



ΙΕΡΑ ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΗ ΘΥΑΤΕΙΡΩΝ & Μ. ΒΡΕΤΑΝΙΑΣ
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Archbishop's Encyclical on the Anniversary of OXI of 28 October 1940

<i>Adremo nell' Egeo</i>	<i>We'll get to the Aegean</i>
<i>Prendereno pure il Pireo</i>	<i>And take Piraeus</i>
<i>E-se tutto va bene</i>	<i>And if everything goes well</i>
<i>Prendereno orche Atene!</i>	<i>We'll take Athens, too!</i>

(Popular song of the Italian Army)

Greece entered the Second World War in October 1940 when the Italian Army invaded its territory through the Albanian Hinterland. The symbolic choice of the date of the Italian invasion underscored Benito Mussolini's and his Fascist Party 18th anniversary from his rise in power in Italy. At the same time, the real motives behind the Italian onslaught revealed the strategic, political and ideological targets of the neighbouring country. Control of Greece was critical to Mussolini's strategy in establishing an Italian hegemony in the Mediterranean and the rebirth of a Fascist-type Roman Empire. Furthermore, through his expected military defeat and submission of the Greeks, the Italian dictator was aiming to flaunt the superiority of Italian fascism and the ethnic supremacy of the Italian people to the world. Masterminded to achieve the total domination and submission of Greece within three weeks, the invasion was successfully intercepted by the Greek Army, causing displeasure and striking fear to the Italian dictator and great surprise to the whole world. The battle at Kalpaki marked the first victorious battle of the Allies in WWII against the Axis Forces, while the epic and victorious for the Greek Guns Battle of Pindos, paved the way for the Greek Counterattack of 14th November across the entire frontline, and was marked by the taking of Korytsa, the largest Albanian city, on November 21st. Korytsa was the first city occupied by the Axis Powers to be liberated by the Allied Forces, during WWII. From Korytsa and pulling upwards, the Greek Army scythed through, pushing back the Italian Forces on Albanian ground, all the way to the 'Spring Offensive' mounted by the Italian Army on the symbolic date of 25th March 1941. Benito Mussolini, who was on Albanian ground, personally taking command of the 'Spring Offensive', returned to Italy, symbolically humiliated and substantively defeated. The Greek victory against Italy was of great significance for the fortunes of WWII, which – unfortunately – has not been projected as much it should have been. The insistence on the argument on the part of the Greeks that the Struggle of the Greeks against the Axis Powers delayed Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union for six weeks, while speaking the truth, deemphasizes the substantive and strategically stupendous effect the victory of the Greeks has had on the whole war effort. This is because reducing the Greco-Italian War to smaller- scale local war episode of WWII 'plays into the hands' of the narratives of the two central European adversaries in WWII: Great Britain and Germany. The British narrative underestimates the significance of the Greek victory, in its effort to take almost total credit for the Glory of its own resistance. The German narrative, on the other hand, adopted by many German generals, seeks to find decent excuses to justify the defeat of the Wehrmacht by the Red Army.

We believe it is worth stating our own, much more realistic narrative of the victory of 1940-41, to demonstrate thus, out of both pride and duty but also serving the science of History ethically and consistently, the true value the cost of the sacrifice of those fallen and those who returned 'humiliated victors' and 'unsung heroes' has had. Our own therefore, true narrative, stresses the strategic and ideological consequences of the Greek Victory in the Mediterranean War Theatre. The Greek Victory in Albania averted Italian control of the Mediterranean and the potential defeat of the British in Egypt. Control of the Suez Canal by the Axis Powers would have offered them complete supremacy over the Mediterranean, since the Fascist regime of Generalissimo Franco in Spain, abandoning any neutrality, would side with the Axis Powers. The fortunes of the war would be completely different, since Gibraltar would come under Spanish control.

But even more significant are the ideological consequences of the Victory to a world who, having had their liberal modernity and its associated value system shattered because of their failure, was still desperately clinging on to it. Greece's victory against Fascist Italy 'disenchanted' the Europeans from the allure of the Fascist Paradigm and a modernity stressing the power of social Darwinism. It effectively removed the Italian Fascist exceptionalism, shredding Mussolini's international charm to pieces, even within the walls of the Italian Fascist Regime. By wreathing the weapons of ideas and not just those of war, the Greek victory swept away the myth of the invincible, hierarchically-organized societies and the illusions of totalitarianism professing a New World Order, a superior civilization that was the expression of the powerful, of supremacy in battle, of racial purity and of adopting war as the major moving force in History. To those therefore fallen on the mountains of Epirus and Albania, to those who returned as 'humiliated' victors, the unsung heroes who have been now lost to the oblivion of life, we bestow honour today, so that we remind ourselves why they have fought and ask ourselves whether their struggle has been duly vindicated and honoured to this day. In that way, we can honour them and bring them back to life, not just as heroes but as active subjects of History and the Motherland.

Under those thoughts, we are called again in yet another celebration of this historic anniversary and to yet another remembrance of all those things handed down to us from those who lived through those events and actually partook in them, as well as all that History teaches us about the great OXI of 1940-41 and its epic. Let us all celebrate in Schools and Churches, in spiritual Organizations and Associations, extending our Thanksgiving to the eponymous and anonymous heroes who fell fighting for the honour and freedom of their country. In the Greek-Orthodox Diaspora in the United Kingdom and Ireland, the Victory of 1940 will be celebrated with special ceremonies and ecclesiastical thanksgiving. In London, the historic anniversary will be officially celebrated on Sunday, 29 October 2017 in the Cathedral of the Divine Wisdom with the usual Doxology headed by His Eminence Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain and the official speech of His Excellency the Ambassador of Greece in London, Mr Demetrios Karamitsos-Tziras. Wishing you all health and the blessing of Almighty God on your pursuits, I remain with warm wishes and blessings in the Lord and honour.

It was the pains of History that not Britain

Archbishop Gregorios
of Thyateira and Great Britain