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A Political Biography of General Ioannis Metaxas

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The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent

Contents

PART III
Prelude to Power: The Momentum of Leadership

PART IV
Radical Reformer and Wartime Leader,
Architect of Military Victory

List of Illustrations

Between pages 116 and 117

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Preface and Acknowledgements

I embarked on this work after I retired from university teaching. The generosity of the British Academy and the Leverhulme Trust helped me embark on this study. My friend John Campbell, Emeritus Fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford, a social and cultural anthropologist and leading scholar of modern Greece, was a steady reference on things Greek and modern Greek society. The work of a younger generation of Greek scholars, many of them incidentally, trained, supervised and nurtured by John Campbell himself over the last three decades in Oxford, was enlightening and helpful. The fact that on the two or three occasions I had ventured to comment in print on limited aspects of modern Greek politics and had engaged the lively attention of some Greeks in Greece, including critics in the media and a number of university colleagues, I found encouraging.

Thanos Veremis, Professor of Modern European Political History at the University of Athens, and Director of ELIAMEP (Helenic Foundation For European and Foreign Policy) was always helpful with references and suggestions; Ioanna Pepelasi-Minoglou, Nicos Mouzelis, Dimitris Livanios, Yannis Nicolaou, Mina Kalogridou, Yannis Koliopoulos, and many others helped by discussing with me their own research. Petros Gavallas, a semi-retired Athenian journalist, was a veritable 'Who's Who' about Athenian politicians and Athenian society of the interwar period; he clarified for me the links between them, the web of alliances and alignments proving to me finally that what Petros Gavallas did not know about the Athens of the last sixty years is not worth knowing.

Most valuable was the time I spent in Athens working closely with the late Professor Yannis Georgakis, when he was Karamanlis's Special Ambassador to the Arab countries in the Middle East. I helped him with the expertise of the specialist, and slaved valiantly, albeit without much

success, to introduce the Greeks on an institutional level and in a more systematic fashion to the world of Islam and the Middle East. A man of vision, intelligence and fertile imagination – and incidentally a great admirer of Venizelos – a veteran of the wartime Axis occupation during which he was director of the Regent's (Archbishop Damaskinos) cabinet, Georgakis offered great service to the Greek and Allied underground Resistance in Greece. Widely and popularly known also as 'the professor', Georgakis was one of the gifted German-trained young Greek jurists of the interwar period – he taught Criminal Law at the Panteios School in Athens. Though a highly controversial figure, he was still counted among the Great and the Good, and served successively as Prefect of the Ionian Islands and Governor of the Dodecanese after the War. A close friend and confidant of the legendary shipping tycoon Aristotle Onassis, Georgakis also made his mark in the aviation industry as Chairman of the Olympic Airways Board, and in the 1980s as president of the Onassis Foundation, after which he persuaded his political friends, Mitsotakis and Karamanlis, to launch the Foundation for Hellenic Culture – a kind of 'Greek British Council' – in June 1992, with himself as its first President. Georgakis introduced me to the nitty gritty of mundane – raw – Greek politics, with all its charms and evils. I also experienced at close range the generosity, splendour, power – and corruption – of a political patron's salon (of an oriental potentate's *diwan* or *seraglio*), the petty personalized fractiousness of Greek – perhaps all Mediterranean – politics. Although repelled, I was at the same time fascinated, and I was determined that I would learn more about the political conduct of this last remaining Ottoman society of my compatriots.

St Antony's College, Oxford, kindly offered me its hospitality as one of its Senior Associate Members, where I could take advantage of the facilities of the Middle East Centre and the European Studies Programme, for which I am grateful.

I am grateful to my old friend and editor Alastair Everitt for helping me to contain the text within manageable length and proportions, and to Professor George Krimbas of Athens University for the large number of illustrations he supplied me with from his father's, Elias Krimbas's, photographic archive, many of which are reproduced in this book. I also wish to thank two other sources of illustrations produced here: the Greek Literary and Historical Archive (ELIA) in Athens, and Mrs Nana Metaxas-Foka, the surviving younger daughter of Ioannis Metaxas.

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individuals and institutions. Last but not least I am deeply indebted to my wife, who suffered quietly through all of this, and dextrously kept me alive, the foremost requisite for undertaking and completing this project, and to the professional advice, treatment and care of the Cardiology Clinic at the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford, headed by Dr Gribbin. For what is presented here, however, I am solely responsible.

P.J. VATIKIOTIS
Oxford, Autumn 1997

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Introduction

I

This is not intended to be a full biography of Ioannis Metaxas, only a political biography, in fact, a political profile of the man, a prosopography. Needless to say both are difficult undertakings, especially as so many of his associates as well as his opponents, and generally the people associated with his career or involved in his 4th August Regime [1936–1941] have long been dead. What I present here is a political portrait of Ioannis Metaxas, drawn mainly, if not exclusively, from Greek sources. I emphasize more the early years of his life; his background, his conduct and style in entering the world of Greek politics during the decade 1910–20, and his road to state power from 1920 to 1936.[1] There is less emphasis on his own 4th August Regime, no elaborate historical narrative of it and its policies, beyond its relevance for an assessment of the man and his political performance. To this extent it follows very closely – even explicitly – his *Diary*,[2] his own record of his own life, his correspondence, and the written evidence – diaries, reminiscences, memoirs, memoranda – of his close associates and his critics.[3] Less attention is paid to the detail of the policies of his regime, except in general terms, that is, the broad aims and spirit of these policies.[4] At the same time I tried to avoid the temptation of essaying a historical narrative of his regime. Making the task even more difficult was the inhibiting knowledge that Metaxas is generally a controversial and unpopular figure in the political consciousness and experience of the average contemporary Greek. He is in fact a prominent feature of the contemporary Greek's political demonology, for he elicits hostility and opprobrium. This may explain, in part, the glaring lack, until very recently, of serious studies by Greeks about Metaxas and his notorious regime, especially when he represents such a virulent figure of political 'evil' in their view

– but also reminds them perhaps uncomfortably of so many personal and political traits that they, as a nation, share with him,[5] such as authoritarianism and autocracy which they have yet to overcome; only now in the mid-1990s do they sustain them with the protection of membership in, and the fig leaf of, the European Union!

A recent fifty-year Anniversary Supplement of the newspaper *TO VIMA*, Athens 6 August 1986, still considered the Metaxas regime a national nightmare. Several contributors put together a rather thin, confused and therefore misleading text, one of them claiming that 'the Metaxas regime was the first in modern Greek history of a systematic attempt at a permanent distortion of the political values, liberal perceptions and national orientation of the Greek people'. Needless to say such a statement is an exaggeration for it ignores the documentation available for research and other evidence. Marios Ploritis, an editor of the paper, discusses the permanence of the regime, with its promised 'Third Greek Civilization' as a chimera and a typical claim of such other European totalitarian regimes as the 'One Thousand Year Third German Reich' of the Nazis, and the new Roman Empire of Fascist Italy. Nicos Mouzelis makes the unoriginal proposition that the ideology of the Metaxas regime of 4th August 1936 was neither a fascist nor simply an anti-democratic episode in the long-term parliamentary history of the country. Rather he adjudges it to have been a mixed autocratic regime. He thought that while it exhibited certain totalitarian features such as the predomination of society and the Nation over the individual, or the state over the citizen, it also affected a link with classical Greece.

It is important in this connection to distinguish between what others said about Metaxas when he was in power and much later, say, in the mid-1980s. His detractors while he was in power did not make their comments in the context of the Right vs. Left antithesis, but rather of the Liberal or Republican vs. the Conservative or Monarchist autocracy; and basically because both sides were autocratic or authoritarian when in power, they shared what one might call for the sake of convenience the post-1909 political ethos and idiom.

What one can say with some certainty based on the documentary evidence is that Metaxas was a protégé of the Royal Court; he was opposed to what he considered mindless adventure in Asia Minor, the quixotic gestures of partisan politicians with their disorganized and inordinate partisan intrigues. In fact, Metaxas disapproved of and disliked certain traits, and especially weaknesses in his contemporary modern fellow Greek. He wished for the higher standards based on a

disciplined, measured ideal, self-controlled and balanced. He craved orderly endeavour among the Greeks; in short, all the attributes to be found in his perception of the efficient German, and his idealization of the latter because he followed a classical Greek ideal! The question – in fact the conundrum – for Metaxas was how to fashion a new Greek on this ideal model. The task he set himself was not only unrealistic, but in the final analysis an unpleasantly arrogant and pompous one too; and in any case he failed in carrying it out. The average Greek was impulsive, spontaneous and disorderly, whereas Metaxas was compulsive and calculating about order and discipline – a German-style RSM in an Army of Greeks!

A question that is often asked about Metaxas is, did his dictatorship break the cycle of royalist vs. republican military coups? It has been difficult to give a categorical answer because of the Second World War and the Civil War. The Left, of course, claims that the Metaxas regime consecrated the right into long-term power in Greece. The evidence, however, only suggests that the Metaxas regime of 4th August 1936 destroyed, or displaced, the Traditional Right, so that a New Right emerged from the crucible of the Occupation and the subsequent Civil War.[6] Although General Tsalakoglou who collaborated with the Nazi occupiers was anti-Venizelist, he was not a typical pro-Metaxas officer; he was simply an anti-Venizelist one. Nor was Brigadier Thrasyvoulos Tsakalotos one either. He was anti-Venizelist and commanded the Rimini Brigade, the first unit of the regular Greek Army to engage the forces of the Left in combat in Athens in 1944. What is also certain is that Metaxas weakened and ridiculed the traditional political and social elite of Athenian and other urban salon-fähigkeit gemütlich urban bourgeoisie. But the War itself, the Occupation and the Civil War further eroded the authority and position of this elite. I have tried to show that Metaxas personally was ambivalent about this elite, or better still, intended to found his own for he detested it while at the same time was desperate at some point to join it. Politically though Metaxas wished to be the leader of the people: he tended to be a populist who aimed at the establishment of a popular autocracy, using the monarch as a figurehead and symbol of national unity while he wielded actual power. He often came across as a social leveller, the castigator of class in favour of social cohesion and national solidarity. At the same time, he was didactically conscious of his educational role in constructing a new society, a 'new Greek'.[7]

The *TO VIMA* Supplement also describes the Metaxas regime as a Police State; this has been a popular perception among several scholars

of that period in Greek political history. Again this must be approached with caution as a relative term and depiction: a Police State in relation to what and to whom? To be sure the Metaxas dictatorship or autocracy lacked a party base or any substitute for it, unless one considers the unlikely case of his National Youth Organization, *Ethniki Organosis Neoleas* (*EON*), or its forerunners at different stages of the political career of Metaxas, such as the small Party of *Eleftherophrones*, the Group of Reformers (*Metarythmistes*), the Associations or Clubs of *Epistratoi* (Conscripts), and the Popular Political Clubs of 1920–21 in Cephalonia. The Metaxas regime in fact rested on the support of the King and an anti-Venizelist faction that dominated the security forces, Army and Police. Metaxas was indispensable to the King: thus on 5 March 1936 he became his Minister of Army Affairs in order to deal with disloyal and seditious army officers. As Prime Minister a month later Metaxas suspended certain basic articles of the Constitution (what in effect constituted the nearest thing to a Bill of Rights), dissolved Parliament and proclaimed Martial Law (in effect, he abolished partisan politics). All of his immediate objectives were music to the King's ears: Metaxas promised to keep the army officers out of politics; keep Venizelists out of the Army; neutralize the politicians; and promote closer ties with Britain. That is why in addition to the premiership, Metaxas combined the portfolios of Foreign Affairs and Defence, and after the 4th August he added those of Education and, for all practical purposes, Interior too. He was overworked because it was difficult to find suitable ministers. Moreover, his objectives were rather idiosyncratic. He was suspicious, overbearing and could be vindictive to boot. Able cabinet ministers like C. Zavitsianos, Andreas Hatzikyriakos, G. Logothetis and Alex. Koryzis tended to resign within two to three years. C. Kotzias and C. Maniadakis were closest to Metaxas among his cabinet ministers and constituted his inner circle or kitchen cabinet – *Camarilla* – along with Theologos Nicoloudis (Minister of Press and Tourism), I. Diakos (a minister without portfolio, but a successful power broker, journalist-publicist and political fixer). Yet none of these people had the ability, idealism and intellectual cultivation of Metaxas; they were conveniently lesser types.

One can only conclude that Metaxas did not want professional traditional party politicians in his government. He was trying to break with the old Greek political world and its mould, to create a new state without politicians, one based on corporatist representation. The fact remains that there were in the regime many ex-army officers from the 1923 Leonardopoulos–Gargalides abortive coup against the Liberal–

Republican–Venizelist–Plastiras post-Asia Minor movement. This abortive coup and the subsequent purge of the army officers accused of being associated with it, constituted a bond between them and Metaxas, reputedly the inspiration and prime mover of the coup. Others in his administration came from the world of banking, especially the National Bank of Greece, and some major local industries like the Bodosakis armaments and weapons manufacturer.

Metaxas depoliticized the army officer corps. He used the expanded police force developed by Venizelos twenty years earlier in order to control the opposition and suppress unrest in the country. He increased the perks of the Gendarmerie (the *Chorofylaki*), and generally strengthened General Security Agencies which since 1929 at least (under the *Idionym Law*) chased up the Communists, and deported political dissidents and seditious elements to the islands and remote countryside. General Security also supplied the Service for the Defence of the State and against the threat of war in the form of counter-espionage: a highly efficient Aliens department was created under the direction of the General Security Undersecretary C. Maniadakis. In fact and in actual practice, the Metaxas regime in this area built on existing institutions and practices. By expanding the training and educational facilities for the Police, it made them a far more efficient agency of state control – a counterweight to the Army perhaps? – eliciting as a result a wider public perception of the regime as a Police State.[8] Yet another source of public resentment of the regime was its high taxation policies and its plainly coercive and intimidating fund-raising for national purposes. Metaxas though enjoyed better relations with the armed forces among whom he commanded wide respect for his brilliant past record as a Staff Officer in the Balkan Wars, and later for setting out the overall strategy of resistance to the Italian invasion in October 1940. Navy Chief Admiral Sakellariou however disliked Metaxas, and at some point the latter dismissed his deputy Economou. Although these were anti-Venizelist, they were primarily monarchist officers. Thus the initial reaction of the army to the Metaxas Palace coup on 4th August was one of acquiescence; many of them happened to be Kondylist – Populist officers. But there was rising discontent in the next two years, especially as they came to resent the new institution favoured by Metaxas, the paramilitary *EON* or National Youth Organization. There were weak unsuccessful coup attempts by the odd officers and minor politicians, some of them allegedly inspired by the Palace.[9] Some blatantly pro-German officers at inopportune times were sacked as for example, General Platys, especially

when Metaxas and the King were trying to balance a foreign policy of neutrality with a pro-British bias so as not to provoke an Italian attack.

Certain concrete achievements of the Metaxas regime remain, lasting developments that are popularly associated with it: the Demotic Grammar of Triandafylides commissioned by Metaxas, a committed demoticist himself; the IKA system of Social Security – National Insurance, and Old Age Pension – a scheme considered earlier by the previous Venizelos regime, but for one reason or another sidetracked; the further development of the Piraeus–Kifissia Electric Railway; the Albania National Epic. Many agree that his personality and strong will kept wartime Greek morale up; there was a total collapse after his death in January 1941. It is interesting that Metaxas never really liked, or at least never respected, General Alexander Papagos; he considered him militarily incompetent or at least inadequate. A joke making the rounds of Greek GHQ at the Grande Bretagne Hotel in 1940, probably inspired and obviously propagated by Metaxas himself went like this: 'Imagine what would happen if the Italians found out that Aleko is our Chief of Staff ...'.

II

The fact is that Metaxas was a dominant figure in the Greek political consciousness and discourse for at least three decades, if not longer – roughly the first half of this century. Originally he was a central figure in the passionate national schism in Greece from 1916 to 1936 and beyond; and later was often invoked by his supporters and enemies alike in the discussion of the tragic post-Second World War developments in Greece. Simply on this basis, Metaxas deserves the attention of historians, and especially so over half a century after his death. But he merits attention too as a major Greek national figure who, at the moment of deadly threat to the territorial integrity and sovereign independence of the country, not only rose to the occasion of leading its defence against a powerful, though cowardly, aggressor in October 1940, but, as it transpired, also had the prescience, the foresight, and vision during the preceding four years in power to organize and equip the Greek armed forces and bring them up to a strength of over 750,000 men under arms, and achieve a modicum of national rehabilitation – even unity, albeit under an autocratic regime – to be able to cope with such a critical challenge. Even his most severe detractors among his

Greek critics grant him this much.[10] The novelist Giorgos Theotokas believed that:

> The worth of Metaxas is that at the fateful moment (which was also the supreme moment in his life) he felt clearly without hesitation the demands of the deeper instincts of Greece ... I greatly appreciate two things about Metaxas. One the fact that from the first moment and without hesitation he placed the national interest above any other – the regime, political or social interest – and in this he towered over Mussolini and the leaders of the French Right. The other, his political sensitivity to the fact that not only all of Greece would be for war till the end or to the last, but what direction it would take. Thus Metaxas became the agent of the deeper passions of the nation. Good general, good intellectual.[11]

On pages 205–6 of his *Diary* Theotokas quotes the impression of Metaxas by Demetra Vakka (Mrs Kenneth Brown):

> While Colonel Metaxas is widely considered the most capable of King Constantine's entourage, he did not make as strong an impression on me: he is a small fat man, an ordinary dark-complexioned type. While a student in Germany's *Berlinkriegsakademie* they called him 'Little Moltke'. It is reported one day the Kaiser put his hand on Metaxas's shoulder and told [his brother-in-law] King Constantine, 'If I had five like him, I'd conquer the world.' Despite his German training and education, Colonel Metaxas did not consider Germany invincible and was not for neutrality at all. Proof of this is all the work he did to prepare a military plan for the capture of Constantinople. His plan was submitted to the Entente, but Britain rejected it.

And Queen Sophia of Greece told her brother, the Kaiser, 'Wir haben unser man in Atene, das ist Yannaki.' Philip Dragoumis in one of the volumes of his memoirs, *Dichasmos 1916–1919* (Athens, 1995), in the entry for 28 July 1919 [p.447] reports, 'The Queen is the only one who continues to rely on the worth of Metaxas.' Furthermore Theotokas in the entry of 31 January 1941 in his *Diary* [p.238] reveals more in his description of the state funeral of Metaxas when he reports,

> It is clear people were sad about his death, especially in view of OXI and repulsing the Italian invasion. The past is erased; what is left is the glorious moment in Metaxas's life, the one that guarantees his fame. But there

> wasn't the same kind of anguish as there was over Venizelos's death. The relationship of Metaxas to the people was never one of love; he was rather cold, logical and calculating. It was like grieving or mourning over the loss of a valuable partner. But also one of undoubted respect: Metaxas, who was so maligned in the political arena in the past and who till age sixty-five was considered a failure, managed in the end to command respect. He achieved what he wanted, that is, to govern Greece, and entered history as leader and saviour of the country. He made us follow his funeral with grief over his loss, and respect for his strength, judgment, exceptional perseverance and courage.

And in the entry of 16 February 1941 [pp.337–8] Theotokas describes the Metaxas *Diary* as one in which the dictator wore his 'Sunday best', constituting a significant historical document of the last thirty years (1910–40), and wholly convincing of Metaxas's patriotism. 'I have no difficulty accepting this', Theotokas concludes, 'because I never believed in the conscious treachery of Metaxas, his ministers or generals. But I deplore the Metaxas regime for its niggardly spirit (*mikropsychia*), narrow mindedness and strategic incompetence, and the reigning dynasty (which can be deplored) for its hereditary, traditional, incurable stupidity, and humble devotion to its material interests and personal safety.'

Beyond that, Metaxas himself gave an extensive explanation of his actions and policy in a major statement to the Greek Press, the owners, editors and publishers of the national dailies (the Athens Press) at the Grande Bretagne Hotel on 2 November 1940.[12]

III

It was only after I had completed the research for this book that I ventured to visit the Metaxas home, a modest Italianate villa at No. 10 Danglis Road in Kifissia, a suburb of Athens, where I met his surviving younger daughter Mrs Nana Foka, a sprightly welcoming lady in her early eighties. She showed me around the house and all the mementos connected with her father and his regime; regaled me with stories and episodes about his closest associates; insisted that I occupy the lounge chair in which the Italian Ambassador Emmanuelle Grazzi sat when he delivered Il Duce's infamous ultimatum to Metaxas at 3 a.m. on 28 October 1940. A plaque on the left-hand side of the front wall of the villa commemorates that momentous occasion.

A gifted linguist, Mrs Foka also described vividly too me her mother's arrest by ELAS during the Communist Insurgency or Civil War. Her main complaint was about the absence of any reference to her father on any of the national occasions the Greeks celebrate or commemorate in connection with the Second World War. She finds this deliberate lack of recognition, tantamount to a denial of her father's contribution to Greek national survival and his other services to the Greek nation, spitefully petty and undeserved. When I asked what she remembered best about her father when she was growing up, she replied, 'He always admonished us not to trust anybody.' Typical of a suspicious autocrat, dictator? When I asked her who her father's close friends were, she snapped, 'he had no friends'; in Greek, 'Itan aphilos'.[13]

IV

Why sketch a political portrait or profile of someone like Metaxas who after all was the authoritarian Prime Minister of a small Balkan country on the eve of the Second World War? His impact on his own country was overwhelming so long as he lived, but not permanent; and he hardly had any than a passing impact on a wider society beyond the boundaries of Greece, including the sizeable Greek communities of the diaspora in Egypt, North America, and Africa. There must be though a natural fascination with an individual of extraordinary talent, achievement or power, and who radiates some kind of glamour. The Chief of the Greeks – 'Great Governor' (O Megalos Kyvernites) of Greece – radiated a glamour of sorts if only because he insisted and succeeded, albeit temporarily, in imposing his will and vision on his country and its people unopposed for at least four years. One is therefore curious about any special abilities Metaxas had that compelled him to act in the public domain and his hopes and vision which many other Greeks may have shared but could not pursue or implement themselves.

Needless to say no biographer or prosopographer, including this one, is free of bias. Both social context and emotional elements constitute conditioning factors. Even the much vaunted documentation which is invoked and purveyed as evidence is not always wholly dependable or trustworthy. Finally, why Metaxas and not someone else? Perhaps to the extent that in his general perception of politics in modern Greece and overall vision of Greece as the expression of Hellenism, Metaxas may have left behind him a broad legacy that lingers on in certain corners of

the Traditional Political Right, reflected in the Military Establishment and remnants of the Monarchist Establishment. His legacy may even encompass the remnants of the underlying anti-Western cultural streak in contemporary Greek nationalism. Yet this particular tendency has always been present in Greek literary/cultural writing and discussion since 1880 at least.[14] Is Greece, in the Eastern Mediterranean, more Hellenistic than Hellenic? Is it more Byzantine Oriental (Near Eastern as per D.G. Hogarth, 1902, and Vatikiotis, 1974)[15] than classical Greek or Western Hellenic? But that is another vast and never ending argument.

V

Interesting too is the fact that there are no serious biographies of the two rivals, Venizelos and Metaxas, whose publicly aired political differences dominated the Greek political scene and divided the Greek nation, both in mainland Greece and in the Diaspora for nearly thirty years.

The contrast in the personality of the two men is relevant here. Venizelos was mercurial, charismatic, clannish, tribal, imperious and autocratic. Possessing an enormous ego, he was seen by the mythopoeic Greeks as a hero and a saviour of the nation.[16] A party political animal, he was a master of political intrigue. A perusal of his voluminous correspondence suggests a contradictory personality, a slippery customer difficult to grasp or pin down. Neither man was a mainland Greek; both were islanders. Metaxas was from Cephalonia that was free of Ottoman influence, and rather more Italianate by virtue of the Venetian occupation of over two centuries followed by a brief French occupation with its fall-out of the ideas of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. He was conscious of his family's Byzantine origins and its subsequent ennoblement by the Venetian rulers in the seventeenth century. He was proud of the fact that in the past members of his family had served as governors of the island of Ithaca for several generations, while others had been prominent soldiers, men of letters, doctors and lawyers. In contrast, Venizelos from Ottoman-ruled Crete, was from a rougher, less genteel, background and of a rebellious disposition.

Venizelos was a lawyer and professional politician, whereas Metaxas was a professional soldier turned politician. Impulsive, empathic, impressionable and ponderous, Venizelos came to power in 1910 on the back of an army coup d'état. In contrast, Metaxas, detached, or even

semi-detached, and openly more snobbish, haughty, coolly analytical, calculating and deliberate, was a highly and widely respected Army staff officer who clawed his way on to the national political scene after having been a notorious courtier, a client of the Greek royal family. In yet sharper contrast, Venizelos was an 'Ottoman' Greek, whose romantic political liberalism and republicanism of convenience were largely the result of French Enlightenment influence. Metaxas was rather Teutonic, impressed by the 19th-century German love of classical Greek 'kultur', Prussian military prowess and efficiency. But he could not match the charm and charisma of Venizelos which verged on demagogy and hero worship.[17] Whereas Venizelos was adulated, actually worshipped by the masses even when he governed them in a 'popular autocracy', nobody worshipped Metaxas. Erudite and a romantic about classical Greek civilization, loyalty and duty were his social-political priorities, civic values and the supreme virtues, not rebellion or pandering to the fickle masses. An elitist and a monarchist pitted against the Greek bourgeois political establishment, Metaxas was determined to impose a new order and discipline on the Greek state and society, and to counter the sentimentality of national dreams woven by Venizelos.

Whereas Metaxas was cautious and premonitional in his political judgment, Venizelos was impulsive and flamboyant. Paradoxically perhaps Metaxas was more radical in his domestic national perceptions and consistently anti-bourgeois, whereas Venizelos was the uncrowned king of the Greek bourgoisie, the darling of the liberal political salons of the Greek 'chattering classes' (to borrow a late 20th-century British metaphor) at home and abroad.[18] He attracted and enjoyed tremendous affection from his followers, whereas Metaxas elicited fear and resentment from his critics and enemies, respect and obedience from his political allies, supporters and collaborators.

VI

Like a period in the history of the ancient Greeks, the Trojan War, the public career of Ioannis Metaxas as a prominent soldier and politician began with a quarrel which led to the Schism (*Ethnikos Dichasmos*), in the country and which lasted for thirty years, at least, from 1915 to 1945, and which was both epochal and significant in the life and political destiny of Greece. There are at least four main reasons why the reconstruction of the public life and political career of Metaxas is difficult; some will

aver impossible. One is the man's complex personality and his own extraordinary description and dissection of it in a *Diary*[19] unique among the personal records left by public men in Greece; there is also a mass of state and private papers, *selectively* collected and preserved in the Greek State Archives, including an intimate correspondence with his wife during the first twenty years of their marriage. Another is the nature of his authoritarian regime under which he governed Greece as an autocrat, a classical dictator from 4 August 1936 to 29 January 1941. The third is that his rule coincided with the greatest epic of the modern Greeks, their heroic and successful resistance against the Italian invaders in Albania in 1940–41. The fourth reason is Metaxas's own unclear and undefined relation to Mediterranean and European fascism, the shift in his political career from a parliamentary politician to being an anti-parliamentarian autocrat. His quarrel with Venizelos dominated the Greek political scene in the interwar period and fuelled the passionate division of Greek politics which emphasizes personal preference and promotes violent factionalism.

The more empathic among us Greeks also find Metaxas an unattractive personality, dry, over-logical, and lacking charisma. Teutonically erudite, pedantic? There are several things we hold against him. The comfortable bourgeois middle class among us which arose under the Tricoupis regimes of the 1880s and 1890s and its successors, and dominated Greek politics from the late 19th century to 1936, find Metaxas a tedious lower middle class (petty bourgeois) clever upstart despite his own claim that he was the descendant of declassé nobility of Frankish counts with Byzantine ancestors. What the 'chattering classes' among us cannot forgive too is his having abolished our favourite sport, namely party politics, or the politics of factionalism – he denied us our clubland world of political gossip and intrigue. Many also cannot forgive him for having been more successful as the champion of greater social justice for the people, the lower toiling classes of farmers and workers. Perhaps most insulting of all to us was the fact that Metaxas managed to govern the country for four and a half years under a practically *personal* regime of enlightened despotism, unsupported by any national political party, and one strictly based on an understanding – not free incidentally of mutual suspicion – with the King, the personal loyalty of a few old collaborators and political cronies, a thoroughly purged army officer corps which respected him as a one-time brilliant staff officer and retired general, and a brilliantly efficient state security service, *Asfaleia*, as well as his own impressive moral authority.