

James H. Barron. *The Greek Connection: The Life of Elias Demetracopoulos and the Untold Story of Watergate* (New York House, 2020)

Review by Michael Smith

The biography of the late extraordinary investigative journalist and freedom fighter Elias Demetracopoulos, *The Greek Connection*, by attorney and investigative reporter James H. Barron, is quite a fine book, exhaustively researched and beautifully written.

Demetracopoulos (1928-2016) became involved in the anti-fascist resistance in Athens during World War II. At age 12, he joined a clandestine royalist group that gathered intelligence, facilitated propaganda, engaged in small acts of sabotage, and organized escape networks for allied operatives and prisoners of war. His group often worked with British Intelligence. Barron writes that Demetracopoulos “was quick witted and had a fierce work ethic and his fluency in English was equal to most others in the group.”

Demetracopoulos was eventually arrested and sentenced to death by the German fascists for the sabotage he had performed, for having kept weapons, and for maintaining a secret radio transmitter in his home. He was imprisoned before his scheduled execution. Barron writes, “It is impossible to describe how the Greek patriot suffered. For two weeks, morning, noon, and evening, Elia underwent the most inhumane torture of the inquisition. Yet, he did not utter a sound, did not even open his mouth. He groaned and bit his tongue, to cut it off if necessary. But until the last day when he was bound and taken to an auditorium for trial and sentenced to death Demetracopoulos bore all torture bravely.” To his torturer, a Greek collaborator with the Nazis, he said, “You can kill me, but you won’t get anything from me. One day you will pay for your crimes, traitor.” Then, he spit in his face.

Due to the intervention of Archbishop Damaskinos, the spiritual leader of Athens and all of Greece, his life was spared as part of a Christmas goodwill package. He was still only 15 years old. He was transferred to an Institution for the mentally ill and imprisoned there for nearly a year. Finally, he was released in October of 1944 when the German occupiers withdrew from Athens and mainland Greece.

Demetracopoulos got a job with *Kathimerini*, destined to be the most prestigious influential newspaper in Greece. He was 21 years old and wrote with concern of how the CIA set up a Greek equivalent. He also wrote against the conservatives allowing collaborators and anti-Semites into their governments. His reporting earned him the permanent hostility of the CIA and the American Embassy.

As an independent journalist in the 50s, 60s, and 70s Demetracopoulos further earned the enmity of Greek and American officials by exposing how Tom Pappas, a Boston-based financier misappropriated development funds to establish a stranglehold with Exxon of much of the Greek economy.

In response to the advent of the Greek junta in 1967, he worked closely with Republican conservatives in Maryland to keep Spiro Agnew from supporting the junta. He was enraged when Agnew betrayed his promises.

When Richard Nixon successfully ran for president in 1968 supporting the Greek junta was an aspect of his foreign-policy. Nixon illegally took campaign funds from the Greek dictatorship. Tom Pappas served as a cochair of Nixon's financial re-election committee. He was in a word Nixon's "bagman." The *Boston Globe* described Tom Pappas as a modern day "robber baron," a salesman for the military junta looking for business opportunities in Greece on his and his associates' behalf. Popular rumor was that Pappas illegally contributed half a million dollars to the Nixon election campaign in cash delivered in a suitcase.

Demetracopoulos uncovered the truth that American taxpayer dollars were funneled to the KYP, the Greek version of the CIA, and then sent back to the Nixon campaign. He tried unsuccessfully to get the story out to the Democratic National Committee headquartered in the Watergate complex. He came to believe that the bungled burglary of the Watergate included the goal of ridding the Democratic Party's files of the data on the money transfers. Had the story been released, the scandal might have cost Nixon the election. Demetracopoulos also revealed Nixon's regime supplied arms to the Greek dictatorship but did so in a deceptive manner by eluding an American arms embargo by listing "new" military equipment as "old," grossly undervaluing it, and shipping arms as "surplus" to the colonels who led the junta.

Elements of the US government attempted to have Demetracopoulos deported to Greece, but he was warned by Senator Kennedy (MA) that if he returned to Greece to tend his sick father he would be murdered. Undaunted, he continued to help build a broad-based coalition to put pressure on political leaders to bring down the Greek junta. Nevertheless, even in the United States he was under a wiretap and other government surveillance. Knowing that to be effective he needed to stay in Washington, he fought to get legal permanent resident status. Through his connections in Congress, both liberal

and conservative, he was finally able to get a green card which allowed him to stay in the United States and work.

Demetracopolous did not have a comprehensive political ideology. He was an ardent ant-communist who loathed all authoritarian governments. Barron puts him on the political spectrum as a “Center leftist,” writing that, “He hated communism and fascism and preferred republicanism to monarchy. He believed in the promise of a well-constructed constitutional framework to guide a flourishing representative democracy.”

Barron describes the CIA’s attacks on Demetracopoulos as “an institutional crusade.” It charged Demetracopoulos was “a megalomaniac who may have suffered impairment of his mental faculties as a result of his imprisonment by the Germans during World War II for sabotage activities.” The State Department, for its part, denied that he was even a journalist or that he worked for *Kathimerini*. The CIA and the State Department carefully monitored his articles and discouraged other newspapers from hiring him.

Because of Demetracopoulos’s exposure of Tom Pappas, the State Department, the Internal Revenue Service, and the CIA made sure that Congressmen, White House staffers, and political operatives got the most damning information they could supply. Barron notes that if there had been any truth to the charges, the FBI would have been in the front lines in bringing an actual case against Demetracopoulos involving his mental health and charges of corruption. Instead, the FBI recommended closing its investigation without taking any action.

Reading about Elias Demetracopoulos’s travails re-enforced my outrage at the hardships faced by contemporary like-minded journalists. I think of Julian Assante, who since he released the Wikileaks material has been driven to near mental and physical breakdown by ten years of government persecution. I think, too, of the hundreds of Turkish journalists imprisoned by Erdogan and the murder of the *Washington Post’s* Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Truly investigative journalists are the essential guardians of democracy and the Rule of Law. Demetracopoulos was of that school. His memory is best honored by defending the legal rights of those who continue to practice truth telling in these terrible times.

[American Journal of Contemporary Hellenic Issues](#) | Copyright © 2022 American Hellenic Institute Foundation, Inc.

All rights reserved. All articles appearing in the *American Journal of Contemporary Hellenic Issues* are the copyright of the Journal. The online edition is free to individuals and institutions. Copies of the individual articles are strictly prohibited. Reproduction, storage or transmission of this work in any form or by any means beyond that permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law is unlawful without prior permission in writing of the publisher, or in accordance with the terms of licenses issued by the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) and other organizations authorized by the publisher to administer reprographic reproduction rights. Distribution of the published articles for research or educational purposes is possible, but requires the formal authorization of the Journal editor and the authors. Commercial use of the AHIF Policy Journal or the articles contained herein is expressly prohibited without the written consent of the Managing Editor at AHIFPolicyJournal@aheworld.org. AHIF 1220 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036.