What's in a Name?

The Third Hellenic Civilisation

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Abstract

The ‘Third Hellenic Civilisation’ was the principal propaganda innovation of the 4th of August regime and the core myth underpinning its ideological hegemony. Though regularly referred to as the central ideological slogan of the regime, there are no extensive discussions of its meaning and uses. This article attempts a comprehensive analysis of the term and the ways this futural discourse was employed as an instrument of legitimacy. By declaring the connection of the Third Hellenic Civilisation to art, literature, and culture in general, and granting the cultural field relative independence, Metaxas enabled intellectuals to assay their own interpretations of its meaning and proposals for its attainment. The article approaches the Third Hellenic Civilisation as a compound construct that was intended to act as a new ‘sacred canopy’, presenting the dialogue between official and intellectual discourses on its central aspects.

Keywords


The ‘national historian’ of modern Greece, Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos (1815–1891), ‘introduced the terms First Hellenism, Macedonian Hellenism, Christian Hellenism, Medieval Hellenism, [and] Modern Hellenism’ in the nineteenth century, and by doing so he ‘constructed a teleological sequence in the Greek national history with long-term consequences’.1 One such conse-

1 Antonis Liakos, ‘Hellenism and the Making of Modern Greece: Time, Language, Space,’ in
quence was arguably the emergence of the slogan ‘Third Hellenic Civilisation’ in the late 1930s. Claims that the first formulation of the concept was made in 1919 by the Greek High Commissioner of Smyrna, Aristeidis Steryiadis (1861–1949), who had been appointed by the liberal PM Eleftherios Venizelos, appear problematic. Nonetheless, when it comes to the content of the slogan, this could be yet another domain in which Ioannis Metaxas indeed relied on the blueprints of Greek national liberalism. He particularly borrowed or continued aspects of the programme of the Venizelos government from 1928 to 1932.

Most of the ideas associated with the Third Hellenic Civilisation had been laid out by Venizelos’s Minister of Education, Yeoryios Papandreou (1888–1968), in the early 1930s, with Metaxas’s speeches often mirroring some of Papandreou’s statements almost verbatim. Even within the framework of the regime, however, attribution of the concept to Metaxas has rightly been disputed. In keeping with the Führerprinzip, which the regime adopted as its organisational principle and promoted for the entire nation, every major idea or achievement was credited to Metaxas. It was

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2 Spyridon Y. Ploumidis, Το καθεστώς Ιωάννη Μεταξά (1936–1941) [The Ioannis Metaxas regime (1936–1941)] (Athens: Viviropoleion tis Estias, 2016), 58. Ploumidis relies solely on the testimony of Michail L. Rodas (1884–1948), found in his posthumously published memoir on the Greek presence in Asia Minor from 1918 to 1922, wherein the author, a writer, critic, and journalist who had served as director of the High Commission’s Press and Censorship Office, merely states that Steryiadis ‘told all those who would visit him that [the expansion of] Greece in Asia Minor will create the third or fourth Hellenic civilisation’, Michail L. Rodas, Η Ελλάδα στη Μικράν Ασία (1918–1922) [Greece in Asia Minor (1918–1922)] (Athens: Typografeia Kleisiouni, 1950), 87.


5 The most characteristic statements by Papandreou are quoted in Matthiopoulos, ‘[Greece’s participation in the Venice Biennale],’ 189–190.

6 Ibid., 698.
often claimed by Metaxas and his supporters that the dictator had ‘declared’ or ‘preached’, or imparted the slogan of, the Third Hellenic Civilisation to the Greek nation from day one. This was a false claim, on more than one count. The term was introduced by the Deputy Minister of Press and Tourism, the Greek equivalent of the Minister of Propaganda, Theologos Nikoloudis (1890–1946) in December 1936, and it was not until well in 1937 that Metaxas made public use of it. Shortly after Metaxas’s passing in early 1941, while praising the dictator for his vision, Nikoloudis claimed authorship of the content of the term as well, moving its origins back to 1926. Before espousing the term, Metaxas had laid out his vision for the ‘elevation of Greek civilisation and culture’. He considered this a ‘great ideal for the Greek people’ and a major aim for his government. On that occasion, he associated this ‘cultural elevation’ with ‘modern civilisation’, which should not be envisaged as ‘expansive’ but as ‘intensive’. This was something that reverberated in various texts discussing the Third Hellenic Civilisation and the way towards its creation. Nevertheless, that speech was given more than a month after the 4th of August 1936.

This article seeks to move away from older approaches to the regime’s principal propaganda innovation that only mention the term in passing and subsume it under the charge that the Greek dictatorship’s ideology and rhetoric lacked coherence and concreteness. After all, similar charges have been levelled against most interwar fascist and para-fascist regimes and movements. References to the Third Hellenic Civilisation were not mere rhetoric and my aim in this article is to take the construct seriously and offer an analysis of its various aspects. Faced with the crisis of authority and legitimacy that plagued Greece in the 1930s, Metaxas aspired to form a new ideological hegemony. This belief system relied significantly on pre-existing ethnocentric ideas, while borrowing selectively from contemporaneous authoritarian and fascist regimes and

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8 The first public references to the term by Nikoloudis and Metaxas seem to be Theologos Nikoloudis, Το Νέον Κράτος και η Τέχνη [The New State and Art] Ελεύθερον Βήμα [Free Tribune], 18 December 1936, 1–2; and Metaxas, [Speeches and thoughts], vol 1, 197 (13 June 1937).


10 Metaxas, [Speeches and thoughts], vol. 1, 35 (6 September 1936).
movements. The construct of the Third Hellenic Civilisation was the spearhead in this pursuit of hegemony, functioning as the new ‘sacred canopy’ in place of the obsolete Megali Idea or Great Idea. Nevertheless, this does not negate the fact that the Third Hellenic Civilisation was often designated by Metaxists themselves as a ‘slogan’ rather than a tangible programme and so could be defined as an ‘empty signifier’ or an ‘empty formula’. In declaring its close connection to art, literature, and culture in general, and granting the cultural field relative autonomy, the dictator enabled intellectuals to develop their own interpretations of its meaning and proposals for its attainment.

The regime’s control over the cultural sphere followed an upward trajectory, with the symbol of its centralising efforts being the Directorate of Letters and Fine Arts (1937; Directorate-General from 1939) and particularly the person at its helm, Kostis Bastias (1901–1972). Bastias assumed multiple additional roles exemplifying the spirit of the Führerprinzip in the domain of culture: Government Commissioner for the Cultural Centre that the regime established in 1938; General Director of the Royal Theatre, 1937; Government Commissioner for the semi-state Kotopouli Theatre, 1939; General Director of state theatres, 1939; as well as head of the department of Ethnology and Folklore that was established in 1939 as part of the Directorate of Fine Arts at the Ministry of Education. According to the Directorate’s own annual reports, periodicals, theatre companies, and cultural associations were supported financially and thus were co-opted and controlled indirectly.

Nevertheless, the dictatorship allowed artists and writers to create and work within a context of relative freedom, so long as they did not openly turn against the regime or its principal values. While bandit fiction was banned as ‘harmful to the moral outlook of the public’, surrealists and followers of Anglo-Saxon modernism were not prohibited from producing and publishing. Some of the most representative early manifestations of literary modernism in Greece


13 Article 41 of the Emergency Law 1092/1938 [FEK 68/22.2.1938].
emerged during the dictatorship, for example the novels *Difficult Nights* (1938) by Melpo Axioti and *Figaro’s Solo* (1939) by Yiannis Skarimbas, as well as Nikos Engonopoulos’s surrealist poetry collections *Do Not Talk to the Driver* (1938) and *Clavicembalos of Silence* (1939). Even requests such as that of academic painters in late 1937 to receive preferential treatment vis-à-vis the modernist ‘Free Artists’ group in the upcoming First Panhellenic Artistic Exhibition organised by the regime were rejected by the dictator, who proclaimed: ‘The Greek State of today will support art, not a specific artistic style…. Art requires freedom for its growth…. The State may sometime interfere in the development of art when exhibitions with indecent pictures appear…. Art will be free to be judged by society…. So let us not impose restrictions upon art. You can rest assured that the State will be even-handed and will not want to support a certain trend at the expense of another’.

Metaxas’s far-reaching reliance on German blueprints, from Prussian militarism and the imperial ideals of Wilhelmine Germany to Conservative Revolutionary and National Socialist thought, is also attested in his stance towards art and culture. His regime stylised itself as a *Kulturstaat*, upholding national culture, supporting arts and art producers materially, and setting the groundwork for the creation of a Third Hellenic Civilisation. In his opening speech for the aforementioned exhibition a few months later, Metaxas made claims similar to those he had put forth in his exchange with the academic painters. He also suggested art was not a personal creation but the result of collective culture and that artists were determined by social, geoclimatic, and, quite importantly, racial conditions. Yet, the cultural policy of his regime and his own views on the matter more closely resembled those of Mussolini than of Hitler. While art relying on folk sources and the Greek ‘soul’ or past was recommended and only xenomania and aping of foreign models were discouraged, Metaxas held no notions of degenerate art, which was one of the reasons he had rejected the requests of academic painters who talked precisely in such terms about modernism. His unwillingness to prohibit or accredit particular artistic trends was
likewise reminiscent of Italian Fascism, where, despite the received wisdom originating from its cohabitation with Futurism, there was no officially sanctioned aesthetic.\textsuperscript{18}

Several of the dictatorship’s initiatives in the domain of arts and letters could be seen as landmarks in the country’s cultural history, as they fulfilled longstanding requests by literati, artists, and intellectuals and set the pace for subsequent cultural policy. The regime instituted state literature awards, provided salaried posts or honorary pensions to writers, and funded periodical publications and special issues dedicated to particular writers. It inaugurated the annual Artistic Exhibition in 1938, allocated ample funds for commemorative and monumental art as well as for artwork purchases, while encouraging local authorities and private entities such as banks to purchase the works of Greek painters. The Royal Theatre was revamped and undertook a highly celebrated tour in England and Germany in 1939, while new theatrical institutions were established, such as the Fascist-inspired Wagons of Thespis (1939) which toured the Greek countryside and the Lyrical Scene in Athens (1939). Theatre tickets were often subsidised in the manner of a Nazi-inspired programme for ‘people’s tickets’.\textsuperscript{19}

The dictatorship saw literary and art critics as useful intermediary elites that could take the role of organic intellectuals, propagators of its ideas, and vital assistants in the endeavour for national cultural renewal and development. Whereas literary and art criticism was banned in Nazi Germany in November 1936,\textsuperscript{20} Metaxas bestowed upon criticism an important ‘gardening’ role, essential for the ‘blossoming’ of modern national literature and art.\textsuperscript{21} This explains why public debate on the Third Hellenic Civilisation was rendered a privileged ground for critics and other cultural operators.\textsuperscript{22} What follows examines the main coordinates of the construct of the Third Hellenic Civilisation as they emerged from this debate.

\textsuperscript{18} Roger Griffin, \textit{Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler} (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 227–228.
\textsuperscript{21} Metaxas, [Speeches and thoughts], vol. 1, 346 (21 March 1938), 434 (20 December 1938).
\textsuperscript{22} The term ‘cultural operator’ is taken from Italian Literary Studies and is used to denote individuals who undertake multiple creative and mediating roles within the cultural field; see for instance Robert S.C. Gordon, \textit{An Introduction to Twentieth-Century Italian Literature: A Difficult Modernity} (London: Duckworth, 2005), 34.
The Spiritual: Culture and the Mythic Core

The *Megali Idea*, or Great Idea, was the national myth that nurtured generations of Greeks from the nineteenth century until the 1922 'Asia Minor Catastrophe'. Greek nationalists often pushed its origins back to the Middle Ages when Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire were conquered by the Ottomans. The Great Idea incorporated irredentist and restorative objectives, envisaging the liberation of ‘unredeemed brothers’ or fellow Greeks under foreign rule, the (re)conquest of territories considered ‘historically Greek’, and the revival of the Byzantine Empire with the transfer of the state capital to a reclaimed Constantinople. The fall of the Great Idea that followed the Greek defeat in Asia Minor and the eradication of the Greek-Orthodox communities in the region meant the disintegration of a symbolic system of transcendence, exposing the terror of the void.23 In its resounding collapse, it unleashed forces of existential angst that were partly responsible for the turn of many Greek intellectuals to the Left in the years immediately thereafter and for the melancholic outlook of the 1920s poetic generation. For the Metaxas regime, the response was to advance a terror management system in at least two ways: the promotion of religion and the intensification of nationalism. Metaxas had appealed for the reconstitution of national(ist) ideals even before the dictatorship while he explicitly linked the creation of a new Greek civilisation with religiosity.24 Metaxism has indeed been classified as a form of ‘Christian nationalism’ and the Third Hellenic Civilisation has been closely linked to ‘Helleno-Christianity’.25


24 See for instance two of his most known addresses to Greek youth, the first putting to the forefront national ideals and the second religious sentiment: Ioannis Metaxas, ‘Η νέα ελληνική γενεά δύναται ν’ αναστηλώσει τα ιδεώδη που συνέτριψεν η θεομηνία του Βενιζέλου’, *Η Καθημερινή* [The Daily], 23 January 1935, 3; Metaxas, [Speeches and thoughts], vol. 1, 197 (13 June 1937). For a more detailed discussion of the intertwining of religious and political discourses under Metaxas see Yannis Stamos, ‘Η σύζευξη θρησκείας και πολιτικής στη λογοτεχνική κριτική των χρόνων της δικτατορίας Μεταξά’, in *Η θρησκεία στη λογοτεχνική κριτική του Μεσοπολέμου (1922–1940)* [Religion in interwar literary criticism (1922–1940)], ed. Vasilis Makrydimas (forthcoming); Yannis Stamos, *Culture and/as Politics: The Intellectuals and Ideology of the 4th-of-August Regime in Greece (1936–1940)* (forthcoming).

25 Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin Books,
The near-identification of the Third Hellenic Civilisation with the construct of Helleno-Christianity as well as collective death anxiety can be traced in a 1940 text by Stratis Doukas (1895–1983), a refugee writer and intellectual from Asia Minor who sided with the communist Left from the 1940s onward. Doukas is perhaps the intellectual who articulated the mythic core of the Third Hellenic Civilisation most typically. In his contribution to I Neolaia [The Youth], the official magazine of the National Youth Organisation (EON) published from 1938 to 1941, Doukas set out an open statement on the cultural and educational efforts of EON and referred to the objective of a ‘Third Hellenism’. He defined it as the ‘fatherland’ or ‘homeland’ turned into an ‘immortal image’ and linked it with the vision of the nation’s future laid out by Dionysios Solomos (1798–1857) in one of the national poet’s late poetic fragments, the apocalyptic ‘Carmen Seculare’. 

Doukas was not the only cultural operator to lend credence to the utopian and mythical traits that the regime attributed to the ideological construct of the Third Hellenic Civilisation. Others expressed how the construct functioned as a new ‘sacred canopy’, a myth unifying and stabilising the social system while providing society with signposts for the way forward. A significant example is that of the pedagogue, writer, and critic I.M. Panayiotopoulos (1901–1982), who became Minister of Culture in the caretaker government which organised the first free elections after the fall of the Colonels Junta decades later, in November 1974. Writing on the third anniversary of the ‘great national celebration of the 4th of August’ in 1939, Panayiotopoulos exhibited his fascination with the utopian aspects of the regime and its project of wholesale transformation and elevation of Greek culture. He recognised the overarching character of the new ideal, like a sacred canopy, over all activities of contemporary Greece. Additionally, he traced the deep allure of the ‘slogan of the third Hellenic civil-

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26 Stratis Doukas, ‘Συμβολήσειςαςπροσπάθεια, [Contribution to an effort of yours] Η Νεολαία, no. 22 (March 1940): 674.

isation’ in the near unattainability of its content, its utopian dynamic. At the same time, Panayiotopoulos presented this ideal as the culmination of pre-1936 national(ist) longings.28

This patently metaphysical aspect of the new Great Idea was manifested not only in its association with religion but also through its designation as ‘pneumatikos politismos’ [spiritual civilisation], since pneumatikos can mean cultural or intellectual as well as spiritual. The aim of creating a more advanced spiritual civilisation in Greece was commonplace in the political and intellectual discourse of the time. One example is Nea Politiki [New Politics/Policy], which amongst those surveyed in this article is the periodical that was most pronouncedly oriented towards technology and practical policies. Even Nea Politiki, however, which was first published in 1923 shortly after the Asia Minor Catastrophe with an agenda for reorganisation and reconstruction partly inspired by the advances of the Fascists in Italy, recommenced its publication in 1937 with an inaugural editorial that included an expression of intent to contribute to the creation of a ‘higher spiritual civilisation’.29 In a speech to Athens technicians given by Metaxas that same year, the dictator urged them to act in accordance with the premise that ‘the technical civilisation of a country has to be inspired by a deeper ideal. This is the expression of the country’s moral civilisation’,30 where ‘moral’ corresponded to the cultural and the spiritual.

Thus, the new civilisation that the regime aspired to, and that all Greeks, and especially the youth, intellectuals, and artists were called to work towards, was identified with Kultur rather than Zivilisation.31 The polarity Zivilisation versus Kultur had been a key component of German nationalist and conservative thought since the eighteenth century and was raised to a central position in the Conservative Revolution movement in the twentieth century. Its presence in Metaxas’s belief system was long-standing, as evinced through his personal diaries decades before he assumed power. It was also widespread amongst

29 ‘Σκοπός της επανεκδόσεως,’ [Purpose of the resumption] Νέα Πολιτική 1, no. 1 (January 1937): 2. Similar claims can be traced in the programmatic statements of other Metaxist publications as well, such as the letter circulated by Aristos Kambanis ahead of the inaugural issue of Το Νέον Κράτος (1937–1941) and published in the periodical three years later: Το Νέον Κράτος,’ [The New State] Το Νέον Κράτος, no. 25 (September 1939): 7.
30 Metaxas, [Speeches and thougghts], vol. 1, 240 (31 August 1937).
31 The fact that the ‘Third Hellenic Civilisation’ represented a non-aggressive and cultural form of nationalism is often pointed out in relevant secondary literature, e.g. Marina Petrakis, The Metaxas Myth: Dictatorship and Propaganda in Greece (London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006), 128; Ploumidis, [The Ioannis Metaxas regime], 58.
Greek intellectuals in the interwar years and earlier.\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Kultur}, as opposed to \textit{Zivilisation}, has generally been associated with the ‘accentuation of ethnic differences’ and the ‘cultivation of extraordinary personality’, but its most relevant aspects here are encapsulated in notions of ‘morality’ and ‘true virtue’ as well as in the focus on ‘spiritual, intellectual, artistic, and religious elements’.\textsuperscript{33} The distinction between the two is between internal and external, spirit and matter, idealism and materialism. Myriad statements juxtaposing \textit{Kultur} and \textit{Zivilisation} or their correlates such as soul and cold rationality, privileging the former and criticising the modern-day emphasis on the latter, appeared in Greek public discourse under Metaxas.

In one of the earliest contributions to the post-1922 intellectual quest for a new national ideal, published in a periodical of the Greek diaspora in Egypt in late 1926, Aristos Kambanis (1883–1956) described the \textit{Megali Idea} as the ‘fertile myth’ enveloping all national activity.\textsuperscript{34} Kambanis reiterated this claim in one of his first publications after the establishment of the Metaxas dictatorship, which was part of a long series of front-page articles in the leading newspaper \textit{Ethnos}: ‘The Great Idea during the post-Byzantine years was summarised in the reconstitution of the Eastern Empire: A fertile idea, a creative “myth”’.\textsuperscript{35} Kambanis’s views were not just indicative of his familiarisation with the non-Greek ideological ferment that fed into fascism, such as the writings of Georges Sorel. After all, he had probably been the first to publicly appropriate the fascist label in the country by enjoining anti-Venizelistsof to form ‘squads of Greek fascists’ shortly before the collapse of the front in Anatolia in 1922.\textsuperscript{36} His views were even more important given his later roles as one of the main ideologues of the

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\item \textsuperscript{33} Boyiatzis, \textit{[Suspended modernism]}, 196. For a discussion of these two terms in the Greek context see also Dimitris Tziovas, \textit{The Nationism of the Demoticists and Its Impact on Their Literary Theory (1880–1930)}: \textit{An Analysis Based on Their Literary Criticism and Essays} (Amsterdam: Ad oH. Hakkert, 1986), 320–322.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Aristos Kambanis, ‘Ελληνικοί δρόμοι: Το νέον ιδανικό’ [Greek roads: The new ideal] \textit{Ερμής} [Hermes], no. 1 (December 1926): 21 (emphasis in the original).
\item \textsuperscript{35} Aristos Kambanis, ‘Δύο παραδόσεις—ένα ιδανικόν’ [Two traditions—one ideal] \textit{Εθνός} [Nation], 6 September 1936, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Spyros Marketos, \textit{Πώς φίλησα τον Μουσσολίνι! Τα πρώτα βήματα του ελληνικού φασισμού} [How I kissed Mussolini! The first steps of Greek fascism] (Athens: Vivliorama, 2006).
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4th of August dictatorship and director of its semi-official theoretical journal, *To Neon Kratos* [The New State] from 1937 to 1941.

One could fruitfully compare here Eric Michaud’s analysis of the Nazi slogan ‘Deutschland erwache’ as an ‘awakening into the myth’, that is as an injunction for the German nation to regain the strength to believe in its national myth and experience the national fantasy in every aspect of its life.37 National Socialist idealism was intimately linked to the notion of faith, as exemplified by the title of the first major Nazi propaganda film, *Der Sieg des Glaubens* [The Victory of Faith] (1933), directed by Leni Riefenstahl. Hitler declared the retrieval of faith and self-confidence of the German people as his main objective.38 Metaxas followed suit by proclaiming he wanted to restore the Greeks’ ability to have faith in themselves and in the exceptionalism of their nation.39

The ideological work-in-progress of Metaxism was characterised by an antimaterialist outlook that could be read against a fundamental premise of Marxism. For Metaxism, all great civilisations relied on great ideals, and thus what would be part of the ‘superstructure’ from a Marxist perspective was taken to be the ‘base’. The primacy of systems of belief was corroborated by the pivotal position assigned to education (indoctrination) in preparation for the Third Hellenic Civilisation. The modernist dynamic of the 4th of August phenomenon was manifested in the organised endeavour to create a civilisation, in the will to ‘make history’. The First and Second Hellenic Civilisation did not emanate from a programmatic intervention into the fabric of time with the intention to found a civilisation. Their durability or grandeur, however, was associated with the ideology and values they came to nurture. The theme of purification and a broader ‘gardening’ attitude that were central within Metaxist discourse can be traced here as well: For a Third Hellenic Civilisation, one had to combine whatever was healthy and useful from the living present and recent, mostly cultural, history with cherry-picking and ‘reactivation’ of the virtues and ideals of the previous two civilisations which could be refitted for modern times.

In sum, the construct of the Third Hellenic Civilisation was closely linked to the domain of culture and invested with metaphysical or utopian qualities. It relied on an idealist conception of historical change and was the mythic core of Metaxist ideology. Such myths were intended to be performative. Yet, for the new national ideal to be performed, it had to be internalised by the collective imaginary. Perhaps one of the safest methods to achieve this was to incorporate

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39 See e.g. Metaxas, [Speeches and thoughts], vol. 1, 49 (2 October 1936).
attributes of old and already internalised collective myths or to present it as a modern rebirth of the previous national myth.

A New Great Idea: The National Ideal Revisited

In part, Metaxism constituted a revival of nineteenth-century nationalism at a time when the questions of Turkish domination and irredentism had been superseded by historical events. However, the vision of instituting a Western-style state remained and was reconfigured based on the ideological milieu of the time and on previous alternatives to the Great Idea. Amongst such alternatives one could count the ‘Model Kingdom in the Orient’, Ion Dragoumis’s futural visions, and the rhetoric of a Balkan Federation. The ‘Model Kingdom’ represented a nineteenth-century variant of the central national ideal which prioritised domestic development over territorial expansion and aimed at regional supremacy and recognition from the ‘civilised’ West by means of a peaceful ‘civilising mission’ in the Near East.40 Ion Dragoumis (1878–1920) was a writer, diplomat, and politician who became the main vector for the transfer of Barres’s ideas to Greece and greatly influenced the interwar intelligentsia of his country, including Metaxas, who was for some time exiled with him in Corsica due to their significant positions in the anti-Venizelist camp. Dragoumis objected to the project of piecemeal territorial expansion that had been identified with the Great Idea at his time and postulated various visions for the national future in its stead, such as the ‘Oriental Idea’.41 Visions of a Balkan Federation that would replace Ottoman rule in the European part of the empire had cropped up at least since the late-eighteenth century, with the most famous Greek proponent of such ideas, Rigas Feraios (1757–1798) inspired by the French Revolution. Variations of these proposals would remain in circulation for decades and would gain traction several

times throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, with the last major efforts towards a Balkan Confederacy promoted in the interwar years by the left-leaning Venizelist politician Alexandros Papanastasiou (1876–1936). However, the ideal that had dominated the first century of Greek independence was undoubtedly the Great Idea, with most other counter-proposals overlapping or being conflated with it. Under Metaxas, this Great Idea was presented as reconstituted through the slogan of the Third Hellenic Civilisation, but without its expansive implications.

Already prior to 4 August 1936, Metaxas had expressed himself in favour of replacing the bankrupt Great Idea with a new national ideal. Similar pursuits characterised intellectual circles throughout the bourgeois camp, who often focused on the creation of a distinct, modern Greek civilisation, which would be able to compete with the ‘great nations’ of the time at the cultural level. The demise of the Megali Idea engendered existential angst, which contributed to the diffusion of pessimist and internationalist aesthetics and ideas amongst various intellectuals in the 1920s. Reaction against this phenomenon intensified in the 1930s, demonstrated for instance in the backlash against ‘Karyotakism’, the trend to follow the aesthetic and personal example of the ironic and pessimist poet Kostas Karyotakis who committed suicide in 1928 aged thirty one. In dialogue with bourgeois intellectuals, the regime moved towards erecting a new ‘sacred canopy’ that would take upon the role previously played by the Great Idea.

Shortly before the third anniversary of the coup, the editorial of To Neon Kratos stated: ‘The 4 of August has gifted a new Great Idea to the Nation: The idea of the creation of a new spiritual civilisation—a civilisation both national


and autonomous’. One finds numerous similar statements in aesthetic essays and book reviews. Reviewing a publication on the history of Greece over the previous twenty-five years in late 1939, the main book critic of Ι Neolaia, Christos Angelomatis (1903–1979), casually referred to the ‘Great Idea in the cultural/spiritual form that it has today’.45 Yiorgos Zoras (1908–1982), Professor of Modern Greek in Rome asserted more elaborately in early 1937: ‘If the “Great Idea” of a large State was destroyed, let another “Great Idea”, that of our spiritual [pnevmatiki] mission, of the “Great Mission” of our nation, warm every Greek heart, and let it become the only thought and the only purpose of our life: the belief that from Greece will rise again one day the Lighthouse that will shine once again and illuminate the whole Globe’.46 In an article he published in the foremost literary journal Nea Estia [New Hearth], under the rubric ‘From life and from art’ in 1940, Stratis Myrivilis (1890–1969)—a famous writer whose memory is usually linked with his anti-war novel Life in the Tomb (1924) but came out vocally in favour of the dictatorship and later became a ferocious champions of anti-communism in post-World War II Greece—made explicit the connection between the two ideals and provided relevant instructions to his readers: ‘We are talking about the third Hellenic civilisation. If we want to keep talking seriously about this “Great Idea”, let’s start work from the beginning. And the beginning is to re-erect the bridges of tradition and history’.47

In the second EON convention in 1940, the Government Commissioner of the organisation, Alexandros Kanellopoulos (1913–1983) claimed that the Third Hellenic Civilisation was the resurrection of the eternal Great Idea of Hellenism.48 Palingenetic discourse, which was often related to the Greek nation or society in Metaxist discourse, was also applied to the new ideal. The objective of a Third Hellenic Civilisation became a vehicle for recreating the Greek nation and was supposed to be the recreated form of the Megali Idea. Although Kanellopoulos’s statements were a form of mythmaking, they point to a useful line of thought, as it was from the 1850s onwards that the concept acquired its irredentist connotations.49 In its early stage, the Great Idea did not have any

military implications. It was rather a civilising or missionary ideal that assigned Greece the role of a transmitter of Western civilisation to the Orient.\textsuperscript{50}

Even though this ideological construct echoed previous futural slogans and conceptualisations and drew on the national past, the Third Hellenic Civilisation was not a conservative vision of restoration. In this respect, it demonstrated elective affinities not so much with the \textit{Megali Idea} in its military conceptualisation, but rather with the modernising, national(ist) liberal tradition of the nineteenth century and the interwar years. The former envisaged territorial expansion with the supposed final aim of reconstituting the Byzantine Empire, whereas the latter focused on modernisation and the demonstration of Greek supremacy and exceptionalism through domestic achievements. Manifestations of this latter strand, aside from the nineteenth-century concept of the 'Model Kingdom in the Orient', also included the proposals for a 'new Great Idea' put forward in the last years of Venizelos's premiership. Such a combination of a nationalist and modernising or modernist dynamic was also seen in Italian Fascism, which claimed the legacy of the \textit{Risorgimento}, a product of nineteenth-century Italian liberalism.\textsuperscript{51}

The middle interwar period witnessed a plethora of cultural projects and proposals that aspired to take on the role of the new Great Idea. For example, Spyridon Loverdos, the vice-president of the Supreme Economic Council of Greece, art collector, owner of Greek Arts sa, and bankroller of the fascist organisation National Union of Greece (\textit{e.e.e}), had posed the creation of 'Modern Greek rhythm' as the new ideal; a uniquely Greek aesthetics, it would pervade all forms of art, including architecture, town planning, interior design, and decor. This was not unrelated to his business activities in Greek Arts sa, which dealt in applied art products intended to meet modern needs and international aesthetic standards while drawing on Greek artistic and decorative models from antiquity to modern folklore. Loverdos's proposal prompted a broad debate on the possibility for a modern Greek style and the ways to achieve it.\textsuperscript{52}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Kremmydas} Kremmydas, [The Great Idea], 25, 28.
\bibitem{Loverdos} The most emblematic text is Spyridon Loverdos, 'Είνε σήμερον δυνατή η δημιουργία Νεοελληνικού Ρυθμού;' [Is it possible today to create a Modern Greek Rhythm?] \textit{Εργασία}, no. 104 (1931): 1383, but Loverdos promoted this ideal through several other articles in the press as well as public speeches in 1931 and 1932. About his sociopolitical profile, his cultural
\end{thebibliography}
Several men of letters and politicians participated in a survey that the Venizelist weekly *Ergasia* [Work] undertook in 1932 on the basis of his article, including the politician and former prime minister Alexandros Papanastasiou and the writer Zacharias Papandoniou (1877–1940). Under Metaxas such aspirations re-circulated and were promoted by various intellectuals, such as Yiannis Chatzinis (1900–1975), the main literary critic of the pro-Metaxas literary magazine *Pnevmatiki Zoi* [Spiritual/Cultural Life] published from 1936 to 1941, who posited national style as the ‘greatest conquest’ for a people and advocated cultural contact with the West as a prerequisite for the consolidation of a modern Greek style.

The ‘1930s generation’, the most illustrious loose grouping of modern Greek writers and artists to date, explicitly aspired not only to shape this modern Greek style according to its own aesthetic and ideological choices, but also to export it, using it as ‘currency’ to be accepted in the wider European(ised) cultural market. This linkage between the introvert concept of Greekness and extrovert aims of equal participation in the international cultural arena was also championed by pro-regime intellectuals, many of whom have often been associated with the ‘1930s generation’, such as Panayiotopoulos, Myrivilis, and Chatzikyriakos-Gikas. It is remarkable that many Metaxist intellectuals were actually more open to foreign influences and promoted an assimilationist thesis, namely that Hellenism’s magnificence rested on its ability to absorb and Hellenise foreign elements, while the supposed liberal core of the ‘Generation of the ’30s’, gathered round the periodical *Nea Grammata* [New Letters] (1935–1940, 1944–1945), promoted the absurdly xenophobic model of the *fin-de-siècle* ultranationalist writer and essayist Periklis Yiannopoulos (1869–1910).

The late 1920s and early 1930s had also witnessed quests for a new ‘sacred canopy’ that had an even more markedly international tenor, such as Angelos Sikelianos’s (1884–1951) Delphic Idea, the mystical poet’s ambitious project to turn Delphi, and consequently Greece, into the spiritual centre of the world; or ‘New humanism, the ideological capstone of the socio-political arrangement that Theotokas advanced’, which ‘aspired to fill the void of meaning in Greece and Europe’.56 New humanism was not only advocated by Yiorgos Theotokas (1906–1966), the novelist and putative central thinker of the ‘Generation of the ’30s’, but represented a wider trend in Europe in the 1930s. Several relevant texts by foreign intellectuals, including Thomas Mann and Georges Duhamel, were published in Nea Politiki during the dictatorship, mostly in translation by the philosopher and pedagogue Elli Lambridi (1896–1970) who personally advocated similar views.57 Several Metaxist intellectuals associated the Third Hellenic Civilisation with Europe, the West or global civilisation, even at times explicitly setting the objective to turn the new Greek civilisation into the spiritual foundation of modern, western civilisation.

Shortly after the August coup, Metaxas identified his conception of the new civilisation with the way in which ancient Greeks allegedly meant civilisation and he defined it as a ‘great ideal, because it gives to the people . . . the feeling of domination, domination not over territories, but of civilisation, domination over others through its civilisation’.58 In a 1935 newspaper article, the then soon-to-be dictator claimed that the ancient conception of the Great Idea was that of ‘Hellenism’s supremacy wherever it is located and acts’.59 In their attempt to form a new ideological hegemony, Metaxas and his supporters had recourse to multiple earlier ideas and debates related to the formation of a national ideal. The result was an ideological construct that bore resemblance to the Great Idea but replaced territorial expansionism with cultural imperialism.

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58 Metaxas, [Speeches and thoughts], vol. 1, 35 (6 September 1936).
59 Metaxas, ‘[The new Greek generation can restore the ideals].’
Reconnection Forwards

Various statements by pro-regime intellectuals demonstrated an understanding of the national past as a basis for the future civilisation. One could compare here Ion Dragoumis’s argument regarding the creation of a new Greek civilisation expressed at an earlier time of national optimism. Just after the end of the Balkan Wars of 1912 to 1913, when a similar sense of rebirth, new beginnings, and reconnection forwards under the charismatic leadership of Eleftherios Venizelos and Constantine I emerged, Dragoumis published a lengthy, seminal essay titled ‘Hellenic Civilisation’. He claimed that the study of folk culture ‘will not help history but the creation of new life and art’. For Dragoumis, this endeavour did not aim at recording knowledge about indigenous traditions in ‘history, dictionaries, and museums’. Rather, it was the means ‘for us to get to know our self and move steadily forward’.60 The certainty about the need for, and the possibility of, a kind of mystical or spiritual return with a view to the future was typical of pro-dictatorship intellectuals, many of whom, like Metaxas himself, were profoundly influenced by Dragoumis. It also encapsulated the idea of a ‘reconnection forwards’, first postulated by the conservative revolutionary Moeller van den Bruck in his 1923 book Das Dritte Reich.61

In keeping with the emphasis on the cultural character of the new civilisation and notions of vitality, spontaneity, and liveness (as opposed to mechanical, artificial, mimetic, scholastic, and dead), the relationship of the third civilisation to the former two was often presented in terms of ‘substance’ and ‘spirit’ and not of form. Aristos Kambanis discussed the ‘new Hellenic civilisation’ in such terms shortly after the coup.62 Following the introduction of the appellation ‘Third Hellenic Civilisation’ by Theologos Nikoloudis, Kambanis was among the first critics to employ it, endowing it with a refined version of features he had already associated with the new civilisation. It has even been suggested that Nikoloudis and Kambanis were those that ‘processed’ or propounded the ‘doctrine of the Third Hellenic Civilisation’.63 Kambanis prescribed the quest for ‘new artistic forms within the spirit that permeates the great Hellenic civilisations of the past’. On this basis, the critic outlined two variations of the term ‘Third Hellenic Civilisation’, which ran through several

61 About the concept of ‘reconnection forwards’ see Griffin, Modernism and Fascism, 132.
62 Kambanis, ‘[Two traditions— one ideal]’.
63 Takis Kayialis, Η επιθυμία για το μοντέρνο: Δεσμεύσεις και αξιώσεις της λογοτεχνικής διανόησης στην Ελλάδα του 1930 [The desire for the modern: Commitments and aspirations of the literary intelligentsia in Greece in the 1930s] (Athens: Vivliorama, 2007), 210–211.
subsequent discussions of the same issue by other critics and intellectuals. One was what could be defined as a ‘creative continuation’ of the ‘substance’ of past civilisations, whereas the other constituted a synthesis. His text suggested a synthesis of elements of the past with the present. What was once ‘alive’, ‘vital’, and ‘valuable’ in different eras of the national past should be integrated with what is ‘alive’, ‘vital’, and ‘valuable’ in the national present.

This discussion, however, relied on a consensus amongst many critics, (wo)men of letters, and artists alike that the level of modern Greek culture was very low and that there was virtually no cultural production worthy of its name. This was expressed, for instance, in one of Kambanis’s 1936 articles, which concluded that ‘the modern Greek civilisation is an affair of the future’. Likewise, the painter Nikos Chatzikyriakos-Gikas (1906–1994) claimed, in his early-1938 aesthetic essay published in Kambanis’s periodical, that there is no ‘Greek art’ at the moment and a modern artistic tradition has to be created. Gikas had studied in Paris and relied upon modernist artists both aesthetically, such as Georges Braque, and ideologically, such as Le Corbusier whom he knew personally and corresponded with, in his quest for the creation of Greek art.

Another characteristic example was the art critic, journalist, and publisher of the major newspaper *Estia* [Hearth] Achilleus Kyrou (1898–1950) with his 1937 text entitled ‘Greece and Art’, where he called for submergence into the cultural inheritance of the nation. Supposedly, this would result in the debunking of modernist artworks and ‘almost automatically’ would create a new Greek Art drawing on tradition, national land, and the ‘contemporary life of the Greek people’. Similar abstractions about the way forward were found in several other texts from the period. The dissemination of education, culture or a particular idea would create a new Greek civilisation by itself. Recurring notions supporting this case were those denoted by words such as ‘automatically’ or ‘natural’ along with those of ‘recovery’, ‘retrieval’ or ‘awakening’, which suggested the spontaneous creation of authentic Greek culture as an organic development, a mere unravelling of traits lingering within the national psyche, genes, or soil.

For Stratis Myrivilis, this was a process that surveyed and classified past cultural achievements and the consciousness of racial distinctness and continu-

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ity. The publisher and editor of Pnevmatiki Zoi Melis Nikolaidis (1892–1979), a religious journalist and writer from Cyprus who turned into an ardent Metaxas supporter, moved continually within a geoclimatic and romantic milieu that at times oscillated between conservatism and Nazism, grounding the creation of a new culture on the Volksgeist and the national soil. Echoing both Myrivilis and Nikolaidis, the writer Pavlos Floros (1897–1981), who had lived and studied in Germany and was a Nazi admirer, indirectly discussed the question of the creation of a new indigenous civilisation, which he associated with the ‘civilising’ role of the teacher. According to the critic Petros Orologas (1892–1958), another Nazi enthusiast who became one of the few journalists to be tried and sentenced to five years imprisonment as an Axis collaborator, what was required for the new civilisation to spring up was ‘a different return, not just to types, schemes, and systems, but to the soul of Greece’. I.M. Panayiotopoulos employed biological in addition to geoclimatic arguments, linking the Third Hellenic Civilisation to the revitalisation of ancient qualities.

This indicative list points to a widespread combination of quasi-biological discourse with a ‘metaphysics of depth’ among Metaxist intellectuals. The idea that was put forward was that there was some hidden truth or essence to be uncovered, which merely had to be reached for suppressed potentials and fac-

69 Stratis Myrivilis, ‘Νεοελληνικός Πολιτισμός,’ [Neo-Hellenic Civilisation] Πνευματική Ζωή, no. 31 (1938): 248. The author here, as elsewhere in his non-literary output during the Metaxas years, appears to be in dialogue with Dragoumis, particularly with Iadas, [Hellenic civilisation], 17. Myrivilis reiterated his injunction for historical and racial consciousness and expanded on several of the points he made in this text in other publications as well, such as in the series of articles he published in Νέα Εστία in 1940.
72 Petros Orologas, Οι συγγραφείς και η εποχή τους [Authors and their time] (Thessaloniki: n.p., 1938), 23.
73 Panayiotopoulos, ‘[The New State and Art],’ 57.
74 The term is drawn from Dimitris Tziovas, ‘The Organic Discourse of Nationistic Demoticism: A Tropological Approach,’ in The Text and Its Margins: Post-Structuralist Approaches to Twentieth-Century Greek Literature, eds. Margaret Alexiou and Vassilis Lambropoulos (New York: Pella, 1985), 258, where Tziovas links this metaphysics to the ‘problematic of nationism’, which, he claims, consists of a ‘search for hidden essence’ (i.e. “Greekness”) or forces (i.e. “Greek spirit”). The concept is more extensively discussed in Tziovas, The Nationism of the Demoticists.
ulties to be awakened and (re)activated. The ‘metaphysics of depth’ was easy to combine with biological and evolutionary thought, which highlighted the importance of cells and genes while framing change as a form of ‘unfolding’, namely as the mere externalisation of inner capacities. Another characteristic example of this was provided by Panayiotopoulos, who presented the Greek people as a natural creator. After having been turned into a destroyer, the people were now in the process of regaining themselves. For him, this return to the ‘true nature’ of the nation was a means to take a leap forward from presumably sound foundations towards the future utopia. The retrieval of the ‘genuine national character’ from within the remains and the memories of the past would facilitate the creation of the future civilisation because the true nature of the Greek people was that of a builder and creator. Consequently, the people could construct its new (and modern) civilisation themselves, taking advantage of an admirable stockpile of past materials.

Such ideas, when seen in the light of metaphysics of depth and the belief in Hellenism’s ‘smoldering/latent powers’ or eternal substance, intimate a notion of ‘national entelechy’. The notion of entelechy is Aristotelian and, much like relevant ideas expressed during the dictatorship, it is based on inherent capacities but is also performative and attained through personal endeavour. Much more than Aristotle, however, intellectuals sympathetic to nationalist variants of totalitarianism borrowed concepts from Plato. Their statements on the way to the future as a reactivation and translation of ‘true Greekness’ in the modern age sometimes echoed the Platonic approach to truth as the negation of oblivion, as amnemesis or retrieval. For them, national character resided in the realm of eternity and metaphysics much like the Platonic Idea.

What the calls for a reconnection forward expressed was the desire to replace national entropy with national entelechy. A highly anomic situation that was supposed to lead Greece to implosion or utter catastrophe had to be reversed and displaced by the opening of an organised and organic path towards national modernisation and self-fulfilment. Thus, discourse on the reactivation of forces dormant inside the Greek people can be understood on the basis of the

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75 This is made all the clearer through the fact that the term ‘ξετυλιξιά/ξετυλί(γ)μός’ [unfolding, unfurling, opening-out] was often used to denote evolution in the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century. See examples in Maria Zarimis, Darwin’s Footprint: Cultural Perspectives on Evolution in Greece (1880–1930s) (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2015), 19, 89.

76 Panayiotopoulos, ‘[The New State and Art].’ 56.

77 See e.g. Alan Kim, ‘An Antique Echo: Plato and the Nazis’, in Brill’s Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, eds. Kyriakos N. Demetriou and Helen Roche (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 205–237.
assumption that those virtues and ideals were not arbitrary developments but were determined by national entelechy and by what Panayiotopoulos defined as the ‘biological composition of the race’ and ‘the peculiar character of the land’. The ‘race’ and the ‘milieu’ were unchanged. The ‘moment’ had changed, and any effort towards a new civilisation would have to take that variant into account while it ‘restored’ the citizens’ link with the constants of land and nation.

Following the 1939 celebration marking the anniversary of the coup, the most extensive and spectacular the regime ever organised, Nikolaidis focused his editorial on a construct that adorned Stadiou Street in central Athens during the festivities. It consisted of three arches representing the three Hellenic civilisations and was interpreted by Nikolaidis as symbolising both continuity and innovation: ‘Three diverse forms, but all three on the same road, the road that symbolises their deeper unity, their inner continuity and consistency . . . The third arch is unfinished . . . It is the will of the Nation . . . for the creation of the Third Hellenic Civilisation’.  

Even if the Third Hellenic Civilisation recalled the past as it drew attention to a First and Second Hellenic Civilisation, it was an open project associated with the alleged creative power of the nation and the open possibilities of the future. In fact, the number three had visionary and futurological implications in the Bible, something that probably lent more credence to the futural visions and ‘prophecies’ of dictators who foretold, and simultaneously led the way to, the full realisation of a Third Reich, a Third Rome, or a Third Hellenic Civilisation.  

Therefore, although increased familiarisation with and study of the previous civilisations was repeatedly encouraged, their blind imitation or replication was emphatically rejected. According to Panayiotopoulos, such a ‘resurrection’ was impossible and unrealistic. On the contrary, ‘the N. State does not preach any retrogression, but looks straight forwards’. The conclusion that emerges is that pro-regime intellectuals saw the past as an exemplar, a guide, and a source of inspiration, but not as a utopia to be restored. Kambanis for instance had contended in 1936 that ‘a page of Thucydides, a drawing on an ancient vase, a Byzantine fresco, a folk song, a piece of folk needlework can become springboards to new autonomous artistic creations’.

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80 See e.g. Kambanis, ‘[Foreigners and us]’; Kambanis, ‘[Third Hellenic Civilisation].’
81 Panayiotopoulos, ‘[The New State and Art],’ 57.
82 Kambanis, ‘[Two traditions—one ideal].’
The Metaxist project for the future pointed extensively to the national past. Nonetheless, it was also invested with the suggestion that the destiny of Hellenism would only be fulfilled through the Third Hellenic Civilisation. Metaxas had even told the Greek youth, the creators of the new civilisation, that the previous two civilisations were not perfect and that it was the youth's task to ‘complement’ them and make a better civilisation. In this respect, the 4th of August dictatorship was not far from the temporal stance of the Conservative Revolution, which Osborne describes, along with fascism, as follows: ‘It understands that what it would “conserve” is already lost . . . , and hence must be created anew. It recognises that under such circumstances the chance presents itself fully to realise this “past” for the first time.’

Synthesis, Modernity, and the Question of Isolationism

In addition to such conceptualisations of reconnection, another notion that was quite crucial for conservative revolutionaries and fascists alike was that of synthesis. Firstly, the Third Hellenic Civilisation was sometimes presented as an amalgamation of the best traits and values of the First and Second Hellenism. The demand for a synthesis applied also to the formulation of the new ideal itself, which had to be ‘deduced from the two traditions’ of ancient and medieval Hellenism. This demand was extended to the practical issue of creating the new civilisation, sometimes having as loadstars the handful of modern Greek writers and artists who had supposedly achieved this synthesis. Based on the analysis in the previous sections, the new Great Idea could additionally be considered a synthesis built upon earlier ideological constructs that had vied for the position of the overarching national ideal as well as pertinent to the religious aspect of the regime’s futural visions. For Helleno-Christianity lies at the core of the Third Hellenic Civilisation project and it represents the distillate of those values of the two previous Hellenic Civilisations which are seen as still relevant and useful for the accomplishment of the project.

The discussion that led to the demand for synthesis within the context of the 4th of August dictatorship began a few days after the coup with a long series of articles by Aristos Kambanis on the front page of the newspaper Ethnos. In

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83 Metaxas, [Speeches and thoughts], vol. 1, 285 (20 November 1937).
85 Kambanis, ‘Two traditions—one ideal.’
November 1936, based on Kambanis’s texts, Nikos Pappas (1906–1997) hit out at ‘cultural deterriorlisation’ through the columns of another major newspaper, *I Kathimerini* [The Daily], and proposed a campaign to promote Greek cultural ‘territorialism’ with Aristos Kambanis at its helm.86 This and other articles from the same period by Pappas may serve to delineate a parallel transition of young, progressive intellectuals towards palingenetic ultranationalism through the path of syncretism in both Italy and Greece.87 Pappas would later join the communist-led resistance to the Axis occupation and is now known as a poet of the Left, but it is worth noting that his spouse, Rita Boumi-Pappa (1906–1984), had lived and studied in Italy in the 1920s and remained well-informed of the cultural and intellectual developments there as a translator. Claiming that ‘there are many and substantial truths’ both in the ethnocentric and the internationalist intellectual camps, Pappas put forward a synthesis of ‘the most creative’ elements from both camps ‘in order to make a Greek spiritual pre-condition for our new civilisation.’ This was a variant of a dialectical approach, with nationalism being the thesis, internationalism being the antithesis, and a ‘Third-way’ position being their synthesis. This was signified very clearly at the syntactic and semantic level, with the nationalist position postulated as an axiom, ‘It is true that Greece has a millennia-old race, limpid and warm like the sun in its sky’, and the internationalist one framed as an opposition, ‘On the other hand, we have the broader problems. We have the Internationalists, the absolute friends of man’. A parallel polarity that should be synthesised was that between Greek tradition and contemporary achievements. What had yet to be obtained, Pappas claimed, was ‘a moderate fusion of the beautiful traditions of Greek spirituality with the international wisdom of postwar achievements’ and ‘an intellectual principle that will not be buried in backwardness and that will also not cease being Greek in the healthiest way’.88

Much like Kambanis had done already in 1936, and Chatzikiyriakos-Gikas when he contributed to Kambanis’s periodical in 1938, Panayiotopoulos, writing for that same periodical in 1939, stressed the selective appropriation of the legacy of the national past as a means for the modern nation to ‘shape its own tradition’. Panayiotopoulos thus predicated the creation of this new

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86 The term ‘ανεδαφισμός’ could be translated more literally as ‘non-territorialism’, but its use by Pappas could be seen as showing similarities to the use of the modern term ‘deterriorlisation’, especially as used in anthropology.


tradition on the ‘clean-up’ of the ‘inheritance of the past’.89 Another cultural thinker publishing his views on the topic in *To Neon Kratos* in 1940, Professor of Ethnography at the University of Thessaloniki Stilpon Kyriakidis (1887–1964), explicitly placed modern folklore on par with ancient and medieval Hellenism as a distinct, third source of inspiration for the new civilisation.90 However, even Kambanis’s reference to the ‘two traditions’ mentioned above should be set within the context of demoticist and organicist nationalist thought. Modern Greek vernacular culture was often seen as rooted in the middle to late Byzantine period, thus being a part of the second tradition. This meant that while Thucydides and classical pottery represent the first tradition, Byzantine painting and products of folk culture were considered part of the second tradition, the former representing the ‘Hellenic’ and the latter the ‘Romaic’.91

Yet another perspective on the issue was given in an essay by Chatzikyriakos-Gikas’s from 1938, which attempted to undermine the camp of ‘academism’ by presenting its exponents not just as obsessed with classical art but as superficial imitators of foreign models, and to promote modern(ist) art as national. Therein he implied that the creation of the ‘New Hellenic Civilisation’ would depend on a synthesis of all Greek artistic achievements of the past along with the eclectic digestion of useful foreign influences and personal experimentation.92 Such statements should be set against the backdrop of widespread discourses on the assimilative power of the Greek nation, linked to assertions of cultural superiority and justifications of foreign influences throughout Hellenism’s history. The superior qualities of the race allowed it to absorb and assimilate foreign influences and to produce something innovative and at the same time genuinely Greek.93 Alongside Gikas, a wide range of pro-regime cultural operators shared a conception of the synthesis that would spawn the new civilisation and culture not only as a combination of elements from the Greek

89 Panayiotopoulos, ‘[The books and the issues],’ 1655–1656; and I.M. Panayiotopoulos, Τα βιβλία και τα ζητήματα. Εξ αφορμής των “Εργών” του Ζαλοκώστα; [Books and issues: On the occasion of Zalokostas’s ‘Works’] *To Néon Krάτος*, no. 23 (1939): 479–480.
92 Chatzikyriakos-Gikas, ‘[About Greek art],’ 130–132.
past but also in a quasi-dialectical sense. The selective appropriation and acculturation of foreign and modern elements was part of the synthesising process, as it reconciled the thesis of Hellenocentrism and tradition with the antithesis of Europeanism and modernity.\footnote{This polarity is discussed in Tziovas, [The transformations of nationism], 19–29 (see esp. 24).} Panayiotopoulos for instance held that the ‘beneficial elements’ of foreign civilisations and the ‘spirit of the age’ were not to be excluded from the new synthesis, while even Kambanis acknowledged the necessity for ‘loans’ from his first articles after the coup onwards.\footnote{Panayiotopoulos, ‘[The New State and Art],’ 57; Aristos Kambanis, ‘Δια να δημιουργήσον μέν νέαν ελληνικάν πολιτισμόν,’ [So that we create a modern Greek civilisation] Εθνος, 20 September 1936, 1. Cf. Kyriakidis, [The importance of ethnographic work], 655–656. This phenomenon was both more intense and more clearly recognisable in Fascist Italy, where the regime for some time even promoted familiarisation ‘with the latest cultural trends in America, Germany, Russia, and other countries so that Italy would be able to develop a modern culture to match its innovative “revolutionary” politics’. See Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Fascism, Writing, and Memory: The Realist Aesthetic in Italy, 1930–1950; The Journal of Modern History 67, no. 3 (1995): 635.}

Furthermore, I.M. Panayiotopoulos projected an understanding of the Third Hellenic Civilisation that could be compared to Martin Heidegger’s early view of National Socialism that led to his collaboration with the new regime in 1933 and 1934. As late as 1935 Heidegger ‘was alluding to his vision of Nazism creating a new synthesis between a globalising technocracy and the human need for rootedness and metaphysical life’.\footnote{Griffin, Modernism and Fascism, 323.} In referring to ‘whatever modern ingenuity and industriousness manages to create’ Panayiotopoulos was most likely alluding to \textit{Zivilisation} and technology. The Third Hellenic Civilisation was seen as the rallying cry that would lead to the export of the ‘idiom/style of Greekness’ to the ‘civilised’ world. Greekness, this ‘higher, epiphanic spirituality’, would ‘guide and supplement’ modern civilisation.\footnote{Panayiotopoulos, ‘[The New State and Art],’ 57.} As a country lagging far behind Germany in terms of technological and industrial development, Greece could not conceivably give birth to ‘a new metaphysically grounded but technocratically powerful race’.\footnote{Griffin, Modernism and Fascism, 323.} However, modern Greece could supposedly aspire to a Promethean mission, to provide its new spiritual synthesis, its culture, everything represented by the Third Hellenic Civilisation, as the metaphysical foundations of modern civilisation, similar to the role played in the past by ancient Greece, especially with regard to European civilisation.\footnote{Fascist Italy had adopted a similar domestic rhetoric and even tried to export its self-image as the most civilised of the two major fascist regimes. This approach was favoured partic-
Thus, while Nikos Pappas was exceptional in pleading for a kind of syncretism of left-wing and right-wing intellectual currents in Greece, of the legacy of both internationalist and nationalist criticism, synthesis was a crucial component of discourse related to the new civilisation. Furthermore, many discussions of the term pointed to a conception of the Third Hellenic Civilisation as an alternative path towards modernity with national colour: the framework was the nation, the foundation was the national past, but the route was towards the future. The predominant reliance on indigenous sources did not coincide with isolationism but was supposedly the very means for modern Greece to establish itself amongst modern ‘civilised’ nations. The extension or supplementation of Greek tradition and the expression of the ‘style’ or ‘rhythm’ of the Greek land and race were coupled with the desire to bring the ‘eternal’ values traced within the previous Hellenic civilisations up to date and to align the new civilisation with the modern Zeitgeist.100

Conclusion

The discussion in this article demonstrates that the construct of the Third Hellenic Civilisation took centre stage in the regime’s futural discourse and was used as an instrument of legitimacy for the Metaxas dictatorship, something that cultural figures contributed to by promoting it in their public discourse. As a compound construct intended to act as a new ‘sacred canopy’, the Third Hellenic Civilisation had multiple aspects and was open to interpretation and refinement by intellectuals. Thus, the term was discussed in cultural and metaphysical terms and was positioned in the realm of the ‘myth’. It was associated with the Megali Idea and represented a modern revisiting of the national ideal.

Its attainment was bound up with a process of ‘reconnection forwards’ or reactivation of inherent traits, a process that did not necessarily entail either a return to the past or isolationism. On the contrary, most pro-Metaxas cultural operators not only linked the creation of the new civilisation to a synthesis that did not exclude foreign loans but presented the Third Hellenic Civilisation as an entrance ticket to modernity and global civilisation. The creation of the Third Hellenic Civilisation was supposed to once more place Greece amongst the leaders of human civilisation, to re-legitimise its ‘civilising mission’, and to fulfil the ‘national destinies’ of Hellenism.

This analysis also brings to the forefront broader questions regarding the supposed cultural isolationism of the Greek dictatorship, its character, and its relation to the other dictatorships of the time. Over the past few decades, scholarship on the 4th of August regime has tended to classify it as ‘authoritarian’, partly as a reaction to early discussions of the regime which were mostly from a Marxist or left-leaning perspective that classified it as fascist. However, the analysis here points to the validity of a reading of the Greek regime as a novel phenomenon beyond simple authoritarianism, which developed in direct, constant interaction with European right-wing ideological and political developments that emerged in the wake of the Great War. David Roberts, for instance, places it firmly within this new-right universe, without hesitating to pinpoint its ‘fascistising’ dynamic. The stage for a new understanding of the regime was set out a decade ago with the discussion of its hybridity by Aristotle Kallis, and Vasilis Boyiatzis’s emphasis on the fusion of conservative and fascist elements in its ideological composition.

Metaxas was open to foreign sources and developments, as were other regime functionaries and pro-regime intellectuals, who brought in elements from fin-de-siècle and interwar movements and thinkers from France, Italy, 

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105 Boyiatzis, [Suspended modernism], 195–316, esp. 269.
Germany, and beyond—such as Portugal and even Turkey. The dictator’s thought had been influenced by Conservative Revolutionaries like Oswald Spengler and integral nationalists like Charles Maurras, but also by National Socialism and Fascism. It relied on indigenous traditions, including both those of nineteenth-century romantic nationalism and turn-of-the-century modernist reconfigurations of nationalism, particularly those spearheaded by Ion Dragoumis, which had in turn developed in communication with, if not in imitation of, Western ideological currents.

But Metaxas’s syncretism went a step further in that he was the first and only person to attempt such an extensive politics of ‘triangulation’ in Greece. He combined anti-Venizelist and royalist policies and views with positions that had mainly characterised the Venizelist camp. This, at least to some degree, accounts for the fact that the majority of the pro-regime intellectuals discussed in this paper were former Venizelists. Even more interestingly, he associated the creation of the Third Hellenic Civilisation with a policy of peaceful Balkan co-existence or actual co-operation, at least within the framework of the ‘Balkan Entente’, and repeatedly identified laying the groundwork for a new civilisation as an anti-plutocratic ‘Workers’ and Peasants’ State’. This is strangely reminiscent of the label ‘Workers’ and Peasants’ Government’, introduced by the Bolsheviks and promoted by Comintern as particularly suitable for regions with large numbers of poor peasants like the Balkans.

Coming from the royalist, anti-Venizelist camp, of which he had been an outsider since the years of the Asia Minor campaign when he refused to accept the leadership of the army as he estimated the campaign was doomed to fail, Metaxas pursued for years before his 1936 coup d’état some sort of ‘Third way’ politics. He did so in the 1920s, as a leader of the Freethinkers parliamentary party that would stay above the fray of the National Schism, even recognis-

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106 The influence from Salazar’s Estado Novo has been mentioned in relevant literature for decades, but it is only very recently that the first extensive and focused analysis of this interaction was published: Aristotle Kallis, ‘Unlikely Mediterranean Authoritarian Crossings: Salazar’s Portugal as Model for the 4th of August Dictatorship in Greece (1936–1940),’ in An Authoritarian Third Way in the Era of Fascism, ed. António Costa Pinto (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2021), 91–106. The exploration of Kemalist influences remains a desideratum.


ing the abolition of Monarchy in 1924 and joining coalition governments with Venizelist parties in the second half of that decade. In the 1930s, he pursued it more in the vein of the fascistic ‘Third position’, which was heavily promoted in the public sphere by leading newspapers such as Estia, Esperini, and Kathimerini. The bitter conflict between Venizelists and anti-Venizelists may be the cause for the failure of any ‘Third position’ scheme to lead to a stable, sizeable, and independent mass movement, but the goal of national unity on an anti-communist and anti-parliamentarian basis, informed by attacks on individualism, plutocracy, and the degenerating primacy of Zivilisation, were far from absent in the Greek case. Hence the celebration of the regime by the publishers of these newspapers as their ‘partial creation’ and their willing collaboration.

There is considerable consensus on the existence of a ‘caesura’ in the history of the 4th of August regime, placed in late 1938 when Metaxas finally outmanoeuvred conservative circles that stood in his way to absolute power. He then set in motion an accelerated agenda of fascistisation, reflected in increased centralisation, proliferation of state-controlled or state-sanctioned cultural initiatives, the rapid expansion of ΕΟΝ, and the permeation of public debate with the slogan of the Third Hellenic Civilisation, about which the dictator orated at the official celebrations of the third coup anniversary in 1939. The construct of the Third Hellenic Civilisation exemplified the fascist thrust of the regime, being a renegotiation of endogenous, future-oriented national ideals and watchwords as well as a modernist conception premised on synthesis, regeneration, and creative continuation. The institution on which Metaxas based his hopes for the furtherance of his socio-political programme and the engineering of the human material that would ultimately achieve the creation of the Third Hellenic Civilisation, that is the National Youth Organisation, has been described as fascist(ic) even by scholars who otherwise seek to dissociate the regime from fascism.

Instead of being mere fanfare that was ushered into the public sphere by the dictator and a handful of regime functionaries and sycophants with no wider impact, the Third Hellenic Civilisation overdetermined intellectual debates during the dictatorship and had a lasting legacy. Despite its short duration, the 4th of August regime managed to coalesce disparate ideological elements and

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109 See also above footnote 4.


111 See e.g. Ploumidis, [The Ioannis Metaxas regime], 45.
come close to a new hegemony and a new sacred canopy that was to become the dominant ideology of the Greek state for decades following the Civil War between communists and nationalists in the late 1940s. The promotion of the values of the ‘Hellenochristian civilisation’ was embedded in the revised Greek Constitution of 1952 as the primary goal of education, while visions of Greece becoming the spiritual exemplar of an increasingly technocratic and materialist globe facing social tensions and the menace of communism circulated widely in the public sphere at least until the 1970s. Both of these phenomena echo Metaxas’s Third Hellenic Civilisation and were partly promoted by some of his accomplices who were reintegrated in the political landscape of postwar Greece or by some of his ‘apprentices’, such as the Colonels who took power in 1967.

Acknowledgments

This article is part of a research project on the Metaxas dictatorship funded by the Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies at Princeton University.