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## The Refugee Resettlement Policies of the Greek State and the Role of Chief Strategist Alexandros Pallis

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# THE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT POLICIES OF THE GREEK STATE AND THE ROLE OF CHIEF STRATEGIST ALEXANDROS PALLIS

*Eleni Kyramargiou*

**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the refugee resettlement policies of the Greek state in the aftermath of the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922) through the career of Alexandros Pallis, a key strategist in managing the influx of over a million Christian refugees from the Ottoman Empire. By analysing five pivotal moments in Pallis’ career, it uncovers his significant yet often overlooked contributions to the resettlement process and the implementation of the population exchange agreement. It also highlights how Pallis’ expertise in public administration and his deep involvement in international diplomacy shaped Greece’s approach to refugee integration, thereby influencing the socio-political landscape of the interwar period.

The Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922 ended in the devastating defeat of the Greek Army and its disorderly retreat, but, most importantly, triggered the withdrawal of the Christian population from the Ottoman Empire and its movement towards the Greek state. More than one million refugees arrived in Greece between September 1922 and December 1924.<sup>1</sup> Their arrival was described as a “refugee shock”, while their resettlement and rehabilitation proved to be a complicated, protracted and particularly expensive process.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This conflict and its aftermath are crucial to understanding the complex refugee resettlement processes that followed, as detailed in Michael Llewellyn-Smith’s comprehensive work on the subject. See Michael Llewellyn-Smith, *Ionian Vision: Greece in Asia Minor, 1919–1922* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 235–38.

<sup>2</sup> Christos Hadziioissif, “Το προσφυγικό σοκ: Οι σταθερές και οι μεταβολές της ελληνικής οικονομίας,” in Christos Hadziioissif, ed., *Ιστορία της Ελλάδας του 20ου αιώνα*, vol. 2.1, *Ο Μεσοπόλεμος: 1922–1940* (Athens: Vivliorama, 2002).

The comprehensive military defeat and the ensuing refugee movement dealt the death blow to the *Μεγάλη Ιδέα*, an irredentist vision of Greece spreading across two continents and five seas, and finalised the borders and population of the modern Greek state. It also marked the end of a decade of constant military conflict and population movements. Finally, the Christian refugees who arrived in the Greek territories from the Ottoman Empire and the neighbouring Balkan states between 1912 and 1924 shifted the political and socio-economic balance of interwar Greece.

Due in part to their sheer intensity, the moments of departure, arrival and settlement loom large both in historiography and in refugee narratives. But these three moments appear disjointed, succeeding one another without any mention of the procedures that were implemented or the bodies that implemented them. Refugee movements are complex processes involving numerous individuals and entities besides the subjects suffering the forced displacement. Alexandros A. Pallis (1883–1972), an administrative and policy expert, served as one of the principal strategists of refugee movement, resettlement and integration within the Greek state. For more than ten years, from 1919 until the end of the 1920s,<sup>3</sup> at a critical historical juncture for population movement in Greece and the entire area, Pallis specialised in refugee population management.<sup>4</sup> Pallis is a fascinating figure, who nevertheless remained marginalised in Greek historiography for decades. Characterised by consequential decisions, active interventions, hard political choices and major contributions to international treaties and compromises, the career of this charismatic man, who became deeply and consciously involved in the Greek administration of Macedonia, the refugee movement and the implementation of the population exchange agreement, can only be described as multifaceted and tumultuous. By following

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<sup>3</sup> In his recent book *The Meddlers*, Jamie Martin presents the history of the imperial origins of contemporary institutions for global economic governance. The architects of these first international economic institutions shared similar social characteristics and professional trajectories, which also fit the profile and life course of Pallis. The histories and careers of these experts have recently been systematically studied in the historiography, shedding light on these major historical figures that had until recently remained obscure. See Jamie Martin, *The Meddlers: Sovereignty, Empire, and the Birth of Global Economic Governance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022), 1–27.

<sup>4</sup> Pallis noted in his autobiography: “I experienced the refugee tragedy, not as a mere spectator, but in my capacity as the official tasked with organising the refugee relief and rehabilitation operations. There is no place in Greece, from Macedonia and Thrace to the Old Greek Territories and the islands, that I haven’t visited to study in situ the myriad problems caused by that major tragedy of the Greek nation.” A.A. Pallis, *Ξενητεμένοι Έλληνες: Αυτοβιογραφικό χρονικό* (Athens: Aetos, 1954), 199.

Pallis' professional trajectory, we can trace the political developments behind the processes of the refugee movement, settlement and rehabilitation.<sup>5</sup> Tracking his course through his various positions in the Greek public administration provides us with an alternative perspective on the period's refugee history, one focused on the political choices made by the experts of the time and the delicate manoeuvring taking place behind the scenes of official diplomatic negotiations.

Five indicative scenes from Pallis' career will serve as the backbone of this article, which will attempt to untangle the relationship between the refugee movement and resettlement of the Ottoman Empire's Christian populations in Greece and the technocrat who designed and implemented many of the policies that co-ordinated and regulated them. From the defining moment that prompted Pallis' involvement in the Greek administration in 1913 to the various positions and roles assumed by Pallis during the lengthy process of refugee movement and rehabilitation until 1930, these five scenes reflect his major contributions to refugee settlement, while also highlighting some hidden aspects of the phenomenon, the sheer complexity of the processes involved and the crucial part played by politics and diplomacy.

### *Scene One*

One day after the Battle of Kilkis, in June 1913, an inspector for the British administration in Egypt arrived in Thessaloniki. Professor Andreas Andreadis introduced the young inspector of Greek origin, Alexandros Pallis, to Stefanos Dragoumis and a relationship of mutual respect developed between the two men. During his stay in Thessaloniki, the inspector spent many nights at the Dragoumis residence discussing with Dragoumis and his son, Ion, the major national issues of the time. Over these discussions, they realised they did not simply share views but had a common vision for Macedonia and its residents.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Pallis, deeply involved in the resettlement of displaced populations, operated in a challenging environment that required not only administrative expertise but also an understanding of the broader geopolitical landscape. His work can be seen as a precursor to later international efforts in refugee management, similar to the principles discussed by Gil Loescher in his analysis of the UNHCR's role in global politics. See Gil Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 112. At the same time, the broader implications of Pallis' work within the context of Greece's national interests are also touched on by Howland, who discusses Greece's strategic challenges during this period. Charles P. Howland, "Greece and the Greeks," *Foreign Affairs* 4, no. 3 (1926), 454–64.

<sup>6</sup> In his autobiography, Pallis mentions their encounter and their shared beliefs regarding the administration of Macedonia. See Pallis, *Ξενητεμένοι Έλληνες*, 146–49.

This meeting led Pallis to make a major life decision: leave behind his position with the British administration in Egypt and take on the role of inspector-general of tax and treasury offices for Macedonia.

### *Scene Two*

On 25 October 1919, Pallis compiled the report “On the operation of the Constantinople Central Committee for the benefit of the displaced Greek populations” for the period from 1 November 1918 to 31 August 1919.<sup>7</sup> The 14-member committee, led by Dorotheos, locum tenens of the ecumenical patriarchate, had undertaken the task of organising the repatriation of Greek populations displaced during the First World War to their villages in Asia Minor and Pontos, and facilitating their resettlement by providing material support. Pallis signed the report in his capacity as general inspector of the committee. He had transferred from Thessaloniki to Constantinople to organise and co-ordinate the process of rehabilitating the Christian populations which were returning to their homelands after their violent displacement.

### *Scene Three*

In December 1922, the ministers of foreign affairs, health and transport sent daily telegrams to the High Commission of Greece in Constantinople in an effort to resolve the chaotic situation developing at the ports of Constantinople and the Black Sea and to secure passage for the Christian populations from these ports to Greece.<sup>8</sup> It was by no means a simple matter. Thousands of people, who had already travelled hundreds of kilometres to reach the coast, were packed at the ports in horrible conditions, facing cold weather, famine and disease under the constant threat of being pushed back towards the mainland by the Turkish administration. To even approach the ports, the Greek ships were required to carry special permits and be accompanied by an escort or present guarantees from the High Commission of the United States. At the same time, there was a continuous stream of requests for aid and material support from the Greek side to foreign charity organisations. The person who received all these telegrams and responded to the correspondence from the ministries was Pallis, who at

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<sup>7</sup> Institute of Historical Research / National Hellenic Research Foundation (IHR/NHRF), Alexandros A. Pallis Archive, folder 1, subfolder 2, document entitled “On the operation of the Constantinople Central Committee for the displaced Greek populations,” 25 October 1919.

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Historical Archive (AYE), Central Service, folder 89, subfolder 3, docs. 1–50.

that point held the position of Greek representative for the resolution of the refugee issue.

#### *Scene Four*

On 21 May 1925, Prime Minister Andreas Michalakopoulos received a confidential letter pertaining to the appraisal of the exchangeable refugees' assets.<sup>9</sup> The population exchange had been completed, the Refugee Settlement Commission (RSC) was hard at work and the first refugee loan had been disbursed. Over its many pages, the letter made a comprehensive presentation of the asset appraisal process, its cost and benefits for the Greek side. The letter ended with a recommendation to the government to sign an agreement with its Turkish counterparts that would merge the economic demands of both sides, and disband the Mixed Commission for Asset Appraisal, since its operation would prove excessively costly and its conclusions might not even benefit the Greek side. The letter was signed by the commission's Greek representative, Pallis.

#### *Scene Five*

On 17 December 1930, the 428th work session of the RSC council took place in Athens. During this session, it was decided that all the RSC's mobile and immobile assets would be transferred to the government and that the president of the commission would sign a mortgage in favour of the International Financial Commission. He would also transfer all the relative documents necessary for the execution of the Geneva Agreement of 24 January 1930. At the next session, the 429th, on 18 December 1930, the council authorised its Greek members to take decisions on all matters submitted to the council through its director-general, except where a modification of a previous decision was involved.<sup>10</sup> The RSC was winding down its operations, finalising any outstanding matters and preparing for its dissolution. Pallis was one of the two Greek representatives on the RSC council.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> IHR/NHRF, Alexandros A. Pallis Archive, document entitled "Appraisal of the Assets of Exchangeable Refugees," 21 May 1925.

<sup>10</sup> Refugee Settlement Commission (RSC), Minutes of meetings of the RSC council, no. 225, 16 June 1926, League of Nations Archives (LNA), C130/9/1, 4, 12.

<sup>11</sup> The members of the RSC council were Charles B. Eddy (president), Sir John Hope Simpson, Achilleas Lampros, Pallis, with A. Domestichos serving as director general and L. Sotiriadis as secretary. Law 4392/1930 ratified the agreement for the "liquidation" of the RSC.

*Alexandros Pallis Arrives in Macedonia*

In the autumn of 1913, after their brief acquaintance that summer, the governor-general of Macedonia, Stefanos Dragoumis, appointed Alexandros Pallis as inspector-general of tax and treasury offices for Macedonia.<sup>12</sup> Pallis accepted the appointment, resigned from his position with the British administration in Alexandria and departed for Greece. He arrived in Thessaloniki in November 1913. For Pallis, his position in the Governorate-General of Macedonia was a dream come true, his return to his imaginary homeland. For the Governorate-General, Pallis was exactly the expert it needed, as his experience with the British administration in Egypt had equipped him with skills and expertise which could prove useful in the smooth integration of the region into the Greek state. In 1913, Macedonia had just been annexed following the Balkan wars and its newly founded administration faced the challenge of creating an administrative organisation which would successfully manage the new socio-political realities of the time and resolve the problems experienced by the local populations, taking into account the rival nationalisms in the wider region and the demographic shifts affecting the neighbouring nation-states. Dragoumis was influenced by Pallis' experience and expertise and, in turn, Pallis was inspired by the former's vision for Macedonia.

When Pallis arrived in Thessaloniki to assume the position of inspector-general, the situation he encountered was entirely different from the one he had anticipated. Dragoumis had resigned<sup>13</sup> and Emmanouil Repoulis had taken over as governor-general. The new governor-general's relationship with Pallis was strained from the start. Relying on his experience from Egypt and how the British administration operated there, Pallis believed that the central Greek administration should endeavour to integrate the local populations into the Greek state, taking into consideration their special characteristics and peculiarities, as well as the problems that arose due to their diverse languages and religions, and the major disruption caused by the Balkan wars and the establishment of the Balkan nation states, ideas he had probably already presented to Dragoumis.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> There were two inspector-general positions in Macedonia, the inspector-general for tax and treasury offices and the inspector-general for customs offices, a position held by D. Tantalidis. See Pallis, *Ξενητεμένοι Έλληνες*, 148.

<sup>13</sup> Stefanos Dragoumis resigned from his position as governor-general of Macedonia after his disagreement with Venizelos on the issue of the privileges of the Aromanians. See American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Stefanos Dragoumis papers, box 109, and Pallis, *Ξενητεμένοι Έλληνες*, 149.

<sup>14</sup> In his autobiography, Pallis mentions: "Dragoumis' resignation was a great misfortune for Macedonia. Emmanouil Repoulis might have had some parliamentary talents, but he was

Repoulis kept Pallis on the margins of the administration, appointing him to a peripheral position of limited responsibility despite his education and long experience in the British administration in Egypt. The criticism Pallis levelled at Repoulis not only highlights aspects of the administration process but also reveals his own, distinct perspective on how to manage a territory that had just been annexed in Greece along with its populations. For Pallis, “an active and paternal administration” would restore balance to multi-ethnic Macedonia, assume control over the area and finally establish true, uncontested sovereignty.<sup>15</sup> He believed that the Greek administration should adopt and adapt features of the British administration by offering the local populations privileges and freedoms and allowing them to participate in governance. According to Pallis, direct communication between the administrators and the people they were responsible for was an important factor which had been seriously neglected, with very few Turkish-speaking officials participating in the Greek administration, when there were areas such as Drama, Kavala or Lagkadas where the population was majority Muslim and Turkish-speaking. As a result, these citizens had difficulty accessing services.<sup>16</sup>

Pallis thought that, overall, the administrative system applied in Macedonia after the annexation was far from democratic, especially for the non-Greek-speaking populations, and that, moreover, it was plagued by bureaucracy than the system put in place by the Ottoman Empire. He believed that maintaining the previous tax system was a major mistake, because for most citizens the taxation it imposed was both unfair and onerous. His plan was to implement a new tax system designed for everyone from scratch, completely circumventing the economic strategy of the Ottoman administration.<sup>17</sup> Restarting the state apparatus would allow for the establishment of new relationships with the local

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completely lacking in the qualifications required for a governor in a territory like Macedonia, which had just been conquered and was inhabited by many foreign elements. Only an active and paternal administration could have won over the population. Repoulis spoke no foreign languages ... Instead of totally dedicating himself to governing Macedonia and solving its many problems, he stubbornly insisted on maintaining his title as Minister of Foreign Affairs and governed Macedonia from Athens.” See Pallis, *Ξενητεμένοι Έλληνες*, 149–50.

<sup>15</sup> On the example of Cyprus, Pallis writes in his autobiography: “In their colonies, the British treat foreign peoples the way ancient Romans did; they allow ample freedom to the populations to express their national beliefs, as long as this is done within the bounds of the law and does not threaten social peace. However, once peace is disturbed, they strike with great force.” See *ibid.*, 136.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>17</sup> For Pallis, the success of the British administration model in Egypt served as the ideal framework for the Greek administration in Macedonia. In his autobiographical writings, he



populations instead of upholding the old, outdated system, and would eventually shift the balance in favour of the Greek state and its long-term goals in the region. Essentially, Pallis believed that nothing short of a total reboot, the cutting of all Gordian knots, could guarantee peace and the eventual integration of the new populations. The belief that wiping the slate clean is the best path towards population integration recurs over the course of Pallis' diplomatic career.

### *Becoming a Venizelist*

In 1914, while Pallis still held a marginal position in the Governorate-General of Macedonia, Miltiadis Negreponitis, president of the Refugee Committee, promoted him to general secretary of the committee. His collaboration with Negreponitis to provide housing and material support to the refugees who arrived in Macedonia from the Ottoman Empire after the Young Turk persecutions marked the beginning of a long career in refugee relief and rehabilitation.

After the Great Fire of Thessaloniki in July 1917, Pallis was invited by the new governor-general, Periklis Argyropoulos, to undertake the task of providing relief to the victims. He was appointed head of the Fire Victims Directorate in August 1917 and remained in this position until December 1918. In the comprehensive after-action report he sent to the governor-general in February 1919, he presented the directorate's work and its contributions towards aiding the fire victims.<sup>18</sup> With more than 72,000 Thessaloniki residents having lost their houses and property to the fire (50,000 were members of the Jewish community, 12,500 were Christian and 10,000 were Muslim), accommodation and food distribution were the most urgent problems to be resolved.<sup>19</sup> However,

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provides a detailed account of this model and underscores its parallels with the Greek context. See *ibid.*, 123–27, 149–55.

<sup>18</sup> The after-action report is kept in the General State Archives (GAK), Historical Archive of Macedonia. Specifically, Governorate-General of Macedonia Archive, folder 28.

<sup>19</sup> The Greek government provided the fire victims with 100 wooden sheds originally built for refugees and the British authorities set up three camps with 1,300 tents each on the outskirts of the city, where about 7,000 fire victims had fled to escape the fire. The French military authorities built at least one more camp hosting about 300 families, while 5,000 fire victims took advantage of the government's offer and moved permanently to the Old Greek territories. Despite these initiatives, there was still a large number of people in need of support. The Greek administration set up bread distribution points and more than 30,000 rations were distributed daily. The various Red Cross organisations (American, French, British) distributed food, milk and other necessities. The data above is included in the after-action report of the Fire Victims Directorate. GAK, Historical Archive of Macedonia, Governorate-General of Macedonia Archive, folder 28.

providing relief and even temporary rehabilitation to the population was far from simple. It was a multifaceted problem, whose many aspects needed to be handled simultaneously, while also respecting the victims' diverse religious profiles. The fire victims had repeatedly lost everything (from clothing and household equipment to their official documentation) and needed multiple layers of support from the special relief committee, state authorities and charity organisations. It is also worth noting that, at that time, the Greek state had limited economic resources and, most importantly, was in the midst of a major political crisis and national conflict, of which Thessaloniki was the epicentre.

Pallis had already joined Venizelos' Thessaloniki movement, but his success in managing and aiding this struggling population, in what was essentially his first important mission, secured him a position on Venizelos' staff and, most importantly, equipped him with expertise in the co-ordination of aid distribution and population management operations in similar crises. For Pallis, 1917 was a landmark year, sealing his transition into an active, central role at the forefront of developments in the Greek state. At the end of 1917, he was appointed general secretary to the governorate, a position he maintained through the tenure of two governors-general, Argyropoulos and his successor, Anastasis Adosidis.<sup>20</sup> From local co-ordinator and member of the Provisional Government, he soon evolved into the main manager of national population crises and crucial diplomatic missions, specialising in representing the Greek government in international committees and organisations. At the end of 1919, after the signing of the Armistice of Mudros, he was sent to Constantinople to supervise the return of the Greek populations to Eastern Thrace and Asia Minor. With his skills universally acknowledged and having gained the trust of Venizelos and his team, it was now time for him to put the whole spectrum of his abilities to good use.

Besides his political associates, Venizelos' environment also included a cadre of experts consisting of educated, skilled and knowledgeable specialists, with experience in administrations abroad and, most importantly, connections in the diplomatic circles of the time. Negrepontis, Adosidis, Ioannis Karamanos and, of course, Pallis, were among them. They worked diligently to resolve local issues, but were also dedicated to finding ways to accommodate the large refugee movements triggered by the First World War, which would soon intensify as a result of Greece's defeat in the Greco-Turkish War. These experts had the additional advantage of being on the winning side of the war on the European

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<sup>20</sup> During that time, Pallis also served as an interpreter officer at the Hellenic Army General Staff in Thessaloniki after the conscription of the Provisional Government, demonstrating his active support for the Venizelos movement.

level, enjoying recognition and, to a certain extent, favour from European officials. The National Schism and the First World War had changed the political agenda and created new issues that had to be resolved. In addition to the Slavic-speaking residents of Macedonia and the integration policies that were already employed in Macedonia when Pallis arrived there in 1913, by 1918 and 1919 there were also Christian populations that had been displaced from the Ottoman Empire to Greece and were in grave need of rehabilitation. Over the next decade, Pallis became the main figure in the management of this population group.

### *Constantinople, 1919*

Alexandros Pallis arrived in Constantinople at the end of 1918 and worked on the return of the Greek populations to their homelands. He co-operated with the patriarchate and the Greek community of the city via the Central Committee of Constantinople, an entity funded by the Greek government. Refugee repatriation was a complicated process, since more than 300,000 Greek-speaking Christian populations, as well as other religious and linguistic minorities, had been forcibly removed from many areas of the Ottoman Empire and had lived in a constant state of displacement throughout the First World War. The most fortunate among them had found refuge in nearby cities and villages, while others had been forced to travel to the mainland of the Ottoman Empire or Syria. Fewer such refugees had made it to Greece (most staying in Western Thrace and East Aegean islands) or the Russian coast of the Black Sea. Their houses and fields had been burnt, making it impossible for them to resettle or cultivate the land. In some cases, their homesteads had been looted so many times that the refugees could not return without extensive repairs and the purchase of new household equipment, farming tools, seeds and animals to make their farms both habitable and productive. To make matters worse, organising the transport of all these people via the rail or ferry network was a complex and costly process. It becomes evident that the task Pallis undertook as the government representative on the Central Committee was both complicated and challenging. Pallis accomplished it within a few months.

On 21 May 1920, Pallis sent to the Greek High Commission a detailed plan for the return of Eastern Thrace refugees, an estimated 82,436 of whom had resettled in Macedonia while a few were temporarily staying in the Old Greek territories.<sup>21</sup> The plan included a comprehensive description of the current

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<sup>21</sup> The “Plan for the Repatriation of the Eastern Thrace Refugees Settled in Greece” and the accompanying population tables compiled by Pallis are preserved in his personal archive, which he donated to the National Hellenic Research Foundation. See IHR/NHRF,

situation in the towns and villages to which the refugees were supposed to return. Apart from taking into account the burnt and destroyed houses and farms, Pallis also factored in another complication: many houses were occupied by Turkish refugees who had been installed there by the Turkish government. As a result, political negotiation would be needed in order to evacuate these homesteads and release them for resettlement by Christian populations. Pallis himself divided the repatriation process into four phases based on the degree of difficulty and compiled four tables where he specified the number of refugees to be repatriated, the town or village they would return to, their means of transport, and their port or train station of arrival.<sup>22</sup>

The repatriation process would begin immediately (at the end of May) and the target was for the first two phases to be completed by August, so that the refugees returning to rural areas would not miss the winter sowing season (wheat and rye). The second phase would start in August and conclude by March 1920, with the final phase taking place from March to May 1920, a year after the formulation of the plan. This timetable indicates the size of the population to be repatriated and resettled as well as the challenges inherent in this endeavour.

For this reason, Pallis believed that it was necessary to build camps where the refugee populations arriving in Greece could stay until they could return home so as to prevent interruptions to the population flows or disruptions to the pace of resettlement. These camps would be located in Raideostos (Tekirdağ), Andrianoupoli (Edirne) and Babaeski. Finally, he recommended that the Constantinople Central Committee should organise the entire operation, since

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Alexandros A. Pallis Archive, folder 1, subfolder 1, docs. 16 and 17. The broader context of minority exchanges in the Balkans, including those involving Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria, is extensively analysed by Stephen P. Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities: Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey* (New York: Macmillan, 1932).

<sup>22</sup> The first phase would entail the return of refugees to cities and towns, where housing and professional rehabilitation would be easier. Some such cities were Constantinople, Andrianoupoli, Raideostos and other smaller ones. During the second phase, refugees would return to those villages where population was small and the available housing stock could accommodate the returnees with the minimal population compression required. It is at this point in his work that Pallis uses the term “occupied dwellings” for the first time and notes that the housing situation would improve within a few weeks thanks to the intervention he had secured from the Thracian Association. The third phase would focus on the refugees returning to villages that had been utterly devastated, in which case the population would need to settle in neighbouring areas until the houses were repaired, and the fourth phase consisted of the villages which had been fully occupied by Muslims. This phase would take the longest because repatriation hinged on political negotiation with the Turkish authorities. IHR/NHRF, Alexandros A. Pallis Archive, docs. 16 and 17.

it required multiple organisational levels and sophisticated manoeuvring. It is worth noting that the operation also included Muslim populations that were now living in the villages abandoned by the Christians and would probably oppose any decision to move or be “condensed” in order to make room for the Greek returnees.

Barely four months after he had taken on his own position and moved to the area where the plan would be implemented, Pallis drafted and presented a comprehensive plan for refugee management and repatriation with a 12-month implementation timeframe. He worked on site, visited the affected areas, calculated the size of the population to be repatriated, took into account the Muslim populations that would also have to move to make repatriation possible, probably had a series of international meetings, and negotiated with the Turkish administration, all in an effort to achieve political consensus and establish necessary relief networks. Pallis was not a mere technocrat who designed the repatriation plan on paper; he was at the forefront of the plan’s implementation. Besides his scientific expertise and his international connections, Pallis belonged to a generation of European, mainly British, administration officials who specialised in managing similar situations. His mission to Constantinople became the first in a series of undertakings involving the movement of populations to or from the Ottoman Empire and their resettlement.<sup>23</sup> Pallis would encounter these populations again a few years later in even more adverse conditions. In Constantinople, he was given the opportunity to collaborate with the city’s Greek community, the patriarchate and the Greek High Commission, but most importantly, he had the chance to get in touch with European diplomats, revive past acquaintances and friendships, and work in a multinational environment, which allowed him to utilise the full extent of his skills for the benefit of the country he was serving. This allowed him to gauge the priorities of the European powers, observe the strategies and policies favoured by European officials, but also reconnect with friends and classmates from his studies who now occupied top-level diplomatic positions, laying the groundwork for his future missions. In this first international mission, Pallis proved that he was more than a good administrator; he was a well-connected, top-level official, which granted him access to the major decision centres of the time. Furthermore, he was recognised internationally as a specialist in refugee movement, minority

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<sup>23</sup> During his stay in Constantinople, Pallis also represented the Greek High Commission in a committee investigating complaints and grievances submitted by Christian populations, which convened at the British High Commission and was headed by his old friend Sir Robert Graves.

management and population settlement, issues which were considered crucial at that time in Constantinople, which had just accepted its first refugees from former Tsarist Russia.<sup>24</sup>

Pallis was still in Constantinople in 1920 when he published his study “On the population exchange and settlement in the Balkans during the period 1912–1920”, in which he attempted an initial evaluation of the various refugee waves resulting from the Balkan wars and the First World War.<sup>25</sup> For Pallis, the study’s aim was to “devise our future settlement plan” so that populations could settle permanently in the entire territory of Macedonia, completing a process which had begun in 1914. In the study, he notes that Macedonia is “the link between Old Greece, Thrace and Epirus; it is the battlement which protects the core of the Greek State. A weak Macedonia means a weak Greece.” The overall settlement plan and the specific schemes that would encourage the newly annexed populations to stay and integrate rather than migrate required strategic planning and high expenditure on the part of the state. To handle this complex task, Pallis recommended that a specialised deputy ministry be established under the purview of the Ministry of Agriculture.

This was the first in a series of studies, speeches and public interventions, in which Pallis outlined his own vision for Macedonia, treading carefully so as not to upset the precarious equilibrium between Greece, its neighbouring Balkan states and the Ottoman Empire. He signed the study not as a mere intellectual, but instead noting all the positions of responsibility he had occupied during the previous years, probably intending to re-introduce himself to the people of Macedonia who were now his political audience, since in autumn 1920 Pallis ran for parliament in Macedonia with the Liberal Party. He returned to Thessaloniki in autumn 1920, shortly before the election. After the comprehensive electoral defeat of the Venizelos party,<sup>26</sup> Pallis moved to Athens where he initially had no concrete employment prospects.

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<sup>24</sup> In 1937, the London Institute of International Affairs conducted a study on the refugee issue, which was submitted to the League of Nations. Pallis was responsible for writing the section on Russian, Armenian and other refugees from the Near East, populations he had first encountered in Constantinople in 1919. See Pallis, *Ξενητεμένοι Έλληνες*, 176.

<sup>25</sup> Pallis presented in detail the movements of Muslim and Slavic-speaking populations from Macedonia to the newly founded Balkan states and the Ottoman Empire and, conversely, the movements of Christian populations from the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria to Greece.

<sup>26</sup> Pallis received 14,671 votes and was the 24th most popular candidate in an election that marked a devastating defeat for Venizelos’ Liberal Party. Benaki Museum Historical Archive, Eleftherios Venizelos Archive, folder 102. I extend my warmest thanks to my colleague Katerina Dede for bringing this source to my attention.

*Return to Constantinople, 1921*

Pallis had been in Constantinople since the summer of 1921. He initially worked as a correspondent for the British newspapers *Daily Mail* and *Morning Post*, standing in for his friend, British correspondent John Quirk.<sup>27</sup> He remained in Constantinople even after Quirk's return and was there when the Asia Minor front collapsed. Although Pallis monitored the situation closely, he did not initially become actively involved for two reasons: First, he was a Venizelos supporter, which put him in the opposition, and secondly, he was stationed in Constantinople, which was not at the centre of the conflict. It was not long, though, before the government of Nikolaos Plastiras in Greece assigned him new responsibilities. The Armistice of Mudanya, the first treaty after the end of the Greco-Turkish war, signed on 29 September 1922, stipulated that the Greek Army had one month to withdraw from Eastern Thrace. During this time, Pallis was tasked with organising the purchase of the grain stockpiles stored in Eastern Thrace and their transport to Western Thrace on behalf of the League of Nations Nansen Committee.<sup>28</sup> However, when he arrived in Eastern Thrace, the withdrawal of the Greek Army and the displacement of the civilian population had already begun, which prevented him from purchasing and transporting the grain.<sup>29</sup>

From Andrianoupoli he travelled to Athens, and from there back to Constantinople in mid-October, this time as the government's official representative on the refugee issue.<sup>30</sup> From 20 September to 17 October 1922, the ministers of relief, foreign affairs and the Greek high commissioner in

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<sup>27</sup> Although Pallis was not a government official during his time in Constantinople, his connections, the respect he enjoyed from British officials as well as his capacity as correspondent for British newspapers allowed him access to detailed information on the developments in Constantinople, the alliances and actions of the Greek High Commission, and even the military operations on the war front. At the time, the position of Greek high commissioner in Constantinople was held by Charalampos Simopoulos, with whom Pallis had a friendship despite their political differences.

<sup>28</sup> The Greek government had not seen to remove the grain stockpile from Eastern Thrace in time, depriving the army and the local population of a necessary food supply. In September 1922, after negotiations, the League of Nations accepted to purchase the crop on behalf of the Greek government and transport it to Western Thrace. See Pallis, *Ξενητεμένοι Έλληνες*, 183.

<sup>29</sup> Pallis' testimony is indicative of the chaotic situation that prevailed. "Arriving in Andrianoupoli, I found that all the trains and cars had been commandeered to transport the army and the military equipment. The Christian population, with their belongings loaded on carts and animals, were fleeing fast towards Western Thrace ... An endless line of overburdened cow carts was slowly marching as far as the eye could see towards the Evros bridge, which separates Andrianoupoli from Karaağaç." Pallis, *Ξενητεμένοι Έλληνες*, 183.

<sup>30</sup> AYE, Central Service 1922, folder 89, subfolder 1, doc. 82.



Constantinople exchanged a flurry of letters in an effort to expedite Pallis' official appointment, writing that "he was best suited for the role due to his previous experience in Thessaloniki, Athens, and Constantinople", he was the only man qualified for the position, and his skills and abilities were well known to the government.<sup>31</sup> When the king's consent was finally secured on 17 October, Pallis could finally assume his new role.<sup>32</sup> At that point, Constantinople was the epicentre of the population movement, with thousands of Christian refugees arriving every day. It was also the centre of all international aid, since it hosted the headquarters of major aid organisations, and the hub of political decision-making due to the international commissions based there. Pallis arrived in Constantinople as the head of the Greek Mission for Refugee Relief with a view to organising the relief and transport of refugees to Greece.

This task was dauntingly difficult. In summary, Pallis was responsible for transporting Christian populations to the ports, securing temporary accommodation in the form of camps, providing food and healthcare during their stay there, negotiating the issuance of travel permits for the Christian populations to reach the coast, organising their transport to Greece, obtaining all necessary permits for the Greek ships to dock and ensuring food provision for the passengers during their journey. To accomplish all this, he was in constant communication with the British and US high commissioners, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other relief organisations, as well as the Turkish authorities where it was possible, since it was usually the British and US commissioners who mediated between the Greek and Turkish side. Simultaneously, he also sent updates to and received guidance and instructions from the ministries of foreign affairs, relief, finance and transport.<sup>33</sup> In December 1922, he was also appointed representative of the Greek Red Cross, which facilitated his work, as he gained more access and established direct communication with the other relief organisations, but also increased his responsibilities.<sup>34</sup>

Every day, his duties, as summarised above, were subject to a series of unpredictable and changeable factors. Transport, food and accommodation costs

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<sup>31</sup> AYE, Central Service 1922, folder 89, subfolder 1, various documents between nos. 83 and 152. In one of these letters, the Greek high commissioner in Constantinople stressed that it was imperative that Pallis be appointed Greek government representative responsible for the communication between the various organisations in Constantinople, because he was the only one who could secure much needed aid for the Greek side. See AYE, Central Service 1922, folder 89, subfolder 1, doc. 136.

<sup>32</sup> AYE, Central Service 1922, folder 89, subfolder 1, docs. 136 and 152.

<sup>33</sup> AYE, Central Service 1922, folder 89, subfolder 2, docs. 1–100.

<sup>34</sup> AYE, Central Service 1922, folder 89, subfolder 2, doc. 78.



reached exorbitant sums which were covered by the Greek government at a time when the country's finances had to be on the verge of collapse. In cases when it could not meet these costs, the Greek government urged Pallis to seek help from European commissioners or charity organisations, or even informing to him that the scheduled transport services would have to be postponed for a few days due to lack of funds.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, he was in constant negotiation with the Turkish administration and the foreign commissioners to obtain travel permits for the refugees and secure permission for Greek-flagged ships to enter Turkish territorial waters. It is important to remember that the Greco-Turkish war had just ended with a crushing defeat for Greece, but the Lausanne Treaty had not yet been signed. Therefore, although the war had forced sizeable populations to move, the terms of this movement had not been agreed and the methods used to achieve it had not been defined. As we can see in the relevant correspondence, which is preserved in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs archive, from October 1922 until July 1923, if not later, it was Alexandros Pallis who managed and co-ordinated the movement of the Christian populations from Constantinople and the Black Sea ports. During this period, more than 40,000 refugees were transported to Greece from the Ottoman Empire under particularly adverse conditions, while a wide array of unresolved issues impeded this already monumental task, with multiple unforeseen complications.

*The Mixed Commission for the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations, 1923*

As compliance with the terms of the Lausanne Treaty had relatively normalised the transfer of the Christian population from the Ottoman Empire to Greece, Pallis' mission was complete, but his work was far from over. The government expanded his responsibilities in autumn 1923 by appointing him to the Mixed Commission for the Exchange of the Greek and Turkish Populations as a member of the Greek delegation.<sup>36</sup> Ambassador Ioannis Papas was the head of

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<sup>35</sup> For example, Doxiadis wrote to Pallis on 22 November 1922 that the Greek government could not promptly transfer the 55,000 Turkish lira needed for the relief of the Pontian refugees gathering at the Black Sea ports and urged Pallis to seek assistance from foreign charity organisations. He also emphasised the need to prevent deaths from famine. See AYE, Central Service 1922, folder 89, subfolder 2, doc. 54.

<sup>36</sup> The commission consisted of delegations from both countries and neutral members who offered an expert opinion in case of disagreement between the two countries. There was also a number of subcommittees with a similar composition. The neutral members were compensated by the two countries. Their compensation was excessive, according to Pallis, and the operational costs of the commission and the subcommittees skyrocketed as a result.

the delegation, while Pallis returned to his original area of expertise: economic management. He was tasked with compiling a report on the economic aspect of the exchange, specifically the issue of assessing the abandoned assets of Greek and Turkish refugees and granting appropriate compensation.

By May 1925, he had systematically investigated the proposed asset appraisal process, participated in the relevant sessions of the mixed commission and, most importantly, had made personal estimates accurately reflecting the compensation due for the assets left behind by the Christian populations and, conversely, the compensation that would have to be paid out to the Muslim populations for the property they abandoned in Greece. Pallis then wrote a confidential memo to Prime Minister Andreas Michalakopoulos.<sup>37</sup> At the time, the mixed commission was temporarily inactive due to the wider negotiations between the two states taking precedence. Pallis thought that would be the right time to present the prime minister with his recommendation that he should not proceed with the refugee property appraisal, since it would bring no benefit to the Greek side, but only burden it with further expenditure.

According to Pallis' memo, the operation of the mixed commission during the population exchange process had already cost the Greek government about 15 million drachmas. The work that needed to be done from that point onwards in order to appraise hundreds of thousands of farms spreading from the Adriatic Sea to Mesopotamia would take far more time (7 to 10 years) and prove extremely costly (30 million drachmas yearly according to Pallis' calculations). In addition, he believed that, should the commission grant Greece compensation, Turkey would never accept to pay it, but also that such an outcome was by no means certain; Pallis thought it equally possible that the mixed commission would conclude that it was Greece that owed Turkey compensation.<sup>38</sup> His recommendation was for the country to withdraw from the appraisal process, saving an estimated 200,000 drachmas from the operation of the mixed

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The appraisal of the assets left behind by the refugees would determine not only the sums that each country would receive as compensation from the other but also the sum received by each exchangeable refugee individually.

<sup>37</sup> IHR/NHRF, Alexandros A. Pallis Archive, folder 2, subfolder 1, doc. 3.

<sup>38</sup> In his memo, Pallis claimed that the Muslim populations left behind huge tracts of land in northern Greece, even entire regions in some cases, like Drama and Kavala. This land would be highly appraised because it had been fertile and ready for cultivation. In contrast, the land abandoned by the Christian populations had been damaged by military operations, while in urban areas the houses left behind had been destroyed, as was the case with Smyrna which had been burnt to the ground. Therefore, the corresponding sums paid out by the Turkish side in compensation would be low.

commission and, most importantly, freeing up the human resources that such a huge task would require in order to reallocate both funds and personnel to refugee rehabilitation, especially for landowners and members of the bourgeoisie who he believed stood to lose the most from this arrangement.

He concluded his memo with a reference to the fact that while the refugees distrusted the Greek government, they expressed complete certainty that the mixed commission would protect their interests. Regardless of the refugees' perceptions, he noted, the problem remained: Any bonds that the Greek government would issue in compensation would have no real value since the government would not be able to pay them out. Instead, he suggested a plan to forestall the inevitable negative reactions, which consisted of explaining the stark realities of the issue to the refugees, presenting the alternative, much more feasible solution and convincing them of its benefits. Moreover, he was confident that the Turkish side would also be willing to dissolve the mixed commission for similar reasons. Finally, he committed to participating in any deliberations and negotiations required to achieve an agreement.

Fearing backlash from the refugees, the Michalakopoulos government refused to adopt Pallis' recommendation and accept a merger of the demands on both sides. Instead, the government removed the head of the Greek delegation to the commission, Papas,<sup>39</sup> in an effort to stave off any negative reactions. After the removal of Papas, Pallis resigned from his position, but chose to remain as Greek delegate to the Council of the Ottoman Public Debt. In 1926, he was appointed government representative to the Refugee Settlement Commission (RSC). For the first time since 1917, he was back in a position of major importance to domestic administration, shaping policy, mediating critical decisions and influencing delicate balances.<sup>40</sup>

In parallel to his contributions from various positions of great responsibility in the wider state apparatus, in 1925 Pallis published his second study entitled *Statistical Study on the Ethnic Migrations in Macedonia and Thrace during the period 1912–1924*. As he mentions in the introduction, the study's aim was to complement his previous work "On the population exchange and settlement in the Balkans during the period 1912–1920", which he had published in 1920. He

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<sup>39</sup> The government's refusal to accept Pallis' proposal should also be viewed through the lens of the solution that was actually adopted. In the end, the refugees were not compensated for the entirety of their lost assets and their dissatisfaction triggered both social and political tensions.

<sup>40</sup> Pallis remained with the RSC until it was dissolved in 1930, while also working as department head at the Ministry of Health, a position he probably retained after 1930. See Evgenios Matthiopoulos, "Bourgeoisie and Tradition: Marriage of Love or Convenience?," in *Eleftherios Venizelos and Cultural Policy*, ed. Tasos Sakellariopoulos and Argyro Vatsaki (Athens: Benaki Museum, 2012), 116.

felt the addition was necessary because during this time “the curtain has fallen on the latest act in the history of the region. The landscape is now completely different. It is the end of a cycle for these three nations, the Greeks, the Turks and the Bulgarians.” At the end of his introduction, he notes that “the only consolation” for the Greeks is that Macedonia “is now purely Greek” and “no other country can use population composition to lay national claims on Macedonia”.<sup>41</sup>

Macedonia was once again the focus of his study, but the differences could not have been more evident: Not only had the demographic and political reality changed, but Pallis himself had. His new goal was to prove that Macedonia was undoubtedly Greek and highlight the process through which this “hellenisation” had been accomplished. He wrote: “In 1912, when we first conquered Macedonia, the proportion of Greeks to other ethnic groups was 43% to 57%, although, even then, the size of the Greek population was larger than each ethnic group separately. Today the proportion is 88% to 12%.” This demographic shift was accomplished through 17 migration waves, some violent, some not, which he analyses in detail over the 24 pages of the study through statistical tables that he compiled by cross-referencing sources. The transnational technocrat of 1913, the proponent of peaceful coexistence and the granting of privileges to all the residents of Macedonia, had very quickly morphed into a more conservative public official, expounding on the advantages of “Macedonia’s ethnic purity”. This shift in rhetoric is somewhat more complicated than it appears and is more likely evidence of political and diplomatic manoeuvring.

The numbers presented by Pallis to illustrate the successive demographic changes in Macedonia essentially became the official national statistics of the population of Macedonia and influenced the technical negotiations which followed the Lausanne Treaty, determining the size of the official compensation and the partitioning of the Ottoman public debt. The figures, in combination with the ones in his next study, were also used as the “official” numbers of the population movements, thus providing a definitive outline of the evolution of Macedonian demographics and composing a cohesive national narrative that aimed at finally putting to rest a series of border disputes based on population composition. The study served this purpose well, with Pallis’ political stature and international acclaim lending an air of authority to his contribution and ensuring its wide acknowledgment as the definitive text on the issue.

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<sup>41</sup> Alexandros Pallis, *Στατιστική μελέτη περί των φυλετικών μεταναστεύσεων Μακεδονίας και Θράκης κατά την περίοδο 1912–1924* (Athens: s.n., 1925), 3–4.

*The Refugee Resettlement Commission (RSC)*

Despite his resignation from the Mixed Commission for the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations due to his disagreement with the Michalakopoulos government, Pallis remained active in the handling of the refugee crisis. In January 1926, he became treasurer of the Refugee Resettlement Commission (RSC), a position he retained until the commission's dissolution in 1930. The role appeared tailor-made for Pallis as it combined economic management, international contacts and designing the refugee rehabilitation process.<sup>42</sup> Once again, Pallis found himself in a position of major importance that was technically outside the state apparatus, but closely related to political decision-making and the management of the refugee population, an area that would allow him to utilise his extensive expertise. Pallis took on the role of RSC treasurer at a time when the commission was implementing rehabilitation schemes funded by the first refugee loan. Specifically, by 1926, about 622,865 refugees, almost half the total number of refugees in Greece, had found permanent accommodation and were relatively self-sufficient thanks to the commission's contributions.<sup>43</sup> The overwhelming majority of these refugees had settled in rural areas (551,939 versus 72,230 who settled in cities) and most of them in Macedonia.<sup>44</sup> When Pallis joined its council, the RSC had already decided to allocate its resources to rural refugee settlement, focusing on Macedonia and Western Thrace.<sup>45</sup> This decision was based on the availability of large, abandoned tracts of arable land, especially in Macedonia, and served the purpose of transforming the refugees into productive, self-sufficient farmers, who would no longer have to rely on state benefits and could even start repaying their rehabilitation loans. In addition, rural refugee rehabilitation

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<sup>42</sup> In 1926, Charles B. Eddy was the president of the commission, Sir John Hope Simpson the vice president and Achilleas Lampros was the second Greek representative. In 1931, Eddy published the study *Greece and the Greek Refugees* based on the work of the commission during the years of his administration. Charles B. Eddy, *Greece and the Greek Refugees* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931).

<sup>43</sup> RSC, *Tenth Quarterly Report*, Athens, 25 May 1926, LNA, C.308.M.117.1926.II. See also Dimitri Pentzopoulos, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities and its Impact upon Greece* (The Hague: Mouton, 1962), 90.

<sup>44</sup> League of Nations, *Greek Refugee Settlement* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1926), chap. 10, table 1, 81.

<sup>45</sup> For more details on the rural rehabilitation process in Macedonia, see Elisavet Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange in Greek Macedonia: The Rural Settlement of Refugees, 1922–1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

offered a solution to the urgent national issue of food security,<sup>46</sup> while also contributing to the demographic “transformation” of sparsely populated northern Greece, a region also inhabited by minority populations.<sup>47</sup> The mass settlement by Greek Christian populations would change the region’s ethnic composition, turning the Greek element into a majority.<sup>48</sup> The assertion of Greece’s sovereignty over its northern borders was a necessary prerequisite for League of Nations officials, as it would guarantee the Greek state’s territorial control and contribute to the area’s economic growth.<sup>49</sup> Thirteen years after his first arrival in Thessaloniki, Pallis once again set his sights on Macedonia, at a time when the region’s population composition had changed and the border regime had been finalised. Pallis was now returning to Macedonia to approve and implement policies under vastly different circumstances, not only for the refugee populations who had ended up resettling in the area but also for Pallis himself, compared to what he wrote and supported only a few years earlier. By 1926, Pallis was universally acknowledged as an accomplished public administrator of international experience and acclaim and a close partner of Venizelos, while the region of Macedonia was the epicentre of the refugee settlement process. Most financial documents of the RSC bear the signature “Le Trésorier A.A. Pallis”. However, knowing how hands-on Pallis’ approach was to every task he undertook, we can safely assume that his was no perfunctory signature, but rather the outcome of systematic engagement and tireless effort to reconcile necessity with feasibility. Despite his long tenure on the RSC and the significance of his position, Pallis does not mention his work with the commission in his autobiography or his other writings, unlike all the other roles and positions he held throughout his illustrious career.<sup>50</sup>

However, in 1929, one year before the dissolution of the RSC, Pallis published his work “A collection of the main statistics on the population exchange and the refugee rehabilitation process: An explanatory analysis”. According to Pallis himself, the study’s objective was to present the most important statistics about the refugee movement “in a concise and practical way” in order to illustrate

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<sup>46</sup> The dramatic rise in the number of consumers required a commensurate increase in the production of food and other commodities. There was also the expectation that a rise in production of certain export products would contribute to a more balanced budget, since it would lead to a reduction in the trade deficit.

<sup>47</sup> Lina Venturas, “Multi-actor Synergies, Sovereignty, and Refugee Resettlement in Interwar Greece,” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 40, no. 2 (2022): 307; Martin, *Meddlers*, 138.

<sup>48</sup> Antonis Liakos, *Ο ελληνικός 20ός αιώνας* (Athens: Polis, 2019), 127.

<sup>49</sup> Venturas, “Multi-actor Synergies,” 310.

<sup>50</sup> This absence could be explained by the application of strict confidentiality protocols.

through figures the new status quo as well as the work carried out by the commission. These figures included the number of refugees who were displaced, the size of the expenditures for refugee exchange, relief and rehabilitation by type, the effect the arrival of the refugees had on the country's ethnic composition, and the cost of the rural rehabilitation schemes. In essence, Pallis used numbers to describe through succinct summary tables everything that had happened in the Greek territories after the defeat of the Greek Army in 1922 on the political, social and economic level.

The three studies published by Pallis in 1920, 1925 and 1929, his most important contribution to the modern Greek state, comprise a cohesive trilogy and present a comprehensive body of data which reflects the demographic changes that had taken place in the New Greek territories. Pallis arrived in Macedonia in 1913 with a vision that never came to fruition; it was overcome by extremely adverse circumstances and rapid political developments. Nevertheless, he soon managed to find another goal to pursue, radically modifying his original vision to accommodate the new status quo. In his trilogy of studies, Pallis recorded his contributions and concluded his work in the field of refugee movement and settlement, laying the necessary foundation for the Greek state. Pallis did not simply provide an overview of the numbers of refugee arrivals and departures or the number of refugees rehabilitated. Especially with his last contribution, he shaped the entire debate over refugee movement and rehabilitation. His 1929 tables and statistics became “the definitive guide for almost all the Greeks who concerned themselves with the population of Macedonia” and were adopted by the League of Nations as the “official statistics”.<sup>51</sup> Even today, studies on refugee movement and rehabilitation use Pallis' tables and data as reference points, proving that his work can indeed be used as a “concise and practical” guide, just as he intended.<sup>52</sup>

### *The Technocrat Alexandros Pallis*

The region of Macedonia, population movements and the compilation of statistics constitute the connecting threads that run through Alexandros Pallis' career from 1913 until 1930. Pallis' professional trajectory might have been largely determined

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<sup>51</sup> Iakovos D. Michailidis, *Μετακινήσεις σλαβόφωνων πληθυσμών (1912–1930): Ο πόλεμος των στατιστικών* (Athens: Kritiki, 2003), 41–50, 67–73 and 91–93.

<sup>52</sup> Lena Korma included Pallis' study among the most important documents that she discovered in the Bank of Greece Archive on the issue of refugee rehabilitation. See Lena Korma, *Πτυχές της αποκατάστασης των προσφύγων στην Ελλάδα, 1922–1930* (Athens: Bank of Greece, 2021), 41–42.



by international political developments beyond his control, but, whether overtly or behind the scenes, he always managed to establish alliances, influence decisions and mediate central policies on the issues of refugee movement, settlement and rehabilitation, subjects which at the time were considered particularly impactful. For example, the management of the refugee crisis was inextricably linked with the Greek state's economic policy, while the various parallel negotiations taking place (such as the International Appraisal Commission and the Council of the Ottoman Public Debt) were connected with the state's foreign policy.

The technocrat specialist of the British administration faced many difficulties when he arrived in his imaginary homeland, but quickly adapted to the new situation and managed to serve diligently at the side of Venizelos, taking on crucial roles at critical junctures as well as participating in international committees and negotiation processes with regard to population movements and the resettlement of the Ottoman Empire's Christian populations. He earned all these appointments on the basis of his hard work and the respect he commanded, while his connections in international diplomatic circles and the universal approval he enjoyed contributed substantially both to his personal ascent and the satisfaction of the Greek side's demands. Pallis was highly opinionated and had very specific ideas about how things should be done, which decisions should be taken, and how the Greek government's policies should be formulated and implemented.

Although his opinions and proposals were often rejected by the Greek government in many of the areas he managed, his trust of and support for the government (and vice versa) was never breached, even when Pallis chose to resign from appointed positions. However disjointed they might appear at first, every one of his actions, recommendations and policies share a common element: Pallis considered the new landscape created by the Asia Minor Catastrophe to be irreversible and was trying, through proposals and negotiations, to establish conditions conducive to the integration of the refugee population at the lowest possible cost for a state in extreme economic peril. At a time when border disputes were constant and relief measures for refugees were non-existent, when refugees themselves believed their situation was only temporary and the state was wasting resources on appraising abandoned Greek and Turkish properties and calculating individual compensation amounts, Pallis worked on multiple levels to ensure the best possible circumstances that would allow both state and people to adapt to the new status quo.<sup>53</sup> Although his battle was fought on

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<sup>53</sup> Pallis' work in refugee management also reflects broader themes in international security and human vulnerability, issues that remain relevant in modern discussions on forced



multiple fronts, his strategy was clear and consistent. Pallis might have been extremely knowledgeable in various fields, very experienced in foreign policy and international relations, highly connected and strongly opinionated, but he was also acutely conscious of his position and served government policy diligently, striving for the best possible results in any negotiation.

Moreover, Pallis wrote a series of concise statistic studies which combined the presentation of useful data with the formulation of an ideological position for the populations living in the Greek territories. His 1920, 1925 and 1929 studies illustrate both his concern for minority and refugee populations and his unwavering dedication to the nation-state. His ideas became entangled with foreign policy and, in the end, all his actions were filtered through a single lens: the best interests of the country. Apart from his ideas, it was always numbers and statistics that supplied him with incontrovertible arguments not only in his writings but also in the causes he pursued and the objectives he worked towards. One way or another, Pallis' tables became the state's official statistics on the population of Macedonia and, mainly, on the refugee movement of 1922–1924. His figures underpinned the policies he supported and, in essence, shaped the Greek national narrative over the following decades.

Searching through Pallis' works, notes and personal archive, we did not come across a single refugee story describing the refugee experience and emotions, like the ones that have been found in the writings of other politicians and experts of the time, such as Henry Morgenthau. Pallis was interested in numbers and believed that it was statistics rather than appeal to emotion that would win the ideological and diplomatic battle. His education and experience with the British administration surely contributed to this perspective. His concern for the people and the state were profound and he served them both faithfully. But sentimentalism and appeals to pity were totally unfamiliar to a diplomat like Pallis, who was armed with a strict education and an iron logic.

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displacement. The theories and approaches discussed by Newman and van Selm provide a useful framework for understanding the long-term impact of Pallis' policies on Greek society. Edward Newman and Joanne van Selm, eds., *Refugees and Forced Displacement: International Security, Human Vulnerability, and the State* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2003). Moreover, the broader history of international humanitarianism during this period, as discussed by Cabanes and Rodogno, offers valuable insights into the international context in which Pallis operated. Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) and Davide Rodogno, *Night on Earth: A History of International Humanitarianism in the Near East, 1918–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Pallis constitutes a special case of public administrator. His name, which he shares with his father, a supporter of demotic Greek, disappears and re-emerges multiple times in twentieth-century historiography. Many recognise it and cite his studies and statistics, but few can give specific information about his work, his views and his personality. Recently, Sir Michael Llewellyn-Smith gave a lecture at the British School at Athens entitled “A.A. Pallis: From Greek abroad to Greek in Greece”, in which he presented Pallis through his autobiography, pointing out that, despite Pallis’ major role in refugee settlement, he remains a largely obscure figure.<sup>54</sup>

Pallis is not so much unknown as unsung. We are aware of his work and his studies, his statistics are to this day our go-to data for refugee arrival and rehabilitation, he is referenced and cited, but we know very little about him as an individual, in a manner similar to Adosidis, Karamanos, Negrepontis and the other public officials he worked with. Our perspective on the 1922–1924 refugee crisis either focuses on the displaced populations through individual and local histories, or on the work of international organisations and central political figures. Pallis played a vital role in the management of the refugee crisis for more than ten years, but a century later he remains in the shadow of the decisions he took or mediated. We are aware of his work and his contributions, but not of Pallis himself, which impedes our comprehension of his choices. This article is a first attempt at tracing critical decisions and policies back to their inspirer, a public administrator who participated in difficult negotiations, liaised with international organisations, and deftly navigated endless political manoeuvring behind the scenes, always in the service of a clear and consistent strategy.

### *Conclusion*

Alexandros Pallis’ career during one of Greece’s most tumultuous periods reveals the critical role he played in shaping the nation’s response to the refugee crisis of the early twentieth century. Through his work, Pallis was instrumental in the management and resettlement of over a million Christian refugees, a task that required not only administrative expertise but also deft political manoeuvring on both the national and international stages. This article has traced Pallis’ involvement in key decisions that defined the resettlement process, from his early role in Macedonia to his pivotal contributions to the Mixed Commission for the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations. His strategic approach – characterised by the integration of local populations, the use of statistical analysis

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<sup>54</sup> Sir Michael Llewellyn-Smith, “A.A. Pallis: From Greek abroad to Greek in Greece,” talk delivered at the British School at Athens, 13 December 2022, <https://youtu.be/vEuGeDVob1Q>.

and a pragmatic understanding of the geopolitical landscape – was crucial in stabilising the newly expanded Greek state. Pallis' influence extended beyond immediate refugee relief; his policies helped shape the long-term demographic and political structure of modern Greece, particularly in the sensitive region of Macedonia.

Despite the challenges he faced, including limited resources and political opposition, Pallis consistently sought to align his policies with the broader goals of the Greek state, ensuring that the integration of refugees was not just a humanitarian effort but also a strategic one. His work laid the foundation for the Greek state's approach to population management and national identity, with his statistical studies becoming the bedrock of the country's official narrative on refugee movements. In conclusion, Pallis was more than just a public administrator; he was a visionary who understood the complexities of nation-building in a time of crisis. His contributions, though often overshadowed in historical accounts, were integral to the successful integration of refugees into Greek society and the consolidation of the Greek state's territorial and demographic integrity.

## APPENDIX: SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF ALEXANDROS PALLIS

Alexandros Anastasios Pallis (Bombay, 1883–Athens, 1975) was the first-born son of Alexandros Pallis and Ioulia-Eliza Ralli. From 1897 to 1902, he studied at Eton College and continued his studies at Belliol College at the University of Oxford, which boasted a long tradition of producing graduates who served in government and high-level administrative positions in the British Empire. After graduating in the summer of 1906, Pallis followed this tradition and sat the Civil Service exam for the position of inspector-general with the British administration in Egypt. He passed the exam, returned to Oxford to learn Arabic and, in summer 1907, arrived at Port Said. Initially, he was assigned to the General Accounting Office in Cairo and in summer 1912, he was transferred to Alexandria, where he became accounting director of the post, telegraphs and telephones company. In autumn 1913, the governor-general of Macedonia, Stefanos Dragoumis, appointed Pallis inspector-general of tax and treasury offices for Macedonia after a short acquaintance between the two men earlier that year. Pallis accepted the appointment, resigned from his position in Alexandria, and left for Greece. He arrived in Thessaloniki in November 1913.

In 1914, he was named general secretary of the Refugee Committee and became involved in the relief operation and housing rehabilitation of the refugees who arrived in Macedonia from the Ottoman Empire. After the Great Fire of Thessaloniki in July 1917, he was invited by Governor-General Periklis Argyropoulos to take over the relief effort for the fire victims. At the end of 1917, he was appointed secretary-general of the Governorate-General of Macedonia. After the signing of the Armistice of Mudros, he was sent to Constantinople to supervise the repatriation of the Greek populations of Eastern Thrace and Asia Minor.

Following the Greek Army's defeat in the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922), Pallis was appointed to the Mixed Commission for the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations and was also the Greek representative to the Council of the Ottoman Public Debt. Between 1925 and 1926 he served as prefect of Corfu. He resigned and took on the position of government representative to the Refugee Rehabilitation Commission (RSC). He remained with the commission until its dissolution in 1930, while also working as department head at the Ministry of Health, a position he probably retained after 1930.

In 1933, he was elected member of parliament for Serres and was later appointed special deputy minister at the Greek embassy in London. He later occupied other positions in various international and European organisations with which he maintained long-standing collaborations.

