

Book Reviews

Barker El., *British Policy in South East Europe in the Second World War*, MacMillan, London 1976, pp. VIII + 320.

My attention was drawn on this book as one of the best on the subject. Considering that I am living in this area and that during World War II, I was sufficiently old to judge by myself developments in 1939-45 when they were happening, my interest and perhaps any knowledge have not to be underestimated. The book deals with one of the problems created by the inability of the United Kingdom to have sufficient strength in order to act as it ought to and to influence its two partners, I mean the United States and the Soviet Union in the right direction. The United Kingdom had the appropriate knowledge of South Eastern Europe, of its problems, of its leaders, of its possibilities and of its dangers. The United Kingdom had further the advantage that in all these countries the esteem for its institutions, for its traditions and for its leaders was substantial even if these countries were led to fight against the United Kingdom in World War II, very often, following a declaration of war of the United Kingdom which it did in order to comply with the wishes of the Soviet Union. British strength, resources and forces were absorbed in the effort 1940-1 to survive practically alone against the Axis Powers and that meant that even after the entry in the war of the Soviet Union (June 1941) and of the United States (December 1941), the United Kingdom was not free to act in South Eastern Europe in the best way. The United States did not know much and did not care in the first five years of the forties about South Eastern Europe. They were reluctant to act there and so excluded the activities the British were right to plan but too weak to carry out. On the other hand the Soviet Union had planned to secure as much as possible of both South Eastern and Central Europe as they did with the exception of Greece and of Austria. It is easy to understand this unlucky combination in reading Mrs El. Barker's book. The author tries to prove: first that the United Kingdom abandoned its positions in many countries of Central and South Eastern Europe in order to hold Greece, without mentioning of course it abandoned Greece in 1947 when that country was kept outside the iron curtain only thanks to the United States; second, that British policy in South Eastern Europe increased those opposing the German army without calculating the sacrifices of the countries involved and particularly of those groups which were the most attached to the United Kingdom; third, that even without British promises given, whilst those concerned knew they will be unable to comply the extension of the Soviet Union in South Eastern Europe, would have been unavoidable after Germany's defeat; fourth, that British sacrifices in this area in both human lives and wealth were not unimportant; fifth, that the leaders of the United Kingdom did not want to leave their two great allies in ignorance of any move and of any initiative on both British and South Eastern sides in order to accelerate the end of World war II. American short sightedness and Soviet long term plans caused the abandonment of Angloamerican landings in Greece and in Yugoslavia, the interruption of negotiations which would have led to substantial results for the world, last but not least the expansions of Soviet influence and strength to the Centre of Germany and of Austria. The British foresaw all this, planned accordingly but were unable to act in the appropriate way, as they were too weak to proceed.

It seems that the British considered themselves as spectators in an old Greek tragedy leading to a catastrophe both foreseen and unavoidable since they were not strong enough and so, as their big Allies, each for different reasons, refused to act in the right directions.

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Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Medieval Western Civilization and the Byzantine and Islamic Worlds*, Lexington, Massachusetts and Toronto, D. C. Heath and Company, 1979, pp. xiii & 513, 21 Maps + 3 Charts, Hardcover, Illustrated.

Whenever the term "medieval history" or "medieval civilization" is used, it invariably but erroneously is used to describe medieval *Western* civilization. Professor Deno Geanakoplos, Professor of Byzantine and Renaissance History and Religious Studies at Yale University, has sought to correct this imbalance in a survey text that takes into account Byzantine and Islamic history in order "to provide a complete, enriched, and balanced view of medieval Western civilization from 300 to 1500 by presenting it in the broader context of the *entire* medieval world—the Byzantine and Islamic East, as well as the Latin West" (p.v.). Though it is intended principally as a college textbook in medieval history and civilization, it can easily be used by the interested general reader. The approach is comparative and will help the modern reader to understand the medieval background of the West, the Slavic East, and the Islamic East. The experienced teacher will find familiar material here in a new framework but also new material on social topics and institutions, such as demography, epidemics, economic depression, the treatment of women, Jews, heretics, and homosexuals. Life styles and theological questions in Constantinople, Cordova, Rome, and Paris are presented interestingly, and the intellectual and artistic achievements of the Latin, Byzantine, and Muslim worlds in literature, philosophy, science, painting, architecture, and music are compared and evaluated succinctly but authoritatively. The formative impact of late Byzantine humanism and painting on Early Renaissance culture is demonstrated and a much fuller treatment of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the West is provided, along with material on the Slavs, the Turks and others who came late on the European scene.

Dr. Geanakoplos, in a book that is richly illustrated, beautifully produced, and written with crystalline clarity, superbly describes the interaction that took place among the three medieval societies—an interaction that was careful to preserve the Koranic core of Islam, the Greek Orthodox Christianity and classical Greek learning of Byzantium, and the Latin Catholicism strongly tempered by German influences of the West. All three absorbed Greek learning, particularly Aristotelian logic and philosophy. In the process of cultural interaction, the principles of both "receptivity" and "repulsion" were to come into play. Each was to preserve its own distinct characteristics, despite a long series of encounters that resulted in certain mutual borrowings. Yet from all this the West was ultimately to benefit the most and create a new and unique civilization with enormous consequences for the development of the modern world.

Over one thousand years of history are reviewed in this book. The three main parts cover the Early Middle Ages, The High Middle Ages, and the Later Middle Ages (The Early Renaissance). The fourteen chapters (which all contain an up-to-date bibliography) range over the legacy of the ancient world; the barbarian Germans; the Latin West before and after Charlemagne; Western feudalism, manorialism, and the papacy; Eastern Christendom