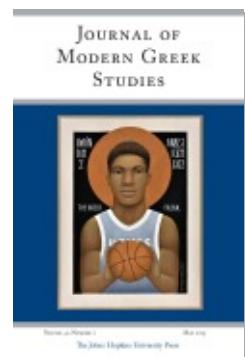




PROJECT MUSE®

The Greek Military Dictatorship: Revisiting a Troubled Past, 1967-1974 ed. by Othon Anastasakis and Katerina Lagos (review)

Kostis Kornetis



Journal of Modern Greek Studies, Volume 41, Number 1, May 2023, pp. 141-145 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mgs.2023.0006>

➡ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/893146>

to various autocrats across the globe. In the case of Greece, American strategy was tied to Greek local priorities through influential mediators with Greek or Greek-American surnames, among them Tom Pappas, Spiro T. Agnew or CIA Chief of Station in Greece Thomas Karamessines.

Several US and Greek documents enrich the authors' narrations. In Papahelas's book they build up a voluminous body of primary sources while avoiding the image of a scholastic analysis through the use of new technologies. In particular, the extensive application of printed QR codes allows the portability of the book as well as the scanning of rich archival material that helps reveal the complexity of research into the rather recent and cryptic period of the Greek dictatorship. Amply documented, meticulously indexed, and remarkably well written, these two works contribute significantly to the historiography of Greek-American relations and their rocky path during the Cold War.

KONSTANTINA E. BOTSIOU

Department of International and European Studies, University of Piraeus

Othon Anastasakis and Katerina Lagos, eds., *The Greek Military Dictatorship: Revisiting a Troubled Past, 1967–1974*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2021. Pp. 398. 7 illustrations. Hardback \$145.00.

Fifty years is the usual landmark for a full reconsideration of historical phenomena. This anniversary of the *coup d'état* of 21 April 1967 inspired a conference in Sacramento in April 2017, gathering together various generations of researchers who have studied the Greek military regime. The present volume, seamlessly assembled and edited by Othon Anastasakis and Katerina Lagos (both researchers with a long record of scholarly engagement with facets of Greek authoritarianism), is the fruit of that endeavor and an indispensable contribution to the growing field of studies on the Greek dictatorship.

The volume is ambitious insofar as it brings together diverse approaches, which are customarily kept separate [as in the case of the edited volumes by Sourlas (2016) and Klapsis et al (2020)]: these range from cultural history and the history of education to economic and hard-core diplomatic and political history. The main body of the book is divided into three parts. The first part is dedicated to the historical and ideological background of the junta, with the army as its institutional driving force. This part includes a chapter by the late André Gerolymatos on the *longue durée* history of army interventions in

Greece. It provides a useful background to the subject matter even though it ends right at the point at which one would expect an analysis of the years 1967–1974 and hence lacks particular originality. Katerina Lagos's contribution offers a much-needed overview of the junta's ideological outlook and its borrowings from previous regimes (especially the Metaxas regime, an antecedent which Lagos has researched in depth) in terms of its own vocabulary and adoption of catchall Greco-Christian slogans.

The second part of the book is dedicated to domestic affairs, and forms the core of the volume by virtue of its originality, as these chapters tackle hitherto understudied facets of the regime. It begins with Andreas Kakridis's excellent contribution on the colonels' economics, which demonstrates how the regime relied heavily on pre-existing personnel and institutions since it lacked its own body of experts on economic and public policy: "Most of the regime's supposedly new economists were hardly new at all" (79), and at times the dictatorship even relied on work done in 1959 by Andreas Papandreou's Centre for Planning and Economic Research. Kakridis also convincingly shows that the regime never managed to legitimize its arbitrary and violent rule and policies through economic growth, despite the common view that the colonels managed to "buy off" political dissent and thus secure popular acquiescence. In fact, Kakridis contends, the explosion in popular discontent in 1973 had little to do with the difficulties encountered by the regime's economic policies.

In the following chapter, Nicholas Kalogerakos also focuses on economic issues but he shifts our attention to a little-explored topic—namely, US foreign investment in Greece during the period. He argues that, despite the Greek dictators' over-eagerness to attract foreign investment, American business elites and foreign investors were often left disappointed and frustrated. Kalogerakos correctly points out that this was frequently due to the latter's lack of understanding of both the regime's complexities and of the power relations between Greek government services, banks, and other public entities. The regime's educational policies, meanwhile, are the focus of Othon Anastasakis's astute analysis. Anastasakis aptly identifies the swift turnover of education ministers as "typical of the Greek military regime's undecided and vacillating 'experimentation' with education" (141). He draws the valid conclusion that the regime's wavering between "[the] reactionary, the repressive, the ideological, the pseudoliberal and the pseudotechnocratic policies" (142) was representative of its general outlook. Foteini Dimirouli's elegantly written chapter ventures to unpack the uninterrupted popularity of Cavafy's poetry during the junta years. She takes a fresh look at the misreadings and "brazen domestication" of some of the poet's emblematic texts by two of the regime's main propagandists, Georgios Georgalas (who features in several chapters) and Dimitrios Tsakonas. She

then proceeds to juxtapose these with Dimitris Maronitis's treatment of Cavafy which appeared in the seminal publication *Eighteen Texts* (1970). Dimirouli ultimately questions the limits and ethics of the appropriation of past texts to promote present-time political goals, be they reactionary or progressive. Finally, in the last chapter of this part, Andreopoulos and Grammenos offer an original analysis of the relation between church and state during the junta years, showcasing how the regime manipulated the institution of the Church for its own interests (and how the latter willingly offered itself to such manipulation).

The third part of the book is dedicated to external affairs. Alexander Kitroeff vividly illustrates the extent of the regime's misreading of Archbishop Iakovos—the only Greek priest more cynical than Makarios, according to Henry Kissinger's sarcastic assertion. Touching upon contested issues such as Iakovos's letter criticizing the "revolution" and his support for a Sunday liturgy performed in English, Kitroeff critically engages with the Greek diaspora's junta politics as a whole and the Greek-American community's lack of a resolute stance toward the regime (225). Another chapter, on US-Greek relations around the time of the 1967 coup, is written by James Edward Miller, a veteran analyst and mentor of sorts to journalist Alexis Papachelas (whose recent book, *A Dark Room*, offers new insight into some of the topics in this volume) and provides a smooth narrative of complex developments regarding American involvement in Greek affairs. In his own contribution, Alexandros Nafpliotis uses mostly diplomatic sources to show how the maxim "business as usual" dictated the relations of Britain and Europe with the junta. Mogens Pelt adopts a similar approach in his chapter on West Germany, which zeroes in on the role of that country's dynamic foreign minister and later chancellor Willy Brandt and the evolution of his policy vis-à-vis the colonels. Both Nafpliotis and Pelt convincingly demonstrate that the West's greatest fear with regard to Greece was the possibility of the country's eventual departure from NATO. They also both show how public opinion and moral sensibilities clashed with individual countries' interests (as in arms trading, for example), all culminating in the key moment of Greece's forced withdrawal from the Council of Europe in 1969—according to Nafpliotis, "the very first instance where an interstate complaint against another member was to be investigated so thoroughly and a ruling made" (269). Finally, John Sakkas offers a succinct account of the highly complex Cyprus Question as the catalyst, alongside the global shock triggered by the oil crisis, that accelerated the regime's (inevitable?) collapse in 1974. Surprisingly, Sakkas concludes that "the Colonels' Cypriot policy differed very little from that of their predecessors" (331).

A few key themes permeate the volume. Organized religion, with the Church being scrutinized for its associations to the regime, is one of these.

The language question, namely the use of *katharevousa* as a political and ideological tool, is another. But the strongest conceptual theme, which runs across the volume, is *continuity*. In contrast to other scholarship, most of the chapters start in the mid-1960s and there is a constant thematizing of what came *before* 1967 that can potentially explain what came *after*. By not reading the coup as a full rupture, the volume situates junta history firmly within the continuum of the Greek 1960s but also within international Cold War coordinates and antagonisms. This approach extends to the regime's policies and the main institutions with which it collaborated in order to control the state and society: these include the army, the Church, public policy, and especially political economy (the latter having recently turned into a booming field in terms of new research).

Even though some recent scholarship on the seven-year dictatorship which has been published in Greek—such as the books by Axel Sotiris Wall-dén, Kostas Katsapis and Leonidas Kallivretakis—is left out of the editors' survey of the topic, this volume nevertheless provides valuable insights into both the regime's inner workings and its reception abroad. Many chapters in this book are innovative and refreshing while others offer useful chapter-length syntheses of previous research. Still others sum up existing historiography, offering streamlined versions of otherwise extremely complex and labyrinthine developments. The quality of the chapters is generally high, even though at times a certain unevenness is noticeable in terms of writing style and length. Repetition is one of the volume's weaknesses, and this could have been avoided. Details of the Acheson Plan, for instance, are rehearsed almost identically in a number of chapters. That being said, the majority of the contributions, even the more historiographic and descriptive ones, offer rich primary material as well as depth of analysis.

The editors' conclusions to the volume are a welcome addition as they touch on the legacies of the troubled past represented by the dictatorship. By portraying the 1973 Polytechnic uprising as a "threshold moment" that stopped the regime's "impossible and unacceptable" liberalization attempt (341), Anastasakis and Lagos take a bold stand against revisionist attempts to portray it as an unnecessary event that somehow led Greek society to greater evils ranging from the Cyprus tragedy to a certain culture of lawlessness. Equally or even more acute is their conclusion that the July 1974 moment of the breakdown of authoritarian rule retained a dual conflicting significance in the subsequent intergenerational memory, as a moment of national tragedy, on the one hand, and a moment of celebration for the victory of democracy over the dictatorship, on the other, as well as the start of a new epoch in Greek politics. (341)

The memorial bifurcation and peculiar *bras de fer* between these two crucial “moments”—17 November, or the “transition from below” vs. 24 July, or the transition “from above”—does in fact reflect the complex ways in which Greek society remembers and commemorates the fall of the regime and its legacies. This timely and up-to-date volume paves the way for even more innovative and systematic research on the regime and its afterlives in the years to come.

KOSTIS KORNETIS
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

REFERENCES CITED

Kallivretakis, Leonidas. 2017. *Δικτατορία και μεταπολίτευση* [Dictatorship and Transition to Democracy]. Athens: Themelio.

Katsapis, Kostas. 2013. *To «πρόβλημα νεολαίας». Μοντέρνοι νέοι, παράδοση και αμφισβήτηση στη μεταπολεμική Ελλάδα 1964–1974* [“Youth as a problem”: Modern times, tradition and contestation in postwar Greece 1964–1974].

Klapsis, Antonis, Constantine Arvanitopoulos, Evangelia Hatzivassiliou, Effie G. H. Pedaliu (eds.). 2020. *The Greek Junta and the International System: A Case Study of Southern European Dictatorships, 1967–74*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Maronitis, Dimitris N. 1972. “Arrogance and Intoxication: The Poet and History in Cavafy.” Translated by A. A. Fatouros. In *Eighteen Texts*, edited by Willis Barnstone, 117–134. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [Originally published in Greek in 1970 by Kedros]

Papachelas, Alexis. 2021. *Ένα σκοτεινό δωμάτιο: Ο Ιωαννίδης και η παγίδα της Κύπρου. Τα πετρέλαια στο Αιγαίο. Ο ρόλος των Αμερικανών* [A dark room: Ioannidis and the trap of Cyprus, the oil at the Aegean Sea, the role of the Americans]. Athens: Metaichmio.

Sourlas, Pavlos (ed.). 2016. *Η δικτατορία των συνταγματαρχών και η αποκατάσταση της δημοκρατίας*. [The Colonels’ dictatorship and the restoration of democracy] Athens: Idrymatos Voulis ton Ellinon.

Walldén, Sotiris. 2009. *Παράταιροι εταίροι. Ελληνική δικτατορία, κομμουνιστικά καθεστώτα και Βαλκάνια 1967–1974* [Awkward partners. The Greek dictatorship, communist regimes and the Balkans, 1967–1974]. Athens: Polis.

Dimitris Keridis and John Brady Kiesling, eds., *Thessaloniki: A City in Transition, 1912–2012*. London and New York: Routledge, 2021. Pp. xvii + 390. 54 illustrations. Paper £29.59.

The history of Thessaloniki attracts many researchers from various countries, not only Greeks—and not without good reason. Thessaloniki has some features