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Anglo-American bias and the Italo-Greek War of 1940-1941

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Abstract (summary)

The scant attention that Anglo-American historians have paid to the Italo-Greek conflict of Oct 1940-Apr 1941 is discussed. By ignoring the struggle between Greece and Italy, the myth that the UK stood alone from the fall of France until the US's entry is perpetuated.

Full Text

Most Anglo-American historians have paid scant attention to the Italo-Greek conflict of October 1940-April 1941, perhaps because the British played a minor role in Greece and the Americans none at all. Nonetheless, to ignore the struggle between Greece and Italy is to perpetuate the myth that Britain stood alone from the fall of France until the U.S. entry into the war; to distort the roles of the major belligerents, who included Italy as well as Germany and Britain in late 1940 and early 1941; and to misunderstand why World War II took the course that it did.(1) It is therefore worth examining the literature on the Italo-Greek conflict available to the reader of English.

Most monographs and translations available in English discount the Italian role and place the conflict in a German or British, rather than an Italian or Greek, context, and by doing so reinforce the Anglo-German bias that permeates historical works in English.(2) Over the past decade, only John Bitzes and Macgregor Knox have published studies on the Italo-Greek war, but Bitzes is interested primarily in examining the Greek war effort and Knox's discussion is flawed by a strong antifascist bias.(3) Consequently, although Mario Cervi's study was published well before the official history and many of the diplomatic documents were released, it is one of the few Italian works dealing with the war to have been translated into English and remains the best account of Italian military operations available to English readers.(4)

Typical of the offhand way in which the Italo-Greek conflict has been treated is the first official history of British operations in Greece by Christopher

Buckley. While Buckley understandably focused his attention on Imperial units, he also belittled the Italian role and, despite some mandatory remarks about Hellenic heroism, he deprecated the Greeks, thereby reinforcing the impression that only German and British forces mattered in what was essentially an Italo-Greek theater.(5) More balanced is the later, multivolume official history of the Mediterranean and Middle East theaters by Playfair, who discussed Italian strategy and operations in some detail. But he still conveyed the impression that what really mattered were British and German operations. According to Playfair, the Greeks were able to repulse Italian counterattacks in early 1941 "without great difficulty," evidently because "there were many Italians whose hearts were not in the war." Yet he noted that after suffering "heavy losses" during the Italian offensive of early March 1941, the Greeks "had very nearly reached the limit of their endurance," and that the "long fight against the Italians had exhausted the Greek armies and drained the national resources," triggering a political breakdown.(6)

Less objective and less accurate is Hanson Baldwin's survey of the 1939-41 period, which dismisses the Italian attack on Greece as "a tragic military farce." By censuring Mussolini for wrecking Hitler's efforts "to dominate and stabilize his southern flank by political and economic power," Baldwin implied that all Italian actions should have been subordinate to German diplomatic goals.(7) Charles Cruickshank has also discounted Italian goals as irrelevant and clearly considered only German and British objectives in the theater to be worthy of analysis. Not surprisingly, he depicted Mussolini as an unwelcome nuisance who had to be "carefully watched and kept in line" so that his "irresponsible aspirations" would not "endanger German long-range plans."(8)

Such a fixation on Germany and such denigrations of Italians not only distort analysis, they also reinforce the misunderstandings and myths that have grown up around the Greek theater and allow historians to lament and debate the impact of the Italo-Greek conflict on the British and German war efforts, yet dismiss as unimportant its impact on the Italian.(9) Because **Anglo-American** authors start from the assumption that Italy's war effort was secondary in importance to that of Germany, they implicitly, if unconsciously, deny even the possibility of a "parallel war" long before Italian setbacks in late 1940, because they define Italian policy as subordinate to German from the very beginning of the war.(10) Alan Levine even goes most authors one better by dismissing the whole Mediterranean theater as irrelevant, but only after duly scolding Mussolini for "his imbecilic attack on Greece."(11)

Imbecilic the attack may have been, but Italy was a major factor in the war, and there is no question that the British welcomed the Italian attack in an area that they had been trying to "set alight" since June, because it drew off Axis forces that could have been used against British positions elsewhere.(12) The fact that the Italian attack was ill-considered and haphazardly executed does not justify ignoring the critical consequences of Mussolini's action, which effectively gave Britain a breathing spell by tying up twenty-nine Italian divisions, the bulk of Italian seaborne transport, and more than a quarter of the Italian Air Force (IAF).(13) Because Mussolini and the Italian high command considered it more important to supply Albania than North Africa, operations in the Balkans delayed Graziani's buildup in Cyrenaica and allowed the British to mount a two-month-long offensive in the winter of 1940, thus shifting the momentum of the war in Africa, where the Italians had chased British forces out of Somalia and away from the Egyptian frontier.(14)

Nonetheless, at best the Italo-Greek conflict's effect on the Italian war effort and its impact on the war in the Mediterranean have been reduced to a few commonplaces by most **Anglo-American** scholars, who thereby reinforce a popular acceptance of traditional stereotypes. An extreme example is provided by the **Simon and Schuster** Encyclopedia of World War II, which discusses the Italo-Greek war under the heading "Balkans, German Invasion of," and reduces analysis of the Italian role to the inaccurate observation that, "The Italian invasion of Greece in 1940 had been ignominiously defeated by the Greeks, and the Italians were being slowly driven out of Albania." In fact, the Italians had been driven into Albania, but far from being driven out by the time that Germany intervened, they were on the offensive; and if they failed to push back Greek forces, they bled them white trying to do so.(15)

Yet in his history of the German assault on Crete, Alan Clark dismissed Italian forces with the assertion that in Greece the Italians had been "stopped short, beaten, and turned tail," while "the Aegean and the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean up to the heel of Italy had been cleared of enemy (i.e., Italian) ships and aircraft" after the British attack on Taranto in November 1940 and the introduction of Hurricanes into the Greek theater in early 1941. Clark saw Italy's failure in Greece and the Aegean as forcing the Germans "to take over Mussolini's responsibilities in the Balkans in order to secure their southern flank" against the Soviets, and this is what mattered to him.(16)

Of course, such an interpretation not only begs the question of why Hitler had to secure his flank against a country with whom he was not at war, it also ignores Italian air and naval bases in the Dodecanese and assumes the Mediterranean to have been an inconsequential theater--a point of view that would have surprised Churchill and the British, as well as Hitler and the members of OKW in late 1940.(17) London was greatly concerned that it gain successes in North Africa and Greece in order to keep Turkey neutral and to prevent both the Italians and the Germans from dominating the Balkans; and Berlin was not only aware that Britain attached "great importance to the domination of the...Mediterranean," OKW had begun to study ways in which it might intervene in the Middle Sea by August of 1940.(18)

Exaggerating the impact of British operations in late 1940 and early 1941 also gives an inaccurate impression, because London's perceptions notwithstanding, there was never a serious Italian naval or air threat to the eastern Mediterranean owing to the geographical location of Italian ports and airfields; and the handful of Hurricanes in Greece apparently fared less well than the obsolescent Gladiators against Italian aircraft.(19) However, if Italian bases in the Dodecanese Islands lacked the aircraft and naval units to seriously menace the British, they remained a latent threat and an irritant, despite the success of British operations in North Africa; and by early 1941, Churchill was worried that the collapse of Greece might "eclipse" British successes against the Italians in North Africa and adversely affect Turkey's attitude.(20)

But Clark has been in good company. In a work of some seven hundred pages on World War II, the late B. H. Liddell Hart devoted only a handful of lines to the Italo-Greek war. However, he praised Hitler's "amazing military achievement" in attacking both Greece and Yugoslavia and still being able to mount Operation Barbarossa--even though Hitler's unilateral decision to attack Yugoslavia caused considerable problems for the Italians, as the Germans were well aware.(21) Hitler thus confused operations in the Balkans more than they need have been, ultimately triggering partisan movements and civil wars there that sapped Italian, and to a lesser extent, German strength through 1943.(22) As for the importance of the Greek theater, Liddell Hart dismissed its effect on German operations in Russia, and saw it as crucial only because it cost the British "a golden opportunity" to knock the Italians out of Africa.(23)

Unfortunately, Liddell Hart's approach has been typical. Graham Ross also viewed the Italo-Greek war from an Anglo-German perspective, devoted less than a paragraph to the conflict, and echoed the traditional interpretation when he noted that "here too Hitler would have to rescue Mussolini from the results of his military incompetence."(24) In what has become a fairly standard text on World War II, Calvocoressi and Wint also devoted only a handful of lines to the Italo-Greek conflict, despite writing over five hundred pages on the European theaters. Like Liddell Hart, Calvocoressi saw the diversion of Commonwealth forces to Greece as weakening Britain's effort against Italy in Africa, but he made no effort to assess the impact that the conflict had on Italy's effort against Britain in Africa, even though the British were pleased that so many Italian forces were tied down in Albania in late 1940.(25) Primarily concerned with the effect on German policy of Italy's attack on Greece, Calvocoressi concluded that Mussolini had wrecked Hitler's efforts to strengthen German "control of the Balkans" peacefully.(26)

This is a rather remarkable conclusion to draw, given that in July 1940 Hitler had encouraged Ciano to "liquidate" Yugoslavia and to resolve the Greek problem as he saw fit; in mid-September Ribbentrop had assured Mussolini that Greece and Yugoslavia were solely Italian concerns, even after the Italian had depicted Greece as Italy's "Norway"; and in October German penetration of Italy's sphere of influence in the Balkans had precipitated the

Italian attack on Greece.(27) The reference to Norway could not be misconstrued, yet Cruickshank failed to appreciate the confusion generated in Rome by the mixed signals coming from Germany.(28)

Of course, his failure to do so is not surprising, since Knox also strove to explain away the reference to Norway while most **Anglo-American** historians have viewed the Italo-Greek war as a convenient way to explain Germany's decision to meddle in the Mediterranean and to excuse Britain's failure to chase the Italians from the Western Desert in early 1941.(29) Even historians of Fascist Italy have given short shrift to the conflict. Alan Cassels concluded that like other Fascist debacles, Greece "exposed...the sham of Italian Fascism" and was Mussolini's "last important initiative in foreign policy," with the Italian leader following "resignedly in Hitler's wake" after early 1941.(30) Alexander de Grand dismissed the Italo-Greek war as "a masterpiece of ineptitude that threatened to become a national humiliation" and seemed to believe that "the Yugoslav gesture of heroic defiance in March 1941...led to a full-scale German invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece," even though Operation Marita had been approved in the late fall of 1940, and the new Yugoslav government rapidly, and obsequiously, sought to reassure Berlin. Any details regarding the Greek war, as well as military operations in general, are of little interest to him, even though it is clear that the fascist regime was destroyed as a result of military defeats and the Grand Council's decision in 1943, not because some industrialists began to press for a separate peace in 1942.(31)

Denis Mack Smith also skipped most of the military and diplomatic maneuvering during the Italo-Greek war to conclude that the conflict ended Mussolini's parallel war, destroyed the fascist regime's prestige, and made Italy a German puppet.(32) He managed to ignore the military aspects of the conflict by focusing on Mussolini, whose purported "improvident and disorganized attitude to the hard facts of real life" supposedly led to the debacle in Greece. Although he correctly identified Greece as a crucial turning point in the Italian war effort, he then depicted the Italian occupation of the Balkans as comparable to the German by putting Italian discussions of mass reprisals on the same plane as such actual German atrocities as the slaughter of thousands of civilians at Kragujevac in Yugoslavia.(33) This is not to say that the Italians could not be brutal, but as the president of the Greek Red Cross noted, they tended to be more humane and "more civilized" than the Germans, whose behavior was both "cruel and barbaric." (34)

Yet Anglo-American historians have depicted the purportedly inept Italians as doubly culpable, first for sabotaging Hitler's efforts to dominate the Balkans without war, and then for their supposedly brutal occupation of the Balkans, which triggered massive resistance and tied up large numbers of troops.(35) By repeatedly asserting that Mussolini and the Fascist regime corrupted the military, provoked the conflict with Greece for frivolous reasons, and thus caused the debacle there, it is possible to avoid discussing the military reasons for the Italian check in the Pindus mountains, including the performance of Greek forces, and to lay the blame for Hitler's errors on Mussolini rather than censuring the Nazi leader for provoking havoc by trespassing on his ally's sphere of influence.(36) But beyond seizing the opportunity to make glib generalizations and reiterate stereotypes, **most Anglo-American** historians have little interest in the Italo-Greek war and are satisfied to repeat the story of the inferior "Eyeties," who--misled by a "blundering" and "inept" Mussolini--were saved by the genial Hitler and his superior German war machine, which met its own ruin as a result of its generous aid to its pitiable and ridiculous ally.(37)

Perhaps the most succinct summary of the traditional point of view is that presented by J. R. Thackrah, who observed that, "Mussolini's ideas were grandiose, impracticable and not always consonant with German policy." He consequently dismissed the Italian attack on Greece as "more like a whim that [sic: than] a campaign," even though it "seriously distorted the Fuhrer's overall strategy." For Thackrah, Mussolini's jealous and suspicious nature led to a military action that was merely "the unco-ordinated reflex of an ally who was not a good partner"; precluded Spanish intervention in the war; heightened tensions between the USSR and Germany; forced German forces away from the "decisive theaters" to fight in Africa and the Balkans; and, perhaps most seriously, interfered with "Germany's freedom of choice."(38)

This sort of exacerbated Anglo-Germanic bias, which insists on interpreting even an Italian war in a British or German context, contains tacit assumptions about Italians that are essentially racist.(39) There is a stress on the putative military incompetence and cowardice of the Italians, who are depicted as being overly fond of luxury and having little stomach for such manly activities as battle. Incapable of being serious enemies, it is inconceivable that they might have worn down the British in North Africa and prevented their capture of Tripoli in 1941. Rather, the British, who could not admit being bettered in any way by the inferior Italians, gained an alibi with their involvement in Greece. How pervasive is this logic can be seen in Theodore Ropp's classic survey of warfare, in which he concluded that while the British had quickly destroyed Italy's "will to fight," Greece had "cost" Wavell "the forces which might have held both Crete and Cyrenaica."(40) Yet the British hardly fought the Germans at all in Greece, where, as Playfair noted, the British campaign was "from start to finish a withdrawal."(41)

Britain's foolish, and futile, action in aiding Greece is thus made to parallel Germany's support of Italy, and a sort of symmetry is achieved, with the Germans losing the war in Russia because Mussolini's stupidity delayed their attack a crucial six weeks at the same time it led the British to suspend their victorious offensive in North Africa to take on the Germans in Greece because the Italians could neither win nor lose their war with the Greeks. That the British could afford to wait five months before sending land forces to Greece is explained by Italian incompetence, and Britain's rapid expulsion from Greece is attributed to German military genius. The role of the Italians, like that of the Greeks, is merely instrumental: it brings together the two "real" protagonists of the war, Britain and Germany. Knox thus concluded that after Italian setbacks in Greece and North Africa, "the war once more became an Anglo-German duel."(42)

In effect, he interpreted Mussolini's efforts to wage a "parallel war" as a parenthesis in the Anglo-German war, thus unconsciously echoing Croce's dismissal of the fascist regime as a "parenthesis" in Italian history. Because Knox saw the Italians as all bluff, he viewed the conflict as merely one in a series of defeats that made Italy "a German satellite with no more than a consultative role in determining strategy even in mare nostro." Like Denis Mack Smith, he took an extremely censorious attitude toward the Italians, and while such an attitude was in line with a general bias evident in **Anglo-American** historical writing on Italy, it flawed his scholarship.(43) But because his is one of the few efforts in English to discuss the Italian war effort in detail it is worth looking a bit more closely at his views on the war.(44)

The most obvious characteristic of Knox's discussion is that he has seized every opportunity to criticize, even when there was little reason to do so. For example, he censured the Italians for not accepting an offer of German divisions in October, assuming that Roatta's claim that it would take three months to ship the divisions to be specious. Yet in one estimate OKW assumed that it would take two months to ship a single armored regiment from an Italian port to Africa, and in another that it would take four weeks to reorganize and nine weeks to ship and acclimatize 3d Armored. Three months was therefore probably the estimate given by the Germans, who promised to deliver their armored units only in January of 1941-long after they would have been needed either in Greece or in Africa.(45)

Even had German forces been immediately available, the Italians wanted equipment to arm their own troops, not German units to supplant them, just as the Greek wanted weapons and ammunition, not British formations. But Hitler reneged on promises to Mussolini to supply trucks, dive-bombers, and heavy tanks, and instead pressed German divisions and air units on his ally.(46) That he did so seems to have been due to Berlin's intention to intervene in Italy's sphere of influence, where the Germans sought to assume a major, even dominant, role. Hitler and OKW not only wanted to control Axis relations with France, they were anxious to have German forces in Africa and to maintain complete control of those units and their logistics. Rome was thus justified in suspecting that their ally intended to take over operations in Italy's theater.(47)

Knox also condemned Badoglio, and by extension Mussolini, for having a "parochial" vision of the war, because American assistance "rendered a clear-cut German and Italian victory steadily less likely" in the fall of 1940.(48) But in late 1940 the United States had not yet begun to arm in earnest;

Russia was still neutral and effecting a rapprochement with Italy; and Britain was extremely vulnerable to a joint Axis offensive in the Mediterranean. More to the point would have been the observation that Germany's continental strategy was parochial and precluded any sort of viable Axis attack on the British empire. But rather than criticize Hitler and OKW, Knox chided the Italians for not realizing during their meeting with the Germans at the Brenner in early October 1940 that Hitler intended to invade Russia in June 1941.(49) Of course, to have done so would have required a fortune-teller's acumen, especially since as early as 1 August OKW had begun a systematic deception regarding Aufbau Ost.(50)

Knox also discounted Italian efforts to keep the Germans out of the Mediterranean and thus dismissed the idea that Germany's invasion of its ally's sphere of influence was a major cause of Italy's attack on Greece. He instead asserted that the attack on Greece had as "its fundamental purpose...the obvious and long-harbored one of adding Greece to Italy's booty," at the same time observing that Mussolini had to react quickly owing to the German threat to Italy's sphere, since "without swift and unilateral action to safeguard its interest, Italy could expect nothing more than crumbs from the German table." To resolve this contradiction, he concluded that Romania was "the occasion rather than the fundamental cause" of Mussolini's action--a rather casuistic attempt to let the Germans off the hook.(51) Yet the Germans had deceived the Italians regarding their intentions to occupy Romania militarily since at least late August, even though they were aware that Romania was of concern to the Italians as early as the spring of 1940. In short, it seems that Berlin never intended to allow the Italians to preserve a separate sphere of influence.(52)

In a sense, those who embrace Knox's point of view are blaming the victim of German duplicity, albeit a victim with predatory designs on its own neighbors, especially since it seems that at the Brenner Hitler gave Mussolini a green light to attack Greece. Nonetheless, Knox gave the benefit of what small doubt exists to Hitler by claiming that Mussolini's "sketchy grasp of spoken German" led him to misunderstand his interlocutor.(53) Yet given earlier German encouragement of an Italian action aimed at Greece, approval by Hitler to do so would not have been strange, especially since he was primarily concerned with bringing France into the war and preoccupied with planning operations in the western Mediterranean. Conceding Mussolini Greece may thus have been a quid pro quo to assure Italy's approval of Germany's invasion of yet another nominal Italian sphere of influence.(54)

But Knox seemed intent on building a case against the Italians, given that he rationalized or ignored such German duplicity as Ribbentrop's failure at the Brenner conference to inform the Italians that Germany was about to send 15,000 troops into Romania. Knox also seemed oblivious to the implications for Axis policy of Hitler's inclination "to seek victory...in the Ukraine" because of the Italian attack on Greece.(55) Aware that Hitler's initial reaction to the Italian attack was ambivalent and that OKW was far from alarmed, Knox still chose to highlight Hitler's complaint that his ally had acted without his permission, then failed to discuss the significance of either the German leader's reaction or OKW's failure to try to forestall Mussolini. Instead, he dwelled on Hitler's scolding of Mussolini and Britain's attack on Taranto, asserting that the latter was a "judgement" on Mussolini and Domenico Cavagnari (chief of staff for the Italian Navy, 1933-1940), who "had lost Italy's war at sea." He also focused on Mussolini's 15 October meeting with his service chiefs to illustrate the fascist leader's "military dilettantism," and he stressed Italy's dependence on Germany to "rescue" it in Albania.(56)

But Taranto was far from a judgment. Not only did the Italian navy continue to fight for another two years, it successfully protected its supply routes to Greece and North Africa for most of that time with a minimum of German support.(57) And to censure Mussolini for not knowing the limitations of the military on 15 October, and then qualify as "not entirely harebrained" his idea of landing troops at Prevesa to flank Greek positions in Epirus, shows Knox's taste for snappy, and inaccurate, phrases, not the Italian leader's "dilettantism."(58) Clearly it was up to Badoglio and the service chiefs, not Mussolini, to stress the problems involved in occupying Epirus, and while Italian assumptions regarding Greek morale reinforced faulty assumptions, it would seem that Mussolini was let down by his subordinates as much as by his purported lack of expertise in military affairs.

Moreover, it does not seem that the Italians were much more dependent on the Germans after setbacks in Greece and North Africa than they had been before. Aside from sending troops to Romania, not only did the Germans fail to make an appearance in the Balkans until April 1941, save for a few score transport aircraft whose impact was minimal, but Rome had clearly signalled its need for raw materials, machine tools, and weaponry long before it even entered the war, only to find the Germans indifferent to its plight, which was worsened by Britain's blockade of the European continent. Yet Berlin was anxious to import and exploit Italian labor, foodstuffs, and raw materials.(59) In the meantime, the Italians poured men and materiel into Albania, stabilized their overextended and fragile line, and went over to the offensive.(60) But rather than give the Italians credit for correcting an unquestionably critical error of judgment, Knox focused on the collapse of the Lupi di Toscana Division as "a convenient illustration of why the Italy army failed...to do more than slow the Greek advance"--thus consciously or unconsciously misleading his readers.(61)

Knox correctly noted that in late 1940 Italian divisions suffered serious shortages of artillery and transport; that the reservists lacked training in new weaponry; that headquarters were not complete; and that the binary division was ill-suited to mountainous terrain. But he neglected to mention that most Italian divisions did not break. For example, Julia, although almost out of ammunition and totally exhausted, not only managed to hold together, but staged a stubborn, fighting retreat. In other words, because they could not be effectively reinforced, relieved, or supplied, even when Italian units fought gallantly, they could not slow the advance of a numerically superior enemy operating on interior lines with relatively more efficient lines of communication. Moreover, far from living comfortably far to the rear as Knox has implied, the vast majority of Italian officers from the regimental level down fought and died with their troops. But rather than credit Italian units with having held superior Greek forces, he offered a gloss on Hughes, noting that "given the conditions, the manifest ineptitude of their leaders, and their own lack of training, one can scarcely blame" Italian troops for not fighting.(62)

Because it leaves the impression that most commanders displayed similar traits, Knox's discussion of General Bollera as "incompetent" and "ill" is also misleading, as is his conclusion that the Italian army was peculiar in its efforts to save Bollera from disgrace. More germane would have been a detailed discussion of the military operations and the hardships suffered by those units that had been in line during the winter with almost no supplies for over two months. But Knox seemed less concerned with analysis than with building a case against Mussolini and the Italian military. He thus appeared to think it unique to the Italian military to "close ranks in order to protect members from the consequences of failure," and he criticized improvised general staffs for being "negligent" over maps--a shortcoming he sees as "fully in accord with Regio Esercito tradition," even though he had earlier noted that divisional headquarters were incomplete owing to the haste with which units were reconstituted and moved to Albania.(63)

Given the conditions and pressures under which replacement units operated, it would have been amazing had they not been "negligent" regarding a whole range of items. That the German attack in April went more smoothly than had the Italian in October was due not only to the fact that the Germans had five months to prepare their attack on Greece while the Italians improvised theirs in two weeks, but also to the fact that OKW threw in three times the forces needed and attacked an enemy who had already been worn down by the Italians and had no intention of fighting anyone else. (64) Consequently, when the Germans attacked, they easily overran retreating Greek and British forces, while the Italians struggled against Greek rear guards and ran into German forces under orders to block their ally's advance.(65)

Knox's assertions that Mussolini "followed bewildered" in Hitler's wake after early 1941 and that Italy's parallel war became "a subsidiary part of the larger German war" are debatable, especially since it is clear that the more powerful state dominated the alliance from the point at which war became inevitable and Mussolini lost his diplomatic leverage. But Italy was never simply "a German satellite with no more than a consultative role" in the Mediterranean, which remained a primary, not a secondary theater, because it was the only one in which Britain could be effectively attacked.(66) The loss of Greece, the collapse of Yugoslavia, the Axis advance in Africa, and the mauling of British forces during Axis operations in the Aegean from March to May 1941 seriously threatened the British war effort and left London bewildered. Even after Germany's foolish attack on the Soviet Union, the

Mediterranean remained the primary British theater through late 1942, and then occupied large numbers of Anglo-American forces until 1944.

Finally, it is worth stressing that since there was a good deal of infighting among the fascist leadership and the armed forces, and because the Italians lost the war and former members of the regime sought to ingratiate themselves with the Allies, it is relatively easy to find Italian memoirs that are sharply critical of opposing factions, and by combining such opinions, to conclude that all Italian leaders were inept. For example, the depiction by Italy's prewar chief of military intelligence, Giacomo Carboni, of Badoglio's adjutant, Quirino Armellini, as a sycophant seems accurate, given Armellini's characterization of his former boss as a "saint." But Carboni's own objectivity is questionable, owing to his lambasting of Pietro Badoglio (chief of general staff in 1940), Soddu, Francesco Pricolo (chief of air staff in 1940), Mario Roatta (assistant chief of staff prior to the war and chief of army staff, 1941-1942), and the fascist regime for provoking and losing World War II, as if his role as intelligence chief prior to 1940 had been insignificant.(67)

Yet Knox and other Anglo-American historians have not only selectively used Italian sources, they have gleaned negative observations and racist slurs and comments from British, American, and German sources and then presented them as objective depictions of Italian political and military leaders, a game that if played in reverse would yield some interesting results regarding German, American, and British competence.(68)

It is clear that Greece was a turning point in the war because it preoccupied Mussolini and undermined Italy's military effort just as the British were mounting a major action in the Western Desert, and most Anglo-American authors would agree that this was the case. But it is not clear that its major significance was that it stymied British efforts to take Tripoli and brought German units into the Mediterranean because it ended the "guerra parallela." Certainly, the conflict should not be mentioned only in a German or a British context, especially since it was essentially resolved by the time either intervened. Indeed, it is not even clear that the Italo-Greek conflict ended a "parallel war," since the German occupation of Romania in October was merely one of a series of unilateral German and Soviet incursions into Italy's sphere of influence in southeastern Europe, and it is obvious that the Germans were making plans to intervene in the Mediterranean by August 1940.(69)

Germany had infiltrated Italy's sphere of influence long before Mussolini attacked Greece. Hondros thus has noted that German economic penetration was already well advanced by 1940, and Kousoulos has concluded that Italy was already a junior partner before October. Kousoulos also saw Hitler's occupation of Romania as a violation of the Tripartite Pact, and German consent to the Soviet annexation of Bessarabia and Bukovina in June 1940 as a slap in the face to Italy.(70) Nor was the effect of such actions arcane knowledge, since in 1940 the Rivista di studi politici internazionali published an article which speculated that after the Vienna awards and the Soviet annexations, control of the Balkans was disputed and the best that Italy could hope for was a condominium with Germany.(71) Indeed, a mere ten days before Italy's entry, the German agricultural minister made it clear that Germany intended to import foodstuffs from eastern and southeastern Europe--Italy's sphere of influence--to feed the newly conquered German territories of Denmark, Holland, Norway, and Belgium.(72)

Renzo De Felice, whose recent work is the most detailed study of the Italian war effort, believes that by October 1940 Mussolini was worried that Germany might conclude a separate peace with France and Britain, leaving Italy with little to show for its participation in the war. Relations between the Axis powers had reached a nadir, and one of the key elements in Mussolini's decision to attack Greece was undoubtedly his fear of again being faced with a German fait accompli, as in June 1940.(73) One could even argue that the fait accompli had become Germany's preferred method of dealing with its ally, as Attolico did after the German attack on Denmark and Norway in April 1940.(74)

Germany's occupation of Romania may therefore be seen as the last straw in a cynical German policy of exploiting its ally while conducting its own parallel war. That Italy failed to defeat Greece was therefore, to paraphrase Knox, the occasion for German intervention in the Mediterranean theater, but certainly not the cause, and there is every reason to believe that the Germans would have found some pretext to intervene militarily in the Italian theater because they lacked the nerve to attack Britain directly and were looking for someplace to use their armed forces in late 1940.(75)

Although the introduction of massive air and armored formations seemed to cause the tottering Anglo-Greek defense to collapse quickly, the reality was that the British and Greeks retreated so quickly before the Germans that the latter had few opportunities to fight them. And it is far from clear that the Germans "saved" the Italians in Greece, since by April there was no threat of a collapse of the Italian fronts in either Albania or North Africa. Nor is it obvious that the Italo-Greek conflict destroyed Italy's "will to fight," since Italian soldiers continued to fight through mid-1943, if not for Mussolini and fascism, for their country, king, comrades, pride, and their own survival.(76)

Enthusiasm for the war was not high in late 1940, but this was true of troops and civilians in Italy before the attack on Greece, and had to do with such inevitable consequences of war as inflation, low wages, rationing, and the censoring of letters to and from the military--factors common to all belligerents and not to be exaggerated in Italy's case, since morale did not collapse either at home or at the front.(77) Setbacks in November and December did not raise morale, but far from giving up, Italian troops contested the Greek advance "inch by inch" and were proud to serve their country "honorably." As one officer noted, at the front "everyone was your brother" and "everyone was a hero."(78)

Not only has the low level of Italian morale been exaggerated, but so has the high level of Greek morale. As early as January 1941 the Greek leaders Metaxas and Papagos made Albania their top priority because of worries that an Italian advance there would lead to a Greek moral collapse. By March 1941, the Greeks were depressed owing to the certainty of German intervention and frustrated by their inability to bring Yugoslavia into the war and defeat the Italians.(79) They were also on the defensive and making plans to surrender to the Germans, since it was obvious that British help would be insufficient to hold a combined Axis offensive and the Greeks had rejected the idea of a tactical retreat to shorten their front.(80) Although not successful, Italy's March offensive had cost the Greeks dearly, and Greek POWs reported that morale had fallen so low that many soldiers were on the verge of deserting.(81)

German intervention thus tipped the scales, which were already delicately balanced. Yet most writers in English would agree with Ange Vlachos that the Greeks humiliated the Italians, who were rescued by the Germans; and that the campaign cost the British dearly in Africa, and the Germans even more dearly in Russia--as if the cost to Italy was irrelevant.(82) Fairly typical of this tendency to ignore the effect of the war on the Italians was Baldwin's conclusion that, "The Greek campaign itself, of which Crete was but an offshoot, was a walkover for the Germans...for the Greeks, it was heroic tragedy; for the British, the only solace was a moral one."(83)

This is a very odd way to view the Italo-Greek conflict, since even allowing that it marked the end of an independent Italian war effort, which is not at all clear, it should merit special attention in that it enervated one of the major belligerents and made Britain's task that much easier.(54) Moreover, not only did the Italians bleed the Greeks white, but they then occupied most of Greece until 1943. Yet in their volume on decisive battles during World War II, Jacobsen and Rohwer did not even include the Italo-Greek war. Instead, they presented an essay on the importance of Crete by Karl Gundelach, who concluded that the German assault on the island had some effect on Hitler's decision in 1942 not to take Malta, but no effect at all on German operations in Russia, which as Leach and Stolfi have shown, were condemned by German, not by Italian, incompetence.(85) But there has been little effort to assess the specific impact that the war with Greece had on Italian operations in Africa, or on the Italian war effort in general, aside from the ritual incantation that it ended Italy's putative parallel war.

Indeed, the standard interpretation is based on a misunderstanding of the "parallel war" as a unilateral Italian decision, whereas in fact the Germans were also waging a "parallel war," which came to an end when German troops marched into Romania in early October 1940, much to the chagrin of the Italians. Mussolini had feared all along that his own sphere of influence would not be safe from Germany, and thus hoped by entering the war to consolidate his position before Hitler could turn his attention south, but the move into Romania showed that the Italian leader had little time to do so. That Italy would become a German "vassal" was probably inevitable, and to see the attack on Greece as a blunder that brought on the end of an

Italian parallel war is to miss the point that as a result of their failure to invade Britain in August, the Germans had diverted the full weight of their war to the Mediterranean, allowing the British to begin to shift the bulk of their forces to the south as the invasion scare began to abate after September 1940. If anyone was bewildered in late 1940 and early 1941, it was either the British, who were reeling from two military disasters and the collapse of their Balkan allies, or the Germans, who were casting about for other areas to conquer and spinning rationales to justify invading their ally's sphere of influence.(86)

In effect, most authors treat the history of World War II as if Italy was not a major belligerent, which is seriously to distort the realities of 1940 and 1941. Moreover, to reduce the conflict in Greece to a minor event in an Anglo-German war is to misunderstand not only Italy's role, but also those of Britain and Germany. After all, it was Italy, not Germany, that held the British at bay through early 1941; and Italy, with a minimum of German help, that stymied the British for another two years. Indeed, it was Italy that gave the British Empire its first real scare in 1935-36, and Italy, not Germany, that posed a threat to Britain's imperial life lines. To deny Italy the status of a major belligerent is therefore also to misapprehend the roots of the war. The conflict with Greece obviously distracted and weakened Italy, and by doing so had a major impact not only on the Italian war effort, but on the war as a whole. It therefore deserves study in its own right, and at least as much attention in general histories of the war as the 1940-41 campaigns in Africa, or the raid on Dieppe.(87)

The Italo-Greek war should not be treated as a German-British affair any more than the Mediterranean theater should be interpreted as an Anglo-American victory over Germany. Rome never enjoyed more than token German support. Italy garrisoned the Balkans and the Dodecanese Islands until September 1943, and its land, air, and sea units provided the majority of Axis units employed in the Mediterranean between 1940 and 1943. Although one would be hard-pressed to conclude the importance of Italy from most works in English, the British and Americans did have to beat the Italians to get at the Germans, and they did not manage that until the fall of 1943, and only then because the Italians wisely preferred a negotiated settlement to Gotterdammerung. It was therefore the debilitating effect of the Italo-Greek conflict on Italy that mattered in the long run, not the belated and sporadic, if flashy, guest appearances made by Germany.

During the past decade a number of official publications relating to the Italo-Greek war have appeared, including new volumes of the Italian Foreign Ministry's Documenti Diplomatici, the Italian Army's two-volume study of the Greek campaign, Hinsley's history of British intelligence, and Clearwater's publication on microfilm of Ultra decrypts.(88) The Italian Army's history includes a thousand pages each of text and documents and helps to clarify a number of questions regarding Italian operations, while Hinsley and the Clearwater microfilm answer a number of questions regarding British operations. Finally, there is a rich Italian literature, from diaries to polemical tracts, that touches directly or indirectly on the subject. Many of these works are highly critical of both the Italian military and the fascist regime, but they all have the virtue of discussing the war within the context of the Italian war effort, not the German or British.(89)

With an abundant literature in Italian and a growing number of studies available in English, there is no longer any reason to ignore the conflict or to pretend that it was important only to the extent that it affected the British and Germans, unless we are content to maintain the traditional ethnocentric biases that have characterized Anglo-American historiography. Not only did the Italo-Greek war have a profound influence on the Italian, and thus the Axis, war effort-but aside from the Italo-British clashes in North and East Africa, it was the only "real war" being fought between October 1940 and early December. And if O'Connor's campaign of December 1940-February 1941 is worthy of attention, how much more is the war that helped to assure his success against the Italians.

FOOTNOTES

1. Dimitri Kitsikis, "Information et decision: la Grece face a l'invasion allemande dans les Balkans (13 decembre 1940-6 avril 1941)," in La guerre en

- Mediterrane, 1939-45. Actes du colloque international tenu a Paris du 8 au 11 avril 1969 (Paris, 1971), esp. 203-7, and his "La Grece entre l'Angleterre et l'Allemagne de 1936 a 1941," *Revue historique* 238 (1967): 85-116. Kitsikis considered British aid to Greece to have been merely "symbolic" and resented Churchill's claim that England stood alone after the fall of France. John S. Koliopoulos, *Greece and the British Connection, 1935-1941* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 202, concluded that Britain had abandoned Greece to save North Africa.
2. Robin Higham, *Diary of a Disaster: British Aid to Greece, 1940-1941* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 23-24, 100-120, 159-60, 205, 236-37, provides an excellent analysis of Britain's role in the war that shows Churchill's policy to have been a costly show of force and makes clear the British preoccupation with the Germans and Churchill's illusion that the situation could be salvaged by defeating "the demoralized and rotten Italians."
3. John G. Bitzes, *Greece in World War II to April 1941* (Manhattan, Kans.: Sunflower Press, 1988); and Macgregor Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed, 1939-1941: Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
4. Mario Cervi, *The Hollow Legions: Mussolini's Blunder in Greece, 1940-41* (New York: Doubleday 1971). Bitzes provides an excellent account of Greek and Higham of British operations.
5. Christopher Buckley, *Greece and Crete 1941* (London: HMSO, 1952), 136-37, 291-93, 303-4, and for Italy, 9, and 278.
6. Ian Stanley Ord Playfair, *The Mediterranean and Middle East, vol. 1, The Early Successes against Italy (to May 1941)* (London: HMSO, 1954), 336, 388, 343-49, and *The Mediterranean and Middle East, vol. 2, The Germans Come to the Help of their Ally (1941)* (London: HMSO, 1956), 75 83-84, 87, 95.
7. Hanson V. Baldwin, *The Crucial Years, 1939-1941: The World at War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 175-77.
8. Charles Cruickshank, *Greece, 1940-1941* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1976), 9.
9. The more persistent myth of Italian incompetence, which John Gooch discerned in the armed forces of both liberal and fascist Italy, indicates that the bias applies to Italians, not merely to fascists. See John Gooch, "Italian Military Incompetence," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 5 (1982): 257-65.
10. There is something to such a point of view, as the Italian ambassador to Berlin, Bernardo Attolico, warned on 16 January 1940 when he wired Ciano that "The alliance was never conceived by the Germans as one of equals, but everyone expected that when Germany gave the signal, Italy would have to meekly throw itself into the melee, without any regard for its own interests. Even Goring, for example, did not want Italy to fight--even in parallel with Germany--a war distinct from the German, that is its own war....he saw it as fighting the same war as Germany." Italian Foreign Ministry, *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, Series 9, Volume 3 (hereafter DDI 9/3), doc. 137.
11. Alan J. Levine, "Was World War II a Near-run Thing?" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 8 (1985): 57-59.
12. That the British saw the region as crucial is clear from their efforts to "set alight" the Balkans after France's collapse and to drag Yugoslavia into the war to counter Italy in the region; see Elizabeth Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1976), 19, 78-95.
13. The most detailed campaign study is the official history published by the Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Ufficio Storico (SME/US), *La campagna di*

Grecia, 3 vols. (Rome, 1980).

14. That the Italians could have held in Africa involves another detailed discussion, but it is clear that Graziani was unable to maneuver owing to a lack of vehicles, the lion's share of which went to Greece. See SME/US, *La prima offensiva britannica in Africa settentrionale (ottobre 1940-febbraio 1941)* (Rome, n.d.), passim, and Higham, *Diary*, 226, who noted that the British saw Greece as diverting the Axis from Africa. For an analysis of the operational and diplomatic impact on Italy's war effort, see James J. Sadkovich, "The Italo-Greek War in the Context of Italy's War Effort," *Journal of Contemporary History* 28 (1993): 439-64.

15. See Thomas Parrish, ed., *The Simon and Schuster Encyclopedia of World War II* (New York, 1978), 47, and 246-48, for the "Greek Civil War," which gets over two pages, as opposed to a paragraph for the Italo-Greek war. Also John Lukacs, *The Last European War: September 1939/December 1941* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor/Doubleday, 1976), passim, who also devotes little space to the Italo-Greek war; as do James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War II* (New York: William Morrow, 1980), 142-45; and Martin Gilbert, *The Second World War: A Complete History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989), 135, 143-48, 157-62, 170-73, whose narrative history discounts the Italo-Greek war and quickly transforms it into a struggle between Germany and Britain. Higham, *Diary*, 184, and Bitzes, *Greece*, 129-33, for the effects of the March offensive on Greece.

16. Alan Clark, *The Fall of Crete* (New York: William Morrow, 1962), 12-14; also Anthony Heckstall-Smith and H. T. Baillie-Grohman, *Greek Tragedy* (London: Anthony Blond, 1961), 15-16; and Stokesbury, *Short History*, 145-47.

17. Koliopoulos, *Greece*, 112, 124, 130-31, 135, for Greece's importance to British naval operations and shipping, and for the importance of the "Italian factor" in late 1939 and mid-1940, which "acted as a brake and paralyzed (British) action in the Balkans generally." Also Great Britain, Cabinet Office, *Cabinet History Series, Principal War Telegrams and Memoranda, 1940-1943. Middle East* (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: KTO Press, 1976), vol. I, B.1, 8.

18. D. S. Detweiler, C. Burdick and J. Rohwer, eds., *German Military Studies* (hereafter *GMS*) (New York: Garland, 1987), vol. VIII, MS C-065 1, 12 August 1940; also 7 September for Hitler's order to begin serious planning for German operations in the Mediterranean, 20 September for plans to move German Air Force (GAF) units to the theater, as well as 2, 24 and 25 October; and MS C-065 j, 7 and 9 August 1930, for orders to study the dispatch of German armored units to Egypt "as part of measures to be taken in case operation Seelowe should be canceled." Also Playfair, *Mediterranean and Middle East*, 1:338-45, for Greece, Turkey, and the high priority assigned the capture of Bardia, the occupation of Rhodes, and operations in the eastern Mediterranean. Also *Principal War Telegrams*, vol. 1, B.1, 5-6, for British worries that Italy might occupy Crete in early November 1940.

19. Higham, *Diary*, 162-63, for Air Marshal Arthur Longmore's complaints that the Hurricanes did badly against the Italians; and 209, where Higham reports only 19 of 99 RAF aircraft in Greece on 5 April 1941 to have been Hurricanes. Also *Principal War Telegrams*, vol. I, B.1, 11-12, 15, for British anxiety, which was mixed with Churchill's appeals "to take risks and strike the Italians by land, sea, and air" in mid-November 1940.

20. Playfair, *Mediterranean and Middle East*, 1:338-39, 343-45, for British worries that the GAF would use Italian bases in the Aegean, which led London to urge the occupation of Rhodes; and *Principal War Telegrams*, vol. I, B.1, 21, 24-25. Higham, *Diary*, 53-54, noted that Churchill was worried that Athens might conclude a separate peace.

21. *GMS*, vol. VIII, C-065 1, 29 and 31 March, and 3 April 1941 for OKW's assessment of Italy's problems.

22. For the problems caused by the German decision, Mario Roatta, *Otto milioni di baionette, l'Esercito italiano in guerra dal 1940 al 1944* (Milan, 1946), 161-63, and SME/US, *Le operazioni delle unit italiane in Jugoslavia (1941-1943)* (Rome, 1978). Italy had only five divisions on the Yugoslav border in April 1941, thirty-two fewer than in September 1940, and was forced to send twelve additional divisions to the Venezia Giulia merely to conduct a defensive campaign. By the end of 1941, Italy had twenty divisions tied up in Yugoslavia.
23. B. H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (New York: Putnam, 1970), esp. 115-18, 131, 145, 151-52. Higham, *Diary*, 236, also believes that Greece hurt Britain's chances to take Tripoli in early 1941, and was a costly sideshow due to the weather.
24. Graham Ross, *The Great Powers and the Decline of the European States System, 1914-1945* (London: Longman, 1983), 41-45, 132; also Henri Michel, *The Second World War* (New York: Praeger, 1975), 186-88. Although French, Michel has had a wide audience in the English-speaking world.
25. Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint, *Total War* (New York: Penguin, 1972), 147-60. For British pleasure, see Koliopoulos, *Greece*, 184.
26. Calvocoressi and Wint, *Total War*, 149-50; Playfair, *Mediterranean and Middle East*, 1:225-26, also gives the impression that Rome acted despite Berlin's warnings not to do so, and is so little concerned with Italian policy that he notes that Mussolini "may have been influenced" by the dispatch of German troops to Romania.
27. DDI, 9/5, docs. 161 and 200 for Hitler, and docs. 432, 435, and 617 for Ribbentrop. Due to the Italian sinking of the Greek ship *Helle*, the Germans were worried over a conflict in Greece in August, but not in September. Also Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato. L'Italia in guerra, 1940-43* (Turin: Einaudi, 1991), 1: 186-88, 305-6. De Felice, whose discussion of Mussolini's war aims and motivations is by far the best in print, sees the Germans as having given the Italians a free hand in the Balkans in August 1940, but believes that Mussolini felt he could attain his goals there using diplomatic rather than military means.
28. Cruickshank, *Greece*, 26, 30-32.
29. Knox, *Mussolini*, 189-90, argues that the reference to Norway should not be taken seriously because "even in Ciano's version" the Italian dictator agreed that the defeat of Britain was paramount, and Knox interprets Mussolini's belief that he had a "free hand" in Greece as something less than an okay to mount an "immediate attack." Perhaps, but the Germans were aware that the Italians held their hand only because they were sure that they could obtain what they wanted at the peace table, and Germany's occupation of Romania made that problematic. In other words, Ribbentrop had to be aware that he was giving the same sort of nihil obstat that Laval had with regard to Ethiopia five years earlier. It is also worth noting that on 11 April 1940, Hitler had written Mussolini that the Balkans should be kept quiet by "un'Italia forte," which suggested the possibility of the use of force, especially since the Nazi leader was responding to Mussolini's letter that Italy would be on a war footing from 12 April. Finally, it is worth noting that on 22 April, one of Attolico's sources indicated that Berlin wanted Romania and would concede Greece to Italy. See DDI 9/4, docs. 37, 40, and 163.
30. Alan Cassels, *Fascist Italy* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1985), 102-5. Cassels pays relatively little attention to the conflict, and in essence repeats the standard **Anglo-American** point of view; and Elizabeth Wiskemann devotes less than two sentences to the Graeco-Italian conflict in *Europe of the Dictators, 1919-1945* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 165, 192. Cassels follows Knox, *Mussolini*, 285, who asserted that "Mussolini followed bewildered in his ally's wake" after April 1941.
31. Alexander de Grand, *Italian Fascism: Its Origins and Development* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 124-135. This is a short survey, but de Grand's failure to delve into the details of the war leaves him no choice but to parrot the dominant cliches, including his inaccurate observation

that "the British quickly snuffed out the newly won Italian Empire" in East Africa because the Germans were unable to help. In fact, no reinforcements could be sent to East Africa owing to British control of Suez, and even then it took over 250,000 British troops until late November of 1941 to force the surrender of all Italian forces--hardly an easy or rapid victory. See SME/US, *La guerra in Africa Orientale* (giugno 1940-novembre 1941) (Rome, 1952), *passim*. Higham, *Diary*, 54, noted that the British knew that the Germans intended to invade Greece as early as December 1940.

32. Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1983), 263-66, attributes the partisan movements in the Balkans to "fascist administration," thus failing to distinguish between Italian and German, Croatian and Bulgarian, Hungarian and Serbian regimes--or to take into account the importance of the USSR to the birth of partisan movements such as that led by Josip Broz "Tito." Barry A. Leach, *German Strategy against Russia, 1939-1941* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 167, correctly observes that German ruthlessness provoked a partisan response which had a long-term debilitating effect on the Axis war effort.

33. Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (New York: Viking, 1976), 232-33, 245-46. For Kragujevac, see Robert Lee Wolff, *The Balkans in Our Time* (New York: Norton, 1967), 191-267, esp. 209; and for a similar, and inaccurate, depiction of the Italians and Bulgarians as worse than the Germans because while Italian reprisals were "harsh and arbitrary" and Bulgarian policy "arbitrary and severe," German policy was "stern but consistent," see U.S. Department of the Army, *German Antiguerrilla Operations in the Balkans (1941-1944)* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1954), esp. 13-18. The authors of the study also noted that "the common (Italian) soldier hoped for a state of mutual toleration with the population," and the Italian military only reacted to Yugoslav and Greek "depredations."

34. Mario Pacor, *Italia e Balcani dal Risorgimento alla Resistenza* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1968), 244, also notes that 400,000 Greeks died of hunger in the winter of 1941-42.

35. See Knox, *Mussolini*, esp. 4, for another effort to tar the fascists with the nazi brush of genocide by equating Italian repression in Africa with German extermination of whole peoples.

36. Bitzes, *Greece*, describes the military reasons for the Greek success in turning back the Italians in a chapter entitled "Italian Attack and Greek Triumph."

37. For the depiction of Italians as "Eyeties," see Robert Crisp's romanticized memoir *The Gods were Neutral* (London: Frederick Muller, 1960), 10, and his "Prologue," a 17 February 1945 excerpt from Hitler's "diary" which blames Italy's "pointless campaign in Greece" for the coup in Yugoslavia, the delay in Barbarossa, the diversion of German troops later in the war, and the failure to acquire Gibraltar. For a "blundering and "inept" Mussolini, see Cruickshank, *Greece*, 26, and Heckstall-Smith and Baillie-Grohman, *Greek Tragedy*, 10.

38. J. R. Thackrah, "The Italian Invasion of Greece and its Effects on Allied and Axis Policy, 1940-41," *Army Quarterly and Defence Journal* 106 (1979): 341, 345-48, perpetuates the myths of Italian inferiority and German superiority when he claims that the Greek campaign was "a fiasco" for the British because "The Germans were a far tougher enemy than the Italians," an odd remark given the subsequent course of events in Africa and the fact that the British never confronted Italian units in Greece or on Crete, but did considerable damage to German formations.

39. For a short discussion of such stereotypy, see Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), esp. 123-28.

40. Theodore Ropp, *War in the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 329-32.

41. Playfair, Mediterranean and Middle East, 2: 83; and Higham, Diary, 159-60, 216-59.
42. Knox, Mussolini, 283. Higham, Diary, passim, for a detailed discussion of why British aid was so long coming.
43. Knox, Mussolini, esp. 272. Knox's book is an excellent source of data, as Lucio Ceva noted in his review of the work, but Ceva also felt that Knox's scholarship invalidated his own thesis. See Lucio Ceva, "Macgregor Knox, Mussolini unleashed 1939-1941," *Storia contemporanea*, 1983, esp. 374-75.
44. Others, especially Bitzes, discuss the Greek war effort in detail, but even though denigrating the Italians also implicitly demeans the Greek effort against Italy, my concern in this paper is with the Italian, not the Greek, war effort.
45. Knox, Mussolini, 192; and GMS, vol. VIII, MS C-065 1, 7 September 1940, for Hitler's order to study the dispatch of an armored corps to Africa, and 5 October 1940 for the estimate that it would take from forty to fifty days to move a single armored brigade (or regiment) from Naples to Bengazi; and vol. VII, 5 September 1940, for the 3d Armored Division, as well 8-9, for January 1941 delivery. Higham, Diary, 60-63, noted that in January 1941 Metaxas still believed that they could "clean the Italians out of Albania" and did not think the Germans could traverse the mountain passes in winter.
46. DDI , 9/5, doc. 677 and 719; and GMS, vol. VIII, MS C-065 1, 5 October 1940. Part of the problem for the Greeks was that they needed metric weapons. See Higham, Diary, 22, 40, 83-84.
47. As early as 14 November 1940, Warlimont and von Kitter agreed that cooperation with France precluded the continuance of separate Axis "zones of interest" since Germany intended "shaping the military situation of France in Africa." See GMS, vol. III, S C-O, 11 and 14 September 1940, for the decision to send units to Italy after dropping Sealion; 4 November 1940 for Hitler's second thoughts; and 14 November for agreement reached by Warlimont and von Hitter.
48. Knox, Mussolini, 192.
49. Ibid., 200. This type of gratuitous charge is, of course, historically untenable. That the Italians were not sure of what the Germans were up to with the Russians was hardly surprising since the Germans systematically deceived their ally. For example, see GMS, vol. VII, MS C-065i, 1-121, for Greiner's account, which makes it clear that Hitler's staff repeatedly warned him that the Mediterranean, not Russia, was the only possible theater in which German forces, owing to their limitations, could be effective.
50. GMS, vol. VIII, MS C-065j, 1 August 1940.
51. Knox, Mussolini, 196-98, 207-9, 346 n.84. Knox, who is more of a political and diplomatic than a military historian, presents an essentially traditional interpretation, even using such standard terms as "booty" to characterize Italian policy goals.
52. See GMS, vol. VIII, MS C-0651, 28 and 29 August 1940, for German plans to occupy Romania, and Ribbentrop's failure to discuss this with Ciano at Vienna on the 29th. For examples of Italian concerns, see DDI 9/4, docs. 37, 40, 50, 99, 130, and esp. 116, for Attolico's 17 April warning that "la Germania si prepara ad assumere un ruolo preponderante nella regione del Danubio," which would put Italy "in una posizione delicata." He therefore advised that Rome "parlare anche pit chiaro (to Berlin) di quanto non si sia fatto fin qui."
53. Knox, Mussolini, 203-5. For Jodl's suspicions that Hitler had given the okay, see GMS, VIII, MS C-0651, 23 October 1940.

54. For German plans, see GMS, vol. VIII, MS C-065j, 25 September, 1, 10, 14, and 21 October, and 1, 2, 7, 11, and 14 November 1940.

55. Knox, Mussolini, 205-7, 241; Knox ignores indications that OKW and Hitler would have been pleased with a rapid Italian victory in Greece. It was thus the setback, not the attack, that bothered the Germans, and that is probably why Hitler was not that upset in Florence. See GMS, vol. VIII, MS C-0651, 24 October 1940.

56. See Knox, Mussolini, 223-26, for ambiguous German reaction; 214 for 15 October; 238-39 for Taranto; and 230, 271-72, for salvation. For German failure, see GMS, vol. VIII, MS C-065 1, 24 October 1940, for Jodl's remarks on Greece, which make it clear that the Germans expected an attack and that they saw advantages to an Italian victory there, but since no German units would be ready to move to the Mediterranean before January, OKW saw no need to talk to the Italians.

57. For the naval war in the Mediterranean, see James J. Sadkovich, "Re-evaluating Who Won the Italo-British Naval Conflict, 1940-42," *European History Quarterly* 18 (1988), and *The Italian Navy in World War II* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1994).

58. Knox, Mussolini, 234; also 236-37, for his description of Ubaldo Soddu (commander in Albania, November-December 1940), who was "less divorced from reality" than Visconti Prasca (commander in Albania, May-November 1940); 247, for Alfredo Guzzoni (assistant chief of general staff) as "reasonably competent" and Ugo Cavallero (commander in Albania after December 1940 and later chief of general staff) as practicing a "consummate scophancy"; 250, for a general censure of the Italian officer corps; 250-51, for his contradictory conclusions that Soddu had "temporarily lost his head" on 4 December, but "probably meant" to suggest getting German or Bulgarian military support as "political intervention"; 252, for his condemnation of Graziani because "he refused to make the best of what he had by concentrating his vehicles in a small mobile force" (which Graziani did do--he just lacked vehicles); 254, for Graziani's "insisting hysterically that all of Cyrenaica was in danger (it was, as it turned out); and 255, for his attempt to "hold everything" (which was in part a function of his lack of motorization).

59. For Italian efforts to get Germany to honor economic accords and help with Italy's need for weaponry before June 1940, see DDI 9/3 and 9/4, passim, esp. 9/3, docs. 724, for Attolico's sarcastic comment that "despite all the beautiful promises...nothing has been done"; 661, for Attolico's complaints that Germany was hurting Italian interests; 694, for Marras, who urged getting materiel from Germany before entering the war; and 640, for Germany's supply of sixty-seven aircraft to Yugoslavia in late March, at the same time that Germany was stalling on the supply of three antiaircraft batteries to Italy; and 9/4, doc. 691, for Ciano's effort in early June to get the Germans to honor their accords, and doc. 829, for Favagrossa's 9 June advice to secure German materiel before the war began.

60. Knox, Mussolini, 279, only belatedly mentions that the Germans did little to aid the Italians, yet, 256, claims that with the arrival of Rommel in early 1941, "The Italian war in Africa was over," a misleading statement, since Italian air, naval, and ground units continued to form the great majority of forces there throughout the campaign, and since while Rommel was the front-line commander, Bastico remained responsible for the theater and saw to such crucial items as logistical support. For details of operations in Greece, see SME/US, *Grecia*, vol. I, passim; and for Africa, James J. Sadkovich, "Of Myths and Men: Rommel and the Italians in North Africa, 1940-1942," *International History Review* 13 (1991): 284-313.

61. Knox, Mussolini, 258-59. Bitzes, *Greece*, 87-92, noted that the Siena division overcame Greek resistance on the "Iba line," as well as noting the crucial role played by Greek mortars. Ritzes also catalogued the Greek buildup, from 35,000 troops on the frontier in late October, to 232,000 by 14 November, with 63,000 in reserve, giving them two to one odds against the Italians.

62. Knox, Mussolini, 250, 259-60; for a sampling of Italian attitudes, see Giulio Bedeschi, *Fronte greco-albanese, c'ero anch'io* (Milan: Mursia, 1977).

63. Knox, Mussolini, 258-59.

64. Knox, Mussolini, 277, notes that Roatta felt that as early as January the Italians had worn down the Greeks, but fails to connect this to Germany's success. Bitzes, Greece, 125, for the comment by Papagos that he "would rather be stabbed in the back by the Germans than pushed in the Front by the Italians"; and Higham, Diary, 169-73, 205, 216-22, for the appreciation by Athens, Belgrade, and London that an attack on Italian forces in Albania was a more viable option than an effort to hit the Germans in the spring of 1941.

65. See Principal War Telegrams, vol. I, B.3, 23-89, for the British concern with the collapse of Yugoslavia, the fall of Greece, and the British rout in Cyrenaica, esp. 89 for a summary of operations in Greece. As Bitzes, Greece, 145, 159, noted, while Tsolacoglu and the Greek generals planned to hold the Italians and surrender to the Germans, the few Greek units who did resist the German attack in the Metaxas line fought well.

66. Knox, Mussolini, 272-73, 275, 285.

67. See Quirino Armellini, *Diario di Guerra. Nove mesi al Comando Supremo* (Milan: Garzanti, 1946), 8 September 1940, for "Santo Pietro Badoglio," and Giacomo Carboni, *Memorie segrete (1935-1948)* (Florence: Parenti, 1955), esp. 4-8, 87-93.

68. For example, Efsio Marras (Italian military attache in Berlin in 1940) concluded after seeing Belgian defenses in 1940 that the German forcing of the Albert Canal was probably "a rather easy feat" (*impresa di scarsa difficulta*); while Hitler considered the British, who let their allies bear the brunt of the fighting, to be hopeless in attack and hamstrung by an incompetent high command; DDI 9/4, docs. 567 and 584.

69. For Italian alarms, see DDI 9/3, 9/4, and 9/5, *passim*; and for German plans, see GMS, esp. vol. VIII, MS C-065j, 7, 9, 12, 21, 26, 28, and 29 August 1940; and Leach, *German Strategy*, 72-75.

70. John Louis Hondros, *Occupation and Resistance: The Greek Agony, 1941-44* (New York: Pella, 1983), 30, for German economic penetration of Greece; 33-37, for German "vetoes" and meddling in the Balkans in 1940; and Dimitrios G. Kousoulos, *The Price of Freedom: Greece in World Affairs, 1939-1953* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1953), 54-55, for German support of Metaxas in August 1940, 57, for Romania, 58, for Italy as a junior partner, and 51, for the Soviets. Typically, David E. Kaiser ignores Greece completely and gives Italy short shrift in his *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War: Germany, Britain, France, and Eastern Europe, 1930-1939* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), *passim*.

71. Francesco Cataluccio, "Nuovo equilibrio balcanico," *Rivista di studi politici internazionali*, 1940, 18-35. Cataluccio spoke of an Axis new order, noting that in April 1939 during his meeting with Ciano in Venice, Boza Markovi (Yugoslav foreign minister in 1939) had promised that Italy and Germany could count on Belgrade, and Cataluccio presented the award of Transylvania to Hungary and the Dobrudja to Bulgaria as settlements by the Axis. In other words, by August-September 1940, the Germans were already infiltrating Italy's sphere of influence in the Balkans.

72. DDI 9/4, doc. 678.

73. De Felice, *L'alleato*, 1:282, 290-93, 300-302.

74. DDI 9/4, doc. 30, for his observation that the Germans had again used "the usual system, that of acting and then communicating their fatto compiuto, explaining how they could not have done otherwise." Attolico found this especially alarming, since Hitler and Mussolini had just met at the

Brenner and since Italian military, naval, and air attaches had been left in the dark.

75. GS, vol. VIII, MS C-065j, 8, 9 August, 1, 8, 25, and 28 October 1940.

76. This, at any rate, is the conclusion to be drawn from the 670 pages of reminiscences collected by Giulio Bedeschi, *Fronte greco-albanese*, e.8., 197-98, 214-15, 322-26, 365-68 379-80, 408, 426-33, 477, 487, 514-15, 566-68, 573, 590. It would seem that the Italians also possessed the sort of comraderie that maintained morale despite gross errors by military and political leaders. For a more detailed discussion of Italian morale, see De Felice, *Alleato*, 2: 760-68, 720, 773-76, 921-58, and James J. Sadkovich, "Italian Morale during the Italo-Greek War of 140-1911," *War and Society* 12 (1994: 97-123.

77. National Archives Microfilm, Series T-821, Reel 130, frames 422-67: Knox, Mussolini, 260-72, 289, despite noting that no organized internal resistance to the regime emerged and that the crisis in public confidence disappeared during the spring victories, still exaggerates the importance of the setbacks.

78. This sort of generous impulse was obviously abused by the Italian high command, but it is absurd to assume that only the "good guys" produce heroes and soldiers with feelings of comraderie. See Bianca Ceva, *Cinque anni di storia italiana 1940-1945 da lettere e diari di caduti* (Milan: Edizioni di Comunita, 1964), 35-39. For Carlo Rolando's comment on serving his Patria "with honor," Nuto Revelli, *L'ultimo fronte. Lettere di soldati caduti o dispersi nella seconda guerra mondiale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971), 36. For more memoirs, see Lucio Ceva, "Testimonianze sulla guerra di Grecia," *Risorgimento* 31(1979): 103-6.

79. Barker, *British Policy*, 99, for Metaxas's effort to draw Yugoslavia into the war; and Koliopoulos, *Greece*, 202-8, for Greek attitudes.

80. Emilio Faldella, *L'Italia e la seconda guerra mondiale (revisione di giudizi)* (Rocca San Casciano: Cappelli, 1967), 201, saw the Italian army as the anvil ("l'incudine") on which the Greek army was shattered; and on 30 April 1941, the commander of the German forces in the Balkans, List, told Anfuso that Germany's advance was greatly eased by the fact that the vast majority of Greek units were deployed against the Italians to the west. See DDI , 9/7, doc. 30; and Higham, *passim*, for the weakness of the Greek forces by April.

81. Higham, *Diary*, 159-60, 173, 184, for the cost of the Italian offensive, and Bedeschi, *Fronte greco-albanese*, 525-29.

82. Ange Vlachos, "Victoire oubliee," *Balkan Studies* 23 (1982): 3-6; also see Charles Hurdick, "L'Axe Berlin-Rome et la campagne italo-grecque," *Revue historique de l'Armee* 16 (1960): 972, 980, 985. Also Kousoulos, *Price*, 73, 80; and Heckstall-Smith and Baillie-Grohman, *Greek Tragedy*, 22-1-28. Hitzes, *Greece*, 81, believes that Greek resistance in 1940 "had seriously damaged the aura of Axis invincibility."

83. Baldwin, *Crucial Years*, 299-302.

84. De Felice, *L'alleato*, 1:309, claims that Mussolini never resigned himself to being Hitler's vassal and had no intention of subjecting Italy to German overlordship.

85. This, of course, reflected German thinking, and is appropriate in a book on German operations, but unfortunately also characterizes general histories of the war, and most works in English. Karl Gundelach, "La battaglia di Creta," in H. A. Jacobsen and J. Rohwer, eds., *Le battaglie decisive della 2a guerra mondiale* (Milan: Baldini and Castoldi, 1974), 121-69, esp. 166-69. Nor is Greece discussed in Seymour Freiden and William Richardson,

The Fatal Decisions (New York: Berkley Publishing Corp., 1958). Leach presents a detailed discussion of inept German staff work and friction within the German leadership in his *German Strategy*, passim; also see Russell H. S. Stolfi, "Barbarossa Revisited: A Critical Reappraisal of the Opening Stages of the Russo-German Campaign (June-December 1941)," *Journal of Modern History* 54 (1982), esp. 31-32, 35-36, 42.

86. This is clear from even a cursory glance at German documents, including those in GMS, and it is thus all the more amazing that the Italians have been saddled with sole responsibility for "dragging" Germany into the Mediterranean theater. Also see *Principal War Telegrams*, vol. I, B.3, 96, for evacuation statistics, and B.4, 4.

87. For a fuller discussion of Italy's role, see J. Sadkovich, "Understanding Defeat: Reappraising Italy's Role in World War II," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24 (1989): 27-61, and "The Italo-Greek War in context," passim, for the consequences of the Italo-Greek war for Italy.

88. The best sources for the Italo-Greek conflict are in Italian and Greek, but De Felice's recent volume presents the war in a much larger context, and Higham's *Diary* is undoubtedly the best in English on British policy, although Playfair is still useful. Bitzes has written the best account of the Greek side of the war, and Cervi's *Hollo Legions* remains a solid narrative of the conflict, while Alexander Papagos, *The Battle of Greece, 1940-1941* (Athens: n.p. 1949), is useful for Greek military operations. For comments on the Italian official history, see the articles by Tsirpanlis et al. in the special issue of *Balkan Studies* 23 (1982), and Lucio Ceva's review, "La guerr italo-greco del 1940-1941 nella narrazione dell'ufficio storico," *Risorgimento* 33 (1981): 180-86. For a discussion of the diplomatic and military context of the war, see J. Sadkovich, "The Italo-Greek War in Conext." Knox is a very rich source, as is Galeazzo Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries*, ed. Hugh Gibson (New York: Doubleday 1946). For intelligence operations, see F. H. Hinsley et al., *British Intelligence in the Second World War* (London: HMSO, 1979-). Clearwater's microfilm on Ultra's role in the Greek conflict and the eastern Mediterranean are of limited use. Although the Ultra decrypts in roll 258 indicated that a German operation against Crete was imminent, Ultra could not yet follow Axis operations in detail on a daily, and timely, basis.

89. For the diplomacy and direction of the war, see the official history, the General Staff's diary, compiled by Antonello Biagini and Fernando Fractolillo, *Diario storico del Comando Supremo*, 4 vols. (Rome: Ufficio Storico dell'Esercito, 1986-93), and the accounts by Ugo Cavallero, Quirino Armellini, Cesare Aime, and Mario Roatta, as well as those by Francesco Rossi, *Mussolini e lo stato maggiore. Avvenimenti del 1940* (Rome: Regionale, 1951), Francesco Jacomoni, *La politica dell'Italia in Albania* (Bologna: Capelli, 1965), Sebastiano Visconti Prasca, *Io o aggredito la Grecia* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1916), and Emanuele Grazzi, *Il principio della fine (l'impresa di Grecia)* (Rome: Editrice Faro, 1945). For armored operations, see Rinaldo Panetta, *Il ponte di Klisura (i carristi italiani in Albania: 1940-1941)* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1965), and Dino Campini, *Nei giardini del diavolo. La sfora inedita dei carristi della Centauro, dell'Ariete e della Littorio* (Milan, 1969); for air operations, Francesco Pricolo, *Ignavia contro eroismo. L'avventura italo-greca. Ottobre 1940-aprile 1941* (Rome: Nicola Ruffolo Editore, 1946) and *La Regia Aeronautica nella seconda guerra mondiale, novembre 1939-novembre 1941* (Milan: Longanesi, 1971), Giuseppe Santoro, *L'aeronautica italiana nella seconda guerra mondiale* (Milan: Edizioni Esse, 1957), and Nino Arena, *La regia aeronautica, 1939-1943* (Rome: Stato Maggiore Aeronautica, Ufficio Storico, 1981-83). For accounts of the front, see the previously noted Bianca Ceva, Nuto Revelli, and Giulio Bedeschi, as well as Filippo Balistreri, *Coi bersaglieri nella campagna di Grecia* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1942), Domenico Calvi, *Sul sentiero sbagliato (memorie di guerra e di prigionia)* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1979), Fernando Campione, *Guerra in Epiro: diario di un combattente della divisione "Siena"* (Naples: Guida, 1950), Manlio Cecovini, *Ponte Perati. La Julia in Grecia* (Milan: Longanesi, 1973), Giacomo Fatuzzo, *Storia della Julia nella campagna di Grecia* (Milan: Longanesi, 1970), and Alceste Mainardi, *Sul ponte di Perati, bandiera nera (Storia di una compagnia alpina friulana nella guerra di Grecia)* (Trieste, 1974). In addition to the histories by Mario Cervi, Renzo De Felice, and Emilio Faldella, also see Carlo Baudino, *Una guerra assurda. La campagna di Grecia* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpino, 1965), Luigi Mondini, *Prologo del conflitto italo-greco* (Rome: F. Treves, 1945), Carlo Cigliana, "I precedenti della campagna di Grecia," *Rivista militare* 29 (1973): 11-12, Giacomo Fatuzzo, *Storia della 'Julia' nella campagna di Grecia* (Milan: Longanesi, 1970), and Gian Carlo Fusco, *Guerra d'Albania* (Milan: Mondadori, 1961).

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