

50 YEARS AFTER THE JUNTA

OTHON ANASTASAKIS revisits the Greek military regime half a century after it ended and considers some lingering legacies of the past

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the fall of the military junta in Greece. As a child of the *metapolitefsi*, growing up in the years of the post-1974 transition to democracy, I remember how Greek society struggled to recover from the traumas (or, even, the guilt) of a seven-year troubled period of tyranny and fear. This vivid memory affected my academic preferences, and during my doctoral years I focused on the study of authoritarianism in Greece. Since then, and with the benefit of hindsight, I keep on returning to this topic by revisiting original assumptions and empirical observations.

With the passing of time, a living memory always changes and fades,



and the recollection of a period as a continuum of events becomes a selective recall of critical historical or personal moments. Half a century later, everyone with a living memory of the Greek dictatorship probably remembers where they were at the time of the imposition of the military coup, when the tanks marched in front of the Greek Parliament in the early hours of 21st April 1967; or when the gate of the Polytechnic School in Athens was crashed over by

a tank at 2.45 am on 17th November 1973; or on the morning of 24th July when the Military Council handed power over to a civilian government, and Konstantinos Karamanlis landed from his exile in Paris on the private jet of the French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing to form the new government. These are important events that changed the course of Greek history and remain in memory as critical junctures. At the same time, they form part of a historical chain of events which shaped the experience of Greece under the long and gloomy shadow of a dictatorship.

While the 1967–74 Greek military regime had a clear beginning and a clear ending – as a dark episode of Greek history – it was also the

outcome of a recent and/or not so recent past. As such, the stormy period of the mid-1960s, when political elites led parliamentary politics to a standstill, was a catalyst and opportunity for the middle-rank officers to intervene in politics, a coup they were preparing for some time.

Others trace the roots of the military coup to the 1940s Greek civil war and the creation of the paramilitary organisation known as IDEA (whose members effectively imposed the coup in 1967), as well as to the post-civil war political environment that allowed for the “autonomisation” and empowerment of the military.

Others have argued that the origins of the 1967 military coup reach further back in time, to the turbulent interwar years, when military interferences became recurrent in Greek politics.

The advent of the Greek dictatorship

was a clear rupture with the previous parliamentary period, but it was also part of a historical continuum which led to the imposition of this extreme form of authoritarian rule.

Having said that, the Greek military regime was not only the outcome of Greek national idiosyncrasies, it was also a product of its time and a transnational phenomenon. The imposition – and survival – of the Greek dictatorship was part and parcel of a wider Cold War environment, during which military and paramilitary forces were allowed to intervene in politics in the name of the fight against the communist threat, more typically in a number of countries in Latin America. In 1964 in Brazil the military remained in power for 21 years after a coup; in 1973 in Chile until 1990; in Argentina from 1966 until 1973, and again from 1976 until 1983; in Uruguay in 1973 until 1985.

All of these military interventions

in politics came as a response to the feared rise of left-wingers, to the upsurge of social protests, to student mobilisation or trade union movements. Most of them came in the midst of economic problems and social unrest. The role of the United States was crucial in supporting these coups, in active or passive ways. All of the military regimes created a repressive state marked by censorship, clandestine detentions, human rights abuses, torture, disappearances and assassinations. While there were some differences between the Latin American so-called “bureaucratic-authoritarian” cases, and the Greek military junta, the Cold War was a common backdrop for all these cases of military regimes.

The imposition of military coups always comes as a shock and marks a rupture in politics because it prohibits parliamentary opposition, curtails personal freedoms and relies on repression as a principal form of controlling society. As

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ABOVE Coat of arms introduced in 1973 Government of the Hellenic Republic; Wikimedia Commons

such it affects the personal lives of everyone, most palpably those who refuse to live under the control of an oppressive regime. All the countries under military rule experienced persecution of perceived enemies of the state, arbitrary imprisonment, torture, murder and exile; in the Greek case, many politicians, dissidents and intellectuals left for European destinations in the UK, France, Sweden, Germany and North America.

As governors, the Greek military rulers left mostly negative legacies over the economy, education, Church, foreign policy, defence and culture. In every domain the military elites applied recipes of a reactionary, often outdated, nature, which were compatible with their own clientelistic, militaristic and conspiratorial mentalities. While they arrived during a time of economic growth in Greece, unlike their contemporaries in Latin America, and indeed sustained growth rates for part of their time in power, they did not manage to attract foreign direct investment or to diversify the economy. While sustaining similar economic policies to their governmental predecessors in state spending, construction boom, tourism, and shipping capital, they eventually left the country – badly hit by the 1973 oil crisis – with stagflation.

In education, one of their biggest targets, the junta pursued reactionary policies of nationalist and religious indoctrination in secondary schools, purges of dissidents and control of higher education. In Church matters, they imposed their own preferred choices in the highest echelons and created a dependent institution under the authority of the military state. When they tried to liberalise and partly civilianise their rule in 1973, they met with public incredulity and student opposition. Overall, due to the lack of any credible ideological legitimisation, the regime tried to sustain its rule by advancing consumerism, political apathy, censorship and control of dissidents.

In the end, torn by their own internal divisions between hardliners and soft-liners, they collapsed in the face of a military and foreign policy disaster in Cyprus.

July 1974 is one of the most significant moments in Greek history with a long-lasting legacy in the national collective conscience associated with an ambivalent double memory, that of the breakdown of the dictatorial rule but also of a military defeat in Cyprus. The two legacies are inextricably and ironically linked with each other: a democratic triumph next to a foreign policy tragedy. Both legacies are still with us today: the political system has consolidated its uninterrupted civilian, multi-party democratic path, while Cyprus remains divided and increasingly unlikely to reunify along federal lines.

Seen from a global perspective, the breakdown of military rule in Greece and the subsequent transition to democracy is a transnational story, part and parcel of a pattern of democratisation in Southern Europe and membership of the European Communities.

The 50th anniversary of the breakdown of authoritarianism is not the only anniversary being commemorated. It is also the 50th anniversary of the Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974 in Portugal, where a peaceful military coup led by leftist military officers brought about the fall of the four-decades-long *Estado Novo*, one of the longest authoritarian regimes in 20th-century Europe. A year later, in November 1975, Spain transitioned to a democracy following the death of the dictator Francisco Franco, ending yet another long dictatorship that had started in 1939. All three countries applied to join the European Communities, with Greece becoming a member in 1981, and Portugal with Spain in 1986.

Without doubt, the accession of these states in the European Union helped the consolidation of their democracies, providing models

for the post-1989 Central and East European post-communist transitions. As such, the Southern European transitions to democracy are perceived as the pioneers of what Huntington popularised as the “third wave of democratisation” in the late 20th century that saw more than 60 countries in Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia undergo some form of democratic transition.

The end of the military regime, 50 years ago, was a significant transformational moment in Greece’s international trajectory. Greece entered a new period in its foreign affairs by distancing itself from the hegemony of the US and moving closer to Europe, building relations with its northern communist neighbours, exploring ways of regional détente and entering into a new era of competition with its eastern neighbour Turkey, a NATO ally, around the Cyprus problem and the Aegean Sea. With the legalisation of the communist party, the “de-jurification” of the state apparatus, the return of left-wing exiles, the rise to power of the socialist party in 1981, Greece’s anti-communist official national obsession came to an end. Greece arguably therefore became the first western country to enter a post-Cold War frame of mind, way ahead of the actual collapse of the communist bloc in 1989.

With today’s global rise of authoritarianism and illiberalism, the world is witnessing a return of despotism and populism in the age of fake news, war in Ukraine and new global multipolar uncertainty. The Greek military junta, like other contemporary military regimes of the 20th century, may seem distant, outdated and, possibly, irrelevant. Yet we are constantly reminded of the recurring ascent of authoritarianism which, while taking different forms and using different instruments, imposes similar experiences of repression, human rights abuses and control of opposition and dissidents. Seen from this perspective, the military regimes of the Greek type remain highly relevant. **A**

A BRIEF GUIDE TO THE CLASSICAL FACE OF GLASGOW

By JANE DRAYCOTT



ABOVE A view of the classical exterior of Holmwood House © National Trust for Scotland

Edinburgh may be known as ‘the Athens of the North’, but its Central Belt neighbour – and rival – Glasgow has a considerable amount of ancient Greek and ancient Greece-inspired art and architecture on display, should you wish to cross Hadrian’s Wall and then the Antonine Wall and venture into the far north.



THE BURRELL COLLECTION

Green space may not be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Glasgow, but the city in fact contains a large number of public parks, many of which contain museums. For those of us with a passion for the classical world, the Burrell Collection, housed just outside the city centre in Pollock Country Park, is definitely worth

a visit. If you have access to a car, there is plenty of parking available outside, while if you prefer public transport, the bus stop or the Pollockshields West train station are only a short walk away.

The Burrell Collection reopened in March 2022 after being closed for six years for an extensive (and expensive, at £68 million) refurbishment, but the

time and money were well spent. For the first time, visitors can access all three floors of the building, and over a third more gallery space has been added to enable the display of many objects which have either not been displayed for decades or have never been displayed before. It was awarded the Art Fund's prestigious Museum of the Year title in 2023, and numerous other accolades.

As the name suggests, the Collection once belonged to the Glaswegian shipping magnate Sir William and his wife Lady Constance Burrell, who amassed an enormous collection of more than 9,000 objects spanning more than 6,000 years of world history. The couple donated their Collection to the City of Glasgow in 1944 on the condition that it be housed outside the city centre in a bespoke building sitting in beautiful woodland, where the objects

would not be damaged by the city's pollution. This was an entirely philanthropic bequest, coming in conjunction with funds to build a museum to display the Collection, as the Burrells wished everyone to take the same pleasure in it as they did. They continued to add objects to the Collection even after they had donated it.

Their tastes were eclectic. As you wander through the museum, you

will encounter ancient Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Persian and Chinese artefacts, as well as Medieval arms and armour, stained glass, tapestries and embroideries, and many works of modern art (especially French masters such as Degas, Rodin, Cézanne and Manet). The artefacts are arranged thematically, so you will find ancient Greek antiquities displayed alongside objects from other ancient civilisations in an attempt to elucidate their respective cultures' similarities and differences.

As may be expected from a museum collection with ancient Greek objects in it, there are many drinking vessels on display, most beautifully painted with mythological creatures such as Gorgons, harpies, and winged horses. My favourite pieces here are an adorable *aryballos* (oil or perfume jar) in the shape of a soldier's head, and a *rhyton* (horn-shaped drinking vessel) in the shape of a goat's head. There is some Greek bronze work, including a Corinthian helmet and a beautiful box mirror depicting Zeus, Ganymede and Hebe. There is also a selection of elegant Tanagra figurines with visible traces of coloured paint. It isn't Greek, but my own personal highlight is an enigmatic female portrait head from a Palmyrene grave relief.

The museum is a wonderful place to take children of all ages. As I wandered through it early one Tuesday morning, I saw parents and grandparents introducing their toddlers to the interactive displays, encouraging them to touch 3D-printed recreations of ancient objects set up alongside the originals, and teachers leading columns of primary school children around the galleries. There is also a play area on the far side of the car park. The next time I visit, I'll bring my two-year-old daughter with me.

While you can certainly take a whistle-stop tour of the museum in an hour or two, if you want to spend the better part of the day there, you will be well served by the coffee bar for elevenses and the restaurant for lunch or afternoon tea, with huge

ABOVE Some of the decoration of Holmwood House is reminiscent of that of the palace at Knossos © National Trust for Scotland