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Introduction

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Special Section I / Section Spéciale I

BALANCING BETWEEN SOVEREIGNTY AND DEPENDENCY: THE GREEK REFUGEE CRISIS IN THE 1920s

Introduction

The aftermath of the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922) and the ensuing compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey, formalised by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, marked one of the most significant humanitarian crises of the early twentieth century. This forced migration uprooted nearly 1.2 million people, altering the demographic and economic landscape of Greece. Faced with the dual challenge of resettling these refugees and modernising its state infrastructure, Greece sought assistance from the international community, particularly the League of Nations. This special section of *The Historical Review* brings together three scholarly articles that examine the complex dynamics of this period, highlighting the interplay between international intervention and national strategy, with particular emphasis on key figures like Thanassis Aghnides and Alexandros Pallis.

In the first article, “The Genevan Intervention and the Man in the Middle: Thanassis Aghnides, Greece and League of Nations Economic Assistance,” Haakon Ikonomou explores the critical role of the League of Nations in Greece’s economic reconstruction during the 1920s. As Greece grappled with the financial strain of integrating a massive influx of refugees, the league’s involvement became essential in stabilising the economy and guiding the nation’s recovery. Central to this process was Thanassis Aghnides, an Ottoman Greek who served as a high-ranking official within the league. Aghnides acted as a crucial intermediary, skilfully navigating the complex demands of international financial institutions and ensuring that Greece secured the necessary resources for its recovery.

In the second article, “The Urban Settlement of Refugees, 1923–1930: An Assessment of the Objectives and Policies of the Refugee Settlement Commission (RSC),” Alkiviadis Kapokakis, Eleni Kyramargiou, Olga Lafazani and Thanasis Tyrovolas delve into the strategic collaboration between the Greek government and the League of Nations in addressing the refugee crisis. It focuses on the establishment and functioning of the Refugee Settlement Commission (RSC), a body tasked with overseeing the resettlement of refugees and managing the allocation of international loans. The article provides a detailed analysis of the

challenges faced by the Greek authorities in implementing these resettlement policies, particularly in the face of domestic political pressures and international expectations.

In the final third article, “The Refugee Resettlement Policies of the Greek State and the Role of Chief Strategist Alexandros Pallis,” Eleni Kyramargiou offers an in-depth examination of the national strategies employed by Greece to integrate the influx of refugees. Alexandros Pallis, the chief strategist behind these policies, emerges as a pivotal figure in this narrative. Pallis’ approach combined practical resettlement strategies with broader state modernisation efforts, aiming to transform the demographic influx into an opportunity for economic and social development. The article explores how Pallis’ vision was implemented across different regions of Greece, highlighting both the successes and the limitations of these efforts.

Together, these three articles provide a comprehensive exploration of the refugee crisis in Greece, examining the intricate interplay between international intervention and national strategy. This special section aims to contribute to the ongoing scholarly discourse on post-conflict recovery, refugee resettlement and the role of international organisations in state-building. By revisiting the case of Greece in the 1920s, these articles offer valuable insights into the complex dynamics of international governance, economic recovery and national policy-making – issues that remain relevant in contemporary discussions on the global refugee crises and international economic assistance.

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