"Pawns that never became queens": the Dodecanese Islands, 1912-1924

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The Dodecanese Islands are located in the Aegean Sea, off the south-east coast of Turkey.[1] Contrary to their name, which is derived from the Greek δώδεκα νησιά (twelve islands), the Archipelago consists of thirteen islands and their adjacent islets: Astypalæa (Stampalia), Chalki, Kalymnos, Karpathos (Scarpanto), Kasos, Kastellorizo, Kos, Leros, Nisyros, Patmos, Rhodes, Symi and Tilos (Episkopi).[2] The appellation "Dodecanese" is merely a political expression by which, in 1908, the islands became known in conjunction with their resistance to Ottoman encroachments.[3] Despite the fact that, apart from Kos and Rhodes, the Dodecanese are quite barren of natural resources and consequently of negligible economic importance, they became early in their history a bone of contention between various powers. Due to their location, they were of immense strategic value, since the power which possessed them could, it was argued, command wide control over the naval routes to the Dardanelles in the north, the Aegean Sea in the west and

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[1] The islands are also known as the Southern Sporades and the Archipelago. Hereafter, the appellations "Dodecanese" and "Archipelago" will be used interchangeably.

[2] Although Kastellorizo geographically and, nowadays, administratively forms part of the Archipelago, its history falls outside the purview of this essay. Due to the island's proximity to the Anatolian coast opposite and its distance from the rest of the Dodecanese, Kastellorizo enjoyed virtual autonomy in as much as neither the Knights of St John nor the Ottomans considered its permanent administration necessary. For her part, Italy followed much the same attitude and it was only after the end of the Great War, and largely on account of the island's occupation by the French in December 1915 (primarily for strategic reasons), that Rome claimed Kastellorizo as forming an indispensable part of the Dodecanese. For a detailed, albeit non-scholarly, exposition see Vardamidis 1948.

[3] Great Britain, Admiralty, Naval Intelligence Division 1943: 4.

southwards as far as Cyprus and Egypt. It was this strategic reality, or rather perception, that in the wake of the demise of the Byzantine Empire led to the occupation of the islands, first by the Knights of St John in the early fourteenth century and two centuries later by the troops of Suleiman the Magnificent.

The Ottoman occupation marked a turning point in the history of these ethnically-Greek islands. As in many other areas of the Ottoman Empire, it was not only impossible but even undesirable for the Sublime Porte to apply a centralized system of administration at a time when the empire stretched across three continents and was engaged in constant warfare. Hence newly occupied areas, especially when they offered few opportunities for economic exploitation, although nominally under the Sultan's sovereignty, were accorded virtual autonomy – with the proviso that their inhabitants remain faithful to the Porte. Suleiman the Magnificent was the first to bestow certain administrative and religious privileges upon those of the islands which had surrendered willingly to his power, by issuing a *firman* (imperial decree) to that effect c. 1540.[4] It is in this connection that the Dodecanese, apart from Kos and Rhodes which had unsuccessfully resisted the Ottoman onslaught, came to be known as the Privileged Islands. Subsequently, they were to enjoy civil liberties and a level of religious tolerance unknown under previous occupiers and appreciably more lenient than what applied to other areas of the Greek world which were subjugated to Christian rulers (for example, the Ionian Islands and, up to 1669, Crete).

The virtual autonomy accorded to the Dodecanesians gave them the opportunity to establish an administrative system which a German archaeologist who visited the Archipelago around 1840 described as a replica of the system that existed in

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[4] Volonakis 1922b: 2-3; Volonakis 1922a: 294-7; Speronis 1955: 5-6. There seems to be disagreement as to the exact date of Suleiman's decree as no copy has survived. However, subsequent imperial decrees regarding the Archipelago point to the fourth decade of the sixteenth century. The Booths (1928: 30, 195-6) argue that Symi was the first island to be accorded certain privileges in 1522, although no evidence is offered. On that assumption it would be safe to maintain that the privileges accorded to Symi were extended to the rest of the islands by 1540.

classical Athens.[5] Each island was governed by a council of elders (Δημογεροντία) whose twelve members were elected annually by a general assembly of the island's male population.[6] As the representative bodies of the local communities (κοινότητες), the *Dimogeronties* and the Greek Orthodox Church in the Archipelago solidified the linguistic, cultural and religious bonds of their members, who gradually came to share common attributes and experiences. In turn these features imprinted upon the islanders a sense of a (Greek) ethnic identity. The cultivation of ethnic consciousness in the context of Anderson's definition of the "mental" construction of nations as "imagined communities"[7] was to pave the way for the Dodecanesians' incorporation into the schema of Greek nationalism and irredentism.

Up to the second half of the eighteenth century the Dodecanese hardly appear in post-classical history. The might of the Ottomans and the fact that there was no great cause for friction in the islands had diminished the probability of any great power interference – despite the fact that the strategic location of the islands might have acted as an incentive for intervention. However, the gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire, the intense efforts of the powers – particularly Russia – to gain from the Sultan's waning authority over his subjects, and the concurrent appeal of nationalism, encapsulated in the establishment of an independent Greek state, combined to upset, albeit only in times of crisis, the status of the Archipelago. Thus, from the 1770s until the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923, the question of the islands constituted an integral, although peripheral, parameter of the Eastern Question. In this connection a precedent was established whereby the islands were to be seen and indeed used as an object of barter in the diplomatic struggle amongst the apparent heirs of the "sick man of Europe".

By the late 1820s the Privileged Islands were administered as a *de facto* district (επαρχία) of the Greek state and officials

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[5] Cited in Agapitidis 1967: 14.

[6] Booth 1928: 207-11; Agapitidis 1967: 13; Volonakis 1922b: 4.

[7] See Anderson 1991 and Kitromilides 1990: 23. For the features and function of similar local bodies elsewhere in Ottoman Greece and Asia Minor, see Kondoyioryis 1982 and Augustinos 1992: 33-54.

were appointed by the government of Ioannis Kapodistrias.[8] Yet the Protocol of London (3 February 1830), by which the independence of Greece was proclaimed, made no reference to the Archipelago. The Great Powers were determined to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman Empire and to prevent the creation of a large and powerful Greece which might prejudice their own conflicting interests in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean. Thus, nine years after the islanders had hoisted the flag of liberation and after they had gone through many upheavals and experienced grave calamities, their status had not changed. Yet in many ways the Dodecanesians' participation (and its outcome) in the Greek War of Independence should be considered a landmark in the history of the islands. Firstly, it made the islanders identify themselves with the Greek nation. Greek statehood and political territoriality, encapsulated in the quest for sovereign independence, offered the islanders an alternative to other foci of group attachment (*koinotites*, dynastic empires, religious formations, etc.). Secondly, it provided them with a feeling of security, if only emotional, and a sense of distinct national belonging. However, it also brought home the limited role that the Greek state could (and would) play in their eventual "redemption". To the extent that the latter rested primarily, though not exclusively, upon the attitude of the Great Powers *vis-à-vis* the Ottoman Empire and Greece, the fact that the Dodecanese did not figure prominently in the irredentist agenda of the *Megali Idea* (Great Idea) should not come as a big surprise. Barren of natural resources and scarcely populated, the Archipelago could not attract the attention either of Kapodistrias or of his successors. But even after Greece gradually embarked upon the successful realization of her irredentist aspirations, Athenian politicians and activists continued to consider the Dodecanese of secondary importance, especially as the islands' "Hellenic" character was not under threat nor was the Archipelago coveted by "great ideas" inimical to Greece's interests (as was the case with Macedonia and Thrace). When eventually, in the second decade of the twentieth century, it transpired that Italy's presence in the

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[8] Tsakalakis n.d.: 13; Booth 1928: 217; Finlay 1877: VI.2, 165; Volonakis 1922a: 309-10.

Dodecanese would alter the premises upon which Greek policy had been based, the legacy of nineteenth-century statesmen was so strong that even a politician of the status of Venizelos found it difficult to overcome.

On a different level, the islanders' siding with their compatriots in mainland Greece significantly altered their position *vis-à-vis* the Sultan. The Porte came to perceive the Dodecanesians as its enemies, as rebels and villains conspiring against their nominal sovereign. Their constant endeavours to associate themselves with the rest of the Greek world were met with strenuous attempts on the part of the Ottomans to curtail the islanders' privileges. To these outbursts of oppression and violence, which were particularly acute in times of crisis, the islanders responded with the tried and tested method of foreign protection. Nevertheless, the pressure brought upon the Porte by the Great Powers to respect the privileges of the islands was not followed up by steps which would guarantee that the Ottomans would keep their promises. The admission of the Porte into the Concert of Europe in the aftermath of the Treaty of Paris (March 1856) had committed the Great Powers to guaranteeing the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire.[9] And although this undertaking was not scrupulously observed, it did adversely influence the extent, as well as the nature, of great power intervention in regard to peripheral issues such as the Dodecanese question. Consequently, when in the spring of 1912 Italian forces occupied the islands after a brief show of resistance, most of the Archipelago's privileges had already been abolished – if not officially, at least in day to day practice.[10]

The Italian occupation of the Dodecanese arose out of Rome's need to bring to a victorious end the Italo-Turkish War over Libya which had begun in late September 1911. Characterized as one of the least justified wars in European history,[11] it also represented a conspicuous, albeit belated, attempt by the weakest of the Great Powers to expand and fulfil its colonial ambitions. As such it was bound to upset the delicate balance of

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[9] Anderson 1983: 141-4.

[10] Stéphanopoli 1912: 44; Tsakalakis n.d.: 23. For a detailed account of the first months of the Italian occupation, see Carabott 1993.

[11] Anderson 1983: 288.

power amongst the Great Powers. Yet, the response of the latter to Rome's designs was rather mild and, by and large, of a defensive nature. Italy's allies, Austria-Hungary and Germany, passively watched as she established herself more permanently in the Dodecanese, afraid that if they intervened the war might spread over to the Balkans. Likewise, for the Triple Entente (Britain, France and Russia) it was essential that no wedge should be driven into the European Concert and that nothing should be done "to press Italy away from us towards the other Powers".[12] This particular perception was so pivotal that it overrode the potential threat posed to Britain, the supreme naval power, by Italy's presence in the Archipelago. The most London was willing to do was to caution the Italians. The message was clear enough: any alteration in the status quo of the eastern Mediterranean would be inimical to British (and French) interests.[13] But it did not amount to anything more than a gentle hint which carried no special weight. It was not meant to deter Rome by means of "gunboat" diplomacy, but rather to act as a bargaining counter for London's *reconnaissance* of the Italian annexation of Libya.[14] In the event, the British trump card evaporated into thin air.

Naturally, the Greek government exhibited a strong interest in the ultimate fate of these ethnically-Greek islands. On the one hand, Venizelos was at pains to demonstrate that Greece had no ulterior motives and that her only concern was the well-being of the islanders. As was the case with their Turkish counterparts, politicians in Athens entertained the belief that Italy would not be allowed to stay indefinitely in the Archipelago, since such an eventuality would be in direct opposition to the conflicting interests of the other powers. On the other hand, the Greek government did not fail, clandestinely of course, to guide and support the Dodecanesians in demanding union with their mother country.[15] This two-faced policy was largely necessitated by Greece's weak international standing and by the

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[12] Public Record Office, London, Foreign Office Papers, FO 371/1536/43275: Grey to Bertie (11 October 1912). Cf. Hayne 1987: 332-4.
[13] Ibid., /35667: Bertie to Grey (23 August 1912).
[14] Ibid., /43275: Grey to Bertie (11 October 1912)
[15] See Carabott 1993: 297-302.

fact that the Dodecanese had never been placed high enough on the country's irredentist agenda.

If Athens's policy was two-faced, that of Rome was ambiguous, ambivalent and, to paraphrase A.J.P. Taylor's comment on Italian diplomacy prior to 1914, by and large dishonest.[16] Although the Italian objective in occupying the Archipelago had been to use the islands as a lever for the complete evacuation of Libya by Turkey, the attitude of Italian diplomats and the measures taken by the authorities in the Archipelago clearly indicated that Rome was slowly, if somewhat hesitantly, drifting towards proving the old proverb "possession is nine-tenths of the law".[17] Heralded as "the first act of Italian imperialism in the Levant",[18] the occupation of the Dodecanese was to be used as a bargaining card, as a pawn for extracting concessions. Numerous disclaimers on her part could hardly disguise the fact that Italy would not evacuate the islands unless she got something in return.[19] Indeed, this particular motivation guided and characterized Rome's policy on the question of the islands from 1912 onwards.

The Treaty of Lausanne in October 1912, which granted Rome sovereignty over Libya, provided that Italy would relinquish the Dodecanese immediately after Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were evacuated by the Turks.[20] In addition, the Porte undertook to introduce a series of widespread administrative reforms in the islands, "without distinction of cult or religion". Thus the Archipelago was restored to its status *ante bellum*. However, it was widely believed that the Porte had struck a secret agreement with Rome whereby Italy would "only evacuate the islands when asked by Turkey to do so, thus preventing their

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16 Cited in Bosworth 1979: 299.

17 Ibid., 305.

18 Seton-Watson 1967: 377.

19 A British diplomat noted in his memoirs that such disclaimers "were becoming almost as numerous as those of British statesmen thirty years earlier regarding the occupation of Egypt", adding, somewhat self-consciously, that they "were no doubt made in equally good faith"; see Rodd 1925: III, 176.

20 Text of treaty in FO 371/1526/52253/52253 and Childs 1990: 250-3.

occupation by the Greeks".[21] On the other hand, Italy, on the pretext of waiting for the evacuation of Libya by the Ottomans, hoped to remain indefinitely on the islands. As the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs characteristically noted, to make Rome's withdrawal "dependent upon the fulfilment of a treaty by Turkey", a country which had "never fulfilled a treaty entirely, though it was not equivalent to a freehold, might almost be regarded as equivalent to a 999 years lease".[22]

In theory, the Treaty of Lausanne sought to ensure that henceforth the question of the Archipelago would constitute a bilateral issue between Rome and the Porte, to be solved after the Turks had evacuated Libya. Yet the events that were unfolding just as the treaty was being concluded made such a postulation highly improbable. The spectacular territorial gains that the Balkan allies secured in the course of the First Balkan War signalled the beginning of the end for the "sick man of Europe". Facing political instability at home, and with minimal Great Power support, the Porte was forced to relinquish most of its European possessions, including the strategically situated northern Aegean islands, to the victorious allies. In turn, Athens's *de facto* hold over these ethnically-Greek islands inevitably complicated the issue of the ultimate disposition of the Dodecanese. The Greek character of the Archipelago had never been seriously disputed, and now that the status quo in the region was being dramatically altered Greece expected the Dodecanese to be handed over to her outright. For its part the Italian government, while officially determined to hold the islands as a warranty until Turkey had fulfilled her treaty obligations, continued to harbour hopes of using the Dodecanese as a bargaining card for the attainment of other foreign policy objectives, particularly with regard to Albania and Asia Minor.[23] Thus, the question of the Archipelago ceased being solely a matter of Italo-Turkish relations. Instead, it became an issue inextricably wedded to Greek irredentism, Italian expansionism and the perennial Eastern Question.

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[21] FO 371/1526/43550: Lowther to Grey (16 October 1912); FO 371/1536/47250: Minute by Vansittart (8 November 1912).
[22] Grey 1925: I, 271.
[23] Giolitti 1923: 370; Bosworth 1970: 691-2.

This new reality was clearly demonstrated in the course of the Conference of Ambassadors that was held in London from December 1912 to August 1913. The Conference sought to preserve peace among the Great Powers and deal with the territorial complications that had arisen as a result of the Balkan Wars of 1912-13. The Entente powers proposed that the Dodecanese should be handed over to Greece, provided she relinquished her claims on southern Albania (northern Epirus). Austria-Hungary and Germany vetoed this suggestion on the grounds that the question of the Archipelago's disposition should not be discussed in connection with the delimitation of Albania's frontiers, as it was linked to the Treaty of Lausanne.[24] Naturally, Rome adopted a similar position and in fact objected "to every possible mode of approaching a discussion" on the issue.[25] Highly irritated, but unwilling to force the issue further, Britain and France concurred in accepting Italy's pledge to fulfil her obligations from the Treaty of Lausanne, before deciding on the ultimate fate of the islands. But Rome was not content simply to accept this ruling, and sought ways of using the Dodecanese to maximum diplomatic, political and economic advantage. Eventually, in late 1913-early 1914, Italian intentions became crystal-clear. With Turkey unwilling to accept the restoration of the Dodecanese, until she had "sufficiently advanced her naval preparations" to deal with the Greek threat, Italy would evacuate the islands under two conditions: firstly, she should receive economic and commercial concessions in Asia Minor, similar to those enjoyed by Britain and Germany; secondly, she should be compensated for the expenses she had incurred in the administration of the islands, as the occupation cost £3,000 a day.[26] The die had been cast.

The Entente powers were scandalized by the new Italian proposals. London informed Rome that "it will not do to connect schemes of Italian expansion" in Asia Minor with the question of

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[24] Fabo-Macris 1981: 72-3.

[25] FO 371/1764/2913: Rodd to Grey (15 January 1913).

[26] FO 371/1844/56128: Rodd to Grey (13 December 1913); FO 371/2112/2179: Rodd to Grey (11 January 1914).

the evacuation of the Dodecanese.[27] Privately, the British were far more virulent in their condemnation:

> After all this shuffling in the matter of [the] evacuation and restoration of the islands, one thing stands out quite clear: that the words and professions of Italian governments are not to be trusted.[28]

In a moment of grandiloquent desperation, the French proposed to go to war to get the Italians out of the Dodecanese.[29] Yet, with Italy enjoying the tacit support of her allies in the Triple Alliance, such threats carried little weight. After all, no power would seriously jeopardize the fragile status quo for the sake of a few barren islands. In a world of *realpolitik* to do so would be tantamount to committing suicide.

Thus, on the eve of the Great War, Rome's diplomacy had triumphed at minimal cost. Italy was allowed to remain in the Dodecanese, despite the fact that none of the powers, not even her nominal allies, looked favourably upon her presence in the eastern Mediterranean. However, their attempts to compel her to withdraw were feeble and limited to verbal warnings. Such attempts as were made lacked coordination and cohesion. The division of Europe into two power blocks prohibited collective action, and Italy's political and strategic importance enabled her to play one power against the other. In the event, Italy emerged from this chess match in possession of the Dodecanese, and having acted as a great power whose economic ventures in Anatolia had to be acknowledged. Despite the fact that Italian credibility had been ruined, it was, considering the odds, a formidable accomplishment.

Meanwhile, in the Dodecanese, the authorities had embarked resolutely on a policy of demonstrating to the islanders the iron fist of their rule because, as the Italian governor put it, "the Greeks obey only under the rule of fear; those who believe

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[27] Bosworth 1970: 699. Yet, in October 1913, Grey had minuted that "we need not oppose anything in Asia Minor that does not conflict with the rights of the [British] Smyrna-Aidin Rly. Co."; cited in Hayne 1987: 347.
[28] Cited in Bosworth 1979: 324.
[29] Stieve n.d.: 161.

otherwise have only had a brief experience of living amongst them."[30] To this effect, a series of illiberal religious and administrative measures were employed to bring the Greek element into submission, while favouring the Muslim and Jewish elements in the age-old colonial fashion of "divide and rule". What the Ottomans had failed to accomplish in the late nineteenth century, the Italians hoped to achieve by forcing the islanders to emigrate and thus alter the ethnic map of the Dodecanese at the expense of the Greek element. It was a well-thought out plan, orchestrated by unscrupulous diplomats and executed by harsh and brutal administrators. Its aim was to change the whole fabric of Dodecanesian society, by force if necessary, and prepare the ground for the Italianization of the islands.[31]

In the diplomatic struggle which followed the outbreak of the First World War the Dodecanese constituted one of the many bribes by means of which the Allies (as the Entente powers were called henceforth) strove to secure the support of neutral Italy. Adopting a stance which was diametrically opposed to their exorcisms of the previous two years, the Allies had no hesitation in officially sanctioning Italy's presence in the islands with a view to securing Rome as an ally. In a world of secret diplomacy and *realpolitik*, moral or ethnic niceties played little if any role. Greece's misgivings and indeed her *amour propre* were brushed aside, as Italy's stance became of paramount importance for the Allies. For her part, Italy sought to achieve maximum territorial concessions from both groups of belligerents before committing herself to either. Her policy was guided by what Prime Minister Salandra defined as *sacro egoismo* (best rendered as sacred national selfishness).

> The guiding principles of our international policy will be tomorrow what they were yesterday... We must be bold in deeds... without prejudice and preconceptions, and uninfluenced by any

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[30] Cited in Cole 1975: 54.

[31] *Inter alia*, see Tsakalakis n.d.: 29; FO 195/2451/496/496: Biliotti to Barnham (20 January 1913); Buonaiuti-Marongiu 1979: 18; Cole 1975: 50, 55; FO 195/2451/496/1111: Barnham to Lowther (5 March 1913); Angel 1980: 39-40, 81-2; Papachristodoulou 1972: 547-8.

> sentiment but that of an exclusive, unlimited devotion to our country, a sacred egoism for Italy.[32]

The absence of any reference to moral or lofty democratic principles in what came to constitute the *raison d'être* of Rome's foreign policy "derided the specious ideology" of the Allies,[33] while exposing Italy to accusations of "diplomatic *vagabondaggio*" and "double blackmail", both at the time and later on.[34] Yet, in many respects, Salandra merely expressed, albeit in a clumsy manner, what had been the driving principle of governments all over Europe when deciding whether to go to war or not. His idea was not novel; perhaps the way he expressed it and the means by which he and his successors attempted to realize it were.[35]

Italy's presence in the Dodecanese was sealed by virtue of the secret Pact of London. Concluded on 26 April 1915, it committed Rome to take the field against the Central Powers within a month. In exchange, Italy received entire sovereignty over the Dodecanese, the southern provinces of Austria-Hungary north of the Italian border, Trieste and the Istrian peninsula, almost the whole of the Adriatic littoral down to the port of Valona in Albania, as well as an unequivocal acknowledgement of her standing as a "great power" with indisputable economic interests in Asia Minor.[36]

The alacrity with which the Allies sanctioned Rome's claims to Albania, the Dodecanese and Asia Minor inadvertently impeded Greece's entry into the war on their side, strengthened the case of the Anti-Venizelists, and made the rift between King Constantine I and Prime Minister Venizelos seem inevitable. With Greece divided against herself, Italy's task of asserting her superiority over the "most annoying and uppity Small Power", in a manner befitting a "Great Power", became much easier.[37] Venizelos's dependence on Britain and France and

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[32] Cited in Gottlieb 1957: 233.
[33] Mack Smith 1959: 305
[34] See Gottlieb 1957: 233; Renzi 1968: 1415; Roukounas 1983: 112.
[35] Mack Smith 1959: 305; Burgwyn 1993: 16.
[36] Text of pact in Albrecht-Carrié 1938: 334-9.
[37] Bosworth 1984: 64; Bosworth 1979: 253.

his compliance with their occupation of numerous regions and islands of the Greek state, justified on military and security grounds but in effect used as a means of forcing Constantine to resign and place their liberal protégé back in power, provided Rome with a tailor-made excuse for violating Greece's territorial integrity.[38] By the time Venizelos established his provisional government in Salonika in the autumn of 1916, Italian troops had already moved into areas of southern Albania which had been under Greek occupation since October 1914. Gradually they advanced into Epirus, a decision justified on the grounds of establishing an overland link to the Salonika front.[39] Yet this move was designed to forestall post-war Greek claims to southern Albania, rather than serve Allied strategy in the region or exercise pressure on King Constantine to abandon his neutralist policy.

Italy's military actions in southern Albania and Epirus were in line with Rome's anti-Greek policy which was conspicuously demonstrated in the case of the Dodecanese, where de-hellenization continued unabated.[40] As the Greek consul put it in the summer of 1916, those of his compatriots who had not yet fled from the islands had become "slaves who had to suppress their national feelings and obediently submit to the authorities' commands".[41] Taking a far more grim view of Italian designs, his successor wrote that the condition of the Greek community was gradually but steadily being reduced to that of "Kaffirs and Zulus".[42]

However, for Rome the issue at stake was not to annex a dozen rocky islands but rather to ensure that they would not fall into Greek hands, and to use them as pawns for securing a sphere of strategic and economic influence in Asia Minor. Therefore, her

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[38] For Allied violation of Greece's neutrality and territorial integrity, see Tounda-Fergadi 1985.

[39] Leontaritis 1990: 327-34; Seton-Watson 1967: 463.

[40] *Inter alia*, see Archives of Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, AGMFA 1915/A/52: Papadakis to Athens (24 and 28 May 1915); Cole 1975: 219-20; Petsalis-Diomidis 1978: 29; Mackenzie 1940: 192, 203; AGMFA 1916/AAK/24: Chatzivassiliou to Athens (1 July 1916).

[41] AGMFA 1916/AAK/24: Chatzivassiliou to Athens (29 August 1916).

[42] AGMFA 1918/A/5/5: Dassos to Athens (10 January 1919).

policy in the Archipelago has to be seen in the more general context of Greco-Italian relations. Venizelist Greece was considered a main threat to Italian interests in Albania and Anatolia and for that reason at the beginning of the war Rome had sought to impede Greece's entry on the side of the Allies, while after June 1917 she had put every possible obstacle to the realization of Greek territorial claims.[43] It was on account of this objective that a serious attempt was made to alter the ethnic map of the Archipelago by forcing the Greeks to emigrate,[44] and, in the words of the British ambassador at Athens, by favouring and cajoling the local Turkish community to cry "viva, evviva Italia".[45] Irrespective of whether such a policy was compatible with the notion of two allies fighting for the cause of liberty and self-determination, it constituted one of the many factors that fostered Greco-Italian antagonism in the run-up to the Paris Peace Conference, where the victorious Allies met to discuss how to allot the war's spoils.

From the outset of the diplomatic deliberations it transpired that the Archipelago did not constitute one of Greece's primary national claims.[46] For Athens the issue of the islands was to be determined by the successful realization of the country's territorial aspirations elsewhere (particularly in Asia Minor). Consequently, on numerous occasions Venizelos and his successors urged the Dodecanesians to avoid expressing their desire for union with Greece too strongly, for fear of offending Rome and

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[43] See Leontaritis 1990: chapter 9.

[44] Characteristically, whilst at the time of the Italian occupation the population of Rhodes was estimated at 45,000 (38,000 Greeks, 4,500 Turks, 2,500 Jews), by 1920 it had dropped to 31,000 (22,000, 6,000 and 3,000 respectively). See Great Britain, Admiralty, Naval Intelligence Division 1943: 49; Great Britain, Historical Section of the Foreign Office 1920: 11.

[45] Cited in Llewellyn Smith 1973: 68.

[46] The British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs well summed up the overall Greek attitude when minuting that "I cannot see the *slightest reason* why we should fight the battles of Greece. If she does not mind losing the islands, I do not see why we should go in mourning" (emphasis in the original); see FO 371/8822/C13383: Minute by Curzon (7 August 1923).

creating difficulties regarding Greek claims on Smyrna.[47] On the other hand, for successive Italian governments the islands were of secondary importance compared with Italian assets on the mainland of Anatolia, and were to be used solely as pawns in getting Allied recognition of, and backing for, Rome's interests in Asia Minor.[48] In the event, the relative value accorded to the issue of the islands by both countries as a means to an end may have been a predictable choice of action, but was hardly rewarding (particularly for Greece).

A month after the opening of the Paris Peace Conference in January 1919, Venizelos presented his country's territorial claims to the conference's Supreme Council. Speaking with great eloquence and avoiding matters sensitive to his interlocutors (for example, the issue of Cyprus), he asked for southern Albania (northern Epirus), eastern and western Thrace, a large share of Asia Minor (including Smyrna), and the Dodecanese.[49] At the suggestion of the British prime minister, a committee of experts was established to examine Greek claims and "make recommendations for a just settlement". In its final report, the Greek Territorial Committee, as this group of Allied experts became known, failed to reach a unanimous decision on the issue of the Archipelago. The British and French delegates maintained that, on account of the secret Pact of London, they considered it undesirable to discuss the question of the islands. Naturally, their Italian colleague concurred, while the American delegate suggested that, for ethnic reasons, the Dodecanese should be handed over to Greece.[50]

The failure of the first official Allied attempt to solve the question of the islands, and the landing first of Italian and then

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[47] AGMFA 1919/B/59/5: Politis to Diomidis (28 May 1919); Venizelos Archives, Benaki Museum, Athens, VA 1919/F21/1898: Venizelos to Paraskevopoulos (19 June 1919); Karagiannis 1981: 267; AGMFA 1921/A/5/32: Greek community of Rhodes to Athens (11 August 1921); AGMFA 1921/A/5/33: Karayiannis to Athens (23 December 1921).

[48] Cole 1975: 237; Bosworth 1984: 66.

[49] Petsalis-Diomidis 1978: 136-7; Nicolson 1964: 255-6. Commenting on Venizelos's performance, a British official wrote: "We all thought it was the most brilliant thing we've ever heard, such amazing strength and tactfulness combined"; cited in Goldstein 1991: 244.

[50] Llewellyn Smith 1973: 75.

of Greek troops in Asia Minor (in late March and mid May 1919 respectively) forced Rome and Athens to consider reopening direct bilateral negotiations. A first round of negotiations had taken place in late 1918-early 1919, but it had ended in stalemate.[51] At first sight, the responsibility was shared by both sides: Greece refused to consider any solution other than the cession of the islands to her on ethnic grounds, while Italy brushed aside such niceties, stubbornly maintaining that the secret Pact of London had provided her with full sovereignty over the Archipelago. Yet the problem was not merely one of Greek cupidity and Italian obstinacy. A solution acceptable to both sides would inevitably have to be part of a wider Greco-Italian settlement which would include all outstanding territorial questions, like those of Asia Minor and Albania. What complicated matters further was that such a settlement would have to be endorsed and sanctioned by the Allies in the context of the Turkish Peace Treaty. Thus, far from being considered on its own merits, the question of the islands became instead an issue of power politics.

The second round of direct Greco-Italian negotiations led to the conclusion on 29 July 1919 of the Tittoni-Venizelos agreement. Constituting an accord, whose implementation depended primarily upon the decisions of the Supreme Council, it provided for the cession of the Dodecanese to Greece. The island of Rhodes would remain under Italian sovereignty, but would enjoy a large degree of autonomy, and would only be relinquished if Britain ceded Cyprus to Greece, and in any case not before 1924. In exchange, Greece undertook to support Italian claims for a mandate over Albania and for the acquisition of the Meander valley. Finally, both signatories obtained "pleine liberté d'action" should their interests not be satisfied in Asia Minor and Albania.[52]

Perhaps the only positive aspect of the agreement, as far as Greek interests were concerned, was that Rome officially acknowledged Athens as an "equal" bidder in the "struggle" for the ultimate disposition of the Dodecanese. Otherwise, it constituted an unrealistic and flawed document. Instead of

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[51] See Carabott 1991: chapter 5.

[52] Text of accord in AGMFA 1920/A/K/2.

binding the two countries to fulfil their respective obligations, it constituted an accord that merely specified their intentions at that given moment. When in the summer of 1920 it began to transpire that Italy's hopes of attaining a mandate over Albania and an equitable sphere of influence in Anatolia were not going to materialize, Rome had no hesitation in renouncing the agreement.[53]

The Italian abrogation set in motion a new round of frantic negotiations, with the British and the French adopting a pro-Greek position and bringing "strong pressure to lean" on Rome.[54] In the event, Allied pressure (particularly London's threat not to sanction Rome's economic interests in Anatolia) forced Italy to trim her sails. Accordingly and on the same day the Turkish Peace Treaty was signed at Sèvres (10 August 1920), Greece and Italy concluded the Bonin-Venizelos treaty. Drawn upon the lines of the Tittoni-Venizelos accord of July 1919, it provided for the cession of the Dodecanese to Greece, with the exception of Rhodes which was to remain under Italian sovereignty for at least another fifteen years.[55] As a legal document that dealt exclusively with the Dodecanese, it constituted an international agreement whose realization was binding to both parties. Upon its conclusion, Venizelos hastened to inform King Alexander of the "twelve diamonds that are added to Your Majesty's Crown".[56] The response of his Italian colleague was much more down to earth and consisted of two words: "Sta bene."[57] These two stances illustrate quite appropriately the Greeks' idealism and the Italians' *realpolitik*.

In retrospect, however, the fact that the implementation of the Bonin-Venizelos treaty was dependent upon the ratification of the Treaty of Sèvres constituted a pivotal flaw. Allied disunity and the increasing strength of Kemal rendered the realization of the Turkish Peace Treaty highly improbable. As the Allies' proxy, Greece had to enforce upon a rejuvenated people with a strong leader the provisions of a most repugnant

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[53] AGMFA 1920/A/4/3: Koromilas to Diomidis (23 July 1920).
[54] FO 371/5111/E9421: Curzon to Buchanan (3 August 1920).
[55] Text of bilateral treaty in AGMFA 1920/A/4/2.
[56] Ibid.: Venizelos to King Alexander (10 August 1920).
[57] Cited in Cole 1975: 251.

treaty. Yet, what buried the Treaty of Sèvres, together with the Bonin-Venizelos treaty, was the death of King Alexander in October 1920; a tragic, if somewhat comic incident, which set in motion a chain of events: the defeat of Venizelos in the elections of November 1920; the return of King Constantine I; the suspension of Allied diplomatic, financial and military aid to Athens; and, last but not least, the suicidal extension of the Greek campaign in Asia Minor. Churchill summed up the position well when writing that "it is perhaps no exaggeration to remark that a quarter of a million persons died of this monkey's bite".[58]

In the light of these important developments, the Bonin-Venizelos treaty was left to fall in abeyance. Far from handing over the Dodecanese to Greece and according the Rhodians a large degree of autonomy, the Italians continued their efforts to alter the ethnic map of the islands. Prominent members of the Greek community, including the archbishop of Rhodes, were expelled, numerous Muslim and Jewish families were allowed to take up residence, peasant settlers were brought from southern Italy, food supplies were rationed and martial law was established.[59] Engulfed in the politics of the εθνικός διχασμός (national schism), internationally isolated and waging a war in Asia Minor, Greece watched silently, unable to support her "unredeemed brethren".

Meanwhile the British, in the light of Italy's secret dealings with Kemal and her determination to become a broker between the Allies and Turkey,[60] embarked in earnest on a policy of compensating Rome for handing over the islands to Greece. To this effect, London sought to use the region of the Jubaland, situated between Italian Somaliland and British Kenya in north-east Africa, as a lever to force Rome out of the Archipelago and conclude yet another bilateral agreement with Greece, which this time would not be dependent on the

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[58] Cited in Kinross 1964: 253.

[59] See Carabott 1991: chapter 9.

[60] FO 371/6481/E14: Rumbold to Curzon (31 December 1920); FO 371/6481/E694: Rumbold to War Office (14 January 1921); FO 371/6569/E2519: Rhodian Delegation to Lloyd George (24 February 1921); Cole 1975: 259.

implementation of any other treaty. However, this former German colony hardly constituted an attractive alternative, as it was "nothing but desert and steppe providing precarious pasturage for nomadic tribes".[61] Lloyd George's rather exaggerated assertions that the Jubaland was "a rich colony with great possibilities", and that "from the point of view of natural resources was worth fifty times as much as the Dodecanese"[62] failed to impress the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs. In any case, the latter could hardly be expected to publicly conclude an agreement with Athens which would diminish his country's sovereign rights over the Dodecanese, at a time when diplomatic relations between the two countries had been unofficially suspended. Moreover, the British offer of Jubaland merely amounted to the equitable compensation that Italy was entitled to according to article 13 of the secret Pact of London, and therefore did not constitute an additional reward.[63]

In the event, the whole issue was rendered obsolete by the Greek débâcle in Asia Minor. On 8 October 1922 Rome officially denounced the Bonin-Venizelos treaty on the justifiable grounds that, as it was connected with the ratification of the abortive Treaty of Sèvres, it was no longer applicable in view of the altered circumstances.[64] Although highly irritated, Greece was yet again unable to effectively further her interests in the Dodecanese. Following British pressure on Rome, the most Athens managed to secure was to include in article 15 of the Treaty of Lausanne (24 July 1923), by which Turkey renounced in favour of Italy "à tous ses droits et titres sur les îles actuellement occupées par l'Italie, et les îlots qui en dépendent", the provision that the future of the Dodecanese will be ultimately "settled by the parties concerned".[65] In effect, this constituted a rather vague provision in as much as it left open the question of who the "parties concerned" were, although the British took the view

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[61] Toynbee 1926: 464.

[62] FO 371/7799/E6616: Record of Anglo-Italian discussions (29 June 1922).

[63] FO 371/8413/C6137: Foreign Office memorandum, annex I (4 April 1923); Toynbee 1926: 463-4.

[64] VA 1922/F29/2892: Metaxas to Athens (9 October 1922).

[65] Tsakalakis n.d.: 64.

that the "final disposal of the twelve islands remains, in spite of article 15, for discussion between the Allies".[66] Yet, whatever the merits of this provision may have been, Rome's *de facto* possession of the Dodecanese was admitted beyond any doubt.

Pending the ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne, the British worked towards bringing some of the "parties concerned" to the negotiating table but to no avail. Italy could not concern herself "with the ill-humour of the men who rule Greece today", all the more so since Mussolini, who had assumed power in October 1922, had emphatically declared that "an Italo-Greek question about the Dodecanese did not exist".[67] It was evident that a solution could only be forced upon Rome if London delayed its ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne and used (again) the Jubaland as a lever. Indeed, Curzon believed that such a policy would "distress the Italians".[68] However, the assumption of power by the Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald in late January 1924 heralded a significant change in Britain's stance over the issue, which was conditioned by a number of factors: an earlier ruling of the Admiralty to the effect that Rome's presence in the Dodecanese would not be "vital to our naval strategy in the Mediterranean in the event of war with Italy"; London's dedication to international conciliation; the "necessity to maintain good relations with Mussolini" on account of the French occupation of the Ruhr and the question of German reparations; and Athens's failure to countenance any "solution of the Dodecanese question other than either the cession of all the islands or the granting of autonomy".[69] Accepting Mussolini's promise to eventually contemplate the cession of some of the Dodecanese to Greece, particularly those in which Italy "has lesser interest",[70] in late May 1924 MacDonald instructed his ambassador at Rome to inform *Il Duce* that he would be happy to

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[66] FO 371/8822/C13383: Memorandum by Nicolson (3 August 1923).
[67] Cited in Cassels 1970: 97.
[68] FO 371/8822/C13383: Minute by Curzon (7 August 1923).
[69] Ibid.: Admiralty to Foreign Office (16 November 1922); Cassels 1970: 225; FO 371/9883/C7324: Minute by Nicolson (6 May 1924); Marks 1976: 49-54; FO 371/9882/C5696: Cheetham to MacDonald (4 April 1924).
[70] FO 371/9883/C7324: Mussolini to MacDonald (2 May 1924).

conclude an agreement over the Jubaland without further delay.[71] On 15 July 1924 the British prime minister and the Italian ambassador at London signed a treaty which officially transferred the Jubaland to Rome.[72] Exactly three weeks later, the two governments duly ratified the Treaty of Lausanne.[73]

Following the official and unequivocal recognition of Rome's *de jure* title over the Dodecanese, the question of the Archipelago ceased to be an issue of international diplomacy. In September 1924 the islands became part of the Italian kingdom, though not as colonies but as *possedimenti* (possessions).[74] Thereafter, and until Italy's entry into the Second World War in June 1940, the islands' status was never seriously questioned. Rome was left virtually free to pursue her policy of *Italianizzazione*, and, after 1936 when Cesare Maria De Vecchi (one of the *quadrumviri*) became governor, of *Fascistizzazione*.[75] Occasionally, Dodecanesian immigrants based in Greece attempted to bring the issue to the attention of the League of Nations, on account of Rome's efforts to de-hellenize the islands and create an autocephalous church. But neither Athens nor London ever endorsed their efforts. Indeed Venizelos, in September 1928 on his return from Rome where he had signed with Mussolini an agreement of "friendship and reconciliation", emphatically declared that

> no Dodecanesian question exists between Greece and Italy, as no Cypriote [sic] question exists between Greece and Great Britain. And, just as the occupation of Cyprus by Great Britain for half a century has not prevented the maintenance of excellent relations between Britain and Greece, the Dodecanese should not, and cannot, prevent the development and consolidation of relations of trust and amity between Greece and Italy.[76]

As a prominent Italian diplomat wrote in his memoirs, during the inter-war period Athens had "suppressed the word

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[71] Ibid.: MacDonald to Graham (20 May 1924).
[72] Toynbee 1926: 467.
[73] Buonaiuti-Marongiu 1979: 44; Frangopoulos 1958: 53.
[74] Frangopoulos 1958: 53.
[75] Buonaiuti-Marongiu 1979: 9-10.
[76] FO 371/12931/C7553: Mackillop to Foreign Office (8 October 1928).

'Dodecanese' from the vocabulary of its political conversations" with Rome.[77] For their part, the British, in line with their policy of appeasement, failed to ascribe much importance to the question of the islands, always fearful of the probable repercussions that the cession of the Dodecanese to Greece might have on their occupation of Cyprus.[78]

The outbreak of the Second World War marked a turning-point in the history of the Dodecanese question. By a sudden, but not wholly unjustified, *volte-face* Britain became the champion of the islanders' emancipation from Italian rule. This change of heart was not in the least connected with the desire of applying the concept of national self-determination. On the contrary, it was dictated by strategic considerations and the need to lure Turkey into the war on the side of the Allies.[79] Greece's wish for an unequivocal statement on the part of London that at the conclusion of the war the islands would automatically be ceded to her, if only as a token of appreciation for her sacrifices in the common cause, was cynically brushed aside. The British could not see why the Greeks had to perceive everything in terms of a bargain, and argued that the ultimate disposition of the Dodecanese would only be determined at the post-war settlement.

In the event, and amidst calls for the partition of the islands and/or their autonomous status under a joint Greco-Turkish condominium, the Dodecanese were officially ceded to Greece in 1947. Once more, political and strategic considerations were put forward to justify a decision which should have been reached and realized some 35 years earlier, purely on ethnic grounds. However, like numerous similar issues of great power diplomacy, the Dodecanese question was interlocked in the web of power politics and expediency. In as much as the islands were pawns that were transformed into temporary assets, though never into queens, Italy's continuous presence in the Dodecanese up to the end of the Second World War signifies not only Rome's diplomatic craftiness but also the weakness of minor power victims and the insensibility of great power bystanders.

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[77] Cited in Barros 1982: 5.
[78] FO 371/12931/C3830: Foreign Office to Colonial Office (May 1928).
[79] FO 371/37224/R3136: Churchill to Eden (4 April 1943).

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