George G. Arnakis: The near east in modern times. Volume I: The ottoman empire and the balkan states to 1900

Dimitri Kitsikis

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(6) Constantina Safilios - Rothschild and Anna Potamianou, «Trends of Discipline in the Greek Family», Human Relations, Vol. 24, no 6, December 1971. The book by Arnakis, the third volume of which is still to be published, also studies the whole area with the exception again of Russia, but only covers the 19th and 20th centuries.


As curious as it may sound, the civilization of one third of Eurasia still awaits definition. Traditionally cut between the classical distinction of West and East, the «cradle» of world civilization which lies in a circle around Eastern Mediterranean and more precisely around a fabulous city, Istanbul (otherwise called Byzantium, Constantinople, Polis, Tsarigrad) has never been presented by historians in its unity. This «intermediary region» between West and East, encompasses the Orthodox Christian Slavs (including the Russians) the Rumanians, Albanians, Greeks, Turks, Jews, Arabs, Persians, that is from Belgrad in the west to the Indus River in the East and from Arkhangelsk in the North to Ethiopia in the South.

No textbook has ever been written on the history of this Intermediary Region. The first important effort in this direction was made however by L.S. Stavrianos when, in 1958, Rinehart of New York published his remarkable The Balkans since 1453. This book encompasses only one part of the Intermediary Region, the western quarter of it, describing five centuries of its history. At the same time a parallel effort was made in French by a Lebanese historian Jawad Boulos, published in five volumes by Mouton of The Hague, under the title Les peuples et les civilisations du Proche Orient. This «intermediary region» by which an external power, England, intervenes in the «civil war» going on in the area for the succession of the Istanbul throne and helps the Turks maintain the throne by repelling both the internal contender from the South (the Arabs of Mohammed Ali) and the internal contender from the North (the Russians of Nicholas Ist.). It equally fails to understand why so many prominent Greeks continued their close
collaboration in Istanbul with the Ottoman Emperor, even after the making of a formal treaty. There are French separatists in Quebec and other federalists in Ottawa, in the same way there were Greek separatists in Athens and French «federalists» in Istanbul, for ideological and not just opportunistic reasons.

However the main value of this work, which far exceeds its weaknesses, is that for the first time it gives us a very clear textbook of the last two centuries of the history of nearly the whole of this area of civilization lying in the middle of Eurasia, it situates the Balkans in the Near East where they really belong and bans from its vocabulary the illogical and confusing term of Middle East, which only came into vogue at the outbreak of the Second World War. It is highly desirable that in the near future a synthetic history of the Intermediary Region in modern times, including Greece, be written from the «inside» and not from the Western angle.

The bibliography of both volumes is not satisfactory. The once more repeated, although very weak, argument that «for practical reasons» it was necessary to limit it to works available in English, does not save it from criticism as useful books in English are not mentioned while others of highly doubtful importance are brought in.

DIMITRI KITSIKIS, Ph. D.
Professeur agrégé d’Histoire à l’Université d’Ottawa.

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