
**Rezensiert von:** Andreas Guidi, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris

Greece’s recent exit from the bailout program regulated by international institutions makes the question of sovereignty and dependency of this state a relevant issue of inquiry for the social sciences. From the historian’s point of view, this includes reflections on the long-term entangled processes of Greek State, market and class formation.

Sakis Gekas’ first monograph *Xenocracy* offers a valuable and original contribution in this field, most of all by de-centering the narrative of state (and nation) building from the perspective of the capital Athens and connecting it to the history of British colonialism in the Mediterranean.\(^1\) Gekas, Associate Professor of Modern Greek History at York University in Toronto, illustrates the dynamics of rule and social change anticipating the unification of the Eptanisa (the Greek denomination for Corfu, Paxos, Lefkada, Kefalonia, Ithaka, Zakynthos and Kithera) with the Greek Kingdom in 1864. He analyzes the experience of the United States of the Ionian Islands, a British protectorate created by the Treaty of London in 1815 after the demise of the Septinsular Republic, one of the post-Venetian "satellite" entities of Napoleonic France.\(^2\)

*Xenocracy* is structured along chapters mixing a chronological and thematic axis. After introducing the conundrum of how to define the experience of the Ionian State within a wider notion of colonialism, Gekas discusses his object of study in the broader framework of social change and rule in the Post-Napoleonic Mediterranean (Chapter One). Within the British rationale of governance, priority was given to neutralizing subversive potential in local politics and assure „tranquility“ (Chapter Two, p. 62) and order. This was made possible through the establishment of an accountable and subsidiary legal infrastructure linking police, tribunals and government (Chapter Three). The expertise of colonial officials like Thomas Maitland favored this process through the circulation of governmental knowledge both diachronically (building on previous regimes) and synchronically, through their mobility between different colonial domains. The control over the population, a central issue of govern mentality, is illustrated among others through the example of the „Blue Books“, statistical records which contributed to the efficiency of rule by classifying the population through an „information revolution“ (Chapter Four p. 107).

In the central chapters, Gekas offers an impressively detailed empirical account of the Ionian economy’s evolution. Through the encounter with a „brave new business world“ (Chapter Five, p. 163), local entrepreneurs negotiated with the British authorities and adapted to the implementation of the liberal principles of „free trade“ and accountability, resulting in regulations on monopoly, prices, custom fees and insurance system. Next to this process of market regulation and merchant class formation, economy is investigated in terms of public finances and expenditures, another field of negotiation between British authorities and the local elite. Gekas stresses the priority given by the governors to military defence infrastructure, which motivates the definition of a „warfare, rather than a welfare state“ (Chapter Six, p. 188). The author also puts forth the claim that the deterioration of public finances contributed significantly to the fall of legitimacy in the last phase of British rule, starting in the 1850s. The improvement of infrastructure through sponsored public works is analyzed as a link between colonizers and colonized. In this relationship, however, Gekas’ perspective underlines the vantage point of the state in creating „controlled places of modernity“ (Chapter

---


\(^2\) The Septinsular Republic covered the same territory and was established at the end of the Venetian rule. It first became part of the first French Republic (1797–1799), before being administered as a Russo-Ottoman protectorate (1800–1807), and, lastly, included in Napoleon’s empire.
Seven, p. 212) such as a prison and a lunatic asylum in Corfu.

The government of the Ionian state’s effort at regulating economy and bureaucracy relied furthermore on „progress”, a concept at the core of Victorian liberalism. While discussing this notion, the author recognizes the gap between the envisioned goals and the achievements, claiming that, in the discourse on social problems, „Ionian and British officials were very good at diagnosis but exceptionally idle in finding a cure“ (Chapter Eight, p. 231). This also resulted in a new connotation attached to „poverty” from a blend of Victorian discourses and local realities. A paternalistic, moralizing, and disciplining attitude of the wealthy toward the poor did not only stigmatize the most vulnerable segments of society. It was just as important for the self-perception and representation of a middle-class active in charity and voluntary associations (Chapter Nine).

The book concludes with an account of how an Ionian middle-class gained visibility and influence in politics. A new hegemonic political faction oriented toward reformism within the status quo of British rule developed following the emergence of a public opinion and the press as well as new educational opportunities. According to the author, the social transformation inherent to education and urban middle-class sociability eventually sowed the „seeds of discontent” (Chapter Nine, p. 290) toward British rule among local politicians, whose criticism was rooted in the liberal ideology and capitalized on the financial and administrative problems of the State. Eventually, a radical minority achieved the goal of Énosis (unification with Greece) in 1864 because the fate of the Ionian state was more and more entangled with that of the Greek kingdom. When King Otto was exiled from Athens in 1862, the British Empire renounced to the islands and shifted his strategy from being a sovereign state in the Ionian Sea toward becoming an informal colonial patron of the whole kingdom.

Gekas mobilizes above all the notions of governmentality and modernity to write the history of entangled paths of British colonial officials and the Ionian elite, which stood in different periods in a symbiotic or dialectic relationship to each other. The compelling central argument of the book is that the framework of state formation went hand in hand with the emergence of a new middle-class whose ideology, socialization, and modes of consumption (one could say habitus) was peculiar and neither reducible to a British colonial nor to a Greek national identity (p. 332). At the same time, Ionian intellectuals-politicians played an important role both within a system ultimately regulated by British imperial authorities and in Greek national politics before, during and, most importantly, after the cession of the islands to the Greek Kingdom.

Xenocracy is a well referenced monograph which builds on literature from new imperial history and colonialism as well as primary sources such as the Ionian Government Gazette, British Colonial Office records, Ionian bank archives etc. Moreover, Gekas’ book is written elegantly with captivating transitions between paragraphs and chapters.\(^3\) It has the merit of proposing a new narrative linking state and class in a colonial framework and its influence on the history of the Greek national state. More specifically, it highlights the pervasiveness of liberalism for Mediterranean settings under colonial influence.

Whereas the analysis of the economic factors emerges as the most solid aspect of the book, the recurring references to the concepts of „governmentality”, „elite”, and „middle-class” make the approach of the book predominantly „top-down”, as acknowledged by Gekas in the conclusions. Several aspects which made up the governmental control of the population are dealt more or less marginally in the book (forced labor, response to petitions, smuggling, and bread riots). However, they suggest that including the experience of a larger segment of the population as a subject, not simply an object of change is necessary to understand the interplay of elites and authorities.\(^4\)

\(^3\) Nonetheless and without affecting the value of this reading, one must note several editing errors with whole sentences appearing twice within a few pages, especially in the first part of the book.

\(^4\) For a rather anthropological and social-historiographic approach on the same setting see Thomas Gallant, Experiencing Dominion: Culture, Identity, and Power in...
Inspired by Foucault, the author discusses modernity by convincingly illustrating many practices and discursive tropes that characterized British colonial rule over the local population. However, one could raise the question of the weight and legacy of previous experiences of rule often mentioned in the chapters, most notably the French but also the Venetian period. As an example, one could think of the striking persistence of Italian as a language in several spheres of public life. Further connections derive from the circulation of intellectuals to universities such as Padova and Pisa, commercial networks in Greece, Odessa, Trieste, as well as the influence of European revolutionary events in 1848 in riots in Kefalonia the following year. Therefore, Gekas’ arguments are more compelling when he highlights synchronic and plural geographic entanglements than when he presents claims about a strong diachronic social change confined to Ionian-British interactions between 1815 and 1864, such as the one related to the „attitudes toward crime“ (p. 81).

Furthermore, the author stresses the „contradictions“ of liberal rule in explaining the shortcomings of Ionian governance. However, liberal modernization, when coupled with colonialism, was in fact not contradictory in building state institutions, markets, and infrastructures without effectively promoting sustainable investments or the economic emancipation of the lower classes. This aspect deriving from relation of power between imperial authorities and local society, which many elements of the book suggest implicitly, could have been stressed more, at least as much as the alleged „good will“ of colonial rule or its cooperation with the local elite. Indeed, colonialism coupled with a rhetoric of progress was an unsustainable complex on the long-term, and it was embedded in the rationale of Mediterranean imperialism observable in other contexts – be it „liberal“ or „authoritarian“, in the nineteenth and in the twentieth century – such as French Tunisia, British Cyprus, or the Italian Dodecanese.\(^5\)

To sum up, Xenocracy is a valuable contribution that succeeds in raising broad questions and creating a dialogue between vast fields of scholarship through the analysis of a small-scale, „peripheral“ setting. Gekas’ empirical findings will constitute a solid reference for further studies on Mediterranean colonialism as well as the history of the Greek State. His book is therefore strongly recommended to all readers interested in state and class formation in the nineteenth century.
