

H-Diplo

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Commissioned for H-Diplo by Diane Labrosse

H-Diplo has commissioned reviews of the Makers of the Modern World Series (Haus Publishing), which concerns the Peace Conferences of 1919-23 and their aftermath. The 32 volumes are structured as biographies in standard format or as specific national/organizational histories.

<http://www.hauspublishing.com/product/229>

H-Diplo Book Review of Andrew Dalby. *Eleftherios Venizelos*. (Makers of the Modern World Series (London: Haus, 2010). xvi + 194 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, chronology, further reading, index. ISBN: 978-1-905791-64-4 (\$19.95, hardcover).

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/essays/PDF/Haus-Venizelos.pdf>

Reviewed for H-Diplo by **Erik Goldstein**, Boston University

Eleftheurios Venizelos was something of a superstar among the statesman of his generation. On meeting him at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference one young British diplomat, AWA Leeper, wrote excitedly to his brother, "I've at last got Veniselos's autograph". The subject of numerous, and usually hagiographical, biographies during his lifetime, there has been no biography of him in English for over seventy years. He has been the subject of numerous works in Greek. The recent Greek Prime Minister Konstantine Karamanlis wrote his Ph.D. thesis at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (1984) on 'Venizelos and the external relations of Greece from 1928 to 1932'.

The book, as others in the series, is well produced and reasonably priced. It includes useful maps, numerous excellent illustrations, a helpful chronology which also places events in Greece in a broader context, and an excellent bibliography. This is an extraordinarily well written and conceived biography, and something of a page-turner. While very much a well balanced political biography, it does not neglect Venizelos the person and family man, and the whole individual is pleasantly brought to life. Venizelos's political career spanned the early twentieth century, and as a result the book serves as a lively account of modern Greek history. In just over 150 pages of text Dalby succeeds in discussing the major episodes of Venizelos's career, within the context of the tumultuous events of which the Great War was the pivot.

Venizelos first rose to international prominence through his role in the 1897 revolt against Ottoman rule on his native Crete, and then through his role in the island's government over much of the ensuing decade. It also made him a popular figure in Greece itself. In 1909, in the midst of great political turmoil in Athens, he was invited to advise the king, and the following year he became prime minister, one of many times he would fill this post. As prime minister, Venizelos was one of the principal architects of the Balkan League, which at last saw the Balkan states working in concert and with enough military power to largely drive the Ottoman empire from Europe.

When the Ottoman Empire entered the First World War on the side of the Central Powers Venizelos saw an opportunity to acquire much of Greece's *irredenta* with Allied support. The new king, Constantine, however, preferred neutrality and the two clashed, ultimately leading to Venizelos's dismissal. Venizelos now embarked on a daring course when in the autumn of 1916 he proclaimed a Provisional Government of National Defence at Allied occupied Salonika, which was quickly recognized by Britain and France. King Constantine left the country in June 1917, leaving Venizelos predominant in Greek politics.

By the end of the First World War his standing was so high among the councils of the victorious powers that figures such as Lloyd George saw Venizelos as a future Chancellor of the new League of Nations. Through his success in the Balkan Wars and his adroit diplomacy at the Peace Conference Venizelos would see Greece come very close to achieving the *Megalia Idea*, the Great Idea of uniting in one country the majority of Greeks that had enraptured Greece for decades. The vagaries of domestic politics finally caught Venizelos, who in a general election in November 1920 was decisively defeated, replaced by the restored King Constantine, and went into self-imposed exile. This led to changes of command with pro-Venizelist officers and officials being removed and royalists put in their place. The Greek effort to take control of Western Asia Minor met with military defeat, the route of the army, and a tidal wave of Hellenic refugees fleeing to Greece. Yet, now in defeat, Greece again turned to Venizelos to salvage what could be saved from the ruins. Venizelos represented Greece at the Lausanne conference, the last of the peace conferences of 1919-23, and successfully negotiated a settlement with Turkey, one which was to inaugurate an unusually long period of Greco-Turkish amity.

Domestically he was a reformer, modernising government services and the constitution, but his disputes with the king had begun the National Schism which would dominate Greek political life for decades to come, and really not be healed until the overthrow of the dictatorship of the Colonels in 1974.

Venizelos remains one of the most enigmatic and fascinating statesmen of the early twentieth century, and this biography does much to facilitate our understanding of one of the makers of the modern world.

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