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Vassiliki Theodorou and Despina Karakatsani, Strengthening Young Bodies, Building the Nation: A Social History of Child Health and Welfare in Greece (1890–1940)

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Vassiliki Theodorou and Despina Karakatsani,
*STRENGTHENING YOUNG BODIES, BUILDING THE NATION: A SOCIAL
HISTORY OF CHILD HEALTH AND WELFARE IN GREECE (1890–1940)*,
Budapest: Central European University Press, 2019, vii+366 pages.

In recent years, the literature on Greek medical history has begun to break out of its earlier national linguistic confines and address a wider international readership with works in Western European languages. This new trend renders the topic accessible to interested scholars who, furthermore, experience difficulty in approaching the relevant primary sources, which are invariably in Greek. Indeed, several studies on the Greek social history of health have appeared lately that are beginning to shed light on issues that have been the subject of the Western social history of medicine for decades now. Therefore, this book by Vassiliki Theodorou and Despina Karakatsani is a most welcome addition to a growing list of similar works. The two authors are professors at the universities of Thrace and the Peloponnese, respectively.

The book focuses on the child's body and the involvement of the state in controlling its physical and mental health. Theodorou and Karakatsani adopt a Foucauldian approach to state authority, expressing their intention as follows: "We are interested in exploring the ways in which children's health was turned into a scientific issue, how it was entwined with the social and national questions, and how it became part of government social policy" (p. 5).

Their analysis is grounded in thorough research on archival and published material that reveals the public discourse of their protagonists. The scientific discourse of these protagonists ranged from positivist medical treatises to attention to measurements, to normative and eugenics discourse. Indeed, the book makes clear that, after the 1880s, when the study begins, the treatment of childhood shifted into an entirely different world. Not only was childhood medicalised; it now submitted to the *regard* and the bureaucratic control of the state with the help of universal education. Moreover, according to the authors, "social policies on children's health intertwined with national anxieties in the early twentieth century" (p. 3) following the national trauma of a humiliating military defeat in 1897.

Collectively, according to the new biopolitical agenda, children became viewed as racial stock that was threatened by disease and poverty but also by the unnatural strain of education itself. Eugenic ideas would feed on such perceptions of childhood. The list of diseases that threatened young Greeks included TB, trachoma, typhoid fever, malaria, diphtheria and smallpox. In fact, prevention of TB occupied the lion's share of the attention to childcare activities of charitable

institutions, the school system and the state. Teachers were called on to monitor the medical histories of their students and thus complement the overstretched medical services of school doctors. Student access to the natural environment by means of summer camps and outdoor schools was to be included in the new educational regime. As the twentieth century progressed, state management of children's physical and mental health through the educational system became more systematic, institutionalised, organised and informed by Western European scientific developments in paediatrics, pedagogy and the new hybrid discipline of paedology. In turn, care for motherhood and the creation of its respective care institutions and clinics effectively derived from the attention to child hygiene and health.

The person leading these developments was Emmanouil Lambadarios, the first director of the School Hygiene Service and innovator in the field of child welfare. The two authors have made extensive use of Lambadarios' private papers, which are housed in the Greek Literary and Historical Archive (ELIA). Lambadarios was one of a handful of Greek functionaries whose careers spanned successive government and regime changes despite the notoriously factional nature of the Greek civil service. These functionaries effectively managed to become the backbone of a rudimentary Greek bureaucracy. One other similar figure that comes to mind is that of Phokion Kopanaris, secretary general of the Ministry of Health. Other functionaries, though, had different career trajectories that spanned the public and

private sectors. Paediatrician Apostolos Doxiadis, for instance, became minister for health in Venizelos' liberal government but went on to preserve his influence and propound his racial theories as president of the Patriotic Foundation for the Protection of the Child.

The structure of the book divides the narrative chronologically, into three distinct periods: the period prior to the Greek defeat of 1922, a watershed date in Greek political and social history, the period from 1922 to 1936, which was largely shaped by the social distress generated by the refugee crisis, and that of the Metaxas authoritarian regime from 1936 to Greece's entry into World War II in 1940. This periodisation is defined by political developments. The book highlights the fact that state policies towards childhood may have adapted to the social tensions and increased poverty of the interwar years and become more intrusive and populist, particularly after 1936. Yet, they did not alter much in their approach, despite successive regime changes and the impact of demographic developments, and remained focused primarily on the urban than on rural populations.

Nonetheless, for all the continuity in the policies towards childhood, Greek society experienced a major change in the field of welfare in the 1920s. The interwar years saw a shift from the leading role played by private charitable bodies, primarily operated by members of the now impoverished social elite, to state-run services that were politically accountable.

Finally, the book is rich in historical detail, broad in thematic scope and cov-

ers a field at the intersection of health, social class, education, gender, race, urban housing and schools, politics and ideas. The authors have succeeded in

telling this complex story with exemplary clarity and have thus added an invaluable study to the literature of the social history of childhood.

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