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Introduction

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Special Section I / Section Spéciale I

COMMUNISM, ANTICOMMUNISM AND THE SCIENCES IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY GREECE

Introduction

ABSTRACT: This Special Section, based on the workshop “Communism, Anticommunism and the Sciences in Greece” (2023), examines the intellectual history of communism and anticommunism in twentieth-century Greece through the lenses of the natural sciences and history. During the Cold War, the natural sciences acquired not only military and industrial significance but also cultural prestige, functioning as markers of moral and political superiority in the global confrontation between liberal democracy and communism. Yet the ways in which Greek communist and anticommunist discourses appropriated science have remained largely understudied. History, by contrast, became a discipline of central national importance and a key site of ideological struggle. From the 1920s onward, Marxist historiography challenged dominant national narratives, but after the Civil War it was excluded from state institutions, while recent history was mobilised for anticommunist purposes. The contributions gathered here analyse how science and history operated as crucial arenas of ideological contestation, cultural mobilisation and the articulation of both national and global Cold War frameworks.

The articles of this Special Section originated in the Workshop “Communism, Anticommunism and the Sciences in Greece”, which was co-organised by the Institute of Historical Research, of the National Hellenic Research Foundation, and the Contemporary Social History Archives, in April 2023. These articles approach the intellectual history of communism and anticommunism in Greece by focusing on two distinct disciplines: the natural sciences and history itself.

The natural sciences are recognised as one of the principal concerns of the Cold War, not only for their military and industrial applications but because of their cultural prestige on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The impact of the “Sputnik Shock” on NATO allies, the ensuing Space Race and the Atoms for Peace initiative are well-documented facets of the global Cold War.¹ In

¹ See for example John Krige, *American Hegemony and the Postwar Reconstruction of Science in Europe* ((Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008); Audra J. Wolfe, *Competing with the Soviets: Science, Technology, and the State in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Naomi Oreskes and John Krige, eds., *Science and Technology in the Global Cold War* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014).

the 1950s and 1960s, science, as well as its applications, became something more than a modernising force: It also acted as moral and political ones. Scientific achievements acted as indicators of the superiority of the political system – liberal democracy or communism – that enabled them, and thus as hallmarks of the character of the people who produced them.² Science had to be mobilised against the “atheist” communists, just as the sciences – and technology – were to ensure the defeat of the capitalist bourgeoisie. However, and despite the growing recognition that the Greek Civil War and the decades that followed it were also part of the global Cold War conflict, the way that the natural sciences were contested and appropriated within Greek communist and anticommunist rhetoric has not yet been systematically examined.³

History, on the other hand, was recognised by historians, scholars and by the state itself as a discipline of vital national importance. In the nineteenth century, history – the shared past – emerged as a foundational element of national identity, especially in response to Fallmerayer’s theories about the Greek nation and its origins. At the same time, it became a field of ideological confrontation among differing positions and perspectives which, however, all converged on the centrality of the nation. In the 1920s, the emergence of the Marxist perspective, combined with the rise of the communist movement, led to the most significant challenge to national history. This gave rise to a conflict that dominated nearly the entire twentieth century that was closely linked to political and social developments. In the context of the Cold War and following the defeat of the communist left in the Greek Civil War, Marxist historiography remained excluded from state institutions. At the same time, recent history was utilised as part of a vast anticommunist campaign, which used historical examples to

² See Jonathan Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America’s Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Audra Wolfe, *Freedom’s Laboratory: The Cold War Struggle for the Soul of Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018)

³ For the few relevant studies, see Maria Rentetzi “Gender, Science and Politics: Queen Frederika and Nuclear Research in Post-war Greece,” *Centaurus* 51, no. 1 (2009): 63–87; Maria Rentetzi and Loukas Freris. “How to Turn a Mobile Laboratory into a Diplomatic Bag: International Relations, the IAEA and Nuclear Diplomacy,” *History and Technology* 41, no. 1 (2025): 27–52; Kostas Tampakis. “Science as an Orthodox Weapon and the Politics of Anti-Communism in Mid-Twentieth Century Greece,” in *Orthodox Christianity and the Study of Nature: Histories of Interaction*, ed. Kostas Tampakis and Ron Numbers (Turnhout: Brepols, 2025). 171–95; Loukas Freris, “‘Through Diplomatic Channels’: Science, Diplomacy, and Greece’s Efforts for Election to the IAEA Board of Governors, 1957–1961,” in *The Missing Interaction: Science and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War*, ed. Maria Rentetzi (Turnhout: Brepols, 2025), 157–78.

illustrate and reinforce its narrative.⁴ Nevertheless, a systematic discussion and reappraisal of the historiographical work of Greek Marxist historians, as well as the counterarguments and narratives of their intellectual opponents, is still lacking.

Lina Chordaki's article addresses these questions from a novel perspective, that of gender. While science, atheism and Christianity have been the focus of historical exploration, the gender aspect of these same episodes and processes has been ignored. More specifically, although gender as an analytical category has been studied separately in relation to religion/atheism and science, what is the role of gender at the intersection of those notions? Chordaki takes as her starting point the lack of female voices in the relevant archives, and creates a methodological and theoretical framework, drawn from gender studies and history of science. She proposes to explore the various masculinities that these discourses create, by focusing on the journal *Πρωτοπόροι* in 1930–1931. Her article identifies the left's appropriation of the notion of objectivity, neutrality and science, as well as the paternalistic use of the notion of the "people", which needs to be educated and informed. However, she also argues for the need to enrich such historical discussions with more careful and elaborate concepts of feminism, masculinity and gender.

In the second article, Ioannis Koubourlis offers a critical historical examination of early Greek Marxism through the lens of theory, politics and history. The study focuses on how key thinkers, such as Georgios Skliros, Yanis Kordatos and Yannis Zevgos, addressed the fundamental questions surrounding the "historical transition" in modern Greek society. Koubourlis argues that previous scholarship has predominantly viewed these texts through an exclusively historiographical lens, thereby neglecting their crucial theoretical dimensions and the heated internal disputes among authors regarding their interpretation of historical materialism. A central focus is the major controversy between Kordatos and Zevgos, which revolved around foundational Marxist

⁴ See, indicatively, Efi Gazi, *"Scientific" National History: The Greek Case in Comparative Perspective (1850–1920)* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000); Vangelis Karamanolakis, *Η συγκρότηση της ιστορικής επιστήμης και η διδασκαλία της ιστορίας στο Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών, 1837–1932* (Athens: Historical Archive of Greek Youth/NHRF, 2006); Antonis Liakos, "Modern Greek Historiography (1974–2000): The Era of Tradition from Dictatorship to Democracy," in *(Re)Writing History. Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism*, ed. Ulf Brunnbauer (Münster: LIT, 2004), 351–78; Polymeris Voglis and Ioannis Nioutsikos, "The Greek Historiography of the 1940s: A Reassessment," *Comparative Southeast European Studies* 65, no. 2 (2017): 316–33; Vangelis Karamanolakis, "Who is the Historian? The Formation of Modern Greek History and the Historical Community in the Short Twentieth Century," *Historein* 19, no. 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.25282>.

interpretation. Zevgos, representing the Leninist-Stalinist perspective, systematically attacked Kordatos' methodology as "economistic", "mechanistic" and "fatalistic", arguing that Kordatos emphasised tools (economic development) as the driving force of history rather than the class struggle. Kordatos, in turn, defended his adherence to a deterministic view he believed aligned with Marx. Koubourlis notes a persistent contradiction: despite rejecting bourgeois nationalism, these Marxists often conflated the analytical unit of "sociohistorical formation" with the "national society," an anachronistic tendency that allowed nationalist concepts to influence their seemingly revolutionary analyses. The article concludes that, while characterised by evident economism, these thinkers produced historical interpretations that frequently tested the limits of their deterministic sociopolitical framework.

Despina Papadimitriou's article internationalises the historiographic perspective, by providing a critical analysis of the ideological mechanisms that defined the East-West divide following World War II. The study focuses on the resignification of anticommunism through its encounter with the concept of antitotalitarianism during the early Cold War period. The article argues that this new framework formulated a semantic field around the concept of totalitarianism that allowed the emergence of a new historical space. This concept was notably expansive and unifying, allowing diverse actors, from US officials to Greek anticommunists and from Soviet dissidents to anti-Soviet liberals and conservatives, to converge in a shared ideological language. As Papadimitriou shows, the resulting semantic field defined the conflict using notions such as freedom of speech, the captive mind, intellectual enslavement, anticommunist martyrs and the sharp antithesis between truth and ideology/fanaticism. The article highlights that anticommunism itself had a genealogy, but its fusion with antitotalitarianism introduced a new temporality – one that viewed communism as moral decadence and a persistent threat to the nation. In the specific Greek context, the article shows how national concerns were subsumed into this global grammar. Greek anticommunism became tightly intertwined with nationalism, transforming the national frontier into the boundary of the "free world". This narrative often silenced the civilian nature of the conflict in favour of portraying it as the West's war against "Asian despotism".

The next article brings us back to the history of science in Greece, and its relations with atheism and Orthodox Christian apologetics. Sandy Sakorrafou undertakes a comprehensive review of how "atheism" was conceptualised and discussed within Greek Orthodox Christian circles between 1936 and 1974. She argues that the Orthodox perception of atheism consistently moved beyond a purely theological interpretation of "apostasy" from God, instead focusing

predominantly on secular materialism and its diverse manifestations within Greek cultural, political and social life. This treatment of atheism as a problem of culture and ethics rather than just theology profoundly shaped the publicly articulated relationship between science and religion in the Greek context. The study traces a significant chronological shift in Orthodox discourse, influenced by prevailing geopolitical and social factors. In the 1930s and 1940s, the discussion was overwhelmingly dominated by intense anticommunism, where atheism was almost universally conflated with political ideology and framed as an existential threat to the unified Greek national and religious identity. By the 1950s and 1960s, while anticommunism persisted, its intensity had lessened, giving way to more nuanced ecclesiological and politological explanations for the persistence of communist atheism. Crucially, this period saw the emergence of a vigorous practice of “scientific apologetics”, an intellectual effort dedicated to reconciling “true faith” with “true science”. The final period, spanning the late 1960s to 1974, marked a thematic pivot towards secular materialism and moral decline. As Greek society rapidly modernised and technology advanced, Orthodox authors shifted their focus to the erosion of faith caused by these societal changes. This new type of atheism was viewed as a failure of moral motivation. The intellectual debate sought to introduce “Helleno-Christian ideals” as a humanist counterpoint to ethical decline and the misuse of technology. Thus, the article demonstrates the church hierarchy’s increasing, and sometimes politically co-opted, engagement with modernity and its ensuing challenges to traditional faith structures.

In the fifth article, Kostas Tampakis shifts the focus to the career and intellectual output of astronomy professor Demetrios Kotsakis. It examines how Kotsakis mobilised scientific expertise in the service of the widespread anticommunist campaign in mid-twentieth-century Greece. By analysing Kotsakis’ diverse range of publications – from religious periodicals like *Ακτίνες* to university textbooks and planetarium lectures – the article challenges conventional historiographical boundaries between scientific work, political history and ideological aspirations. Tampakis argues that Kotsakis’ intellectual activity was a deliberate strategy, perceived as a duty, to synthesise his scientific credentials with his deep religious convictions, thereby creating a unified persona that actively redefined “true” astronomy as inherently antimaterialist and, by extension, anticommunist. The article treats his disparate outputs as a single, coherent corpus, revealing how his scientific authority was weaponised to participate in the most extensive anticommunist campaign of the era. Crucially, Tampakis emphasises that this campaign was not merely a local reflection of the global US–USSR Cold War conflict. Kotsakis and his peers initiated their

crusade against materialism well before the Cold War began and continued it long after its initial tensions subsided, utilising deep-seated local resources – specifically, Orthodox apologetics and prewar antimaterialist rhetoric. This localised approach provided the ideological foundation for a religiously charged struggle against scientific materialism, which was seen as inextricably linked to communist ideology.

In the final article, Vangelis Karamanolakis moves the discussion back to history, and delves into the life and intellectual legacy of Yanis Kordatos (1891–1961), widely recognised as the first significant Marxist historian in Greece. Through a focused examination of his career, the article explores the intricate ways in which Marxist and national historiography intersected within the Greek context. A primary objective is to understand the mechanism by which an intellectual figure becomes inextricably associated with a particular historical perspective, such as Marxism, and is established as its foremost representative, with their authoritative voice being both acknowledged and repeatedly contested over time. The article systematically surveys the key milestones in Kordatos' intellectual and historiographical trajectory across several decades. Karamanolakis highlights that, despite Kordatos' influential role, his work often found itself outside the realm of official historiography cultivated by academic institutions, frequently being met with silence or outright exclusion as unscholarly. Nonetheless, his form of history was successfully disseminated through the party press, public lectures, cultural performances and the extensive network of the left in the 1950s and 1960s. Within this new societal context, Kordatos' work engaged directly with political developments, establishing him as a crucial figure whose intellectual formation was continually shaped by them. Largely excluded from academic history, and for extended periods from party-sanctioned history as well, he successfully carved out a distinct historiographical niche. By the end of the 1950s, this niche became an essential refuge for citizens who felt marginalised or disillusioned by the official state narrative, offering a national history that was transformed from a revolutionary project into a potent element of identity, a source of pride and a defence against accusations of anti-Hellenism and betrayal.

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