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**Review of Christopher Clark's Οι Υπνοβάτες: Πώς η Ευρώπη πήγε στον πόλεμο το 1914 [The Sleepwalkers: How Europe went to War in 1914]**

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end? The second weakness of the book is the fact that it contains several spelling mistakes, both in English and in Greek, which can sometimes be a little irksome. This, of course, has to do more with the scant proof-reading services of the publishing houses nowadays than with the author himself.

But these are minor details. When all is said and done, Gallant's delve into the past has produced the most all-encompassing account of the Greek long nineteenth century to have been written, a book that has genuine literary merit and at the same time can be usefully used in class.

**Christopher Clark**

*Οι Υπνοβάτες: Πώς η Ευρώπη πήγε στον πόλεμο το 1914*

*[The Sleepwalkers: How Europe went to War in 1914]*

**Athens: Alexandria, 2014. 736 pp.**

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There is hardly an issue (except obviously for Nazism and the Holocaust) in the entire history of the twentieth century that, in the course of time, has captured so much interest from historians and has seen the production of such a huge number of books and articles as the one regarding the origins of the First World War. If for the average European citizen knowledge and memory of the Great War is mainly linked to the images and descriptions of the suffering in the trenches of the Western Front and to the specific commemorative narratives existing (to a varying extent) in each separate country, academic historiography, which is very prolific as a whole in all war-related issues, has shown a particular interest in the core question of how Europe arrived at the bloodshed of 1914–1918 and who is mainly to blame for this outcome.

The existing number of both primary and secondary sources available on the subject is immense, almost beyond the reach of even the most hard-working and polyglot historian.<sup>1</sup> The quest for the causes and responsibilities for the war emerged almost simultaneously with its outbreak in the summer of 1914<sup>2</sup> and in the intervening decades has never ceased to attract the interest of historians, politicians, diplomats and the general public. The question became even more crucial after the end of the

hostilities, as the treaty of Versailles in 1919 placed blame explicitly on the German side, in a way that proved to be decisive as it played an important role in the course of events that led to a second, even more catastrophic war 20 years later. The issue of what led to the First World War has thus become a core issue in studies about the entire twentieth century. Historians have mainly used two major (sometimes distinct, but often intertwining) approaches and narratives; the first one throws light on the deep causes of the war (to be found, among others, in the new realities created by the economic and demographic growth in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the rise of nationalism, in the competition between the great powers, in the quest for armaments, for expansion to previously unexploited or more easily accessible parts of the world). The second is connected to the series of events that led to the outbreak of the war in the summer of 1914, as an analysis of causes and results, dictated by the exhaustive pursuit for heroes and villains of that tragic month between the Sarajevo assassination and the formal declarations of war.

It is no surprise, thus, that the explosion of interest in the First World War on the occasion of the centenary year was marked – if not dominated – by new discussions on the good old issue of the origins of the war, among other themes. Both the publishing industry and the academic world were eager to offer new approaches, even more since there were evident signs that the prewar period of the early twentieth century seemed to be significantly closer to the present-day situation than one could have initially imagined. From the rich number of recent publications on this issue (more will follow, in all probability, until the end of 2018), we could indicatively highlight Margaret MacMillan's comprehensive and highly-acclaimed *The War that Ended Peace*,

as well as a number of contributions whose writers try to launch or to repropose alternative narratives regarding the causes and responsibilities for the war (such as Sean McMeekin's *The Russian Origins of the First World War* and the historical essay *La Scintilla. Da Tripoli a Sarajevo: Come l'Italia provocò la prima guerra mondiale*, written by Franco Cardini and Sergio Valzana). The book, however, that has mostly caught the attention of public and academic debate is no other than *The Sleepwalkers* by Christopher Clark, professor of modern history at the University of Cambridge, first published in hardback in 2012.<sup>3</sup> The author declares from the very beginning of his work (xxix) that he is going to search not "why" (so, not the deep causes mentioned before) but "how" the world arrived at armed conflict in 1914 – that is, the main actions that led to the war and the persons behind them. This clear methodological statement predefines very well the content of the book – and also what one could call its omissions. Turning back the clock to the very beginning of the twentieth century (and sometimes going even further back in time), the author examines one by one the states that played a crucial role in the 1914 events – their overall situation, their priorities, their alliances, their internal conflicts and, most of all, their leaders. There is an explicit purpose in Clark's writing – to try to show why the main players acted in the way they did and not in another in that fatal summer of 1914. In order to achieve this goal, the writer covers exhaustively all possible factors (in terms of politics, bureaucracy or even personality) that could have influenced these actors in their decision making in a particularly crucial moment. Though rich in small detail, the book is not lacking in offering useful hints regarding the broader realities of the period, that bring us back to the deep roots that the writer doesn't intend to analyse – but it's impossible to leave them aside completely.

The book focuses on the stars of traditional historiography (politicians, diplomats, generals), generously offering what one would call “microhistory of politics”, that is, particular moments and aspects of political action, often unused or neglected by previous research, which help compile the vast mosaic of a whole era, which appears so complex and puzzling even when regarded from the safe distance of a whole century. There was a danger lurking behind such a historiographical strategy – to create a boring book, that nobody, except for the keenest specialists of the period, would have found interesting enough to read. The author tackled this risk perfectly through the charisma of his compelling narration, which is universally acknowledged as the book’s main strength. Keeping up the pace with the best tradition of English-speaking historiography, the text is flowing, understandable also to the nonspecialist reader, with an injection of good and pointed humour at certain moments. At the same time, though, the narration is dense and demanding – the concerned reader has to stop more times on each single page in order to take note of persons or facts and connect them to what was previously written or keep them in mind for the next steps that follow. One could say that the narration follows, in a magisterial way, the pattern of some beloved old-fashioned novels – building step-by-step the portraits of the heroes (in our case, countries and their leaders), up to the moment when the whole thing unravels and the persons act and take crucial decisions in the way that the reader would expect them to do. Even if, as Clark explicitly puts it, the history of the course towards the war is not like an Agatha Christie mystery, where everybody in the end comes to know the name of the culprit (561), the feeling the reader has on the last page is not very different from the one created by a good fiction book.

Literary merits aside, the book is based on very thorough documentation of all kinds, including a rich bibliography (sadly not listed at the end of the volume), the consultation of which was made possible, as the writer admits, through both personal work and the precious help of a supporting team who helped expand the research to more countries and languages. Coverage of the widest possible range of available sources is nowadays thought to be a prerequisite for a really comprehensive history of First World War issues, as we still know much more about the Western Front and the countries that fought on it (and their respective viewpoints and realities) than about the way other parts of Europe and the world participated or were affected by the war.

The book has been a big commercial success (300,000 copies had been sold worldwide by March 2014), with a really impressive reception in Germany.<sup>4</sup> The overall assessment of the book was enthusiastically positive, the public wisdom conferring to it the value of a milestone in First World War studies, mainly because of its divergence from the “established” narrative of German responsibility, which was very much consolidated through Fritz Fischer’s fundamental *Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/1918* and his following works in the 1960s. On the other hand, there has been criticism that the book is pro-German and biased against Serbia and Russia regarding their role in the build-up to the war.<sup>5</sup> In our view, Clark’s book is a very thrilling text, as well as an essential contribution to the study of the origins of the war, but it is, of course, just one of the numerous studies (surely not the first one) that have disputed the dominant Germanocentric narrative about the responsibility for the war. If one stands only on the main facts and the sequence of events and actions as presented by Clark, it is clear that the

author does not spare either focus or criticism on any of the countries directly connected with the July 1914 escalation. He clearly mentions all factors that affected the prewar decisions and developments, not only in the Entente countries, but also in those of the Central alliance. There are, it is true, some emotional expressions in certain parts of the text and a number of rather uninspired comparisons with later twentieth century or present-day events, which sometimes do not portray either the Serbs or the Russians in a positive light; some of them could even be considered as misleading, as in the case of the attempted comparison between Russian pan-Slavism and the German notion of Lebensraum (279–280). Despite the above, it is obvious that the overall value of the work far outweighs these objections and that the whole analysis offers a stable basis and argumentation for the final conclusions of the author, who talks about the decision(s) to opt for the war in terms of tragedy, rather than crime, with shared responsibility among the main actors.

We conclude by adding a few words regarding the Greek edition of the book, which was published in late 2014. This publication is an important input to the rather scarce bibliography available in Greek regarding the Great War. The Greek edition follows closely the original one, even in the pagination, with very few additions in the form of translator's notes. One may observe the absence (which is to be mentioned regarding the English original, too) of a chronological table at the end of the book, which would be particularly helpful considering the great bulk of facts and events provided in the text. The translation, carried out by the experienced Kostas Kouremenos, has succeeded in its most important task: to transmit to the Greek reader the rhythm and flow of the language that makes the original book so readable. At a more technical level, the over-

all quality of the Greek text is very good, considering the length of the book and the narrative power of the demanding original. There are, of course, some questionable choices in specific words<sup>6</sup> or terminology; just to mention one example, in the translator's choice of "Μπουρ" (which is maybe closer to the original pronunciation, but rather rare in Greek) instead of "Μπόερ(ς)", which is commonly used by Greek historians when referring to the Boer War of 1899–1902. There are a few more cases that could be mentioned, but an exhaustive analysis of the Greek text would go beyond the purpose of this review. In general, we would definitely like to praise the translation of such an important book and the overall very good job done by its editorial team, in the hope that this could give an incentive for the launching of more publications regarding the First World War in Greece.

## NOTES

- 1 For a recent solid account of the events that led to the war, with special attention on the main historiographical approaches explaining them, see Jean-Jacques Becker and Gerd Krumeich, "1914: déclenchement," in *Cambridge History. La Première guerre mondiale*. Vol. 1. *Combats*, ed. Jay Winter (Paris: Fayard, 2013), 53–77 (and 754–760, for a very useful bibliographical essay by the same authors).
- 2 See Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *La Grande Guerre des Français, 1914–1918* (Paris: Perrin, 1994), 25; also François Cochet, *La Grande Guerre: Fin d'un monde, début d'un siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 2014), 12.
- 3 Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane 2012).
- 4 "Still in the Grip of the Great War," *The Economist*, 29 March 2014, accessed 21 July 2015, [www.economist.com/news/books-](http://www.economist.com/news/books-)

and-arts/21599798-first-world-war-was-defining-event-20th-century-thousands-books-have.

- 5 See, for example, the review of the book by Miloš Vojinović in *Balkanica* 44 (2013): 422–432, where a bibliography is provided. See also Boris Begović, “In Search of Lost Time: A View of Contemporary Historiography on the Origins of the First World War,” *Balkanica* 45 (2014): 463–466.
- 6 See Nikos Bakounakis, “Υπνοβάτες,” *To Vima*, 8 Feb. 2015, accessed 21 Jul. 2015, [www.tovima.gr/opinions/article/?aid=674939](http://www.tovima.gr/opinions/article/?aid=674939).

**Alexis Rappas**

***Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict***

**London: IB Tauris, 2014. 320 pp.**

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The 1931 Cypriot uprising against British colonial rule is the pivot and point of departure in Alexis Rappas' well-researched and comprehensive account of *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*. He unfolds a broad-ranging account of the colonial state, the local community and the relations between them in the 1930s. On 21 October 1931, “summoned by church bells”, a procession of Cypriot political leaders, students and priests set fire to the colonial governor’s residence. Their aim was to break away from British colonial rule and link up with Greece (the so-called “enosis”). This desire had gained ground especially from 1925, in reaction to the unpopular British decision to make Cyprus a crown colony and thereby dash hopes for enosis. Protests against British rule intensified in those October days as communists strategically allied themselves with Orthodox prelates. Various groups raided government offices and police stations, ripped up the union flag and threw stones at British troops, in urban and rural Cyprus, throughout the entire island. The colonial authorities responded swiftly and restored order by the beginning of November. Nonetheless, the events sent shock waves throughout Cyprus and the British Mediterranean.

As a result of the October 1931 uprising, the colonial authorities launched a number of suppressive measures that directly affected the