

Italian Scholars of Modern Greek as Political-Cultural Mediators during the First Years of Censorship by the Greek Junta, 1967–1971

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SYNOPSIS

This article examines how Italian scholars of Modern Greek played the role of cultural and linguistic mediators of Greek writers during the first years of the dictatorship in Greece, 1967–1971, a period in which the country was under strict censorship. From the very beginning, the work of scholars of Modern Greek, along with the Italian press and the student movement, tended to endorse the anti-dictatorial struggle, acting as a channel of communication between Italian society and Greek writers.

KEYWORDS

Censorship; Greece; Greek junta; Regime of the Colonels; Italy; scholars of Modern Greek; cultural mediators.

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The poet is speechless. What a disaster! [...]
In the midst of a war — imagine, greek poems.
C. P. Cavafy, *Darius*

Don't forget, gentlemen, that we find ourselves in the presence of a patient, whom we have on an operating table, and for whom, if the surgeon does not strap him to the bed during the time of the surgery and the anesthesia, there is a chance that instead of the surgery leading to the recovery of his health, it may lead to his death. This, as a preamble, is the answer which you must expect if, speaking of democracy and freedom, you mention restraints. The restraints are the straps that fasten the patient to the operating table so that he may go through the surgery devoid of any danger (Papadopoulos 1968, p. 11; emphasis added).¹

¹ The translation is by Van Dyck 1998, p. 16. The original reads: 'Μην ξεχνάτε κύριοι ότι ευρισκόμεθα ενώπιον ενός ασθενούς, τον όποιον έχομεν επί της χειρουργικής κλίνης και τον όποιον εάν ο χειρουργός δεν προσδέσει κατά την διάρκειαν της εγχειρήσεως επί της χειρουργικής κλίνης, υπάρχει περίπτωση αντί διά της εγχειρήσεως να του χαρίσει την



With these words, on the morning of 21 April 1967, the dictator George Papadopoulos announced to Greek and foreign journalists the imposition of a military junta in Greece in order to avoid, as leaders of the coup argued, the danger of a communist invasion by the Soviet army. As it turned out, no such danger existed. Nevertheless, the overthrow of the democratically elected government began at 2:00 a.m. that night with the first military mobilisations, continued until 4:00 with the arrest of a large number of citizens and members of the Greek parliament, including the Prime Minister and the leader of the official opposition,² and culminated in the seizure of the state radio and telecommunications buildings leading to total control of the media and communications throughout the country (Deliolanes 2019, pp. 10–12). Thus, shortly before 6:00 in the morning the dictators announced on the radio the suspension of 11 articles of the Greek Constitution, including the one regarding the right to freedom of speech.

The care with which Papadopoulos, in his first speech, framed the imposition of censorship on the country was a clear sign of what was to follow. In the immediate aftermath of the junta, however, a large part of the Greek population did not have a clear picture of the extent to which human and political rights were being violated, nor could they clearly formulate their concerns about the authoritarianism of the new regime, nor, finally, was it easy for them to grasp so quickly the full effect of the censorship that had already been imposed. In fact, the majority of the population had their first contact with censorship and the authoritarian way in which the junta planned to exercise its power when it imposed the *katharevousa*³ on public debate, legislation, and education.⁴ Thus, once again in modern Greek history, the issue of language is linked to the authoritarianism of the junta regime which, combined with the imposition of strict censorship, eventually managed to bring under its control all publishing activity in the country (Van Dyck 2002, pp. 42–43).

The severe restriction on freedom of expression soon triggered a passive protest by many writers and intellectuals of the period, some of them ceasing all publishing activities as a form of resistance to the dictatorship and to censorship (*ibid.*, pp. 41–63; Papanikolaou 2010, pp. 177–180). However, at the same time, several of these writers took part in a publishing movement abroad in which translation was de facto turned into one of the most important channels through which the Greek writers that had

αποκατάστασιν της υγείας του, να τον οδηγήσει εις τον θάνατον. Αυτή είναι εκ προοιμίου η απάντησις την οποίαν πρέπει να αναμένετε εάν, ομιλούντες περί δημοκρατίας και ελευθερίας, μνημονεύετε τους περιορισμούς. Οι περιορισμοί τους όποιους θα επιβάλλωμεν είναι το δέσιμον του ασθενούς επί της κλίνης διά να υποστεί ακινδύνως την εγχείρησιν.' Spelling has been adapted.

2 More than 6,500 arrests were made in Athens: see Deliolanes 2019, p. 12.

3 'Katharevusa originated in the 19th century owing to efforts to "purify" the language of foreign elements and to systematize its morphology by using ancient Greek roots and much classical inflection. Its syntax differs only slightly from that of Demotic, the spoken language, but is much more resistant to loanwords' ('Katharevusa Greek language', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Katharevusa-Greek-language>, accessed 1 Feb. 2021) — editor's note.

4 Article 6 of the Constitution, 1968.

been excluded by censorship in Greece could express themselves, either by republishing works that had been previously published before the imposition of the dictatorship, or by presenting unpublished texts in translation (*ibid.*, p. 183).

From the first moments of the Greek coup d'état, the Italian press directed its attention to Athens, following the developments with intense interest and, in some cases, with some concern (see also Soave 2014a, p. 77). By indexing newspapers with the largest circulation during the period in question we discover that the Italian press, with the help of correspondents in Greece and other European countries, covered several aspects of the events in Greece from the first day, though we also find several inaccuracies, due mainly to the tumultuous nature of events.⁵

5 The newspapers *Corriere della sera*, *L'Unità*, *La Stampa* and *Il Messaggero* were completely indexed for the period 21 April — 30 June 1967 as part of the research *Per un Osservatorio di Studi neogreci in Italia* conducted by the Chair of Modern Greek Language and Literature of the University of Rome Sapienza. Other widely circulated newspapers of the time were also checked, from which the same picture emerged. Indicatively, I quote some of the articles that were published in the first week of the coup d'état in the above newspapers: *Corriere della Sera*, 22. 4. 1967: Governo militare è stato d'assedio in Grecia istituiti con un proclama di re Costantino και Un travaglio permanente; 26. 4. 1967: Disagio nel consiglio atlantico per il colpo di Stato in Grecia. Si teme una riacutizzazione del problema di Cipro; 26.-27. 4. 1967: Ondata anti-beat nelle scuole in Grecia. Proibiti minigonna e capelli lunghi, «Re Costantino appoggia il colpo di Stato dei militari»; 29. 4. 1967: Incontro a Mosca. Capi comunisti greci a colloquio con Suslov. *L'Unità*, 22. 4. 1967: Colpo di Stato militare in Grecia, Alla vigilia delle elezioni la corte e le forze reazionarie spalleggiate dagli USA tentano di strozzare la democrazia, La VI flotta USA nel Porto di Pireo, Dal Vietnam alla Grecia; 23. 4. 1967: Terrore fascista in Grecia, Sorga in tutta Italia la protesta e la lotta contro lo strangolamento della democrazia greca!, La Grecia è vicina, Appello del PC greco alla lotta contro la dittatura fascista; 26. 4. 1967: Proibito parlare del ruolo della CIA nel colpo di Stato in Grecia, Gruppi di resistenza si organizzano a Creta; 29. 4. 1967: Passo ufficiale sovietico contro il fascismo in Grecia, L'Italia, la Grecia e il Vietnam, Abbiamo parlato con Andrea Papandreu. *Il Messaggero*, 22. 4. 1967: Situazione drammatica e confusa dall'alba di ieri ad Atene, I militari al potere in Grecia con un colpo di Stato del Re, Arrestati Giorgio e Andrea Papandreu, Cannelopoulos e altri leaders politici; 23. 4. 1967: Calma carica di tensione dopo il colpo di Stato in Grecia, Andrea Papandreu ferito mentre tentava di sottrarsi all'arresto, Costantino più vittima che fautore dei drammatici avvenimenti ellenici, Il triste risveglio degli ateniesi con la città in stato di assedio; 24. 4. 1967: Contrasti fra i militari in Grecia sulla drammatica svolta politica; 25. 4. 1967: Costantino sarebbe prigioniero del gruppo militare al potere; 26. 4. 1967: Re Costantino finirebbe per avallare il «putsch», Le prospettive del regime militare ad Atene; 27. 4. 1967: Costantino approva il regime militare; 28. 4. 1967: Cinquemila i comunisti tratti in arresto in Grecia; 29. 4. 1967: Smentita l'uccisione del comunista Glezos. *La Stampa*, 21-22. 4. 1967: L'annuncio dato stamane alle 5.40 da Radio Atene. Colpo di Stato militare in Grecia, Papandreu e altri leaders arrestati, Costantino difende il regno contro le nuove forze repubblicane; 22. 4. 1967: Dittatura militare imposta dal re in Grecia, Vuole salvare la corona, Per impedire le elezioni di maggio, La Costituzione sospesa, ripristinata la pena di morte per i reati politici, Un trono in pericolo, Il re giovane tra due regine; 23. 4. 1967: Il fulmineo colpo di Stato in Grecia, La caccia, ai nemici del re, Echi nel mondo al complotto di Atene, La Grecia minacciata dalla guerra civile?; 25. 4. 1967: Il governo militare controlla la Grecia ma forse l'intesa con il re



If the interest shown by the Italian press was surprisingly intense, quickly transforming the Greek coup d'état into one of the top stories of public debate in the Italian domestic political scene, the reasons for this interest are not so surprising. As Deliolanis notes, 'in addition to its geographical proximity, as well as the presence in Italy of a large number of Greek students and the influx of a large number of political refugees from all sides, what disturbed Italian policymakers was the possibility that the NATO army would intervene in a member country of the European Community'⁶ (Deliolanis 2019, p. 126; see also Soave 2014b).

As for the Greek students who came to Italy to study, forced into exile by the junta regime and banned from Greek universities because of their political views, a clarification needs to be made: even if most of these students were not politicised before their departure to Italy, they would have inevitably become actively involved and integrated into the political scene upon their arrival, almost by definition.⁷

Finally, what must not be overlooked is the impact of the political actions taken by leaders of the Greek coup behind the scenes in Italy, with the purpose of closely monitoring various people or creating tension in the local political scene, either by establishing student organisations friendly to the military dictatorship of Athens (Deliolanis 2019, pp. 139–163),⁸ or through political propaganda promoted in both Italy and Greece (*ibid.*, pp. 116–120; cf. Soave 2014a, p. 80).⁹ These actions were of direct interest to neo-fascist movements in Rome, with which the coup leaders collaborated closely for a period, but also sparked great concern among the political circles of all democratic political parties in Italy (Deliolanis 2019, 118–122, 139–159).¹⁰

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- è precaria, poche e in certe notizie filtrano per ora da Atene, Il premier danese chiede la libertà di Papandreu; 27. 4. 1967: Il re esce dalla reggia ed avalla il colpo di Stato; 28. 4. 1967: Le reazioni italiane alla crisi ellenica. Fanfani al Senato parla della Grecia, «Il re non sapeva nulla» dicono i militari ad Atene, Ex ministro di Papandreu fugge da Atene a Istanbul.
- 6 'oltre alla vicinanza geografica, alla presenza in Italia di un gran numero di studenti greci e all'afflusso di un numero considerevole di rifugiati politici di ogni schieramento, a turbare la politica italiana era la possibilità dell'intervento di un esercito NATO in un paese associato alla Comunità Europea.'
- 7 Pelliccia — Raftopoulos 2016, pp. 67–82, offers detailed numerical data as well as a thorough historical presentation of the Greek student presence in Italy. Specifically for the years of dictatorship, see p. 72 et seq.
- 8 Indicatively, I mention that on 23 April 1967, just two days after the coup d'état in Greece, a student organisation friendly to the junta is established in Naples called the National Association of Greek Students of Italy with the aim of monitoring people in Italy and creating tension and political confusion.
- 9 Characteristic is the admission of Ioannis Ladas, Minister of Public Order of the coup d'état government, that since 1968 the Greek dictators had been trying to exert influence on the Italian political scene. See also the remarks of Deliolanis who notes that the junta followed a 'strategia di destabilizzazione [...] già agli inizi del 1968 verso [Italia e Cipro] che il regime greco considerava i due paesi più pericolosi'; Deliolanis 2019, pp. 118 and 135. For the relations of the junta regime with Italy, see the comments *ibid.*, 186 *passim*.
- 10 Paolo Soave talks about 'processo di interiorizzazione del tema [greco] nel dibattito politico, culturale e sociale [in Italia]' (Soave 2014a, p. 79) and claims that 'la cultura italiana si dimostrò da subito ricettiva riguardo al tema greco e cercò di favorire una diffusa sensibi-



Based on these considerations, it is clear that the Italian press and student movement were two of the main channels of information reaching the Italian public about the (real) situation as it developed in Greece.¹¹ Both played a pivotal role, especially during the earlier and stricter period of censorship in Greece (1967–1971),¹² helping to relay news to the Greek public that was not otherwise available. Though their main objective was to inform the Italian public, Greek students were also interested in projecting the image of Greece as a democratic country, one that was in political turmoil and cultural disarray, but unable to express itself due to censorship laws (Papanikolaou 2010, p. 183; Van Dyck 2002, pp. 53–63).

The third channel of communication between Greek and Italian society during the first years of the dictatorship was established through the work of Italian scholars of Modern Greek. Bruno Lavagnini, a professor and Chair of Modern Greek at the University of Palermo, resigned from his position as *Console onorario della Grecia a Palermo* ('Honorary Consul of Greece in Palermo') in protest of the coup d'état in Greece and as an example for others (Deliolanes 2019, p. 149). This was only the beginning of a series of actions by Italian scholars of Modern Greek who actively gave their support to those silenced by the censorship laws of the Greek junta.

As we will show below, most of these 'mediators' were academic professors, others were translators who were new to the field. Not only did they play the role of cultural mediators between Greece and Italy, but in many cases they carried out linguistic mediation between Greek writers and the Italian readers, either by translating texts that had been published in Greece before the junta, or by translating previously unpublished texts from the original Greek into Italian for publication.¹³ Perhaps the most typical example of this form of mediation is that of Giorgos Seferis, who, in 1968, entrusted two previously unpublished poems to Pontani¹⁴ from *Notes for a 'Week'* (the poems 'Tuesday' and 'Wednesday'), so that Pontani could translate and publish them in Italy (Seferis 1968a).¹⁵ Something similar happened with one of Seferis' most famous

lizzazione per combattere il rischio di assuefazione alla nuova dittatura, percepita come un'eresia inaccettabile per la democrazia occidentale e una minaccia più o meno latente in particolare per quella italiana' (ibid., 82). In particular, about Nenni's policy during the junta, cf. Ghezzi 2014.

- 11 For more information on the reactions of many prominent Italians, journalists, politicians, economists, people of letters and arts, against the Greek junta, see Soave 2014a, pp. 82–84.
- 12 For this first phase of censorship in Greece, see also the view of Papanikolaou 2010, pp. 176–177.
- 13 The phenomenon is mainly observed during the first years of the junta, although it should be noted that it was not particular to Italy, but also occurred in other countries, such as France and England. Cf. Karamanolakis 2012, p. 9.
- 14 For more information on Filippo Maria Pontani (1913–1983) see Anna Meschini Pontani's (2015) online lemma of *Treccani Dizionario biografico degli italiani*.
- 15 It is stated in the colophon: 'Questo volumetto a cura di Vanni Scheiwiller è stato impresso a Milano dalla tipografia U. Allegretti di Campi in mille copie numerate da 1 a 1000 il 29 febbraio 1968'. In this edition, the two unpublished poems by Seferis are published in Greek for the first time. I call to mind that the *Notes for a 'Week'* had been published without these two poems since 1940, the year the *Book of Exercises* was published. Cf. Daskalopoulos 2016.



and dissident poems published during the junta in Greece, ‘The Cats of St. Nicholas’. Before its first publication in Greece (Seferis 1969),¹⁶ the poem had been published in Italian in a non-commercial translation by Pontani, as stated on the last page of the publication: ‘This poem by Giorgio Seferis, unpublished in Greek, translated by Filippo Maria Pontani is printed in Rome in a limited run of only a few copies for the friends of Enzo and Grazia Crea, New Year’s Day 1970’ (Seferis 1970).¹⁷

Similarly, in 1971, Pontani translated two short collections of previously unpublished poems by Yiannis Ritsos (Pontani 1971a; Pontani 1971b). Yet another example is that of *The Parade*, a one-act play by Loula Anagnostaki. In May 1965, it had been staged for the first time by the Art Theatre in Athens, directed by Karolos Koun. In April 1967, the month of the coup d’état, it was presented at the Teatro dei Verdi in Padua, translated by Filippo Maria Pontani and directed by N. Tsingakou. Finally, in May 1968, it was staged in Paris by the Maison des Lettres, translated by Nikiforos Papandreou and J.Y.C. Fossé and directed by Antoine Vitez. Despite its success abroad, an excerpt of the play was first published in Italian, in the volume *L'altra Grecia*, published by Pontani in 1969 (Pontani 1969a, pp. 141–160).

During the first years of the dictatorship, Seferis was undoubtedly the most widely promoted Greek literary figure in Italy. Even before 1967, his work was well known to the Italian public. Pontani had first translated poems by Seferis in 1949, and had edited the first extensive anthology of his poems in 1963, followed by a collection of essays in 1965. Meanwhile, other translators and scholars were involved in Seferis’s work, contributing to its promotion and dissemination to a wider Italian readership as early as 1967.¹⁸ In addition, the Nobel Prize for literature that was awarded to Seferis in 1963 was a decisive boost to the promotion of his poetry.¹⁹ Finally, the famous

16 The publication is accompanied by the following comment from the newspaper’s editors: ‘Το ποίημα το πήραμε από την ελληνική εκπομπή του ραδιοφωνικού σταθμού της Κολωνίας. Ο Σεφέρης το ‘γραψε, όπως αναφέρθηκε, στις αρχές του χρόνου [1969]’ (We took the poem from the Greek program on the Cologne radio station. Seferis wrote it, as mentioned, at the beginning of the year [1969]). Cf. Daskalopoulos 2016, p. 74: ‘Το ποίημα, προτού τυπωθεί στη *Χαραυγή*, και αργότερα στα *Δεκαοκτώ κείμενα* [Ιούλιος 1970], κυκλοφορούσε δακτυλόγραφο από χέρι σε χέρι’ (The poem, before it was printed in *Charavgi*, and later in the *Eighteen Texts* [July 1970], passed from hand to hand in manuscript).

17 ‘Questa poesia di Giorgio Seferis, inedita in Greco, tradotta da Filippo Maria Pontani è stampata a Roma in pochi esemplari per gli amici di Enzo e Grazia Crea, Capodanno 1970.’ Cf. Daskalopoulos 2016, pp. 73–74, 148. The Italian publisher of luxury editions Enzo Crea and his wife Grazia were friends of the Seferises. They had spent a few days with them in Delphi, shortly before the publication of the Seferis *Declaration* in March 1968. Then, along with Pontani, they accompanied Maro and Seferis on their trip to Italy in May–June 1968. Cf. Beaton 2003, pp. 570–571, 578–579, 586.

18 During that period, the modern Greek scholars in Italy involved with Seferis’s works, in alphabetical order, are: Cotardo, Dalmati, Lavagnini, Marcheselli, Mascaro, Stomeo, Vitti. Cf. Azzoni 1970, pp. 235–244.

19 The awarding of the Nobel Prize to Seferis was covered with particular interest by the Italian press. Let me mention, for instance, that in the period 1949–1966, according to the indexing of Oliveti (1974, p. 33) records are delivered with publications related to Seferis’s work.



Seferis Declaration denouncing the dictatorship was published on 28 March 1969; this boosted the dissemination of his work considerably, not only in Italy but also in other foreign countries.²⁰ In this way, Seferis's name came to be associated with his public opposition to the coup and resistance to the dictatorial regime, alongside other, more overtly political and anti-dictatorial figures, such as Mikis Theodorakis, Melina Merkouri, Andreas Papandreou, and Vassilis Vasilikos.

During the period 1967–1971, Pontani would continue to be the scholar most involved with Seferis's work. In 1967, he reissued the volume *Poesie* with Mondadori, where it was published as part of the series *Gli Oscar mensili*. In 1968, the *Tre poesie segrete* ('Three secret poems') was published, with an introduction by the translator in which he presents the evolution of Seferis's poetics. On 29 February 1968, an edition of *Note per una 'Settimana'* ('Notes for a "week"') was released containing the poems 'Tuesday' and 'Wednesday' (as mentioned above), which Pontani edited on behalf of the *All'insegna del Pesce d'oro* publications.²¹ On 14 April 1968, the same publisher printed one hundred non-commercial copies of the entire collection, in which all seven poems appeared for the first time in Greek.²² The following year, Pontani published *Giorgio Seferis: Premio Nobel per la Letteratura 1963* ('Giorgos Seferis: Nobel Prize in Literature 1963') which included an extensive number of poems, as well as several essays by Seferis. Finally, in 1970, a translation of the poem 'The Cats of St. Nicholas'

20 For the Seferis Declaration, see Papanikolaou 2010, pp. 117–180. The news of the Declaration, which was broadcast recorded by the BBC, immediately received a warm welcome by the foreign press. For Italy, see indicatively: *Corriere della sera*, 29. 3. 1969: Contro i colonnelli il Nobel greco Seferis: 'Il poeta ha accusato il regime militare di avere soffocato la libertà e di avere gettato nel torpore i valori intellettuali'. *La Stampa*, 29. 3. 1969: Un duro colpo per la dittatura dei colonnelli. Da Atene il poeta Seferis chiede libertà per la Grecia: 'Il Premio Nobel Giorgio Seferis ha rotto oggi il suo lungo silenzio, accusando il regime militare greco di soffocare la libertà e di avere imposto al Paese un torpore in cui "tutti i valori intellettuali stanno per essere sommersi come in una palude, in acque stagnanti"'; 27. 4. 1969: Un bilancio a due anni dal colpo di Stato. Nella Grecia dei colonnelli. Incontro con il poeta Giorgio Seferis.

21 The volume was printed in 1,000 copies.

22 It is noted in the colophon of the book: 'Questo opuscolo a cura di Vanni Scheiwiller è stato dal volume di Giorgio Seferis *Note per una "Settimana"*, traduzione e nota di Filippo Maria Pontani, Vanni Scheiwiller, Milano 1968, e tirato in cento copie numerate da 1 a 100 su carta azzurra dalla Tipografia U. Allegrati di Campi a Milano il 14 aprile 1968 per festeggiare il viaggio in Italia del poeta'. G. P. Savvidis confirms the same information: 'Τα Τρίτη και Τετάρτη (από τις Σημειώσεις για μια "Εβδομάδα") πρωτοδημοσιεύτηκαν στις 29 Φεβρουαρίου 1968 στη δίγλωσση έκδοση: Giorgio Seferis, *Note per una 'Settimana'*, Traduzione e nota di Filippo Maria Pontani, All'insegna del Pesce d'oro, Milano Mcmlxviii, σε 1000 αντίτυπα αριθμημένα-το ελληνικό κείμενο ανατυπώθηκε και χωριστά, από τον ίδιο εκδότη, στις 14 Απριλίου 1968, σε 100 αντίτυπα αριθμημένα' (*Tuesdays and Wednesdays — from Notes for a "Week" — were first published on February 29, 1968 in the bilingual edition: Giorgio Seferis, Note per una 'Settimana', Traduzione e nota di Filippo Maria Pontani, All'insegna del Pesce d'oro, Milano Mcmlxviii, in 1000 numbered copies; the Greek text was also reprinted separately, by the same publisher, on April 14, 1968, in 100 numbered copies*)' (emphasis added): Seferis 1998²⁰, p. 353. Cf. Daskalopoulos 2016.



was published (cf. Olivetti 1974, p. 224). During this time, Mascaro, Sangiglio, and Dalmati also contribute significantly to the promotion of Seferis's work, through both critical studies and Italian translations.

It was also during this time that Pontani helped mediate Seferis's poetry in Italy in the field of literary criticism. In addition to providing the introductions for many of his translations, Pontani wrote the most complete critical work on Seferis's poetry: the collective volume *Omaggio a Seferis* was published in 1970 on the occasion of the poet's 70th birthday as a 'miscellany of unpublished works and studies dedicated by the Institute of Byzantine and Neo-Greek Studies of Padua, directed by F. M. Pontani' (ibid., p. 222).²³

In terms of sheer volume, only the case of Yiannis Ritsos can be compared to Seferis during the first years of the Greek junta. While some translations of his texts had been published before the junta, the introduction of his work in Italy only really began after 1967, mainly thanks to Pontani's mediation.²⁴ As Evangelos Tsianàs notes:

*Ritsos' career was only really launched in Italy during the years following the 1967 coup. The translation and publication of his works by Italian scholars was therefore a political stance against the regime of the colonels and in solidarity with the Greek people oppressed by the dictatorship [which] would mobilize [...] a large part of Italian culture in favor of Ritsos and bring fame and popularity abroad to those of his poems that we might characterise as social, militant, and political, while the translation and publication of his more straightforwardly lyric poetry, for the moment, would go largely overlooked (Tsianàs 2000, pp. 9–10).*²⁵

In 1967 a short edition of excerpt XII from the poem *Unruly State* was released, translated by F. M. Pontani and edited by Enzo and Grazia Crea (Ritsos 1968). The following year a series of poems from Cristino Sangiglio's collection *Symphony of the Spring*, along with several excerpts from *The March of the Ocean* were included in the antho-

23 'miscellanea di opere inedite e di studi dedicata dall'Istituto di Studi Bizantini e Neogreci di Padova, diretto da F. M. Pontani.' The volume, in addition to a number of unpublished translations by Pontani, contains works which 'secondo un procedimento analitico basato sulla tecnica dei "riscontri" e dei "paralleli", intend[ono] contribuire ad una visione più completa del mondo poetico di Giorgio Seferis' (Olivetti 1974, p. 222).

24 Pontani is the first to refer to Ritsos's work in Italy (Pontani 1950), while Mario Rosario Conti is Ritsos's first translator to Italian (Conti 1961). In 1965 a short excerpt from the *Epitaph* is translated (Ritsos 1965) while in April 1966 Vitti publishes the second, enriched and revised edition of the anthology of the 20th century Greek poetry that was first published in 1957. In this second edition Vitti adds some poems by Ritsos (Vitti 1966); cf. Olivetti 1974 and Tsianàs 2000.

25 'Un più grande lancio di Ritsos in Italia iniziò dopo il colpo di Stato del 1967. La traduzione e la pubblicazione delle sue opere da parte di studiosi italiani è stata quindi una presa di posizione politica contro il regime dei colonnelli e di solidarietà verso il popolo greco oppresso dalla dittatura [che] mobilerà [...] gran parte della cultura italiana a favore di Ritsos e incentiverà all'estero la fama e la popolarità di quella poesia che potremmo definire sociale, militante e politica, mentre verrà trascurata, per il momento, la traduzione e la pubblicazione della sua poesia più propriamente lirica.'



logy *Poesia greca contemporanea* (Sangiglio 1968a, pp. 75–87). In 1969 Sangiglio curated a collection of Greek poetry for the magazine *La cultura nel mondo*, prominently featuring Ritsos and his work, under the title *Panorama della poesia greca contemporanea* (Sangiglio 1969).

In the same year, Giorgos Gatos published a short article about Ritsos in the magazine *Uomini e Libri* presenting the political side of his work (Gatos 1969). Finally, in October 1969, Pontani edited an anthology of Greek poetry that represents the most characteristic example of the phenomenon we are examining here, namely cultural mediation by Italian scholars of Modern Greek during the first years of the junta. With the title *L'altra Grecia. Testi di poeti e scrittori* ('The other Greece: texts by poets and writers'), the anthology included works by Ritsos, Plaskovitis, Vasilikos, and Anagnostakis, as well as an essay on Seferis by the editor. The selection of Ritsos' work includes poems from several of his collections, including *The Last Hundred Years Before Man*, *Vigil*, *Unruly State*, *The Farewell*, and *Philoctetes* (Pontani 1969a, pp. 27–58).

What makes this work so characteristic is that it inaugurates a new period in which practices of mediation begin to strike out more directly against the junta regime. Published by one of the largest Italian publishing houses of the time, *L'altra Grecia* was released as part of the famous *Nostro tempo* series, which presented 'works of social, political, and cultural relevance [...] and essays or testimonies of contemporary history'²⁶ (ibid., p. 4), as well as texts from various fields of contemporary Greek literature (poetry, prose, testimonies, theatre). The *Nostro tempo* series did not aim simply at showcasing a panorama of contemporary Greek literature to the Italian public, but also at taking a clear political stance. As Pontani notes in his introduction, 'we only want to bring a tribute of love, which involves a resolute moral and political choice, to a kind of writer that is persecuted or in exile, and who well deserves to represent the face of that other Greece, the true one, regardless of any hierarchy of values [...]. In any case, [this volume includes] striking figures and literary works in which "engagement" is combined with a commitment to artistic practice'²⁷ (ibid., p. 7). The political nature of the book is clearly spelled out on its cover, which shows a photo from the funeral of Sotiris Petroulas, a student killed by police during demonstrations against the involvement of the palace in politics on 21 July 1965 (known as the "July events"). Finally, the back cover of the publication is particularly interesting, presenting a short text that has many of the characteristics of a political manifesto against the dictatorship in Greece, and which is worth reproducing in its entirety:

Let us not forget Greece: a country close to our own borders where an entire population, living under conditions of poverty and underdevelopment, has been dominated and crushed by a military dictatorship imposed by force, maintained with terror,

26 'opere di attualità sociale, politica e cultura [...], e saggi o testimonianze di storia contemporanea'.

27 'si vuole solo recare un tributo d'amore, che implica una risoluta scelta morale e politica, ad alcuni scrittori di razza, perseguitati o esuli, ben degni d'incarnare il volto dell'*altra Grecia*, la vera, indipendentemente da ogni gerarchia di valori [...]. In ogni caso, [il volume comprende] figure spiccanti e pagine in cui l'"impegno" è congiunto al sigillo dell'arte.'



with threats and with violence. It is the latest episode in a long history of wars, violence, dictatorships, and coups that have forcefully separated Greece from the developed countries of Europe, preventing the economic, social, and civil growth of her people. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to remember the years in which the Greek people were truly free and master of their destiny, in which democratic process was duly followed. Today we remember this tragic fate because we have imprinted on our conscience the image of Panagoulis' face, surrounded by policemen, following his escape from prison; because we can still see the beautiful and engaged face of Melina Mercouri, speaking out from Greece that she may be heard by the entire world. In these pages, the best writers and poets of Greece today testify to the hope of freedom and progress of a people, reminding everyone that behind the sad present there is an 'other Greece', which strives to find in the ancient culture of its classicism the basis for its European identity, and for the certainty of its future democratic reality.²⁸

The first extensive anthology of Ritsos's poems was published in Italy in 1970, translated and edited by Pontani, and later that year the first translation of the unabridged *Epitaph* and *Macronisos* was published by Guanda, edited by the young translators Nicola Crocetti and Dimitris Makris. Lastly, a tribute to Ritsos, which carried considerable weight due to its nature, was presented in *Popular Photography Italiana*, a magazine that was famous at the time in Italian artistic circles. The publication provided real artistic credibility to the denunciation of the dictatorial regime in Greece, containing photos, inspired by Ritsos's poems, by renowned photographer Pino Colla. The photos were later presented at the *Pino Colla per Jannis Ritsos* exhibition at the Galleria dell'immagine in Milan on 7–21 April 1970 (De Micheli 1970).²⁹ The tribute was presented by Mario De Micheli, who openly attacks the Greek dictators in the first lines of his introduction, denouncing the political imprisonment of the Greek poet:

The painful news that reached us from Greece three years ago, after the military coup, included a report on the arrest of Yiannis Ritsos, the poet who had received Greece's National Prize for Literature just a few years earlier, and who is considered one of the

28 'Non dimentichiamo la Grecia: vicinissimo a noi un popolo intero, povero, in condizioni di sottosviluppo, e dominato e schiacciato da una dittatura militare imposta con la forza, mantenuta con il terrore, con le minacce, con la violenza. È l'ultimo episodio di una lunga storia di guerre, di violenze, di dittature, di colpi di stato che ha costretto la Grecia lontana dall'Europa sviluppata, che ha impedito la crescita economica, sociale e civile del suo popolo. È difficile ricordare, forse impossibile, anni in cui il popolo greco sia stato davvero libero e padrone del suo destino, in cui sia stato avviato un processo democratico. Oggi ci ricordiamo questo tragico destino perché abbiamo impressa nella nostra coscienza l'immagine del volto di Panagoulis, in mezzo ai poliziotti, dopo la sua fuga dal carcere, perché abbiamo negli occhi il ricordo del volto bello e impegnato di Melina Mercouri, proteso a parlare della Grecia a tutto il mondo. In queste pagine gli scrittori e i poeti migliori della Grecia di oggi testimoniano la speranza di libertà e di progresso di un popolo, ricordano a tutti che dietro il triste presente c'è un'"altra Grecia", che nella cultura antica della sua classicità vuole ritrovare le ragioni di una sua dimensione europea, di una sua futura certa realtà democratica.'

29 The tribute contains translations of Ritsos from *Petrified Time*.

*most authentic voices of contemporary European poetry. After being a prisoner in the notorious Aegean Islands during the Civil War, he fell once more into the hands of his old jailers (ibid., p. 38).*³⁰



In the following years both Pontani and Sangiglio carried on with their translations of Ritsos' work, and several of his poems were translated by Vincenzo Mascaro (1971). Mario Vitti³¹ included excerpts from *The March of the Ocean* and *Letter to Joliot-Curie* in his *History of Modern Greek Literature*, published in 1971 (Vitti 1971, pp. 402–403).

Apart from Seferis and Ritsos, a number of other Greek poets were translated during that time. In 1968, the famous Cavafy edition was published, edited by Margherita Dalmati and Nelo Risi (Cavafis 1968), followed by a translation of poems by Odysseas Elytis (Elitis 1968).

In contrast to the prolific translation of modern Greek poetry, prose works do not seem to have attracted much interest at that time. The only name that stands out — due in large part to his commercial success — is the young Vassilis Vassilikos, who was presented to the Italian public over a three-year period (1969–1971) through four publications. The first of these, published by Feltrinelli in June 1969, was a translation by Elena Barucchello (who was also editor of the French version) of the well-known political novel *Z*. The novel traces the conspiracies that, on 22 May 1963, led to the assassination of progressive Member of Parliament and professor of medicine in Thessaloniki, Grigoris Lambrakis, as well as the ensuing cover-up by the police and government of that time. As mentioned above, several other texts by Vassilikos were presented in 1969 by Pontani in the anthology *L'altra Grecia*, namely short stories in Italian translation from Vassilikos' collection *Outside the Walls*, a work that takes up Lambrakis' activism and speaks openly against all anti-democratic and pro-fascist regimes. Finally, in January 1971, Pontani's translation of Vassilikos' trilogy *The Plant — The Well — The Angel* was released with an extensive introduction by Mario Vitti in which he comments on the author's work in relation to the social, political, and cultural situation of Greece during the 1960s (Vassilikòs 1971).

Several of these translations were accompanied by extensive introductions or critical texts that made direct or indirect reference to the political situation in Greece. Additionally, in 1967–1971, a series of articles and monographs were published in Italy concerning modern Greek literature, which sought, through this channel, to 'inform' the Italian public about the cultural and political developments in Greece. In this sense, the publication of *Storia della letteratura neogreca* ('The history of neo-Greek literature') by Mario Vitti in 1971, published by Edizioni Radiotelevisione Italiana, could be considered the most characteristic example and at the same time most important publishing event of this period, since, among several more obvious reasons,

30 'Tra le notizie dolorose che ci giunsero dalla Grecia 3 anni fa, dopo il colpo di stato militare, ci fu anche quella dell'arresto di Jannis Ritsos, il poeta che qualche anno prima aveva ricevuto il Gran Premio Nazionale Ellenico e che è considerato una delle voci più autentiche della poesia europea contemporanea. Dopo essere stato prigioniero nelle tristemente famose Isole Egee al tempo della guerra civile, egli era di nuovo caduto nelle mani dei suoi vecchi carcerieri.'

31 For more information on Mario Vitti see: Vitti 2006 and Bintoudis 2018.



it was released as part of the Letterature e Civiltà series, which was highly regarded at the time.

In his introduction to *Storia*, Vitti reveals that he originally conceived of the book in 1967, and explains that this contribution to the dissemination and study of modern Greek literature in Italy is his response to — and political stance against — the illiberal state of Greece that resulted from the junta. It is worth reproducing the last paragraph of the introduction, as it seems to summarise the atmosphere in Italy among scholars of Modern Greek during the first years of the junta:

*The first draft of this essay was written just after the 1967 coup, a time when to study the real Greece became more distressing than ever, both for the Greeks and for those who committed their lives, including professionally as I have done, to this country that is so difficult to define, and of which all past and present demagogues and dictatorships have succeeded only in bringing forth the worst and most negative aspects. My book was born from a faith in the freedom of literary creation — not in disengagement. I therefore tried to highlight the dramatic story of that struggle, from the Middle Ages to today, between this aspiration for freedom and all the internal and external pressures that have opposed it (Vitti 1971, p. 8).*³²

What is very interesting, is the adjective that Vitti chooses to add next to the name Greece — ‘to study the *real Greece*’ (‘studiare la *vera Grecia*’; emphasis added) — and which inevitably brings to mind the title that Pontani had chosen two years earlier for his own anthology, *L'altra Grecia*. What this suggests is that, due to censorship, the perception of Greece during the first years of the dictatorship was divided: on one side, the official image that the dictators wanted to project; on the other, *another* image that cultural mediators had identified and were trying to promote to Italian society, on their own part and with the means at their disposal.

This ‘other Greece’ is represented mainly by writers and people of letters who write Greek literature, through both their work and activism, constituting a field of social information regarding the specific conditions that existed in Greece at that time — a process aptly characterised by Vassilikos’s novel. The scholars of Modern Greek in Italy, for their part, took on the responsibility of presenting and disseminating this hidden, oppressed, censored aspect of Greece in Italian society, an image which in this way came to acquire the characteristics of *another, different, true* country, having little in common with the one that the dictators sought to project.

³² ‘La prima stesura di questo mio saggio ha avuto inizio dopo il colpo di stato del 1967; quando cioè studiare la vera Grecia diventava più che mai angoscioso, sia per i greci sia per chi ha votato la sua vita, anche professionalmente come me, a questo paese così difficile da definire e di cui tutte le demagogie e le dittature passate e presenti portano alla ribalta solo i lati più squallidi e negativi. Il mio libro nasce da una fede nella libertà della creazione letteraria — non nel disimpegno: ho quindi cercato di mettere nella dovuta evidenza la lotta che si svolge drammaticamente dal medioevo ad oggi tra questa aspirazione alla libertà e le pressioni interne ed esterne che si sono opposte ad essa.’

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