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

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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, Tsargrad) 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. But the ambition of this work was so great that it made a failure of the last volumes. With the exception of Russia it tries to encompass the history of the whole Intermediary Region from prehistoric times to the present day. The book by Arnakis, the third volume of which is still to be published, in the meantime continues the «intermediary» history of this area of civilization. To present, as the author does, the Russian State as an external factor to the Eastern Question, on the same level as England for instance, is a very common mistake among historians which prevents us once again from understanding the significance of the internal struggle of the area, which has always been the will of each one of the peoples of the Intermediary Region to hold the sceptre of its Oecumenical Empire in Istanbul. Thus we fail to understand the process 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 peace treaty between the two powers. Among the positive aspects of the treaty, one can mention the improvement of relations between the two countries, the establishment of a diplomatic mission in Istanbul, and the opening of consular offices in the Ottoman Empire. However, despite these positive outcomes, there were also challenges and complexities in the relationship between the two countries. The Ottoman Empire was facing internal struggles and economic challenges, while Greece was trying to assert its independence and sovereignty. The treaty was signed in 1832, and it was a significant step towards the modernization of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of a more equal footing between Greece and the Ottoman Empire.