



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Days before we went to press with this issue, Alexis Tsipras returned to office as Prime Minister of Greece. Within moments he had pledged to ‘give an honest fight’ and ‘shed our blood if necessary to stop our people bleeding further’. His rhetoric, while sullied by the immediate debt crisis and strained relations with the EU, could have come straight out of the nineteenth or twentieth century.

Talk in Greece today revolves around the present and the future (‘What is to come of us?’), as Violet Hudson, Diana Farr Louis, and Harry Mount describe in their dispatches from across the country. As often, however, it is only by looking to the past that the Greek people can be confident that their particular kind of resilience is ingrained rather than acquired. This issue of *Argo*, the second in the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies’ new series, reflects in some depth upon the climactic events which helped to shape this resilience over the recent centuries.

While, in our cover story, Paul Watkins goes in search of survivals of the 1922 Catastrophe in Smyrna (modern Izmir), Tom Winnifrieth reflects on the inadequacy of a war memorial as a commemoration of those who lost their lives in Greece’s historic battles. Messolonghi, where Lord Byron died, may be absent from the war memorial at Kardamyli, but as Veronica Kotziamani explains in her travel essay on this ‘Sacred City’, memories of the ‘Exodus’ – the break-out of the starving population during the Greek War of Independence – still reverberate today. In a novel reviewed by Emma Bridges in this issue, journalist Clive Aslet turns his hand to satirizing daily life in Salonica (Thessalonika) during the

First World War. Humour must flourish in times of adversity.

Greece, of course, has meant different things to different people in difficult times, as Luke Richardson explains in his penetrating essay on Albert Camus’s visits to Athens in the period of the Algerian War of Independence. But for Camus, as for so many Greeks since, the closest definition of ‘Greekness’ lay in the country’s past rather than its present. As we continue to embrace the culture of ancient Greece – from the art described by Sadie Pickup in this issue, to the literature that inspires Tim Whitmarsh’s opinion piece, and the language evoked by Andrew Robinson and Steven Hunt in their respective features – we go a lot further than merely softening the blow of our times.

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