The Satirical Cartoon in War Propaganda: The Case of the Greco-Italian War (1940-1941)

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Abstract: This paper highlights the use of satirical cartoons in war propaganda as a method to persuade and influence public opinion, through the case study of the Greco-Italian War (1940-1941), which represents one of the most important events in late modern Greek history. Based on visual, contextual and semiotic analysis, the paper examines representative samples of Greek and British satirical cartoons selected from a comprehensive primary and secondary dataset published in Greek and British newspapers during the Greco-Italian War (1940-1941). I aim to show that Greek cartoonists cleverly used humour to mock the enemy and strengthen national identity, while sharing themes, motifs and propaganda objectives with British cartoonists. The selected cartoons, marked by their adaptability and recurring motifs, played a pivotal role in war propaganda, served as a valuable source of information for the public, and played a significant role in shaping collective consciousness about the war.

Keywords: *visual propaganda, cartoons, Greco-Italian war 1940-1941, Second World War, satire*

Introduction to satirical cartoons in the press

Recent historical research has focused on the study of the press. According to Greek historian Μπάλτα (pronounced Balta), the press, "recording and analysing the ephemera of the current situation, of History in the making, ultimately produces history, not so much as an eyewitness but as a constructor of social reality itself" (1999, 11).[1] The press is one of the most important tools of war and political propaganda, for its prestige permits it to focus the attention of public opinion on a specific topic for a given period, while, at the same time, it can unobtrusively submit specific positions and opinions on the news to the reading public (Γεωργάλας 2008, 316-317). Political cartoons are an important aspect of the press. Satirical cartoons as a visual genre in the press are a special and interesting case. In Greece, this genre experienced significant growth during the nineteenth century, especially at a time when illiteracy affected a large percentage of the population. Cartoons showed a significant development from the nineteenth century onwards in Greece, mainly due to the genre's ability to communicate with the public directly and to trigger emotional rather than logical responses (Αντωνόπουλος 2016). In the attempt to define the genre of satirical cartoon, scholars have argued that it is a graphic representation

which synthetically captures complex situations and events in a comprehensive illustration, aimed at satirising, critiquing, and humorously conveying important facts, usually with the support of a short and scathing caption (Τσάκωνα 2008, 381-382). The terms "caricature" and "cartoon" are used to describe humorous satirical drawings that are often political in nature. A caricature mainly refers to satirical portraiture while cartoons construct a situation through the image, disregarding any realistic rendering. Caricatures and cartoons are directly related to visual satire. Therefore, it is not surprising that early forms of satirical representation can be traced back to ancient Greek and Roman cultures. At the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the first examples of caricature appear in their modern form. There are four main techniques used in cartooning, according to Sarıgül: reversing, contrast, assimilation and intertextuality. In the first case, a known fact, item or situation is reversed in order to create a humorous feeling. Contrast, instead, emphasizes the ability to shock the audience by presenting a fact or situation through enlargement or reduction, which means that "the size and number contrast was used for boosting the meaning." In assimilation, the property of one object is given to another; and in intertextuality, which is one of the dominant techniques in the visual communication media of the postmodern era, the cartoonist assigns a new meaning to an already existing work (Sarıgül 2009, 8-9). According to Σαπρανίδης (pronounced Sapranidis), cartoons are like the news, as they are topical and "lose their topicality" over time (356). Important elements for the communication of the message of the cartoon are, finally, the variety and characteristics of the forms, shapes and captions (Σαγιάς 2020).

Methodology

The purpose of this article is to highlight the use of satirical cartoons in war visual propaganda, as a method to persuade and influence public opinion, by discussing how the Greco-Italian War of 1940-1941 was depicted in representative samples of Greek and British satirical cartoons. Furthermore, I will highlight the similarities and differences between Greek and British satirical cartoons, underscoring the role of humour in influencing wartime narratives from both perspectives. Based on the content and semiotic analysis, I carried out the research on representative samples of Greek and British satirical cartoons selected from a comprehensive primary and secondary dataset published in Greek and British newspapers during the war. I also refer to archives of Greek newspapers, including but not limited to *Ethnos Asyrmatos*

and *Hellinikon Mellon*, the digitized archive of the press of the Library of the Hellenic Parliament, and other secondary sources. As for the British newspapers, I refer to publications such as the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Lancashire Daily Post* for cartoons reflecting the British perspective on the war. This paper, therefore, mainly consists of the study of hundreds of Greek and British political satirical cartoons, which were published in the ephemeral and periodical press during the war and in later literature. I have selected satirical cartoons through a systematic and comprehensive process to put together a diverse and informative sample, thus helping to avoid bias and to present a broader spectrum of wartime propaganda. The sources were selected on the basis of their thematic relevance, e.g. depictions of Benito Mussolini or the Italian military tactics, and sorted in a rudimentary chronological order with the purpose of creating a chronological narrative of the Greco-Italian War (1940-1941), which should also help to understand how the cartoons evolved. Apart from these criteria, the selection prioritises cartoons that are historically significant and emblematic of the broader propaganda apparatus during the Greco-Italian War. Then, I studied the selected sources through visual and contextual analysis, focusing on caricatures, symbols and metaphors. Interpreting and decoding cartoons is crucial in this research due to their polysemic nature. It is important to understand that political cartoons are not primarily created by the whims of the designers for mockery, with few exceptions, but are an ongoing effort to respond to society by capturing events and public sentiments simply and understandably (Σαγιάς 2020). According to Σαπρανίδης (Sapranidis), "in order to understand the meaning and humour of a satirical cartoon, it should be placed in the historical, political and social context of the time in which it was created" (2005). Therefore, it is crucial to start by clarifying the historical and political context of the creation of the cartoons, the circumstance of their publication, and their use in war propaganda. It is necessary to take into account the artistic and political conventions of the time when interpreting cartoons, as these may impose significant limitations on their interpretation, if one wants to reveal the messages produced by the press and consumed by society, especially during times of major political turmoil, thus highlighting how cartoons reflect the mood of public opinion.

Historical context: propaganda and censorship during the Greco-Italian War (1940-1941)

In order to examine the press and by extension the satirical cartoon as a vehicle

of war propaganda during the Second World War through the case study of the Greco-Italian War, it is first necessary to define it as a concept and to record certain characteristics. The term propaganda was coined in 1622 by the Catholic Church during the years of the struggle against Protestantism, when Pope Gregory XI established a new governing body of the Counter-Reformation called the Commission for the Promotion of the Faith (*Congregatione de Propaganda Fide*) in order to spread Christianity and defend the Catholic faith (Prendergast & Prendergast 2013, 23). The transition from the ecclesiastical to the political vocabulary occurred in the middle of the nineteenth century, when the word propaganda was used to mean the technique of spreading ideas with the aim of influencing public opinion (Γεωργάλας 2008, 16 and 23). According to Nelson, propaganda is a systematic form of deliberate persuasion through the mass media, which attempts to influence the feelings, attitudes, opinions and actions of a specific audience for ideological, political or commercial purposes through the controlled transmission of one-sided messages that sometimes may not be real (Nelson 1996, 232-233). The First World War was a turning point in the history of propaganda and communication culture for many countries because during the war public opinion developed its modern characteristics as a kind of collective thought based on the feeling of belonging and participating in the management of important national affairs (Μπάλτα & Παπαδημητρίου 1993, 36). The press, public opinion, and political power now developed an interdependent relationship, within which modern propaganda was organized (36-37).

From 4th August 1936 to April 1941, Greece was under the totalitarian "Fourth of August" Regime of General Ioannis Metaxas, who suddenly died in January 1941 and was succeeded by Alexandros Koryzis. On 31st August 1936, in the context of censorship enforcement, the Deputy Ministry of Press and Tourism was founded and put under the guidance of journalist Theologos Nikoloudis. Censorship is defined as the imposition of control and various restrictions on the public expression of ideas and perceptions, when they are considered to undermine the State's authority or the political system (Περρή 2006, 304). Based on compulsory law 45, the article *On the establishment of the Deputy Ministry of Press and Tourism* specified that the Deputy Ministry was to determine and regulate all matters concerning the enlightenment of public opinion, such as publications in the daily and periodical press, theatrical performances, cinema, the radio, all kinds of advertisements, publications and every kind of events, to ensure that they remained within the framework of national traditions and ideals (Government Gazette 31/8/1936). There were separate special censorship departments, which specialized in specific areas (Πετράκη 2006, 31-32). For the

press, the Internal Press Monitoring Department and the Internal Press Supervision Office were established, which were under the Directorate of Internal Press.

On 28th October 1940 Greece entered the Second World War, following the rejection of the Italian ultimatum to allow Italian troops to enter the country, delivered to Ioannis Metaxas by the Italian ambassador in Athens, Emanuele Grazzi (Ρούσσος 1975, 223). Military operations in the Greco-Italian War unfolded in three phases. The first lasted from 28th October to 13th November 1940, when the Greek forces successfully blocked the Italian invasion of the homeland. The second phase, from 14th November to 28th December 1940, concerns the Greek counterattack against the Italian forces in the Albanian territory of Northern Epirus. The third phase lasted from 29th December 1940 to 5th April 1941, when Nazi Germany invaded Greece (Παπακωνσταντίνου 1966, 47). The imposition of censorship in 1936 had already significantly restricted satirical and political cartooning in Greece. In 1936, the "Fourth of August" Regime had banned satire of heads of state whether illustrated or not (Καστρίτη 2022). However, according to Σαπρανίδης (Sapranidis), after the Italian invasion, the Greek press was allowed, despite the imposition of censorship, to publish satirical cartoons, after receiving the approval of the relevant press control department, in order to boost the morale and patriotism of soldiers and civilians (Σαπρανίδης 2005). On 30th October 1940 Metaxas invited the editors and owners of Athenian newspapers to enlist with their pens and the strength of their souls to fight in the war that had just begun (Πετράκη 2006, 144). Satirical cartoons, in an attempt to spread anti-Italian propaganda and destroy the image of the invincible enemy, to be published had first to be approved by the Deputy Ministry of Press and Tourism. In this way, during the Greco-Italian War, the Greek cartoonists accounted for the events of the war in the Greek press with a satirical and unappealing perspective, sometimes signing their cartoons and sometimes publishing them anonymously. With simple lines and easy-to-understand caricatures as their common characteristics, the cartoonists boosted the morale of the Greeks with refined humour, ingenuity, catchy captions and a critical spirit, thus promoting the valour and exploits of the Greek army. At the same time, they portrayed the conflict by mocking the opponent, emphasizing the collective participation in the resistance and cheering for the victory. However, Greek cartoonists were forbidden to depict Hitler satirically (Πετράκη 2006, 206). Greek cartoons reappeared hesitantly with Mussolini's standardized sketches in November 1941, while from mid-December of the same year a significant upward trend could be observed until the beginning of the Occupation of Greece (207). The

Greek cartoonists willingly and effortlessly enlisted through their art in the war of propaganda with humour and a strong patriotic feeling, sometimes working against the enemy and sometimes cheering for the Greeks (Σαγιάς 2020).

Italy's attack on Greece marked a new phase for British war propaganda, too, insofar as the main concern in the United Kingdom was to safeguard the continuation of Greek resistance and, by extension, to produce a positive impact on the morale of the British population (Στεφανίδης 2018, 222). In the British press, although a restriction on the number of newspaper pages had been imposed in 1940, several cartoons were published with a eulogistic character for the determination of Greece against the forces of Fascist Italy (Πετράκη 2006, 198). The department responsible for publicity and propaganda was the Ministry of Information, which had been established at the end of the First World War and re-established on 4th September 1939 with Hugh Pattison Macmillan as Minister. Through propaganda, an attempt was made to activate the British population to actively participate in the war developments by awakening their voluntary feeling (McLaine 1979; Welch 2016, 43). Similarly, in the British press, the owners of major newspapers immediately realised the importance of presenting a funny side of the war through the ridicule of the enemy, by securing collaboration with important cartoonists of the time (Πετράκη 2006, 198). The approximately one hundred cartoons of important British cartoonists about the Greco-Italian war accompanied the dominant article on the front pages of the British newspapers, depicting the unexpected victories of a small nation against a great European power, projecting messages of courage and heroism, especially in Great Britain, which was fighting alone against the Axis (Πετράκη 2006, 199-200).

On the other hand, already before the declaration of the Greco-Italian War, the Italian newspapers tried to establish an atmosphere of antipathy for the Greeks by publishing mocking articles on a daily basis (Παπακωνσταντίνου 1966, 36-39). However, cartoons were not widely used in Fascist Italy, as Mussolini considered them a decadent art of Anglo-Saxon origins (Skarmintzos 2015).

Early satirical cartoons and symbolism as the Greco-Italian war unfolds: boosting morale and patriotism

From the beginning of the Italian Campaign, satirical cartoons were published in Greece, depicting the nation alongside other small countries that had suffered the aggression of Fascist Italy. A typical example is the cartoon by Fokion Dimitriadis (1894-1977), which was published in the newspaper *Elefthero*

Vima on 2nd November 1940, depicting a young *Evzone* (Greek: Εύζωνας), the elite soldier of the Greek army, in his attempt to protect some young children from Mussolini, whose names are Libya, Ethiopia, Albania and Dodecanese (*Elefthero Vima*, 02/11/1940). The *Evzone* was widely used as a symbol of heroism and courage. A typical example is a cartoon by Pavlos Pavlidis (1911-1979) with the caption "The Greek Stukas", depicting an *Evzone* with his spear in the sky falling rapidly from a mountain peak (Αντωνόπουλος 2016). In this context, there is another cartoon by Michalis Papageorgiou (1896-1987) published in a postcard, in which Greece is represented as a small but strong country and a Mussolini of enormous proportions is being beaten by an *Evzone* wearing a small *tsarouchi*, which recalls the biblical story of David and Goliath. It should be emphasized, at this point, that cartoons circulated in addition to the press and in postcards, a practice which had already been established since the beginning of the twentieth century and proved to be particularly effective in spreading propaganda (Κολύδας 2014, 20). Also, cartoons which were at first published in the press were then printed on postcards, which were either sent to the soldiers in Albania or to the civilian population in order to strengthen patriotism and keep the morale high. (Σαπρανίδης 2005). Cartoonists were particularly inventive in deploying humour and satire to catch the war issues of their time. They ridiculed and satirised key figures and the military leadership of Fascist troops at the front in an understandable way, in the generalized effort to transform the current harsh reality of the war into an opportunity to revive the morale and courage of the Greeks, both at the front and in the rest of the country.

The *tsarouchi*, a leather shoe with the characteristic feature of the tassel on the toe, which is part of the traditional uniform of the *Evzones*, is directly intertwined with Greek tradition and the Greek Revolution of 1821 and is a frequent symbol in satirical cartoons of the Greco-Italian War. One of the most typical satirical cartoons, where the *tsarouchi* is found as a symbol of bravery and freedom, belongs to Kastanakis, who depicted Mussolini as an Italian soldier being hit by a rain of *tsarouchia* and referred to a communiqué from Rome which claimed that bad weather was delaying victory (*Ethnos*, 02/11/1940). Similarly, in a cartoon by Fokion Dimitriadis (1894 – 1977), one of the greatest Greek cartoonists, an Italian soldier is depicted shouting: "Halt! I see a cloud over there!", whereas the cloud is a gigantic *tsarouchi* (Λαζογιώργος-Ελληνικός, 2000). Although the reality was different in the context of Italian propaganda, on 31st October 1940 the Italian General Staff had announced: "Our units continue to advance in Epirus and have reached the Kalamas River in several places. Adverse weather conditions and actions of

retreating enemies do not slow down the advance of our forces" (Αντωνόπουλος 2016). The Italian news agency Stefani also argued that: "The Greeks fight with barbaric and inhuman means, such as the spear." This announcement was satirized by Dimitriadis in a cartoon portraying an *Evzone* standing in front of an enormous Italian tank, from where the Italian soldier challenges him: "Take the lance out of your weapon and come to compete" (Λαζογιώργος-Ελληνικός, 2000). Another Italian announcement that the Greeks had blocked the roads with huge rocks inspired Kastanakis to satirize it by depicting an *Evzone* blocking the Italian tank with his oversized *tsarouchi* (*Ethnos*, 6/11/1940). In another cartoon by Kastanakis, Mussolini is depicted as a harlequin singing under the balcony of Greece, trying to "win" her, but a male figure – probably Metaxas as her father – hits him with a big *tsarouchi* (*Ethnos*, 10/11/1940). The cartoon has the caption "History of two weeks", referring to the Greek military achievements. Another representative cartoon concerning the symbol and the widespread use of the *tsarouchi* in satirical cartoons was created by an anonymous cartoonist and published in the newspaper *Hellinikon Mellon*, depicting a giant *tsarouchi* driving out Mussolini, thus symbolising the strong resistance opposed by the Greek army on the border (*Hellinikon Mellon*, 30/10/1940). The cartoonists of the time used the military shoe as a symbol, which they imaginatively depicted as an anti-tank device, as a physical obstacle to the enemy attack, as a phalanx and even as an aerial means of attack. The *tsarouchi*, symbolizing the strength of the Greeks, was Mussolini's nightmare, as depicted in a clever cartoon in the newspaper *Typos* (9/11/1940).

The war and news announcements of the Italians were a source of inspiration for the Greek cartoonists, as we have seen. Another typical example is the claim of Virginio Gayda, prominent Italian journalist, supporter of Mussolini and publisher of the widely circulation newspaper *Il Giornale d'Italia*, who stated: "Italy was left alone to bear the burden of the war." Dimitriadis, satirizing this phrase, depicted Mussolini crying in front of an *Evzone*, saying: "They left me alone and he [Evzone] is hitting me" (Λαζογιώργος-Ελληνικός, 2000).

Depictions of British reinforcements and the Greek gratitude

As the hostilities progressed, the British sent their first reinforcements and supplies to the Greeks. In general, the attitude of the Greek press towards Britain projected a friendly feeling of gratitude, although much of the British press had criticized the size of the reinforcements sent to Greece (Πετράκη 2006, 201-202). At the behest of British Prime Minister Churchill, the Greek air force had been reinforced with a small number of aircraft, which had arrived

from the Middle East. Metaxas accepted the aid from the Royal Air Force but refused the deployment of British troops on the ground, in order not to provoke Nazi Germany (Skarmintzos 2015). This involvement of the British reverberated in the cartoons of the Greek press and postcards, whose captions were written both in Greek and English in order to recognize the contribution of the British. For example, another cartoon by Dimitriadis shows a smiling Royal Air Force officer and an *Evzone* holding a small Mussolini by the ears as "a delinquent schoolboy taken for punishment" with the caption "Naughty boy" (Skarmintzos 2015). Clive Uptton (1911-2006) drew one of the most important cartoons of that time for the *Daily Sketch* on 1st November, referring to the contribution of the Royal Navy: the cartoon depicts an *Evzone* determined to stop the enemy, as he is supported by the British, with the main caption "The Royal Navy will provide every help in Greece", a message which widely circulated on the Greek front pages (Πετράκη 2006, 201). Another cartoon was published in the British press depicting Greece as a boxer who defeated Mussolini in a match with the help of Britain. A beaten Mussolini addresses Hitler, saying: "I though you said he was going to lie down in the first round", mocking Italy's mistaken belief that conquering Greece would be an easy task (Λαζογιώργος-Ελληνικός, 2000).

Satirical depictions of Mussolini's leadership and military setbacks in Greek and British wartime propaganda

Apart from these examples, the focus of the Greek cartoonists was on Mussolini's praxis of removing and replacing his army commanders in Albania due to continuous military failures, thus demonstrating the chaotic conduction of the campaign. The occupation of Koritsa in southern Albania by the Greek armed forces on 22nd November 1941, resulted in Mussolini forcing General Badoglio to resign on 6th December, followed the next day by the resignations of General De Vecchi from the position of military commander of the Dodecanese (Πετράκη 2006, 207). A characteristic example is a cartoon of Andreas Vlassopoulos (1909-1989), who depicted the relieved Italian Generals Prasca, Badoglio and De Vecchi, playing cards and inviting Ubaldo Soddu, supreme commander up to mid-December 1940, to sit with them, who had been recently replaced by General Ugo Cavallero, supreme commander from mid-December (Αντωνόπουλος 2016). Another cartoon with a witty humorous caption depicts Mussolini giving "the shoes to the hand", a Greek idiomatic phrase meaning that someone is being expelled, as it is written to Badoglio after "he was hit with tsarouchia on the head". Another one by Dimitriadis depicts an *Evzone* as a

boxer, wondering whose turn it is after he has defeated Prasca and Badoglio (Αντωνόπουλος 2016). In another cartoon, Iasonas Serbos satirises Mussolini's constant changes of commanders alongside the Italian announcements of delayed military operations due to adverse weather conditions. Mussolini is depicted asking General Soddu and General Rodolfo Graziani over the phone: "What are you doing there? Why are you delaying?", concerning respectively the operations on the Greek front, and in Libya. Soddu replies: "Tottering rain and bitter cold impede operations", while Graziani reports: "Intolerable heat and lack of water impede the advance". Mussolini disappointedly replies to both: "Reciprocal transfer of Generals" (Λαζογιώργος-Ελληνικός, 2000).

Then, cartoonist Giorgos Lydakis, taking advantage of Mussolini's speeches, who had often proclaimed or implied his intention to create a new Roman Empire, ingeniously portrayed the dictator as the Nero of the twentieth century (*Ethnos*, 07/11/1970). In another typical caricature of the time, we see Mussolini in the centre as Nero singing, wearing the characteristic helmet of the Bersaglieri Corps – the elite light infantry units with cockerel feathers on their helmets – while the Acropolis is burning in the background. Mussolini is also portrayed as another Caesar in many cartoons. A caricature related to the Roman past was published by Kastanakis, who portrayed Mussolini's neo-Roman ideology "Mare Nostrum" ("Our Sea") to be unlikely to become real. The cartoon depicts Mussolini standing outside a naval exhibition and the caption reads: "Tremble Britain, the Mediterranean is ours" (Αντωνόπουλος 2016). In the same context, Pavlidis also created a cartoon depicting Mussolini in front of a bowl of spaghetti instead of the Mediterranean basin (*Asyrmatos*, 04/11/1940). In a sketch by Kostas Bezos (1905-1943), Roman general Scipio, Caesar Augustus and Julius Caesar beat up Mussolini (Σαγιάς 2020). Accordingly, the British press published in the *Lancashire Daily Post* a striking cartoon by William Cavanagh Furnival (1884-1966), which depicts a disappointed Mussolini who watches the eruption of a volcano called Greece in the background, signifying the eruption of resistance and alluding to the idea that the New Roman Empire Mussolini wished to create was doomed to destruction like another Pompeii (Ψαρομηλίγκος 2009). One further British cartoon created by Donald Zec (1919-2021) and published in the *Daily Mirror* depicts Mussolini as another Brutus stabbing Greece in the back, while the successful resistance of the Greeks is symbolized in a cartoon depicting a big Roman legionnaire cowering in front of a Greek hoplite (Ψαρομηλίγκος 2009). Another meaningful cartoon by Leslie Illingworth (1902-1979) that appeared in the *Daily Mail* shows an *Evzone* holding a flag with the line "We are neutral" written on it, and a gigantic Mussolini ready to "stomp" him with his boot. The

caption "It's just Greek to him" highlights Mussolini's refusal to accept Greece's neutrality (Ψαρομηλίγκος 2009).

Mussolini was also derisively compared to Napoleon as a symbol of the arrogance of power after his repeated failures on the Albanian front. For example, Illingworth represented him in the *Daily Mail* as another Napoleon riding backwards to convince the public that he is marching forward, while he is actually "retreating strategically" from Koritsa at the sight of the bayonet of a Greek soldier depicted as an *Evzone* (Ψαρομηλίγκος 2009). Another successful anonymous cartoon characterizes the Italian dictator as the Fake Napoleon, riding a donkey (*Akropolis*, 30/10/1940). After a series of defeats on the battlefield, Mussolini is depicted in a Museum in the supposed "Hall of Busts of Great Conquerors" angrily hitting the bust of Napoleon with a hammer and saying: "Na! Na! Na! You [plural] caused me suffering", while in the background stand out the busts of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and Scipio (Λαζογιώργος-Ελληνικός, 2000). The British press satirised the rapid retreat of the Italians from the front, chased by the Greek soldiers. Characteristic is the cartoon by Furnival, who depicted Mussolini running back to Italy chased by an *Evzone*, spoiled of his military uniform, (Hourmouzios 1991). Also the artist George Whitelaw (1887-1957), a cartoonist of the *Daily Herald*, with the caption "Fast….faster….fascist" represented an Italian soldier chased by an *Evzone* and a Greek soldier, thus ridiculing fascism as the superlative degree of escape velocity (Hourmouzios 1991; Ψαρομηλίγκος 2009).

Mussolini's appearance did not go unnoticed by Greek cartoonists, too. A scathing cartoon by Bezos circulated in the midst of the war. Charlot, the famous movie character played by British actor Charlie Chaplin, is depicted saying to Mussolini: "Listen Benito, I tolerate you imitating my moustache, my hat, my cane, but I don't tolerate people laughing at you more than they laugh at me" (Λαζογιώργος-Ελληνικός, 2000).

Drawing strength from antiquity: the use of ancient Greek symbolism

The phenomenon of association with ancient Greece and the ancient Greeks is common in political cartoons. The invocation of the ancient glorious Greek past was aimed at upholding the morale of the Greek population and the resistance. For example, among Kastanakis's works we find a cartoon depicting an *Evzone* and a lion, the symbol of Britain, cutting the ropes that hold an axe over Mussolini, thus recalling the myth of Damocles and the moral lesson of Damocles's Sword as a symbol of Italy's impending doom (Αντωνόπουλος 2016). Moreover, the battle of the Thermopylae is put in relation to the Greek

resistance at the front, since in both cases it was not possible to predict the successful result of the battle, even using the historical phrase of Leonidas, the king of the Spartans, "Molon labe" (Μολὼν λαβέ) meaning "come and take [them]". A typical example is a sketch by Giorgos Geivelis (1893-1976) titled "480 BC – 1940 AD", which depicts the king of ancient Sparta, Leonidas, who had taken over the leadership of the allied Greek army at the battle of the Thermopylae, congratulating a Greek soldier in 1940 and telling him: "Well done, you did better than me" (*Typos*, 01/12/1940). In another cartoon, Leonidas is again compared with the modern Greek soldier. In the caricature entitled "History repeats itself" the king of Sparta is depicted on one side pronouncing the well-known ancient expression "Molon labe", the sentence Leonidas addressed to the Persian king Xerxes as this invited the Greeks to surrender before the battle of the Thermopylae. On the other side of the cartoon, an *Evzone* answers Mussolini with the pun "Molon palave", which means "come on, you fool" (Λαζογιώργος-Ελληνικός, 2000).

The connection with ancient Greece was accordingly used in the British press, characterizing the situation as "The new Thermopylae" (Ψαρομηλίγκος 2009). Beside these examples, another cartoon depicts a Greek soldier connecting with his ancestors, the ancient hoplites, in order to fight likewise in the shadow of his ancestors (Ψαρομηλίγκος 2009). In the same context, another cartoon shows a courageous Greek soldier ready to face anything as far as Greece stands behind him and looks at him with pride (Ψαρομηλίγκος 2009). The British press published several cartoons praising Greek heroism, associating the soldiers of 1940 with the fighters of Marathon, Thermopylae and Salamis and presenting them as the inheritors of the ancient martial virtue (Πετράκος 1994, 74; Hourmouzios 1991).

Depicting the developments: from the frontline triumphs to the occupation of mainland Greece

The developments on the front are caught in the cartoons that mention important areas such as Epirus, Pindos, Koritsa, Argyrokastro, and Kleisoura. The cartoons of the Greco-Italian War as propaganda communication tools successfully manage to render through satirical virtual representations the developments on the front. For example, a cartoon by Evangelos Terzopoulos (1902-1990) refers to the "first cooldown" that Mussolini had when the Italian divisions encountered significant difficulties in their advance, especially due to the damaged roads and bridges caused by heavy rain (Αντωνόπουλος 2016). An *Evzone* is shown on top of the mountains of Epirus pouring water on

Mussolini, who hits the mountain (Αντωνόπουλος 2016). The outcome of the battle of Pindos (28th October – 13th November 1940), one of the decisive battles fought at the beginning of the Greco-Italian War ended with the victory of the Greek troops, was recorded in a lucid sketch by an anonymous cartoonist. An *Evzone* is here depicted kicking Mussolini outside of Pindos with the caption "How the battle of Pindos ended..." (*Ethnos*, 13/11/1940). Another anonymous cartoon published in *Asyrmatos* on 23rd November represents the failure of the Italian invasion after the occupation of Koritsa. It shows Mussolini with two Italian soldiers on a map trying to distance Italy by pulling it away from Greece. The caption reads: "Help, guys, to push it beyond [Italy], because the Greeks are closing in on us" (*Asyrmatos*, 23/11/1940). A particularly clever cartoon, announcing the defeat of the Italians and their surrender to the Greeks with a strong ironic tone in the fascist salute, depicts Mussolini in front of an *Evzone*, who has captured two Italian soldiers. They kneel with their hands raised as a sign of surrender. Mussolini, in front of this image, says: "I trained them for eighteen years to raise one hand, and he immediately taught them how to raise both!" (Λαζογιώργος-Ελληνικός, 2000). It seems obvious, then, that at such a critical moment for Greece, the cartoonists took on the role of shapers of the historical memory, capturing in their cheerful, clever and allusive sketches the developments on the Greek-Albanian border while simultaneously influencing the awareness of the public concerning the military events.

Additionally, one distinctively unique cartoon is worth mentioning. Cartoonist Bezos served in the Greco-Italian War. Breaking away from the characteristic sketches appearing in the press of the time, the cartoonist switched from war propaganda to the representation of the real conditions of the war at the front, creating an unprecedented self-referential cartoon. In this cartoon, concerning his enlistment in the Greek army, he depicts himself as a Greek soldier kissing goodbye to his favourite cartoon character, Mussolini (Αντωνόπουλος 2016).

The involvement of Nazi Germany in providing aid to Italy was indirectly commented on by Greek cartoonists by depicting a crippled Mussolini asking for alms from Nazi Germany (Ψαρομηλίγκος 2009). However, after the occupation of Greece by Nazi Germany, a harsh regime of control was imposed on the press – among other things – silencing the work of Greek cartoonists. Only a few of them, such as Dimitriadis, managed to send their works abroad for publication, along with pro-freedom accompanying messages (Σαγιάς 2020). However, the British press continued to publish cartoons and topical sketches about the unpleasant developments in Greece. The British press satirized Mussolini's entry into Greece, depicting him wrapped in bandages

and injured as he marches down the Acropolis surrounded by oversized Nazi German soldiers (Hourmouzios 1991). The cartoon was created by Kimon Evan Marengo (1904-1988) with the caption "Caesar's entry into Athens". Another British cartoon depicts an injured Mussolini standing behind an oversized Nazi soldier with the caption "You Greeks can't intimidate us" (Hellenic Parliament). In the same style, another cartoon shows Mussolini slumped in torn clothes and visibly distressed, who, standing next to Hitler, says: "I know I started it, but can't you stop him and make it look like I won?" Apparently he refers to the Greek *Evzone*, who stands haughtily before them (Hellenic Parliament). Another sketch by George Goodwin Butterworth (1905–1988) for the *Manchester Daily Dispatch* depicts Greece as an *Evzone* gagged and tied to a pillar between Mussolini and Hitler. The caption reads: "Thanks Adolf! I think I can manage him now". Another sketch depicts Greece as a chained and blindfolded prisoner in a cell guarded by a Nazi soldier and Mussolini peeking through the door saying: "Are you sure it's safe for me to go in now?" (Λαζογιώργος-Ελληνικός, 2000). However, the aim of war propaganda to revive the morale of the Greeks was not immediately dampened after the invasion of Nazi Germany and the military defeat. The British press continued publishing cartoons in 1941 ensuring the British support to occupied Greece. For example, in a sketch by George Middleton for the *Birmingham Gazette* History is depicted as a man laying a laurel wreath, a symbol of glory and honour, on fallen Greece, represented as an *Evzone* lying under Hitler's boot (Λαζογιώργος-Ελληνικός, 2000). Similarly, in the *Daily Express*, an *Evzone* ascends from the war front to heaven to take his place alongside the ancient Greek heroes, as underlined by the caption "Among the immortals". Among the last British cartoons regarding the Greco-Italian War, I can mention one whose caption reads "Kultur comes to Greece", and one other depicting a classical Greek column with the inscription Athens on it, surmounted with the helmet of a Nazi soldier (Λαζογιώργος-Ελληνικός, 2000).

Conclusions

In conclusion, the Greek cartoonists in a timely and satirical manner ridiculed the Italian military failure in the Greco-Italian War despite the imposition of censorship. War propaganda, in this case, aimed at ridiculing the enemy while strengthening national identity. The explosive rise of cartoons was evident in December 1941, when the Greek press published successive satirical drawings that dominated the front pages of the papers. The cartoonists also adapted proverbs from Ancient Greece, and references from Greek mythology and

history to the developments of the Greco-Italian War (Καστρίτη 2022). It can be observed, through the analysis of the visual and symbolic elements within the cartoons and their underlying meanings, that both Greek and British cartoonists used repetitive patterns and symbols to permit the audience to easily and immediately understand the events and any difficult concepts. It is also worth noting that the majority of cartoons combine images and text, by using imaginative puns, catchy sayings or ironic and humorous comments, exaggeration, and idiomatic expressions, make the art of cartooning particularly dynamic. Regarding the character of Mussolini, one can notice several common points between the Greek and British portrayals. His figure is shown with a stocky body, a large and sometimes oversized head, and wearing the Fascist black uniform. Moreover, his megalomania is emphasized. Another important aspect is the personification of the opponent, as a basic principle in propaganda, which stands out in Mussolini's satirical images. The enemy is synthesized in the person-symbol of the leader of Fascist Italy. Along with symbolism, and critical and satirical mood, the cartoons, in addition to being an important means of war propaganda, were a direct source of information for the public. Cartoons were a daily and uninterrupted presence in Greek newspapers, constituting an integral part of the press of that time. This can be seen, to a lesser extent, in the British press too, confirming the value of imaginative satire in news reporting. While Greek cartoonists voluntarily supported and enlivened the national combative spirit, British cartoons were also laudatory. Whereas Greek satirical cartoons resonate with Greek experiences and aspirations, cartoons published in Great Britain reflect the British perspectives on the war, nonetheless conveying solidarity with Greece in its struggle against the Axis and orienting public opinion in favour of providing military support to Greece. Finally, it can be said that the Greek cartoonists successfully managed to condense the daily war news about the developments at the front into simple but comprehensive sketches. The cartoonists also captured the unwavering patriotism of the Greek people and the rise of morale, while at the same time, they contributed to the further erosion of the image of the Axis. The stages of the Greco-Italian War were depicted in an easy-to-understand and humorous manner in the cartoons of the time, thus enlivening the morale of the Greek soldiers and the Greek society. British and Greek cartoons focused, among other things, on Mussolini's military failures, which aligned with the narrative of Italian troops' weakness on the battlefield. The cartoons managed, through the images and their captions, to shape the collective consciousness about the Greco-Italian War. Cartoons as a means of propaganda were, as demonstrated, a powerful weapon in the psychological warfare that was conducted alongside

the military operations at the front. The continuous growth of war cartoons during the Greco-Italian War was abruptly halted with the onset of the occupation, when cartoons were banned due to strict censorship introduced by the occupation forces. Through the case of satirical cartoons as a powerful and versatile tool in war propaganda during the Greco-Italian War, I aim with this paper to contribute to the understanding of wartime propaganda and the intersection of satire and conflict during one of the most critical stages of late modern Greek history. Future studies should delve deeper into the topic and conduct a comparative analysis of how satirical cartoons were used in different historical periods revealing common strategies, themes and motifs in visual propaganda across various conflicts.

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[1] I translated the quoted texts by Greek authors and extracted from Greek newspapers for the purpose of this article. Any discrepancies in language should be attributed to the translation process, and efforts have been made to convey the original meaning accurately.