

PARTISAN PHOTOGRAPHY

This exhibition of photographs by Spyros Meletzis is the result of a meeting about the possible uses of photography. It took place on the island of Syros in June 2002, and those involved were Procopis Papastratis, Professor of History at the Panteion University of Athens, Nina Kassianou, an expert on photography, and myself. It was arranged in connection with the *Colloquium on History and Photography* in the *Ermoupoli Seminars* promoted by the Institute for Neohellenic Research of Greece. I was there at the invitation of Professor Papastratis, and my contribution, called "No words for horror. Abstract relations, concrete representations", was about how, during the Weimar Republic, there was a widespread lack of confidence in the power of literature – and language in general – to give an account of the catastrophe of the First World War and of the world that dawned when it came to an end. Nina Kassianou's talk was also about war photography – not technological warfare, as in 1914–18, but the war of the Greek anti-fascist resistance in the early forties. In order to show how those photographs gave very different visual stories, marked by the photographers who took them, she compared four splendid photographers who had covered the resistance that opposed the Italo-German occupation: Spyros Meletzis, Kostas Balafas, Voula Papaioannou and Dimitris Charisiadis.

Our common interests and mutual curiosity gave rise to a slightly sceptical desire to organize this exhibition. There is no doubt that our eagerness was influenced in some indefinite way by the fact that the three of us belong to two countries that have suffered two tragic and cruel civil wars. The initial idea was to organize an exhibition about the Greek resistance to develop the points that Nina Kassianou had presented. An exhibition conceived in terms of a more general reflection about war photography and its ability to give an account of the damage and suffering of modern warfare¹. In subsequent meetings, however, we decided to restrict our endeavour to the view of one of those photographers, Spyros Meletzis. This decision was prompted by the existence of the Photographic

Archive of the Benaki Museum in Athens – which has a large number of prints made by the photographer himself for an exhibition in 1944 – and it also took into account the substantial Meletzis archive now in the possession of his niece, Marianna Angelopoulou. It would have been a shame not to take advantage of this rich source of photographic material, which has recently become better known in Greece but is practically unknown in Spain and in a broader European context.

This exhibition – and its catalogue – is not about the Greek resistance to the Italo-German occupation in the years from 1942 to 1944, but about Meletzis's photography in that agonizing period in his country. Matters which are certainly related, but I must emphasize that they are not identical.

This immediately draws attention to two matters which intersect at some point. One is the increasingly obvious fact that the history of twentieth-century photography has yet to be written, or has been written in a tentative, incipient and still fragmentary fashion. This consideration, of course, involves another one, of greater epistemological complexity: whether it is at all possible to draw up a history of photography in the way in which the history of painting or sculpture has been written and rewritten. Even if we put off answering that question, however, it is still true that in the first three decades of the twentieth century the historicization of photography largely, though not wholly, assimilated the standards and criteria of the historiographic view preponderant in modern and contemporary art. A view dominated chiefly by the perspective of the avant-garde art movements. So that – in the realm of photography, too – substantial segments were set aside, not taken into consideration by a mainly linear, progressive discourse associated with the accredited art movements, which to a large extent took certain national, political and geographical contexts into account and not others. If photography was deemed to be one of the causes for the dissolving of the auratic work of art, the outcome

¹ On this point, see Sánchez Durá, N., "Palabras e imágenes, límites y alcance de los testimonios sobre el dolor de la guerra", in Sánchez Durá,

N. (ed.), *La Guerra*, Pretextos, Valencia, 2006.

has been rather ironic. For the aura proved so powerful that it has now also taken hold of photography and conditioned its historicization. I think that for the last thirty years we have been witnessing a multiform process of relating photographs to authors which is not unaffected by the vertiginous development of museums and related institutions, a privileged domain for the transformation of objects into works of art, their attribution to an author and their subsequent assessment as art.

The other matter which complicates the history of photography is its ambiguous or hybrid nature: as a case of the artistic and as a historical document. It will be said that the same thing occurs with any work of art. They are all, at the same time, documents that form part of a visual archive which could be elaborated, not in relation to some particular genre or art movement, but as pointers, trails and traces which historians generally take as a basis for the construction of their various accounts. More so, if anything, now that the history of society, representations, culture, mentalities and so on has acquired such remarkable importance. Look at the histories of everyday life in any period, of women, of death and its rites, of the ways of falling ill or the forms and rhetoric of politics, the processes of colonization and decolonization, totalitarian societies ... they all make use of works of art – or any graphic representation, whether produced by art or technology – in the construction of their various narratives.

Now it is true that a photograph without a caption, without a legend to guide the way in which it is seen and interpreted, either says nothing or else may say anything at all.² However, irrespective of the aims and motives of the makers of photographs, the immediate documentary content of photographs seems greater. The existing quantity of photographs is so large, and the number of published photos, and photos of photos, all around us so overwhelming and immeasurable, that our relation with the world is irreversibly affected by them – not so much by their appearance as by their mass

reception. It is tempting, therefore, to consider the photograph as “the thing that looked at us and saw us” and thus a privileged link to help us to weigh up what we were. I think Susan Sontag is right when she says, in her last, much quoted book, that “To remember is, more and more, not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture.”³

This documentary dimension of photography in general is noticeably greater in the case of photojournalism, and even more so in the case of war photography. Yet, even in this case, photographs that had a testimonial use and value have become objects of art that admit aesthetic appreciation. Many examples might be given, but perhaps the famous Republican militiaman captured by Capa at the very instant of being struck down on Cerro Murriano in Córdoba will suffice. Thus the historicization of photography takes place in a paradoxical situation: they are documents which, having been related to their authors at some point in their reception, are transubstantiated into works of art; photographs taken with artistic aims which become important documents of the general archive of history. We shall see that in Meletzis’s work, quite apart from his opinions, these two aspects appear at the moment of their crystallization.

On the other hand, with regard to war photography, it has become a cliché – ratified by Sontag without further ado – that the Spanish Civil War was “the first war to be witnessed (‘covered’) in the modern sense” by photography⁴. I do not think this is so. Such an opinion often depends on technical considerations: the appearance of lightweight cameras, loaded with rolls of 35 mm film, which could take shots of the fighting without the need for reloading. Some may object, however, that war photography is not just about the heat of the fray but about all the surrounding circumstances, the before and after, its many effects and an established series of well-worn themes which include wounded and dead bodies, ruins, prisoners, displaced civilians, life

² This conviction, incidentally, is the reason why the reader will find here not only the captions that Meletzis jotted down on the envelopes in which they were kept but also information that we have set about obtaining, identifying circumstances, places, dates and names as far as possible; all this appears in brackets after the captions written by Meletzis, beneath the reproductions of the photographs.

³ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2003, p. 89.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

among the troops, leaders and officers, allies and enemies, the effects on the lives of civilians and so on. And a full account of all this was given in the 1914–18 war. But also, before the Spanish Civil War – for instance, in that earlier war – still pictures from films shot on the battlefield were printed in photo books and other media. This is the case with the French cameraman Alphonse, who made a live film recording of an attack on the trenches in the long-drawn-out battle of the Somme, stills from which were used in the same way as photographs when they were printed. There are further examples from the other side of the front line. Even in that war, which people believe to have been recorded in black and white for evermore, colour photographs were published. In other words, even in these aspects, not only has the history of photography yet to be written, but also, in the short term, facts appear which make it necessary to revise opinions.

Be that as it may, it is true that it was during the First World War that the pre-eminence of photography over painting, drawing and engraving as a way of presenting an account of war was decided. People have almost forgotten the drawings and watercolours done by soldiers in the trenches⁵ because of the vast quantity of photos that circulated from the front line and the rearguard – not only the official pictures issued by the photographic services set up by the General Staffs, but also the ones taken spontaneously in the early days. The fact is that among the troops there were remarkable painters, such as Otto Dix, who painted at the front – I am not referring to the work he did after the war – from the perspective of the transformation of the visual arts at the time and not along the lines of traditional historicism. Even so, it is also true that photography triumphed over the various forms of painting in that war. Yet what I wish to emphasize is the fact that the process of a shift from certain forms of representation to others did not take place homogeneously, and did not happen simultaneously in all geographical and national domains.

At this point it is worth singling out the case of Spyros Meletzis and his war photographs of the Greek resistance

to the occupation. The reader will find several of his photographs in which we see painters who also took to the mountains, such as Dimitris Gioldasis and his friend Valias Semertzidis. He took them as a group, as part of the mixture of social sectors that took part in the fighting, and also engaged in their own activity, drawing peasants and shepherds, or making portraits of well-known resistance fighters, such as Captain Orestis or Leonta. These are the photographs that have special significance as documents of that shift. For Meletzis recorded the moments when – in the context of the landscape in which life was lived in ELAS, or inside the official EAM premises – the painter Semertzidis drew the adopted pose in which certain outstanding combatants wished to be immortalized by the dignity of drawing as one of the fine arts. But we see all this in a photograph which then occupied a subsidiary, subordinate position with regard to drawing. The dignity which testified that the person “was there”, with all the historical and moral consequences that it entailed, was attached to drawing, not to photography, which merely recorded the event of the pictorial portrait.

When viewed now, the gallery of heroic photographic portraits taken by Meletzis seems to contradict what I have just said. But I do not think that it really does. What we see now, after the use that was subsequently made of those portraits, is a result of the shift that has taken place, not the process of it happening at the time. In this regard, the way in which Meletzis photographed the charismatic military leader Aris Velouchiotis is significant; he was a farmer from Lamia, one of the first to carry out the instructions of EAM, backed by the Greek Communist Party, to form groups of guerrilla fighters who eventually constituted the National Popular Liberation Army (ELAS). In an interview with Nina Kassianou in January 1998, Meletzis talked about the origin of the idea for the portrait of Velouchiotis – subsequently so well known – and the circumstances in which it was taken:

“When Aris came to Viniani, my friend Semertzidis, the painter, wanted to do a portrait of him. So he went to the house where Aris was staying and I followed him

⁵ As an example, see *Croquis et dessins de Poilus. Une collection du Ministère de la Défense, Somogy, éditions d'art, Paris, 2002.*

because I was interested in how Semertzidis painted Aris. Then I had the idea of taking a photo of Aris, and I asked his permission.”

Yes, now Meletzis’s portrait prevails over the one drawn by Semertzidis, but at the time the photograph was what came after the drawn portrait rather than the other way round. The testimony of Meletzis himself, included in Nina Kassianou’s essay, tells us of the incomprehension that his work encountered among the political leaders of the resistance, even in the propaganda section, and of the ignorance of photography among some of the peasants in the mountains, who were seeing their first photos in his work. Now we can compare Meletzis’s photograph, *Valias Semertzidis Painting the Portrait of a Rebel, Viniani* with the finished portrait, *A Rebel*; and the photograph *Assembly of Villagers in Petrilia* with Semertzidis’s painting *Self-Government, Assembly of Villagers*. In the latter there are many items that appear in Meletzis’s photograph, so they both share time and place and record the same event. There is no doubt that the documentary impression is greater in Meletzis’s photographs. And if we paraphrase what Sontag said – “To remember is, more and more, not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture” – and add that to remember is, more and more, to call up a story from the memory of one or more pictures, we have to recognize that Meletzis’s photographs have a greater power to call up a picture and stimulate the memory.

In his photographs of the armed resistance we see one episode in the erratic establishment of the photograph as a privileged visual document, as an especially effective stimulus of memory. But there is another aspect, connected with the previous one, that is also worth emphasizing: despite their similarity to photojournalism, these photographs cannot be included in that genre. Because in this case there was nothing like a *Vu* or *Life* magazine eagerly waiting for the films to be developed. Meletzis did not go to the mountains to take pictures intended for immediate reproduction in the mass-circulation daily

press. He went, as a specific assignment for the Greek Communist Party, to record the life and many incidents of the Resistance, to bear witness to it. His photographs fulfilled this mission – and still do – in exhibitions and reproductions long after the period of 1942–44 when they were taken. Except for a brief exhibition in Korai Street in Athens at the end of November 1944, which only lasted nine days because of the outbreak of the December Events (*Ta Dekemvriana*), public showing of these photos had to wait until the exhibition *The Greek Resistance* at the Municipal Cultural Centre in Athens in 1976. That marked the start of a trickle of public exhibitions, which intensified in the late eighties. Decisive causes for this postponement were undoubtedly the civil war after the period of resistance (1946 to October 1949), considered “one of the greatest battles in the cold war”⁶, and its lengthy sequels of executions, imprisonments and internment camps.

These photographs, taken at the time of the partisan fighting in Free Greece, were destined to be kept secret: the pictures taken during the first two journeys – to Epirus in 1942, and to the Peloponnese in 1943 – because the place to which he returned was occupied Athens; the pictures of the third journey, made in 1944, because soon after he returned to Athens, after the liberation, there was the outbreak of the December Events, considered the “second round”, which led to the civil war a year later. Meletzis himself, in the interview with Nina Kassianou referred to earlier, described how he was arrested on the night of 6 December 1944, during the battle of Makrygianni, and sent to a concentration camp in Eldaba (Africa), from which he returned after the signing of the Treaty of Varkiza. By the terms of that treaty, EAM was forced to demobilize ELAS, abandon its hope of forming part of the provisional government and accept the trial of all its members, who were recognized as guilty of crimes against common law. Those last photos were lost, but he recounted that on his return an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion, of spies and informers, had taken hold everywhere. In fact, after the

⁶ Julián Casanova, “Guerres civiles, révolutions, contre-révolutions: Finlande, Espagne et Grèce (1918–1949)”, in *Le XX siècle des guerres*, Les Éditions de l’Atelier/Éditions Ouvrières, Paris, 2004, p. 59.

Treaty of Varkiza, imposed as a result of the impact of the British military intervention and proving of immediate benefit to the right wing, there was a period of terror against the left, which boycotted the elections in March 1946. Their abstention contributed to a massive victory of the right in those elections, the first since 1936. Six months later a referendum eventually led to the return of King George II, who had left the country in 1941 after the German invasion. In the summer of 1946 there was the "third and final round" of the civil war: with the support of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania, neighbouring communist countries, the Democratic Army, created in the autumn, launched a powerful guerrilla offensive. In December 1947 the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece was established in the mountains, but it was not recognized by any Eastern Bloc countries⁷. The communist left wing, which had carried the full weight of the armed and political resistance during the years of Italo-German occupation, began its long march towards definitive defeat. Professor Papastratis's essay, "Resistance in Greece during the German Occupation 1941–1944", provides a detailed description of the political circumstances, at home and abroad, affecting Greece in the period that Meletzis photographed, but it also sets out the key points that led to the subsequent civil war.

As a matter of fact, in that later context the Greek Communist Party wanted to recover the photographs of the resistance and finally entrusted them to the custody of Meletzis. On several occasions during the civil war the political police searched his home in search of the photos (which they never found) – testimony of the complicated, tenacious struggle of those who were then relentlessly pursued. Nobody knew where the photos were, not even his wife or family. The friend who constructed the place where they were hidden died a few months later. They remained concealed in their secret hide-out for many years. Compare this with the fate of the war photos taken by the photographers who covered the Spanish Civil War. Their public use was immediate, their authors received international acclaim and now they are almost part of legend.

Meletzis's photographs do not belong to photojournalism, nor, without further qualification, to the genre of war photographs. They belong to the partisan fight. In fact they are a further weapon in the partisan fight, of which they also provide an account for the future. Because the partisan war in which he took part also had its particular features. Above all, they show that the lion's share was carried out by the Greek left wing, and especially the Greek Communist Party through the National Liberation Front (EAM) and the People's National Liberation Army (ELAS). Once again, the essay by Professor Papastratis published here helps to explain this excessively succinct statement. In any case, however, Meletzis's photos also reveal how that fight against international fascism aimed not only to overthrow the occupation – first by Fascist Italy and then by Nazi Germany – but also to construct a new society, with socialism as the framework for its realization. And there was no political project in the 20th century with a greater teleological burden than the communist socialism of those years. Hence the need to record the memory of the fight, and hence the assignment given to Meletzis by the leaders of the KKE and EAM. Not only because of the circumstances of the time, but also as a memorial of a combat for which it was believed that a social epiphany was reserved, subsequently bloodily aborted in a civil war inserted in the order after the Second World War that had been agreed by the Great Powers: firstly, from the outset, the involvement of Great Britain; secondly, at the end of the resistance, the abstention of the Soviet Union, which made no objection to British military intervention after the liberation; and, lastly, the appearance of the United States, under Truman, in the immediate context of the cold war. When we look at Meletzis's photographs now and see the portraits of Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt on the walls of the rebel buildings, or the receptions in Viniani in which British, Russian and American liaison officers took part under EAM direction, an ironical or bitter smile is not out of place.

But when Spyros Meletzis pointed his camera there was no bitterness; there was optimism, historical optimism. Because he thought the time had finally come for the

⁷ See *ibid.*, pp. 63 ff.

hopes of the peasants and left-wing intellectuals and artists, for the desire for reform and emancipation of a poor country where women did not have the vote, a country politically backward and subordinated in the international politics that concerned its area.

The fact that the war photographed by Meletzis was a modern partisan war is revealed in many ways. Or his photos may instead provide an instrument with which to dissect the characteristics of modern partisan war, later so present in the processes of decolonization and in the vicissitudes of the cold war and the subsequent "peaceful coexistence". First of all, our attention is drawn by the large number of photos devoted to the political leaders of the resistance. And by its multiple structure, the meetings, committees and activities, leaders and personalities, and at the same time the relationship of all this with the strictly military side, in this case the activity of ELAS. In the magma of photographs in the archive there are many more devoted to this aspect than to the business of war. For, as Carl Schmitt pointed out in *The Theory of the Partisan* in 1962, unlike the common thief and criminal or the pirate moved by *animus furandi* (felonious intent), the modern partisan is inspired by a powerful political commitment and merges with the revolutionary. In other words, the irregular nature of his fighting is only irregular in relation to the ways of the national army that he confronts. But he seeks a regular organization in some other country to help him, or else he tries to establish one on his own. In this case, with regard to regularity in relation to a foreign country, I have already mentioned the repeated presence of the military liaison officers of the Allied Powers in these photographs. As for regularity in relation to his own country, the alternative political organization to the distant Government-in-Exile and the monarchy is omnipresent. Hence the importance that Meletzis attributed to Viniani, the political centre of Free Greece, to Rentina, a place where the political and the military came together, and to the meetings of the National Council organized by the Political Committee of National Liberation (PEEA) in Koryschades.

Meletzis dwelt on the signs of the new political administration set up in the mountains. He even took photos of the "civilians" involved in administering the

budding process of that new legality. And above all he captured the effects on the surrounding population in the countryside: public education, care of the most disadvantaged (abandoned children or war orphans, displaced women, etc.), health, men and women voting, forms of self-government and popular justice, and so on. Not forgetting propaganda meetings, because, as I have said, the modern partisan merges with the revolutionary and it was impossible to imagine a combat that did not obtain its energy from the prospect that drew it towards the future.

Above all, however, the partisan, the "rebel", has the appearance of an eminently earthy fighter, attached to his land and its more general traditions, adapted to the particular terrain of the land that he is defending and uniting the people who inhabit it. Hence the emphasis on the mountains in many of Meletzis's portraits, as a frame for what he is photographing or as a theme in themselves, with the figures being pretexts or absent. For here the mountain is the metaphorical origin of the fight, an expression of its sublime quality and a symbol of the patriotic war against an invader who, apart from his political definition, is alien, disturbing the people who live in harmony with their surroundings. This is how Meletzis saw it all, a very particular mixture of religiosity, tradition, photographic modernity and militant socialism. That is the ultimate meaning of the photographs that he took of country life during his solitary rambles in Agrafa and Petrilia. Child shepherds with their sheep or their flute, the ploughshare wresting sustenance from the soil, pictures of shepherds gathered together in the highlands or old weaving techniques. Photographs taken as he rambled on his own, just before the ones that he devoted to the Harvest War before going to Fourná to record EAM's third anniversary.

All this brings out another particular characteristic of modern partisan warfare: the complicated nature of the structure of the scene of action, the dimension of its depth. All his photos show this, but perhaps it is brought out most clearly in the series devoted to the Harvest War or in the pictures of the treks undertaken by peasants and youngsters to provide the fighters with provisions. Because these photographs show that in partisan fighting all effort and work becomes an effort and resource for

the fight. That is, everything becomes part of the fight, dispersed, various and manifold: making war, of course, but also harvesting, transporting, provisioning, healing, instructing, training and photographing.

At this point we find another functional characteristic of partisan war which Meletzis's photographs bring out splendidly: mobility, the constant, ceaseless mobility of the combatants, who, as I have said, are not just those who bear arms. A defensive mobility which is also a condition for its disturbing effectiveness. A mobility which has as a condition the earthy, telluric quality of the struggle and the fellow-feeling of the people. I have said that, despite appearances, Meletzis's photographs are not a case of photojournalism but a weapon in a partisan war which set out to record a memorial for the future. For this essential aspect of constant mobility – Che Guevara said that “for a guerrilla fighter, boots are more important than a rifle” – can be seen as an attribute, not just of what he photographed, but also of his very way of taking pictures. Jünger said, in his essay “War and Photography” in the thirties, that people take up weapons and cameras in the same places and circumstances of fighting⁸. When he said this he was thinking of conventional technological warfare between regular armies and nations. But Meletzis bears out the statement in terms of irregular partisan warfare. The reader should consider the journeys on foot undertaken by the photographer, which are described in Nina Kassianou's essay. Constantly carrying his flimsy field laboratory, sometimes accompanying the movements of the guerrilla groups, sometimes on his own. The climbs and treks. Meletzis's descriptions of his equipment and his journeys, his guides and the ways of getting through, bring out the resemblance between his practice of photography and the experience of partisan fighting.

Nevertheless, let me make a comparison which many may possibly consider far-fetched. In contemporary art photography Hamish Fulton has associated his work with his tireless walking. In Spain, for example, he crossed the country on foot from south to north and from east to west. As he went along he took photographs.

And he has done the same in many other, very varied geographical settings. His captions normally include the route, the place, and sometimes even the location in terms of altitude and latitude. They look like entries in a travel notebook. At first sight these photos are landscapes, but they also include, as something assumed, what is excluded in the picture: the effort of the journey, the tireless search, here not for the moment of danger but for the epiphany of nature, with variations in lighting, climatic conditions and mood. Meletzis's photographs belong to a different locale of life but share this quality with Fulton's pictures. Because, despite their partisan quality, or precisely because he perceives it in its inseparable earthy dimension, many of them are not only a chronicle of a military political situation but also an expression of an almost religious admiration for wild places and their people. It is a pity that in this exhibition we have not included many more prints of the photos that he took on his mountain rambles, precisely when he was also recording the deeds of the Resistance on film.

Meletzis was also moved by an artistic aim. He himself said so, complaining of the initial failure to understand his activity when he made his third journey to the mountains: “I would be lying if I said that the leaders of the National Resistance were aware of what an art photographer could offer”⁹. He was constantly taking photos of his friend Semertzidis, as if painting were the phantom that he was pursuing. And so the ambivalence of photography, of the finest photographs, pulses in Meletzis's photographs of the Resistance, in his personal weapon loaded with memories.

This dual nature has determined the way in which we have arranged the pictures in this book. It will probably also condition how they are read. It would not be fair, therefore, to conceal the twofold criterion that has guided us. So, with regard to the partisan war, we have arranged the photos in series. But within the series we have borne in mind the way in which some pictures fit visually with others, in order to release all their visual potential. Thus each sequence follows a particular theme:

⁸ Ernst Jünger, “Guerra y fotografía”, in Nicolás Sánchez Durá (ed.), Ernst Jünger: Guerra, técnica y fotografía, PUV, Valencia, 2000.

⁹ See the essay by Nina Kassianou published in this volume.

heroic portraits; Rentina as a place where the political and the military came together; Viniani as a place for the construction of the new political order; the fighting; tending the wounded and providing protection; trekking and mobility; the staging of the political dimension at Koryschades; public instruction, propaganda and self-government; the Harvest War; the mountains and their people as a subject for aesthetic contemplation; the mobility of the troops; and, lastly, celebration and liberation. One result of this order is that we have not simply followed – but have respected as far as possible – the chronological order of the events photographed, of which Nina Kassianou's essay gives a detailed account. So that, for instance, the section devoted to Rentina is placed at the beginning, together with the photos of Viniani, to show the structural complexity of the armed resistance, whereas strictly chronological criteria would have put them near the end.

However, the final photograph deserves special comment. It is a picture of farmers at Katerini, in western Macedonia. Their appearance identifies them; they are not rich farmers, they are poor and needy. Two women are holding a hammer and a sickle crossed above their heads. Perhaps there was no political symbol more distinctive in the 20th century. The fact that the picture is there, at the very end, is not the result of chance, let alone aesthetic criteria. It is intended to clarify one of the key aspects that have guided the entire exhibition. Because we are aware that it is a case of the public use of history, and therefore belongs to the debate about the shaping of democratic public consciousness. A many-sided debate which certainly also embraces a crucial aspect of European history in the last century: the relations between communism and antifascism. History – speaking of history as a theoretical discipline – is constantly being rewritten, not only by the appearance of new documentary sources but also as a result of theoretical, political and ideological interests, and consequently we have witnessed an unexpected evaluative revision of antifascism since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the break-

up of the USSR. Of course, it has not had the same appearance in France, Germany, Italy, Spain or Greece. All the same, there are some strands in common. Enzo Traverso has warned of the various attempts to discredit the memory and evaluation of European antifascism. The argument, shared to varying degrees depending on the political geography, runs along the following lines: antifascism was substantially pro-Soviet, but now we know about the horrors of the Gulag and Stalinist terror; consequently, as an accomplice, antifascism should not enjoy any moral or political prestige; moreover, antifascism is just as suspect of having contributed to barbarity as the century's totalitarian regimes¹⁰.

It is a matter that cannot be dealt with in a couple of lines, and this is not the place to do it. But this is certainly a place where it should be taken into account. Because, when applied to Greece, that condemnatory argument acquires a sarcasm that is hard to stomach. The Greek Resistance was the largest and best organized national movement of mass resistance to the Nazi occupation in Europe. Meletzis's photographs and Professor Papastratis's essay are ample testimony that it was a valiant popular movement in which people risked their lives and possessions, contrasting with the inertia and ineffectiveness of the traditional middle-class parties and the monarchy in exile. As for the Greek communists and those who followed them, the fate they met was tragic. They were victims of a secret agreement between the USSR and Britain of which they were unaware, and they were abandoned to their fate during the reaction of the British and the Greek right wing after the liberation. The farmers at Katerini, in Macedonia, like so many others in the length and breadth of Greece, still had a bitter destiny to fulfil after they had been photographed and after the brief euphoria of the liberation. From the time of the Treaty of Varkiza to the subsequent elections in 1946, the right wing, with British support, unleashed a campaign of terror against those who had headed the resistance to fascism – in other words, the left. Between 1946 and 1950 about twenty thousand left-

¹⁰ See Enzo Traverso, "Los intelectuales y el antifascismo", *Acta Poetica*, 24-2, Autumn, 2003. Also, *Le passé, modes d'emploi. Histoire, mémoire, politique*, Éditions La Fabrique, Paris, 2005 [there is a translation in Valencian published by PUJ, 2006].

wing citizens were killed. About a hundred and forty thousand went into exile in the final stages of the civil war, and at the end of 1949 the government acknowledged that there were fifty thousand people held in prisons or concentration camps. In 1952 it still admitted 17,089 political prisoners¹¹. Greece now has about ten and a half million inhabitants; the population then was much smaller. In these cases, of course, the real figures will never be known. In Spain we are still working on the same problem.

When the areas of influence were dealt out, everybody was satisfied. It has been said that the USSR

under Stalin looked on at the Greek drama with indifference because the intervention of the British in Greece, with the Americans subsequently taking over, provided it with a pretext for intervening freely in the European countries that fell within its sphere. But those peasants and farmers – like the ones in the last photograph by Meletzis here – who fought, harvested, transported munitions and provisions, met and discussed, voted and celebrated, and who freed their country in the hope of a better life, who raised their work tools to form a symbol that for them was truly liberating ... they knew nothing of all this, and still less of the Gulag.

¹¹ J. Casanova, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

■ Images captions

p.p. 8 The photographer Spyros Meletzis, Viniani, 1944
25 x 19.5 cm. Silver Gelatin. Meletzis Archive

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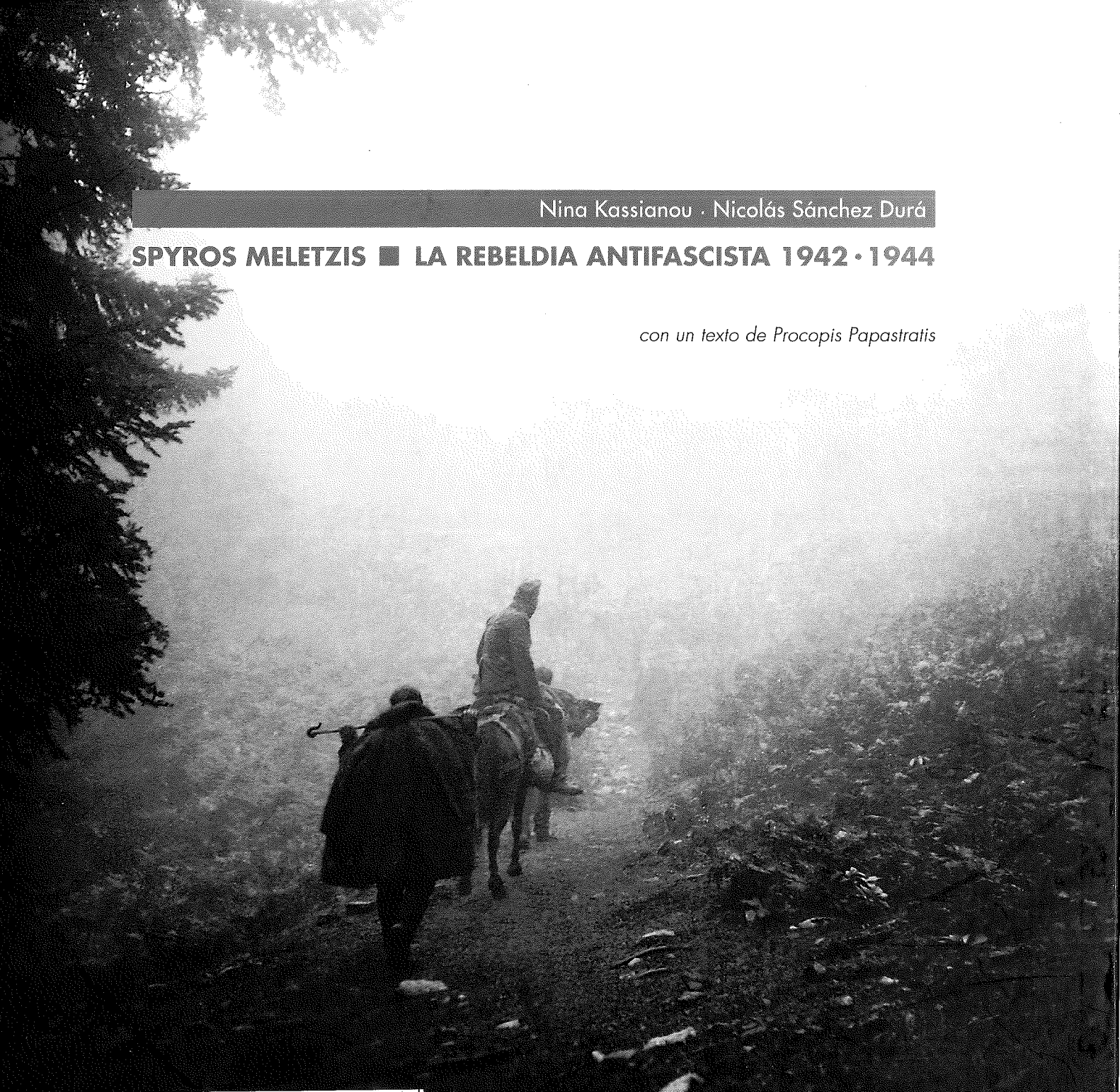
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Nina Kassianou · Nicolás Sánchez Durá

SPYROS MELETZIS ■ LA REBELDIA ANTIFASCISTA 1942 · 1944

con un texto de Procopis Papastratis



Spyros Meletzis. La Resistencia Antifascista 1942-1944

17 enero a 22 de abril de 2007

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Imagen cubierta
Traslado bajo la niebla de las tropas del
ELAS de Petrilia a Fourná (Evrytania), 1944



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