

My initial yet considered views on *Harley and the Holy Mountain*

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Positive

The book comes across to me as a clever blend of history and travel, and is eminently readable and instructive, with clear and skilful use of words, laced with humour, but also betraying considerable knowledge of Greece, warts and all. It is laden with useful and amusing anecdotes that balance the more serious parts of the book. I detect possible shades of Miller's *The Colossus of Maroussi*, as well as Leigh Fermor, and possibly Woodhouse and Clogg.

Some of the text, mainly about the Holy Mountain, comes across as having been influenced by official descriptions of monastic life, the language therefore contrasting in an interesting way with the generally lighter style of the book.

I actually sniggered at the following: 'My mood is not improved by driving past the Hotel Dionissos for the third time.' (p.132); 'The immediate attraction is there is nothing to look at.' (p. 48) and: 'Hit the road on clapped-out wheels 24 without TripAdvisor, BookingDotCom, Expedia, Airbnb, GoogleMaps, the nanny technology infantilising us as we suck on the teat of Silicon Valley' (pp. 24-5).
Superb!

The story of Christos is a clever, touching yet critical way of highlighting the human aspect of the Greek crisis: 'Oh happy days before greed, fraud, corruption, economic mismanagement, incompetence, irresponsible banking and other naughties of the noughties triggered the Eurocrisis and before a

heart attack left Christos with a pacemaker, ventricular tachycardia and early retirement. His pension was cut by a third to €900 a month out of which he pays €750 to service his debt, not enough to stop it ballooning to €150,000. “I have a hundred and fifty Euros a month. My wife gave me cement for my birthday. A friend gave me the plastic.” “You’re doing a great job.” “I could drop dead any time.”” (p.112)

I was also touched by the story of Makarios.

I like the author’s personal touch.

Criticisms

The story of the squashed froglets (p.35), while exciting to read, would actually have been funnier if the writer had expressed sympathy for the wee frogs.

I also found the following sacrilegious, over-the-top and otiose: ‘I’m going to stop before I mention the Holy F*****n, venerated in Italy until the last century and alas now lost.’ (p.76).

Comments on facts

Russia’s rôle (pp. 67-72) in Greek freedom should be shown more accurately. This (from one of my books) should help: ‘It is to Russia, not Britain, that Greece owes its qualified freedom (although revolutionary and Napoleonic France also have an intellectual claim), and it was despite, not because of, Britain, that the 1821 revolution ended in independence. It was the Anglo-Russian Protocol of 4 April 1826 that did the trick: it stated that Britain would mediate to make Greece an autonomous vassal of the Ottoman Empire, but that if this proved impossible, Britain or Russia could intervene jointly or

separately. Russia intervened, and by 1829, Greece, or at least some of it, was free.'

As for official Britain's relations with Greece, the Elgin Marbles apart, here's another quote: 'Whatever the simpering protestations of well-paid off designer academics in both Britain and Greece, British policy has been essentially antithetical to Greek interests since the very inception of the modern Greek state. Apart from a few flashes in the pan, and a few individuals like Canning, the only help Greece has received has been from private individuals such as Lord Byron, or public individuals who were brave enough to go against official British policy, such as Admiral Codrington. Britain was forced into helping Greece, to keep a finger in the Mediterranean pie, for fear of Russia ending up as Greece's main sponsor, and weakening Britain's Ottoman friends. The Don Pacifico Affair is an example of Britain's attitude, when Britain actually threatened Greece with gunboats; while during the Crimean War, Britain, with its then French poodles, blockaded Piraeus. In 1916, Britain and France even interfered militarily in Greece, being beaten back by the King's forces, and then getting their revenge by backing the controversial and Britain-friendly Venizelos, who favoured war: he blindly led Greece into a war which was to lead to the famous catastrophe.'

Re the Greek Civil War, criticism of Churchill's policy seems somewhat muted (although the writer does mention the king's unpopularity). Herewith some more quotes from a book of mine: 'The Greek civil war is an even worse story: having supported the strongest anti-German resistance, ELAS, Britain then turned against it, ending up supporting those Greek forces which had been closest to the German occupiers, and fueling a destructive civil war. As Francis Noel-Baker [mentioned in another context on p.79] wrote: 'Instead of making Greek resistance more moderate, more democratic, more truly representative of the mass of Greek opinion, we drove it to extremes.'¹ 'And as Woodhouse so succinctly writes about the December 1944 killings and the subsequent fratricidal

¹ Noel-Baker, Francis, *Greece: The Whole Story*, Hutchinson & Co., London, 1946, p. 43.

war, 'the combined stubbornness of Churchill and the King was the proximate cause of the tragedy.'²

Regarding Russia's alleged rôle in the Greek Civil War, the following is enlightening: 'Extracts from a Foreign Office (FCO) paper prepared for the Foreign Minister, Anthony Eden, in June 1944 show how Britain betrayed their main anti-German Greek resistance allies, essentially because of her obsession with, and distrust of, the Soviet Union (which was for them Russia): '[...] Nor can any accusation be levelled against the Russians of organising the spread of communism in the Balkans.[...] The Soviet Government's support of the Communist-led elements in these countries is not so much based on ideological grounds as on the fact that such elements are most responsive to and are the most vigorous in resisting the axis.[...] Furthermore, if anyone is to blame for the present situation in which the Communist-led movements are the most powerful elements in Yugoslavia and Greece, it is we ourselves. Russia's historical interest in the Balkans has always manifested itself in a determination that no other Great Power shall dominate them, as this would constitute a strategical threat to Russia.[...] whereas in the nineteenth century we had Austro-Hungary as an ally to counter these Russian measures there is no one on whom we can count to support us this time. [...] As a result of our approach to the Soviet Government, however, the latter have now agreed to let us take the lead in Greece).'³

Varkiza: The writer could have mentioned the Varkiza agreement of February 1945. Even the Foreign Office wrote that a number of EAM complaints about

² Woodhouse, C.M., *The Struggle for Greece, 1941-1949*, C. Hurst and Co. Ltd., London, 2002, originally published in 1976 by Hart-Davis, MacGibbon Ltd. P.110. I find it bizarre that Veremis, Thanos M. and Koliopoulos, John S., in their book *Greece, The Modern Sequel*, Hurst and Company, London, 2002, do not mention Churchill's malign rôle.

³ Top Secret Foreign Office Memorandum for Secretary of State, 7 June, 1944, BNA FO 371/43646, file R 9092. in Mallinson, William, *Britain and Cyprus: Key Themes and Documents since World War Two* [really World War Four, see note 13], I.B.Tauris, London and New York, 2011, pp.12-14.

the activities of the National Guard and right-wing organisations had 'considerable justification'.⁴ Greece was, in fact, the only previously German-occupied country that ended up being controlled to some extent by wartime collaborators. (see p. 163) In fairness to the author, he does mention the collaborators.

General

This is a good and readable book, for a general rather than academic market, but I am a history pedant(!). Most readers are unlikely to notice some of the matters that I have brought to your attention. They are more a question of emphasis than anything else, but may be worth considering for the later editions, which I am sure there will be, given the author's track record and lively style of writing. He has managed to effectively blend travel, history and even matters of the heart, no mean feat.

⁴ *FO memorandum*, 12 June 1945, NA-371/48323, file R 10376/48/19.