was a far from clearly defined, complex and manifold endeavour: the idea of the nation had to be simultaneously identified, defined, fabricated and promoted. Photography was in many ways ideally suited at least to the latter three of these tasks. At one and the same time, photography provided society with a record, a mirror and a model.

The role of photography familiar to all is that of recorder; individual members of society and the Greek state itself both realised that photography seemed to offer the promise of an accurate and apparently unbiased record of achievement. At the same time, photography held up a mirror to the nation, artfully displaying the face it most wanted to see reflected; the resulting images, however distorted by wishful thinking, represent an accurate record of a society's aspirations. For example, the enormous popularity of photographic representations of the transhumant pastoralists of the Pindus in the 1950s clearly mirrored a yearning for a national origin myth rooted in the supposed innocence, simplicity and freedom of life in the high mountains.[1]

The contribution of photography to the construction of national identity is not of course a specifically Greek phenomenon, and similar narratives could no doubt be constructed for most countries. However, the fact that the history of modern Greece and that of the photographic medium share roughly the same time span,

[1] Some of the most powerful and popular work in this idiom was produced by Kostas Balafas (1920–2011) and Takis Tloupas (1920–2003). Both have been well served by recently published and lavishly illustrated monographs; see in particular Balafas 2003 and Tloupas 2005.

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as well as the accidents of history and geography which made of Greece such a late developer amongst European nations, have resulted in an unusually dense and rich interpenetration of photography and history.

The Greek state which came into being as a result of what was to become known as the revolution of 1821, that uneasy mixture of national uprising, civil war, class conflict and ethnic cleansing, was itself inevitably a strange hybrid of very uncertain identity. The new state was, in truth, a disparate assemblage under whose always uncertain authority were gathered uneasily together cosmopolitan merchants and illiterate peasants, semi-piratical island shipowners and feudal primates, great landowners and expatriate intellectuals, idealists and gangsters. Furthermore, its actual and future citizens were scattered over an area greater by far than its original core. What was to provide the necessary unifying factor, now that the mirage of a supranational pan-Balkan federation had been finally laid to rest? As Robert Shannan Peckham (2001: 6) puts it, 'in part because of the wide geographical distribution of the Greeks in diasporic communities […], language and religion, rather than affiliation to a distinct territory, became the chief determinants of Greek national identity'.

Language and faith were indeed the obvious unifying factors, but they were not without their own problems; in the mid-nineteenth century, many citizens of the new state – and of the provinces it was to acquire in the near future – spoke Greek, if they did at all, only as a second language. Similarly, though the Hellenic world subscribed in large part to the Orthodox faith, it included pockets of Catholic, Jewish and Muslim Greeks, while of course Orthodoxy itself was shared by other and potentially hostile national and linguistic groups throughout the Balkans.

From the earliest stirrings of the independence movement in all its disparate manifestations, there seems to have been a general agreement that a national identity would have to be forged from the idea of an unbroken historical continuity stretching back to the distant past – above all, to classical antiquity. This was to become an issue of crucial importance to the political and intellectual leadership of the new nation: the Greeks of the 1830s must, they felt, be regarded as the direct lineal descendants of Socrates and Epaminondas as well as, skipping several centuries, of Justinian and the last Palaiologue. There was, of course, no concept then of nationhood as a self-defining cultural phenomenon; if it was worth anything at all, national identity had to be sought in the blood. In the absence of incontrovertible evidence that Kolokotronis and Pericles had ultimately sprung from the same genetic stock, the forgers of national identity, seizing upon Gottfried von Herder's concept of a linguistic *Volk*, made the most of the self-evident continuity of the Greek language.

The enormous moral and psychological value of material links with classical antiquity was evident to the more thoughtful of the country's leaders, as witness the well-known passage in General Makriyannis' memoirs (1964: 351) in which he describes how he rescued a pair of ancient statues 'so that they might be of use to the fatherland'. Before even formal ratification of independence by the first Convention of London, Governor Ioannis Kapodistrias had given orders for the foundation of the country's first archaeological museum (Woodhouse 1973: 429).

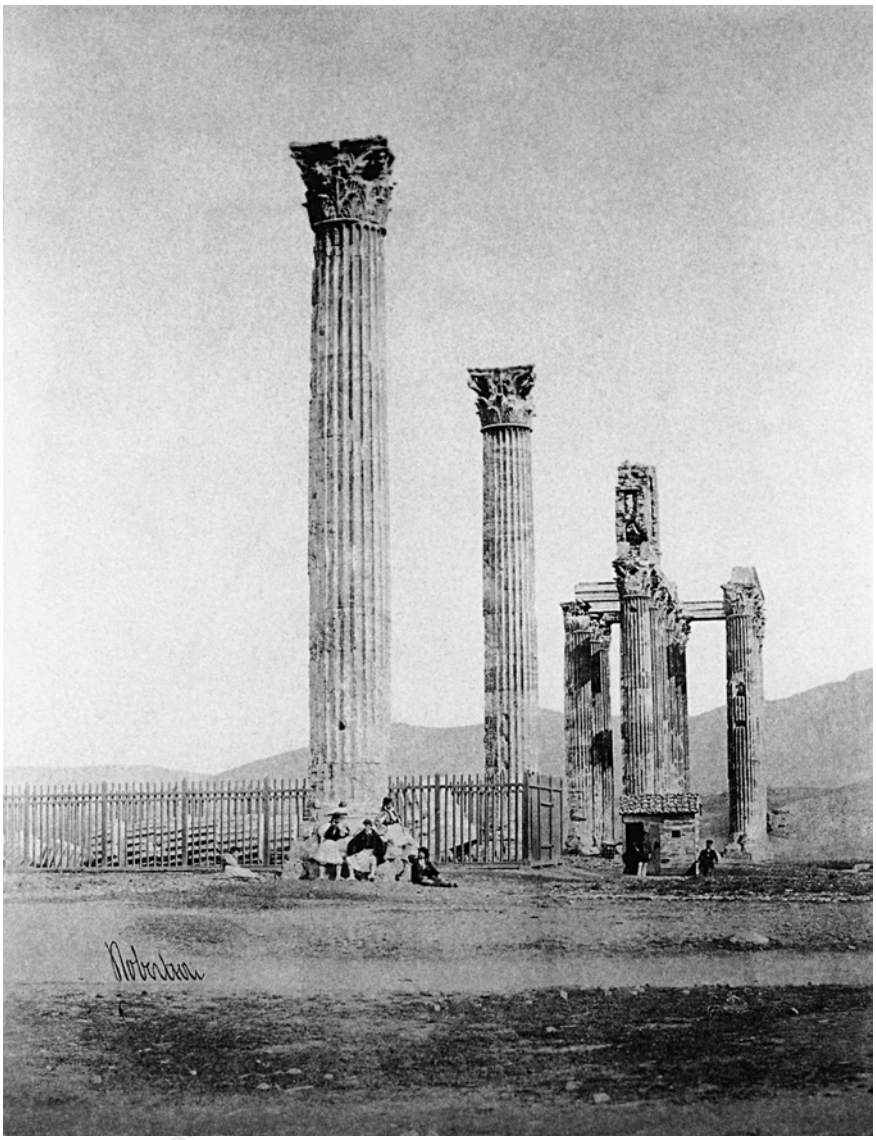

Figure 1.1 James Robertson, Temple of Olympian Zeus from the west, 1853–54

Source: © Benaki Museum Photographic Archive

Some of the earliest Greek archaeologists were in no doubt as to their priorities; Peckham (2001: 117) quotes the unapologetic title of an article published in 1852 by Kyriakos Pittakis, who had been involved in the first restoration of the

Acropolis: 'Material to be used to demonstrate that the inhabitants of Greece are descendants of the Ancient Greeks'.

It was inevitable that the first photographic image taken in Greece should be of the Acropolis of Athens, and just as inevitable that it should be followed by dozens and eventually thousands of closely similar views; once the unique daguerreotype was replaced by the infinitely reproducible albumen print, photographic images became a mass producible and mass consumable item. For both the local market, however restricted it might at first have been, and for the increasing number of foreign visitors, Greece was for a long time synonymous with classical ruins, and classical ruins are what they were offered in profusion by the photographic profession.

In less than a decade, photographs of ruins began to include what were held to be characteristic representatives of the local population (Fig. 1.1). This was partly to provide a useful scale against which to measure the columns, but also in obedience to the dictates of newly fashionable orientalism, which preferred its classicism seasoned with a dash of romance and exoticism – something adequately catered for by extras in white kilts bearing yataghans and long-barrelled muskets. At the same time, their presence was a reminder of the continuity between the original builders and their descendants, a continuity both Hellenes and Philhellenes were happy to emphasise.

Identity crisis

In time, the citizens of the new state, or at least those with the means and leisure to consider such matters, would turn their minds to a consideration of their own identity. Photographic portraiture, increasingly accessible thanks to the professional studios established in perhaps surprising numbers by the mid-1850s, offered a mirror in which the ruling classes could study their reflection and ponder the image they wished to project. High society, under Greece's first king, Otto of Bavaria, was an uneasy but heady mixture of half-civilised warlords from the mountains, members of the rapidly rising mercantile class, ambitious politicians and optimistic modernisers from all over. The warlords were those lucky, skilful or ruthless enough to emerge from the conflict with a commission in the new national army and a pension, sometimes even a position in court; the modernisers launched into schemes for the establishment of banks or educational institutions, many of which proved successful, including the redoubtable Miss Fanny Hill's school for young ladies.

Miss Hill being a moderniser, her girls were plainly but neatly clad in sober European dress, but this was by no means the rule. At the pinnacle of society, the king and queen both instituted a policy of cultural cross-dressing, actively encouraging the wearing of Greek national dress at court. A very early group photograph of Queen Amalia's ladies-in-waiting includes the wives and daughters of Greek notables wearing the authentic local costumes of Psara, Spetses, Hydra and Epirus, as well as two German ladies in European court dress (Fig. 1.2). The seated older woman and the young girl to her left are both wearing examples of an

Figure 1.2 Philibert Perraud, The ladies-in-waiting of Queen Amalia, 1847
Source: © Benaki Museum Photographic Archive

outfit designed for the Queen; based on the dress of Nafpaktos, it became known as the 'Amalia' and remained a favourite of fashionable ladies for a number of decades, eventually achieving the status of authentic folk dress.

Unsurprisingly, the War of Independence remained the defining event in the lives of those who lived through it. As such, it strongly affected how the participants saw themselves, and the kind of image they wanted to project. We can see this in the relatively large number of portraits from the 1850s and 1860s in which the more politically and socially successful of the war leaders are photographed in variants of the traditional Greek warrior's costume, including the foustanella or pleated white kilt. These are, of course, highly formalised versions of what the average kleft would have worn in the 1820s, to which they bear the same relationship as do the kilts and sporrans in Raeburn's paintings to the plaids worn at Culloden; nevertheless, what such portraits testify to is the fact that these men, once powerful military leaders, were now equally influential members of the new order of things.

Inevitably, younger men, or men who perhaps had not fought at all, adopted the same style of self-representation, wearing the foustanella as a mark of national allegiance, or else because it had become, following the example of King Otto, the

fashionable thing to be seen and photographed in; just as inevitably, the style did not necessarily flatter the more sedentary individuals. Finally, by the 1870s, what had been a visual signifier of courage and devotion to a national ideal was acquiring overtones of cliché, even of mockery.

The future of Greece, it was becoming clear to all forward-looking men, lay with Western Europe, and sartorially at least, the ruling class conformed within a single generation. We can see the process at work in a wonderfully evocative family group by Margaritis, which shows a grizzled paterfamilias in full evzone regalia, including decorations, while ranged behind him stand his three sons. They are not merely wearing western dress, but three distinct variants of it: on the left, a clean-shaven bohemian lounger in checked pants, three fingers thrust provocatively in his trouser pocket; in the middle, the full-bearded son in sober, buttoned-up black who is clearly destined for the role of hardworking family provider; and on the right, the highly unreliable-looking boulevardier, complete with waxed moustache and cane. Add to the mixture a formidable looking wife and a clearly discontented daughter, and you have the cast of a peculiarly cynical play by Molière.

The royal dynasty inaugurated by Prince Christian William Ferdinand Adolphus George Glücksburg in 1863 felt able to abandon cultural cross-dressing, and to my knowledge there exists no photograph of King George I in a foustanella. This is probably just as well; in the portraits taken by Petros Moraites, now official court photographer, the Georges, father and son, have the aspect of melancholy and rather anxious greyhounds. Only the women of the court remained faithful to the glamour of 'Greek' costume, however remote by this time from folk origins. In a group photograph of Queen Olga surrounded by royal princesses and ladies-in-waiting dated around 1895, they no longer wear the rather simple and elegant Amalia dress, but some altogether more spurious assemblages to which, incongruously, have been added white gloves. In a nod to more remote antiquity, the train of Mrs Kriezi, standing on the far right, has acquired a border with an antique 'key pattern'.

The bureaucratic and mercantile classes had always regarded themselves as part of a greater pan-European caste, so that Georgios Stavrou, Governor of the Bank of Greece for a total of 28 years, looks no different in the early 1860s from his opposite number at the Bank of England. By the last decade of the century, members of the upper classes had transformed themselves to the point of being indistinguishable from their Italian, French or British contemporaries, from the politician's frock coat and dundrearies to the symbolist poet's black felt hat and Daliesque moustaches.

Apart from recording the change in dress and appearance of the Greeks, photography also celebrated their rapidly changing environment. Whilst ancient ruins and monuments remained favoured subjects, urban landscape photography would proudly record the dramatic expansion of the capital. Indeed, not only was the density of building increasing, but Athens was also expanding rapidly across Attica, northwards towards Kifissia and south-eastwards to the Faliron delta. The great leap forward instituted under Harilaos Trikoupis in 1882 which laid

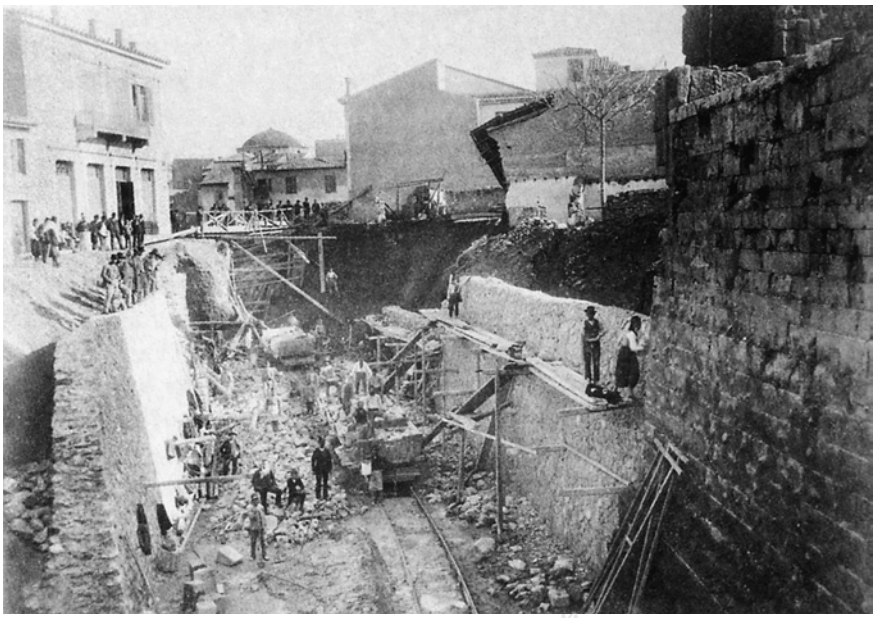

Figure 1.3 Unknown photographer, Extension of the Athens-Piraeus line from Monastiraki to Omonoia, c. 1895. Albumen print, 16.5 x 22cm
Source: © ELIA/MIET Photographic Archives

the foundations of the country's infrastructure was also carefully recorded on film. 'To Trikoupis', writes Woodhouse (1977: 173–5), 'the country owed its system of protective tariffs, the passage of social and industrial legislation, the development of communications by land and sea, and the establishment of limited companies. […] The era of post-revolutionary stagnation was over'.

Industrial photography now made its appearance, focused primarily on the great public works programmes of the 1880s and 1890s, including such visually dramatic subjects as the opening of the Corinth canal and the Athens-Piraeus railway line. Though research remains to be done on the ways in which they were disseminated, images such as these helped publicise and promote what were, for a poor country, enormously costly projects. The dramatising of major industrial achievements by means of powerful visual imagery is something which would resurface several times in the next century, most notably during the post-WWII reconstruction and the subsequent campaign of electrification.

During the same period, the adoption of western dress filtered down to the urban working class, among whom traditional dress had become largely extinct by the end of the century. Careful examination of a photograph taken around 1895 depicting the extension of the railway line from Monastiraki to Omonoia, for instance, shows

a total of some 50 recognisable workmen; of these, only one appears to be wearing the traditional high-wasted baggy breeches and soft cap (Fig. 1.3).

The 'Great Endeavour'

Up until the 1880s, photography played a significant role in the construction of national identity: at first by helping legitimise the new state's moral claim of descent from Byzantium and ultimately from classical Greece, and subsequently by encouraging its development from an anarchic Balkan backwater to an aspirant to contemporary European statehood. At no point, however, during those first 40-odd years, did it develop an overtly nationalist rhetoric. That was to change during the last decades of the nineteenth century, as irredentism and the Megali Idea, the 'Great Endeavour',[2] took hold of the imaginations of the nation and its leaders. At its most utopian, the Megali Idea looked forward to the reconstruction of the Byzantine Empire with its capital at Constantinople.

The infant Greek state had already been enriched by the acquisition, at long last, of the Ionian Islands, which were ceded by Britain upon the accession to the throne of King George I of the Hellenes. The actual handover took place a year later, in June 1864, apparently much to the relief of the British, for whom the islands had ceased to have any great strategic value, becoming instead a nuisance to be shed with little regret or compunction (Holland 2012: 96–8).

The first expansion of the mainland took place bloodlessly in May 1881, when a settlement imposed upon the Ottoman Empire by the Great Powers handed over Thessaly. The acquisition of the rich Thessalian plain acted as a spur to the Greek economy, provoking a development boom for industry and commerce. In this situation, photography played a role essentially similar to the one it had played in America's westward expansion. One way for a town, region or company to bring itself to the notice of potential investors was by commissioning elaborate presentation albums of photographs. Three such albums in the photographic archive of the Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive of the Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece commemorate the wave of entrepreneurial enthusiasm which followed the annexation of Thessaly, dated respectively 1885, 1895 and 1897. The oldest is titled *Souvenir de Thessalie* and includes a manuscript dedication to 'the respected Mr Deliyannis', the ultra-nationalist Greek prime minister.

[2] *Megali Idea* is traditionally translated as 'Great Idea'; it was certainly an actual 'idea', and that is, of course, the literal translation. However, to a patriotic Greek of that period, it would have been clear that the *Megali Idea* was not simply an abstract concept, but a very specific national objective, an endeavour with concrete aims which would inevitably call for almost superhuman efforts on the part of the nation; more than that, it represented (however unrealistically) the longed-for triumphant conclusion to the slow, painful construction of the Greek nation state. For this reason, I believe 'Great Endeavour' to be a more accurate reflection of the complex web of allusions implicit in *Megali Idea*.

It contains 24 fine albumen prints by Dimitrios Michailides of Adrianople, among them a remarkable panoramic view of the monasteries of the Meteora. The second album, titled *Thessaly Railroad: The Volos–Lehonia Line*, also carries a dedication to Theodoros Deliyannis, this time in his capacity as Minister of Finance and President of the Council of Ministers. Unfortunately the photographer or photographers are not identified, as is also the case with the third album, published in 1897 by the Board of Trade of the city of Volos (Stathatos 1996: 31).

The settlement of 1881 excluded much of Epirus, and was in any case seen as merely a first step in the implementation of the Megali Idea. By the last decade of the century, the nation's self-confidence was high, boosted by the unexpected international success of the first Olympic Games in 1896, whose hero – once again represented in emblematic national dress – was the humble market gardener Spyros Louis, winner of the marathon foot race. Greek irredentism was now focused primarily on Epirus and Macedonia in the north, and on the Megalonisos, the 'Great Island' of Crete in the south, where sporadic insurrections had become endemic. The mid-1890s were marked by increasing patriotic enthusiasm and belligerency, actively encouraged by the government of Deliyannis (Papacosma 1977: 10–11). Taken during that period, a photograph of the interior of the Athens Officers' Club betrays an almost hysterical profusion of gigantic national flags, an immense royal coat of arms, a riot of smaller flags, wreaths and crowns and, at the far right, a solitary Union Jack. I think we may take it for granted that this was not the usual decoration of the mess, and must have represented a special occasion for the display of patriotic fervour – most likely the ultimately disastrous outbreak of war with Turkey in spring 1897.

With Crown Prince Constantine in command of the Greek army in Thessaly, the royal family became closely identified with Deliyannis's war policies. Wearing the uniform of a Red Cross nurse, Queen Olga was photographed by the bedside of the unfortunate Pavlos Kouzounas, the war's first casualty; despite the royal personage's rather wooden rigidity, this is a very early example of a successfully stage-managed 'photo opportunity'. It includes a careful arrangement of royal portraits seemingly casually pinned to the wall behind her.

Unfortunately, no amount of stage management could help the badly led and disorganised Greek troops, and the crown prince's forces were quickly overrun. Within a matter of weeks, the Turkish army reached Lamia. The war ended in May with a humiliating peace, border rectifications in Turkey's favour and the payment of an indemnity. The Macedonian question however remained open, and Greek efforts now switched from open warfare to a guerrilla war conducted by irregular bands, usually commanded by regular officers of the Greek army on very unofficial leave of absence; these bands, which became known as *makedonomahoi*, directed their operations not so much against the Turks, whose abandonment of the Balkans was regarded as merely a matter of time, but against their Bulgarian opposites, the comitadjis or 'committee men' who were, like the Greeks, intent on imposing a de facto presence on the ground in advance of the inevitable Turkish withdrawal. Anastasia Karakasidou (1997: 105) has, with some justification,

suggested that 'these conflicts in Macedonia might more aptly be termed wars of national creation rather than the more teleological wars of "national liberation"'.

One of these officers was Pavlos Melas, the charismatic scion of an influential and very well-connected Athenian family. Appointed to overall command of the irregular forces in the Kastoria and Monastir areas in August 1904, he was to be killed in action a few months later. His romantic death, his social position and above all, the circumstances of the times which called for a hero to redeem the humiliations of the recent past, rocketed Melas to instant posthumous fame – making him into the first undoubted national hero since the War of Independence.

His grave in the village of Statitsa was photographed by the Kastorian photographer Leonidas Papazoglou in conditions of some secrecy; though as he was to write, 'I was afraid at first to take a photograph lest I get myself into trouble', Papazoglou exposed two large glass plates as dusk was falling (Golombias 2004: 13–14). The resulting images were widely reproduced in the Greek press and subsequently circulated in the form of postcards. It is hard to say how, or to what extent, the decoration of the grave was stage-managed by the photographer; the backdrop was certainly added by him, and if, as he writes, the village was frequently visited by Turks, the profusion of wreaths and ribbons seems unconvincing. Interestingly, however, the decor includes a mass-produced lithographic print of Melas which must have been published within a very short space of time. The lithographed print remained in circulation for decades, as can be seen in the photograph of a memorial service held at the exact same place in 1930.

The relative paucity of military imagery from the 1897 war was due partly to its brevity and partly to the technical limitations of photographic equipment – and also, no doubt, because most people wished to forget all about it as soon as possible. This was to change during the course of the subsequent conflict, which virtually doubled the extent of the Greek state and, incidentally, assigned to photography a role greater than it would ever again play in any future conflict. The ultimately successful Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 rode a crest of popular patriotic enthusiasm which both fed upon and was aroused by an abundance of pictorial material, including not only photographs but also prints and even paintings. A considerable quantity of photographs survives, the vast majority anonymous. Though a number of professionals followed the army, the ready availability of the new folding Kodak vest-pocket and box cameras meant that many officers and even a number of soldiers were able to take photographs in the field.

The public's insatiable appetite for images was fed in a number of ways: by reproduction in postcard format; by the sale of mass-produced original prints, singly or already placed in albums; by the sale of magic lantern slides; above all, perhaps, through the publication of mass-circulation partworks, of which the best-known was the *Panorama of the 1912–1913 War* of Anestis Konstantinidis. Some issues of the latter included the following editorial announcement: 'The publishers of "Panorama 1912–1913" request those artists or photographers who may have followed the Greek army, or found themselves in its path, to kindly send them by means of the post office anything relevant to the war' (Xanthakis 2008: 246).

Figure 1.4 Rhomaides and Zeitz, The aristocracy of Athens ministering to the wounded in Filipiada, 1912

Source: From the 'Photographic Album of the Unknown Corporal of 1912' (Aktia Nikopolis Foundation)

Judging by the number of complete albums which survive, there can be little doubt that the diffusion of original prints was considerable. The so-called 'Photographic album of the unknown corporal of 1912', now in the possession of the Aktia Nikopolis Foundation, includes a total of 110 photographs, many by A. Romaides and F. Zeitz, with their characteristic RZ monograph engraved on the negative. The as yet unidentified corporal was apparently a driver during the Epirus and Macedonia campaigns: 'In this capacity it would appear that he was often able to come into contact with the photographers of the time, carrying them from place to place, posing for them and taking photographs of the places they visited' (Karambelas 2002: 10). One of these photographs (Fig. 1.4), of women in nurses' whites passing around hot drinks to a group of soldiers, is annotated (presumably by the corporal himself), 'The aristocracy of Athens ministering to the wounded in Filippiada' – a harking back to the rhetoric of the photograph of Queen Olga in 1897, but also evidence of a tradition of service which survived into the Albanian campaign of WWII.

Such images served as models or sources of inspiration for the popular chromolithographs based, however imaginatively, upon photographic

documentation. In some cases, the print was an almost exact reproduction of the original photograph in a different medium with, at the most, a tidying up of unwanted visual clutter; in others, as in numerous prints celebrating the Greek victory at the battle of Sarandaporo, imagination ran riot. Often, an artist might combine elements from two or more photographs to produce an idealised version of the event depicted, as was the case with a much-reproduced (and modified) image of the king and crown prince leading the Greek army into Salonica; in one of the most imaginative versions, perhaps in acknowledgement of the photographic sources of his inspiration, the artist has introduced a young man with a box camera on a balcony just above the king's head.

The first harvest of the Megali Idea proved rich beyond measure, though not beyond expectations, which remained higher than ever. The 'Great Endeavour' had, indeed, sown dragon's teeth which would not come to fruition for another decade, but the signs were there in the spring of 1913, when a lunatic assassinated King George I in Salonika and Constantine came to the throne: 'He bore the name of the founder and the last Emperor of Byzantium, and many wished to call him Constantine XII in succession to the latter. Few doubted that he would one day reign in the city whose name he shared' (Woodhouse 1977: 194). Indeed, Constantinople remained a potent and terrible mirage.

After the Great War, Greece's belated entry on the side of the Allies was rewarded with the cession of all that remained of Turkey in Europe, with the notable exception of Constantinople itself, and with control over Smyrna and its hinterland; the occupation was to last for a period of five years, when a plebiscite would determine whether it should remain Greek, or revert to Turkey. By the end of the war, Greece had nearly a quarter of a million men under arms, many of whom had been serving for almost a decade. In the spring of 1919, Venizelos, responding to the request of the Big Three (Britain, France and the US), ordered the army to occupy Smyrna, but his ambitious plans were already unravelling under the pressure of events, including the growing disunity of the allies and the growing power of Mustafa Kemal. In October 1920, the fateful decision was taken to launch the Greek army in Smyrna against the still disorganised troops of Kemal, inaugurating the final chapter of what is still referred to by Greeks today as the 'Asia Minor Disaster'.

Boissonnas & Co.

The most complete photographic record of the campaign from the Greek side was made by a young Swiss artist, Henri-Paul Boissonnas, son of the better-known Frédéric. The Boissonnas family of Geneva were, to all extents and purposes, the Greek government's photographic and propaganda branches rolled into one. The very close relationship between this dynasty of philhellene Swiss publishers and photographers on the one hand, and the Greek state on the other, was based on equal amounts of sentiment and commercial calculation. In effect, Frédéric Boissonnas placed his considerable talents, as well as those of the family printing firm, at the

service of the expansionist ambitions of the Greek state. As Irini Boudouri noted (2003: 35), 'from his earliest journeys in Greece, Frédéric Boissonnas had already foreseen the political, commercial and tourist publicity which could be generated by photography. […] He became the fugleman of what for Greece was a radical new policy which would place the immediacy, the 'objectivity', but also the poetry of the photographic image at the service of national interest'. Boissonnas had already secured a small grant from King George I as far back as 1907, but the first real sponsorship came in 1913 for the purpose of photographing the newly-acquired territories of Epirus and Macedonia – and, more importantly, of disseminating the images.

Boissonnas more than fulfilled his part of the bargain. An exhibition entitled *Visions of Greece*, held in Paris during February and March 1919, included no fewer than 550 of his photographs, and the lectures presented in the context of this exhibition were published (by the family firm) in a 260-page illustrated volume. Some of the comments made in his welcoming speech by Edouard Chapuisat, editor-in-chief of the influential *Journal de Genève*, underline both the seriousness with which the event was regarded by the Greek government, and the almost messianic importance Boissonnas and his philhellenic supporters attached to his mission: 'Today, all eyes are turned upon Greece, which aspires to regain that place in the East which she occupied so many centuries ago. The support of faithful allies allows us to anticipate the hour when Greece, which has given the world the purest jewels of civilisation, will contribute to the reconstruction of Europe on the very borders of the East' (Chapuisat 1919: x).

With the end of the war and the beginning of the long drawn-out peace negotiations, a new contract was drawn up whereby Frédéric and his sons undertook the publication between 1920 and 1926 of a number of illustrated books – volumes which included the telling titles *Smyrna*, *Thrace*, *Constantinople* and *The Greek Presence in Asia Minor*. Frédéric's position was made even clearer in his written report of 26 November 1922, quoted by Boudouri (2003: 54, endnote 18): 'the text of these works – quite apart from the high artistic quality of the illustrations – reaffirms in the most categorical way the legitimacy of [Greek] claims over these contested regions' – in other words, he considered that the books would make a substantial contribution to the legitimisation of Greek claims upon the contested regions. Two volumes published in 1920–21 conformed closely to this prescription; they were *La Campagne d'Epire* and its companion, *La Campagne de Macédoine*; both included photographs by Frédéric and texts by Fernand Feyler, a retired Swiss colonel and military historian.

The defeat of Venizelos in the elections of November 1920 and the country's increasing diplomatic isolation after the advance into western Asia Minor (Llewellyn Smith 1998: 129) triggered a frantic effort by the Foreign Ministry's Press Bureau to ensure positive coverage in the international press. A new and extremely advantageous contract was signed with Frédéric's son Henri-Paul and with Feyler, whereby the two would cover the campaign; Henri-Paul would provide the Greek government with photographs, as well as placing some in the Swiss

press, while Feyler undertook to publish articles in the *Journal de Genève* and also to publish a book about the campaign and 'the rights of Hellenism in Asia Minor'.[3]

The satisfactory arrangement the Greek ministry came to with the French press, as reported by Boudouri (2003: 54, endnote 20), would probably raise eyebrows today: 'For the purposes of acquiring the French Press, the newspapers *Matin*, *Journal*, *Echo de Paris* and *Petit Parisien* were paid 100,000 francs each during the course of 1921. The newspapers also undertook to "refrain from publishing anything which would adversely affect our interests […] and furthermore, to publish the reports and bulletins with which we will supply them"'. Henri-Paul also proved a worthwhile investment, since during the course of his five-month sojourn with the Greek army, he succeeded in placing at least 800 photos with the international press; his images were also disseminated by the Foreign Ministry to the press as well as to military, diplomatic and political recipients.

Unfortunately, Henri-Paul was the one member of the Boissonnas family who appears to have been largely devoid of photographic talent. His photographs are frequently out of focus, and he obviously had considerable trouble framing correctly; his prints are often confusing, and he has a bad habit of chopping off bits of his subjects, whether heads, roofs, masts or gun barrels; it comes as no surprise to learn that on his return from Asia Minor, he announced his intention of giving up photography and devoting himself to the restoration of artworks. Nevertheless, he did occasionally manage to take a dramatic or at least interesting shot, such as the one of a Greek cavalry squadron advancing at Seindi Gazi. His bleak picture of the Greek army trudging wearily through the wastes of the Anatolian plateau south of Ankara is a sobering reminder of just how vulnerable an army with enormously extended lines of supply would eventually become in this kind of terrain.

The younger Boissonnas was not, of course, the only photographer with the Greek expeditionary corps, though he probably spent more time with it than any of his colleagues. The Photographic Service of the Greek army was formed in December 1920 to coordinate the activities of photojournalists with the troops (Varlas 2003: 28); its duties presumably included a certain amount of censorship, but its primary purpose was to publicise the expedition's successes, of which there were indeed many before the fatal loss of momentum on the banks of the Sakarya river in September 1921. Photographers who spent some time on the front included the Gaziades brothers and the painter, cinematographer and photographer Georgios Prokopiou, several of whose carefully posed tableaux later served as the basis for oil paintings. In June 1922, the army's Photographic Service organised an exhibition in Athens under the title 'Military Art from the Asia Minor Army'. It was billed as the first such exhibition, but there was, of course, never to be a second.

[3] Boudouri 2003: 38. The complete contract is reproduced in the Appendix (pp. 256–7) of this volume.

'Who we are'

By the first decade of the twentieth century, photography in various guises had become commonplace for the urban sophisticates of the larger cities and towns; in the hands of the more prosperous classes, it even became a popular hobby, leading in some cases, such as that of Mary Paraskeva, the daughter of Crimean millionaire Ioannis Gryparis, to a substantial and valuable body of work. In the countryside, however, many people had never as yet seen themselves portrayed in a photograph; to do so was still a rare, even an uncanny experience. Even once it became feasible, perhaps after a professional photographer had set up shop somewhere reasonably accessible, photographic portraiture was limited to a very few of life's major milestones: birth sometimes, certainly if at all possible marriage, and the inevitable group photograph of parents, grandparents and children. An additional spur was provided by emigration; in many of the poorer regions of Greece, men would emigrate on their own, return if successful to get married and father a child, and then leave again for perhaps many years at a time, leaving mother and children behind. In such cases, there would be a steady demand for portraits of wives, growing children and aging parents.

Such was the case on the remote Ionian island of Kythera, where in 1920, Panayotis Fatseas opened a photographic studio in the little market town of Livadi; he had returned from a two years' residence in New York on the outbreak of the Balkan War, bringing with him a camera, one of the first on the island. Over the next 18 years, he photographed most of the people in the south of the island; the main source of demand for his work is identified by an advertisement he published in the local press, emphasising that 'orders can be accepted directly from America and Australia for portraits of the relatives of immigrants'.

The core of the Fatseas archive, quantitatively and qualitatively, is undoubtedly made up of his portraits. The most superficial glimpse is enough to confirm how different they are from the average commercial portraits of the period. They stand out first of all for their immediacy and animation, free of that fatal rigidity which transforms so many subjects of early twentieth-century photographic portraiture into dummies. They stare back at us, most of them, seriously but unaffectedly. Though these images include the incidental period information which is the usual attraction of old photographs, in this case it is unlikely to hold our attention; on the contrary, our gaze settles upon the evocative faces of the sitters, upon the postures which betray so much about them and their relationship with one another. These are, it seems, paradoxically contemporary images – or perhaps, like all good art, they are simply timeless.

Did Fatseas stage his portraits? We do not know. Or rather, yes – of course he staged them; but he did not practice what is meant today by staged photography. In other words, he did not invent stories or devise alternative realities. On the contrary, the purpose of staging was to emphasise the objective nature of those passing before his lens. The way he arranged people in front of the background curtain was a kind of staging, and so was his ever more restrained use of the simple

Figure 1.5 Panayotis Fatseas, Grigoria Kassimatis and Areti Megalokonomos, 1924

Source: Kythera Photographic Archive

props he allowed himself: the few flower petals scattered on the floor at the feet of the young girls, the carved walking stick flourished proudly by a gendarme, the

sprig of basil held by a solitary woman, a bouquet, the dog curled up beneath his master's chair, a long-barrelled shotgun.

And after all, the way he approached his subjects was itself a form of staging: an approach which instead of intimidating, allowed them to be, quite simply, themselves. These portraits offer themselves up for deliberate scrutiny, and the eye constantly discovers emotionally and visually charged details which bring an added dimension to the image: the 'best' jacket of the young boy whose too-short sleeves hover just above the wrists, the heavy hobnailed boots worn with a formal suit, or the almost but not quite identical dresses worn by two young women of the same family (Fig. 1.5) (Stathatos 2008: 17–18).

Alan Trachtenberg's (2005: 19) perceptive comment about Mike Disfarmer, that distant colleague of Fatseas, applies no less to the Greek photographer: '… his people leap out; nothing distracts attention from them, from the physical details which comprise them and make their bodies and dress and expressions such plausible vehicles of particular lives – the delicacy of a hand touching a shoulder, the twist of an ankle, the tilt of a hat, the rumpled folds of trousers, the fall of cotton dresses on the work-stiffened bodies of country women'.

Reinventing Crete

By the mid-1920s, the promotion of Greece as a tourist destination was taken increasingly seriously by the government, and from 1929 onwards, a succession of organisations was formed to undertake that promotion (Katsiyannis 2009). Though graphic design featured strongly in official posters and publications, photography was regarded as equally if not more important; one of the first high-quality lithographic posters to be issued by the Office for Greek Tourism featured a photograph of the Parthenon by Nelly,[4] the *nom d'artiste* adopted by Elli Seraidari.

Nelly, who opened a studio in Athens in 1924, had already travelled and photographed extensively around Greece in the late 1920s. Shortly after the establishment of General Metaxas's dictatorship in August 1936, she was commissioned by Theologos Nikoloudis, the new regime's Under-Secretary for Press and Tourism, to photograph on behalf of the press office. As she writes in her memoirs (1989: 147), 'the Ministry gave me the assignment of touring Greece at intervals in order to photograph the country's treasures and beauty spots; this was for the illustrated albums they planned to publish every three months in three languages, French, English and German'. One of the regions she photographed most extensively was Crete,[5] whose hinterland in particular was still little visited at the time; for a woman to venture there, even

[4] See also Zacharia, this volume.

[5] Nelly was bad with dates and almost never gives any in her memoirs. According to the dates in the volume *Κρήτη/Crete*, co-published in 2001 by the Benaki Museum (which owns her archive), she photographed Crete on two separate occasions, in 1927 and 1939.

Figure 1.6 Fréderic Boissonnas, Kalokairinou Avenue, Herakleion, 1920
Source: © Benaki Museum Photographic Archive

in company with her husband and an official guide, was regarded as something of an adventure.

Crete had previously been intensively photographed by the indefatigable Frédéric Boissonnas in 1910 and again in 1920. Boissonnas's Crete was largely urban and multicultural. Mirroring their subject, his photographs are lively and even chaotic; lots of things are going on in them at the same time: an old man in a fez stumbles past clutching an armful of empty sacks; a sign proclaims a roadside café to be the 'Club International'; a boy helps secure a load of baskets onto a recalcitrant donkey; an itinerant tea-vendor is serving customers seated outside a greengrocer's shop; a man in a European suit and white panama hat shares the street with a Cretan wearing boots, breaches, sash and a fancy waistcoat (Fig. 1.6).

By the time of Nelly's first visit in 1927, the mutual Greco-Turkish ethnic cleansing known as the 'population exchange' had scoured Crete of Turks and Turkish-speaking Greeks, and the cosmopolitan world Boissonnas had known was no longer. Nelly's photographs, however, still have a touch of Boissonnas's essentially neutral way of seeing; they include views of monasteries, antiquities and some fine landscapes, though rather fewer street scenes. By 1939, when she revisited

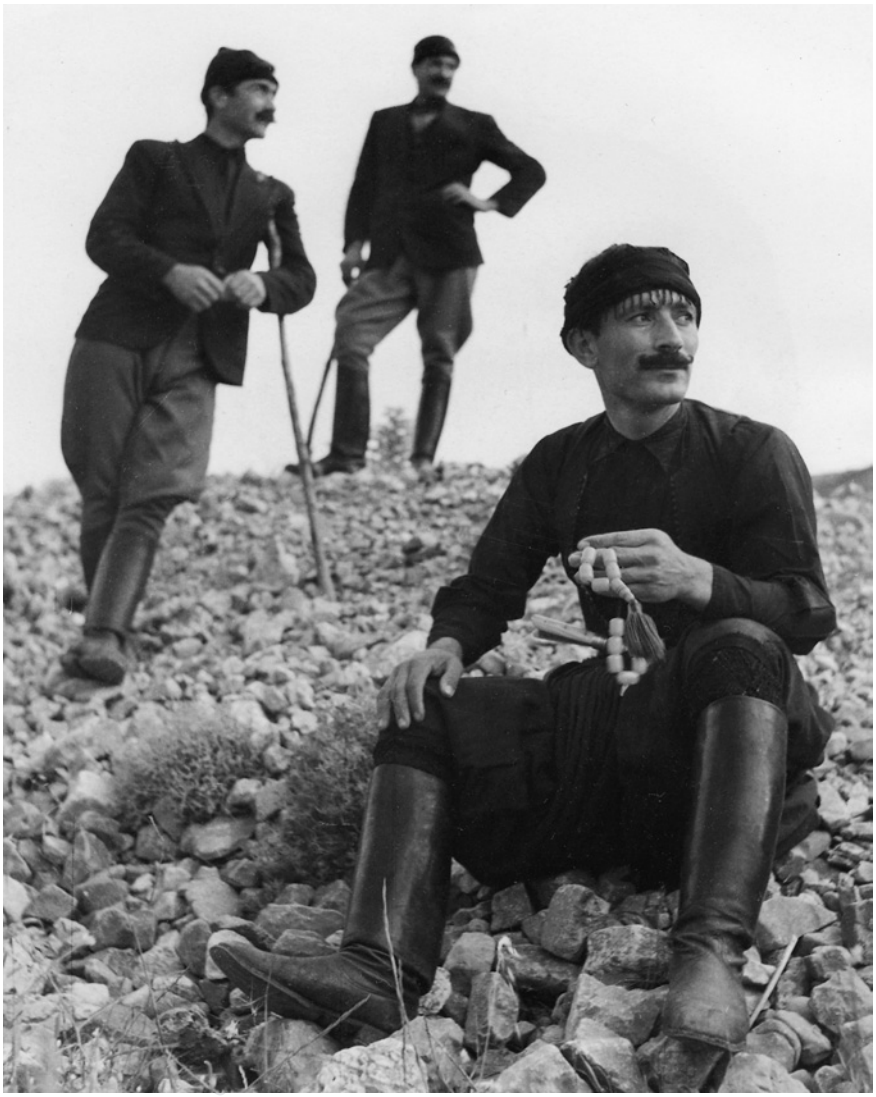

Figure 1.7 Nelly, Cretans, 1939
Source: © Benaki Museum Photographic Archive

the island as the representative, however humble, of the dictatorship's propaganda arm, Crete was being reinvented with Nelly's enthusiastic collaboration.

In place of the cosmopolitan subtleties of the past, she now propounded a simplistic and entirely Greek image with the stress on a gallant, even heroic rural simplicity. In comparison to her earlier vision, the new images are almost

shockingly crude, particularly in their blatantly dramatic or sentimental staging of the male form. Remembering Sfakia, the mountainous region where most of the photographs were taken, Nelly (1989: 165–6) was to write: 'I couldn't believe my eyes […] I will never forget my surprise when I saw all these men assembled, well-dressed and cared for; I thought I was on another planet. Nowhere and never had I encountered so many handsome men gathered together'. In a flurry of boots, capes, beards, headcloths and daggers, Nelly's photos were reclaiming Crete for the fatherland – and for tourism (Fig. 1.7).

Urbanity

The collapse of the 'Great Endeavour' was naturally an unmitigated disaster for Greece, leading to the forced exchange of populations and introducing a million or so distressed refugees to a poor and exhausted country. Certain side effects, however, were to prove beneficial in the long run. Though in most cases they arrived utterly destitute, the refugees brought with them invaluable if invisible assets, above all a generally higher level of education than mainland Greeks, and distinctly more sophisticated industrial and agricultural skills; to these were added the natural energy and ambition of hard-working people who had everything to gain. If the building and infrastructure programme initiated by Trikoupis in the 1880s represented the country's first major step towards modernisation, there is no doubt that the arrival of the Asia Minor refugees marked the definitive swing from a largely agrarian to a largely urban population.

Like the great leap forward of the previous century, this change, too, would be well documented photographically: on the one hand, governments, ministries and non-governmental organisations were all keen to publicise their efforts, while on the other, the change in their circumstances was something that all those struggling to improve their lives wanted to see recorded and memorialised. The characteristic feature of social documentation in these circumstances was the group photograph. Whereas Fatseas's subjects were portrayed as solitary individuals or, at most, as nuclear families, still enclosed in the centuries-old isolation of the countryside, the newly emergent and newly politicised urban population saw itself, and wished to see itself pictured as – above all – a social entity.

Perhaps the most talented and certainly the most dedicated recorder of these decades was the photojournalist Petros Poulidis (Arseni 2004: *passim*). One of several major Greek photographers whose work has yet to receive the study it deserves, he is sometimes dismissed as mere recorder of events or a source of nostalgic trivia; in fact his true subject, whether or not consciously realised, was the rise of the Greek urban working and middle classes. This fundamental change in society was methodically recorded by Poulidis, from the arrival of the refugees, the resultant acceleration of primary and technical education, the earliest experiments in public housing, the rise of worker's associations and unions and,

most interestingly in many ways, the development of leisure – something hitherto the exclusive privilege of the ruling class.

He photographs public holidays and private celebrations, even the first holiday-makers on the beaches of Attica, in Vari, Vouliagmeni and Voula. Their summer shacks and automobiles suddenly appear side-by-side with the huts of the local farmers, many of them still wearing traditional clothes – that is to say, the clothing worn for work in the fields, not the versions seen in court or museums. What, after all, could be more radical than the very concept of holidays, for a people accustomed to a life of back-breaking labour from childhood to deepest old age?

One perhaps insufficiently studied aspect of photography is the way in which responses to the camera change over time. Studying Poulidis's group photographs, one realises that his subjects are, by and large, sufficiently familiar with the process not to be overawed by it, but not so familiar as to be jaded; they respond with neither the solemnity their parents might have displayed, nor yet with the bored indifference with which their grandchildren will react to yet another group snapshot. The result is that each person in the group comes across very strongly as an individual personality rather than a cipher. His photograph of a family celebration taken in 1940 includes 28 separate men, women and children spanning three generations, each one a sharply delineated individual; looking at the group, and noting the date, one cannot help wondering how many of them would still be alive in 1950, after 10 years of war, occupation, famine and civil war.

The 'Black Album'

With the rejection of an Italian ultimatum on 28 October 1940, Greece found herself dragged into WWII. The Greek army at first held its own, then succeeded in forcing an Italian withdrawal halfway across Albania; but in April 1941, Germany came to the rescue of her ally, and the country ended up under tripartite German, Italian and Bulgarian occupation. The policies of all three administrations, but above all that of the German zone, were much closer to that displayed in the Ukraine than in the West European countries then under occupation: instead of a rational exploitation of the captive economy, the Germans opted for outright plunder. As Mark Mazower (1995: 26) writes, 'these policies of expropriation and plunder – the reflection of an ultimately self-defeating tendency in Berlin to see the economic benefits of conquest before the political ones – had a catastrophic impact in Greece. […] But worst of all was the effect on the supply of food'.

The consequence of wholesale food expropriation was magnified in the autumn of 1941 by the poor crops of the previous two years, by lack of transport, by hoarding, by the British blockade, and by the fact that the Bulgarian zone of occupation, despite including only 15 per cent of the national territory, had been the source of 40 per cent of the country's total wheat production, 80 per cent

of its butter and 60 per cent of its egg production – little or none of which was now reaching the other zones. The result was a famine during the unusually hard winter of 1941–42, above all in the Greater Athens area, where 'in January there [were] 465,000 registered in soup kitchens and famine reached its peak with a five-fold increase in deaths compared to the average deaths in January before the war' (Bournova 2006). According to a study commissioned by the Red Cross, 'about 250,000 people had died directly or indirectly as a result of the famine between 1941 and 1943' (Mazower 1995: 41).

If the famine was provoked by the Axis occupation forces (and it is worth quoting Mazower's opinion that despite what many people believed at the time, 'there was no deliberate German plan of extermination'), it was undoubtedly prolonged by the Allied embargo. Mazower's (1995: 46) view is that 'had matters been left to British civil servants, it is doubtful whether the blockade would have been lifted. But there was a vital difference between the Axis powers and the Allies. Public opinion in Britain and the USA was aroused by the news of the famine. Slowly and belatedly, the British came round to the idea of supporting an international relief effort for Greece'. There can be no doubt that it was the international relief efforts organised through the Red Cross and neutral countries which saved the country from a second winter of famine. And international opinion was aroused, in turn, largely by photographs; this was, in fact, the single most effective case in Greek history of propaganda by the photographic image.

Though street photography was forbidden and film was at a premium, largely because the local Kodak factory had been blown up by the retreating allies (Xanthakis 2008: 381), a few brave and resourceful photographers managed to record the occupation and subsequent famine in Athens. They included the journalist and amateur photographer Kostas Parashos and members of the Police Criminological Services Department, but perhaps the most successful efforts at publicising the appalling situation were those of the great modernist Voula Papaioannou. Apart from native talent and a considerable fund of courage, Papaioannou possessed another invaluable asset: her connections with international organisations and with the diplomats of neutral countries.

During the course of an interview taped in 1988, Papaioannou (2006: 70) spoke at length about this time: 'As soon as the occupation began, cameras were forbidden. Then I worked with a hidden camera. That was my resistance. I happened to know [Amalia] Lykourezou;[6] we had both worked for the Near East Foundation. Everybody there knew me, as did the Swiss. They had a representative here reporting back on the situation, Franco Brenni, and we worked together. […] We would take photographs and smuggle them abroad, for the starving children'.

[6] Amalia Lykourezou, daughter of Konstantinos Lykourezos, public prosecutor and Member of Parliament, was a volunteer nurse and member of Near East Foundation. The foundation is described as 'the United States' oldest nonsectarian international development NGO'; http://www.neareast.org/whoweare/history (accessed 10 August 2013).

Figure 1.8 Voula Papaioannou, Athens 1941–42, from *Hellas 1941–1942*, the so-called 'Black Album'
Source: © Benaki Museum Photographic Archive

Marcel Junod, the International Red Cross (IRC) representative, who was handed a hundred or so prints by Lykourezou, subsequently passed them on to the IRC International Committee and various other institutions based in Switzerland, as well as to British and American diplomats in Stockholm (Papaioannou 2006: 20).

In 1943, when the worst of the crisis was over, Papaioannou and the fine-art printer Yannis Kefallinos collaborated in the production of a hand-made album which included 83 original prints glued onto sheets of black cardboard. A total of four copies were produced, of which at least two have survived. Entitled *Hellas 1941–1942*, it became known simply as 'The Black Album' (Fig. 1.8).

Figure 1.9 Kostas Balafas, 'Aris and Sarafis', 1944, from *The Andartiko in Epirus*
Source: © Benaki Museum Photographic Archive

The ambiguities of photography

The history of the Greek resistance remains a heavily mined subject, still capable of arousing strong emotions and ferocious partisanship. No real attempt has yet been made at a dispassionate profit-and-loss accounting of the resistance's activities with a view to at least considering whether those activities proved, on balance, beneficial or harmful to the nation. Nevertheless, few historians would deny that whatever else it may have been, by the time of the German withdrawal from Greece, the resistance had developed into the first act of a ruinous civil war; in other words, the major resistance groups inevitably, and sooner rather than later, found themselves in conflict with one another for ideological no less than for pragmatic reasons (Margaritis 2001: 64).

Figure 1.10 Kostas Balafas, 'The people admire them', 1944, from *The Andartiko in Epirus*
Source: © Benaki Museum Photographic Archive

Of these groups, EAM/ELAS and its core constituent, the Communist Party of Greece, were the best organised, the most highly motivated and disciplined, and arguably possessed the closest thing to a long-term goal. As such, they were the only group with both the resources and the will to propagandise their views and activities. Propaganda by the deed was of course a basic policy of EAM/ELAS and especially OPLA, EAM's internal security organisation, but it was recognised that the movement also needed to present its most positive and attractive face to the world at large. Today, the heroic portraits of resistance fighters produced by Spyros Meletzis have acquired iconic status. Unfortunately, we know very little about the way in which imagery such as this was used and disseminated at the time. Meletzis himself, writing in 1976, is scathing about the attitude of his superiors in the party:

'I would be lying, however, if I were to claim that the leadership of the resistance was aware of the contribution which an artist photographer could make. Nobody, absolutely nobody in the photographic section paid the least attention. […] And so they never took the initiative of giving me a specific assignment' (Meletzis 1996: 21).

Nevertheless, these portraits, strongly echoing a style which might be described as socialist sublime, have become firmly rooted in the iconography of the civil war. Were they of a nature to appeal to any but true believers even at the time? Again, this seems doubtful. Even today, in a far more cynical age, whether they are taken at face value or read as an example of totalitarian kitsch not a million miles from North Korean painting, still depends almost entirely on the viewer's political sympathies.

That Meletzis was wholeheartedly prepared to subordinate his photography to the requirements of the party, accepting not only subject matter but even firmly expressed aesthetic directives, is made clear from the following astonishing passage, in which Yannis Zevgos, a member of the Communist Party's Central Committee, critiques his own portrait:

> Look, Spyro, [he said]. Here you've captured what we were talking about, and more. The whole stance shows a movement, an effort to march forward. In the clenching of my facial muscles you see imprinted not just my own anguish, but that of the people I express. But the most important thing in this photograph is the movement and expression of my hand. Each of my fingers moves separately, but together they represent a sum of forces which, assembled and disciplined in a general dynamic arrangement, are ready for action (Meletzis 1996: 23–4).

The photographic medium is changeable, treacherous and even protean in its nature. What was functional one day is artistic the next, what was truth yesterday is falsehood tomorrow. What a photographer intends, what a photographer thinks he sees is not necessarily what others will see in his photographs. Kostas Balafas was another photographer who recorded the resistance, mostly from the side of EAM, and though he too was a true believer, he rarely indulged in the overblown rhetoric of Meletzis. His photographs are simpler, more direct and hence more convincing than those of his lifelong rival; but he, too, was capable of fooling himself, of wilfully misinterpreting the evidence before his eyes in favour of what he wanted to see. A two-page spread (Figs 1.9 and 1.10) from his book *Epirus* illustrates the entry of ELAS troops into Ioannina on 23 December 1944, following the defeat of the rival EDES organisation (Balafas 1991: 210–11). The photograph on the left page shows a close up of the resistance leaders Aris Velouhiotis and Stefanos Sarafis riding past on black horses. The one on the right shows a crowd of about 28–30 men, women and children presumably watching the riders; it has been captioned 'The people admire them', consonant with EAM's belief, and insistence upon, the fact that it was invariably welcomed with open arms by 'the people'. Even the most superficial examination of the faces in the photograph, however, shows few signs of admiration, but many of doubt, unease and even fear. That Balafas would have published this photograph, let alone in this context, had he realised its true implications, is hard

to believe; the only possible explanation is that this highly experienced and skilful photographer could not see what his own photograph showed, because he did not *wish* to see it.

Coda

In the course of the century running from the 1840s to the end of the 1950s, tempered by almost constant war and all too frequent civil conflict, Greek national identity was slowly forged out of the disparate fragments which made up the first post-revolutionary state. It had been a rough process, progressing by stops and starts, and it was never easy, or indeed possible, to define precisely what that identity consisted of; but like the Greek state itself, it was clear to all observers that in spite of everything that fate and the Greeks themselves could do, it had come into being. Like all national identities, it was woven of history, myth, experience and yearning; like photography, it was and remains in flux, changing over time and under the pressure of events.

During those crucial 100-odd years, photography played an active role in defining, influencing and even at times directing that identity. In subsequent decades, Greek introspection would crumble, and the narrow question of national identity would give way to the search for an identity in the wider world, whether in the context of one of the great international alliances or, more recently, that of a pan-European association. But that is another story.

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