



Paradise Lost: Smyrna, 1922

Giles Milton

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On Saturday, September 9, 1922, the victorious Turkish cavalry rode into Smyrna, the richest and most cosmopolitan city in the Ottoman Empire. The city's vast wealth created centuries earlier by powerful Levantine dynasties, its factories teemed with Greeks, Armenians, Turks, and Jews. Together, they had created a majority Christian city that was unique in the Islamic world. But to the Turkish nationalists, Smyrna was a city of infidels. In the aftermath of the First World War and with the support of the Great Powers, Greece had invaded Turkey with the aim of restoring a Christian empire in Asia. But by the summer of 1922, the Greeks had been vanquished by Atatürk's armies after three years of warfare. As Greek troops retreated, the non-Muslim civilians of Smyrna assumed that American and European warships would intervene if and when the Turkish cavalry decided to enter the city. But this was not to be.

On September 13, 1922, Turkish troops descended on Smyrna. They rampaged first through the Armenian quarter, and then throughout the rest of the city. They looted homes, raped women, and murdered untold thousands. Turkish soldiers were seen dousing buildings with petroleum. Soon, all but the Turkish quarter of the city was in flames and hundreds of thousands of refugees crowded the waterfront, desperate to escape. The city burned for four days; by the time the embers cooled, more than 100,000 people had been killed and millions left homeless.

Based on eyewitness accounts and the memories of survivors, many interviewed for the first time, *Paradise Lost* offers a vivid narrative account of one of the most vicious military catastrophes of the modern age.

Paradise Lost: Smyrna, 1922 Details

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Author : Giles Milton

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From Reader Review *Paradise Lost: Smyrna, 1922* for online ebook

Stan Murai says

Smyrna was one of the Ottoman empire's great commercial center, a rich and cosmopolitan city, whose vast wealth had largely been created by the Levantine families (Latin Christians, mostly of Italian and French origin) who ran businesses and factories, where Greeks, Armenians, Turks, and Jews worked together. It was a unique Christian majority city, but part of the Islamic World. Even during the first world war, it was a place where the various ethnic, religious communities lived in tolerance and peace, in large part due to the local governor Rahmi Bey, who actually favored the allied cause.

In the aftermath of the First World War and with the support of the Great Powers, Greece had invaded Turkey with the aim of restoring a Christian Byzantine empire in Asia, a dream of the Greek prime minister Eleftherios Venizelos. But by the summer of 1922, the Greeks had been vanquished by Atatürk's armies after three years of warfare. As Greek troops retreated, the non-Muslim civilians of Smyrna assumed that American and European warships would intervene if and when the Turkish cavalry decided to enter the city. They were not even unduly fearful when Turkish soldiers first recaptured Smyrna in 1922 during what the Turks call the War of Independence. They hoped Atatürk would view this still prosperous city as an asset to the new republic

On September 9, 1922, Turkish troops descended on Smyrna. Four days later Smyrna was in flames. While Turkish irregulars moved among them, raping and killing, Atatürk sat watching from a friend's villa in the hills. They rampaged first through the Armenian quarter, and then throughout the rest of the city. They looted homes, raped women, and murdered untold thousands. Turkish soldiers were seen dousing buildings with petroleum. Soon, all but the Turkish quarter of the city was in flames and hundreds of thousands of refugees crowded the waterfront, desperate to escape. The allied powers had many ships in the harbor, but they chose to do nothing while the city burned for four days; by the time the embers cooled, more than 100,000 people had been killed and millions left homeless.

Paradise Lost: Smyrna 1922 ends with the exodus of two million Greeks from Turkey and the expulsion of 400,000 Turks from Greece – an exchange of population that was enshrined in law in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.

Based on eyewitness accounts and the memories of survivors, many interviewed for the first time, this book offers a vivid narrative account of one of the most vicious military catastrophes of the modern age.

Jane says

3.5/5. Devastating account of one of the worst tragedies of the 20th century--the complete destruction of Smyrna in the last three weeks of September, 1922, [Izmir in today's Turkey]. It was burnt to the ground. Most of its 19th and 20th century history was reported by and has come down to us from the Levantines, the wealthy upper class of Europeans. Smyrna was a completely religiously tolerant city in the Ottoman Empire, with a Christian majority, although the mayor was a Muslim, Rahmi Bey. During the Great War and until he was replaced he bent over backward trying to protect ALL his citizens from the horrors.

The British Lloyd George was unabashedly pro-Greek and supported Eleftherios Venizelos in his "Megali

["Great"] Idea" of an expanded Greece--Greece AND the part of Asia Minor, including Smyrna. Fighting between Greeks and Turks ended in a Turkish victory under Mustafa Kemal [not yet termed Atatürk] and the flight of the Greek army back to their country. Other cities and villages were devastated by both armies; both were villains here. When the Turkish army entered Smyrna, the population for the most part fled in the face of looting, killing, rape, then finally arson that destroyed the non-Turkish quarters. In the face of destruction, the Allies were apathetic. The "Paradise" of the title was the American section of the city. Today Izmir is a shadow of its former self.

This book was a revelation; I hadn't known much about this period in history. The author appeared to be even-handed; there was enough blame to go around. A cautionary tale: it showed what can happen when a third party [who has no business influencing events] insinuates itself into the affairs of another country and how things can go terribly wrong--does that sound familiar, considering today's events in the Middle East? Two heroic men revealed themselves: Rahmi Bey, who tried to protect the Christians in his city and Asa Jennings, the American Methodist minister who mostly through bluff was instrumental in rescuing a large number of refugees, who had lost everything and was later decorated by the Greek government. I felt the most interesting parts were the first 50 pp. or so where everything was set up, then the last part detailing what happened day by day in Smyrna in that crucial September, along with the aftermath. Newspaper reports were fascinating. I enjoyed the personal or third-person accounts of some folks lucky and fast-thinking enough to escape--the Armenian Dr. Hatcherian; the Armenian Rose Berberian and her family; and even Aristotle Onassis, who I never realized was a Smyrniot. I also recommend a historical novel set in this period, *The Ghosts of Smyrna* by Loren Edizel.

Recommended.

A. Sacit says

This book chronicles the final years of the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, great Levantine city of Smyrna (now Izmir) during the final few years of the Ottoman Empire, when it all ended in an enormous tragedy with the collapse of the Empire after WW1 and the emergence of the Turkish Republic from its ashes.

Milton writes in fascinating detail of the fairy-tale-like lives of the Smyrna Levantines, mainly the people of British, French, and Dutch origin, the fabulous wealth that they accumulated as a result of the trading advantages afforded to them by the Ottoman Empire (Capitulations), peace and harmony between the Christian (Greeks, Armenians), Jewish, and Moslem populations (mainly Turks), and skillful maneuvering and balancing acts of the Ottoman Governor Rahmi Bey to keep peace and harmony between different ethnic groups during the difficult days of WW1.

With the Ottoman Empire on the losing side at the end of WW1, a rabidly nationalistic Greek army was unleashed by Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister at the time, on Smyrna and Western Anatolia, which caused enormous destruction and atrocities, and irreparably damaged the tolerance and good-will which the Empire fostered for her Christian minorities since its early days. For Kemal Atatürk and the Turkish nation, it was a matter of survival, life or death, as the WW1 victors aimed to entirely dismantle the Empire and divide the territory among them, and on several occasions the British and Greek leaderships expressed their desire to drive the Turks back into the depths of the Central Asia where they originated from a thousand years ago. Turks under the leadership of Atatürk were victorious and prevailed, and Turkey emerged as a secular republic, an entirely different polity with no more Sultan or Caliphate.

As the saying goes, "They that sow the wind, shall reap the whirlwind". Regrettable as the circumstances may be, it was clear that the victorious Turkish army would not be sympathetic to the retreating Greek army and the minorities who cheered and supported the invaders. As for who started the great Smyrna fires, this is largely controversial. The book loses its somewhat balanced tact that it has at the beginning, and the final chapters unfortunately become farcical, as they are composed of emotional and unsubstantiated testimonials of only the Christian minorities and foreign officials who were fleeing the city and whose loyalty and sympathies were clearly with the West. There are testimonials and evidence presented in some other sources that the fires were started by Greeks who were dressed in Turkish military garb. This was in character with the defeated Greek army as they burned and destroyed everything in their path while they retreated from Asia Minor, with total disregard for the fate of the Christian minority populations (Greeks, Armenians) whom they were leaving behind. Why would it be any different for Smyrna as the Greek army were fleeing and could see no future for Greeks in the City? Why would the Turkish army burn down the property and possessions in a city which they just conquered from enemy? These questions would be difficult to answer if the allegations about the great fire in the book were true.

Gerald Sinstadt says

In the battle for supremacy in Asia Minor between Greece and Turkey, the city of Smyrna (now Izmir) suffered horrendous collateral damage. Until the outbreak of the first World War, Smyrna was a predominantly happy multinational community. Largely thanks to benevolent Levantine employers, the inhabitants prospered; thanks to that prosperity, the Levantine families led an existence reminiscent of the palmy days of the Raj. On the outbreak of war, Britain and her allies backed Greece while Turkey chose the German side. What ensued was a campaign of ethnic cleansing from which no nation emerged with credit, despite the heroic endeavours of several unsung individuals.

This seems to have been a small corner of British history that had not been chronicled until Giles Morton's detailed account in *Paradise Lost*. Drawing on official papers, newspaper reports, contemporary letters and diaries, and personal interviews, Milton paints a vivid picture of the descent from serene coexistence into the inferno. There are times when the book in somewhat artless style piles atrocity upon atrocity, but it is this very repetition which hammers home the true extent of the tragedy.

Kemal Ataturk's bloodthirsty role as the founder of modern Turkey is a morality tale in itself. Lloyd George's seat-of-the-pants direction of Britain's involvement was far from this nation's finest hour.

Those who deserve credit, do so for personal courage. They include Rahmit Bey, the Ottoman Governor of Smyrna; George Horton, the American consul whose diaries illuminate the narrative; and above all two other 'ordinary' Americans - Asa Jennings, a YMCA employee, and Esther Lovejoy - who masterminded an astonishing evacuation that saved the lives of literally thousands of innocent refugees.

Paradise Lost is a story that needed to be told. We must be grateful that it has been told so well.

PS Although this site says there is no ebook version, I read it on Kindle.

Georgia Vergos thompson says

"one of the keenest impressions which I brought away with me from Smyrna was a feeling of shame that I belonged to the human race."

This is a quote from the book by George Horton, the American consul in Smyrna, and it pretty much sums up how I felt as I read the book. The cruel history is very upsetting and many times I had to put the book down because I just couldn't handle anymore. The cold blooded murder of innocent civilians and the apathy from the self described "civilized" nations. These countries who had a hand in starting the mess and then turned their heads while innocent children, women and men were all tortured and murdered. Thankfully there were heroes who refused their nation's demands to remain neutral and helped the people. These heroes were just normal people, but they left me with hope for the human race. I'm glad that I learned this piece of history. It was interesting, impartial and well written.

Alex K. says

What an incredible read. The politics, the social dynamics, the personalities and the precipitating events of the destruction of Smyrna are already staggering to contemplate, but in Milton's hands the events become vivid and almost tangible to the reader. Being of Greek descent, learning this history was of particular significance for me, but anyone who wants a better understanding of the history of 20th century international relations as influenced by the outcomes of World War I, the development of modern Turkey, the maneuvering of great powers specifically around Greece, and the tension between US and European foreign policy objectives would benefit from reading this intense, absorbing book.

Brigitte says

I wanted to give this 2.5 stars but, since that wasn't an option, I had to scale back my rating. The subject matter is endlessly fascinating, but, sadly, this book doesn't do it justice. It is way too long. Three-quarters of it bows and scrapes to British Levantine families, which gets downright annoying. Despite the book's obsequiousness (or because of it), the Levantines come across as complete ponces and dandies - and maybe they were. As a reader, I was not in the least inclined to identify with them. There was next to nothing about more ordinary folk, whether Greek, Armenian, Jewish or Turkish, except for plenty of graphic stuff towards the end, which is when the earlier preoccupation with the Levantines simply peters out - there's no pay off. That's a major structural flaw - the main characters have very little to do with the climax of the story, the events of 1922. There would have been other ways to write from outside the loaded points of view of Greeks or Turks, and there were plenty of real heroes - such as Asa Jennings - who would have made much more interesting protagonists.

The writing is puffy, grandiose and repetitive. Where was the editor's scimitar? Then, on the last page, to add an unnecessary tug at the heartstrings, the author claims that Nea Smyrni, the area of Athens where many Greek refugees from Smyrna resettled, is one of the city's 'poorest quarters'. That is simply not true - it may not be Kolonaki but it is reasonably well to do. I got the feeling this book was written in a hurry, and from the list of sources it seems plenty has been re-purposed from other books. Perhaps it should have focused completely on the Levantines, with a just a passing mention of what happened in 1922 - it would have been a more cohesive and honest book. As it stands, It lacks gravitas, authenticity, and, bizarrely, emotional impact. And that makes me very sad.

Themistocles says

This book starts off beautifully. For the first 50 or so pages the reader finds out about a fantastic, idyllic city and then get a foreboding of doom creeping in, setting the pace for a real page-turner.

However, it is marred by several serious flaws and ultimately falls flat on its face.

To begin with, for some reason Milton decides to give extreme focus to the Leventine families of Smyrna. Sure, the lives of the rich is something lots of people are interested in, but the lives of the rich do not constitute the life of a city. The reader does not even get a glimpse of that life, with the more seedy aspects of life, darker neighborhoods and *rebetika* taverns. As such the description of the city is severely wanting. Even when the destruction begins, and even though (as he admits) the Leventines didn't suffer anything but the loss of their property, he insists on devoting an inordinate amount of space to their killed cats or abandoned villas.

In terms of interviews, too, the effort is rather pathetic: a couple of half-baked interviews with Greek survivors, perhaps one or two of Armenians, all amounting to maybe a few pages of material. This is really disappointing since not only there are several survivors still around, but also since there are scores of biographies and first-person accounts of Smyrna and its destruction that could have served the book much better. And he ignores the Jewish community altogether.

In terms of writing, while Milton starts in a great way he soon loses track of structure and discipline; as a result you may read, on one page, about the march of the Greek army in the depths of Anatolia, and a couple of pages later, bam! the Turks are entering Smyrna. He doesn't make an effort to supply the reader with the grander picture and it's rather obvious he couldn't care less about the geopolitics of the story. Heck, he doesn't even mention the Crimean war and the ramifications this had for the relations of the Russians with the Turkish nationalists.

The catastrophe itself is described with no empathy and in a relatively small (quite small) section of the book. No matter that there are scores of accounts from victims and observers, he gets it over with rather quickly. No matter that this ranks among the greater catastrophes and tragedies of history, it's almost as he's afraid to tread along the rivers of blood. And then it's suddenly over, and the "Aftermath" section of the book is really a joke, probably written on the bus on the way to submit the book to the publisher.

Milton also appears to be rather ignorant about the dynamics and the peculiarities of the peoples involved. He rather haughtily believes, for instance, that seasoned navy captains would panic in the site of the first random foreign civilian who threatens them with court martial and gets on with the story. He even gets translations completely wrong, proving he doesn't have the slightest grip on the people he's describing.

Finally, the photos accompanying the book are probably the 'mildest' I have ever seen, reflecting the overall attitude of Milton's.

A shame...

Diane says

Beautiful, tragic history of Smyrna (now Izmir), the only majority Christian city in the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th century. The author begins by giving the lead-up to World War I, focusing on the wealthy Levantine families of Smyrna and their luxurious Edwardian lifestyles. He then covers the war, explaining that many of the city's residents supported the allies over the Central Powers (on whose side the Ottoman Empire fought). Next, the book covers the aftermath of the war, particularly Greece's attempt (egged on by Britain) to take over Turkey and make it part of a new Greek empire. The final part of the book gives a day-by-day account of Smyrna's destruction at the hands of the Turkish army.

The book is well-written and features excellent story-telling. The author appears to have interviewed many of the children of the protagonists, and this adds richness to the story. I wish he had written it earlier, when people who had memories of this tragic incident would have still been alive. He also relies on diaries written at the time.

I particularly liked his account of the humanitarian relief efforts undertaken by a few American missionaries. It is inspiring to see how two people could save hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Elaine says

I chose to read this book to augment my research for the novel I'm writing on the Chios Massacre. In addition to my particular interest, I found this book an excellent explanation and description of one of the major upheavals of the 20th century. A beautiful, wealthy, and cosmopolitan city in Turkey was destroyed, at least 260,000 people were slaughtered, and over 300,000 were refugees that finally escaped from the huge conflagration set by the Turks. Mr. Milton successfully wove together the memoirs and oral remembrances of the people who lived through it to highlight the heroes, the villains, and the victims of this cruel moment in history. Even with the dark subject matter, I came away with assurance of man's hope in the face of the most brutal conditions and the moral courage of the few who acted to save the 300,000 refugees stranded on the quay in Smyrna in September, 1922, from a savage end.

Ron Willoughby says

This story was overwhelming at times. Saddened by tragic events and the apathy and complacency of so many who could have made a difference. No country involved or aware came out looking like the 'good guys'. Not England, America, France, Italy, Greece, Turkey, no one. There were moments when it felt like I was reading the prequel to Romeo Dallaire's 'Shake Hands with the Devil'. As if Rwanda was just 'a whole lot of history repeating itself'.

Two heroes emerge. And thanks to Giles Milton's research and excellent narrative, we get to learn about Esther Lovejoy (I think I have that right) and Asa Jennings. Two normal people who go to extraordinary lengths to save thousands.

This is the first of Milton's work that I have read. He's sold me. I'm lining up a couple more of his to read. Well done sir.

Stacie says

It was a good book, gave me a lot of detailed history about a city and event I hadn't known about before. And I appreciated the unbiased language Milton carried when it came to Greek and Turkish armies. But I'll have to agree with other reviewers that I didn't much care for reading about the rich British Levantine classes and a lot of their stories compromised the book.

Karl says

The London-based journalist, Giles Milton provides an insightful look into the tragic story of post WWI Smyrna (present-day Izmir, Turkey) in his latest work *Paradise Lost*. The destruction of the rich, diverse city of Smyrna is a tragic tale of expansionist political goals, mass population exchange, the formulation of modern Turkey, and what became one of largest humanitarian efforts in world history. Located on the Aegean Sea, the ancient cosmopolitan city was overtaken and burned down in 1922 following a three year war between Greece and Turkey. Written with rich clarity, the story of this epic catastrophe is a fascinating yet tragic tale. As a student of world history and Giles Milton, many lessons were learned from the book.

Π?νος Τουρλ?ς says

Για τη Σμ?ρνη και τη Μικρασιατικ? Καταστροφ? του 1922 ?χουν χυθε? τ?νοι μελ?νης, ?χουν φωτιστε? σχεδ?ν ?λες οι πτυχ?ς, οι αιμ?σσουμενες πληγ?ς ρ?φτηκαν βιαστικ? με τη Συνθ?κη της Λωζ?νης το 1923 και την επακ?λουθη ανταλλαγ? πληθυσμ?ν, οπ?τε ?,τι και να γρ?ψω εισαγωγικ? για το βιβλ?ο του Τζ?ιλς Μ?λτον θα ε?ναι σα να κομ?ζω ?χι μ?νο μ?α γλα?κα ες Αθ?νας αλλ? και το σ?ι της.

Ο «Χαμ?νος παρ?δειςος» ε?ναι μια τεκμηριωμ?νη ιστορικ? μελ?τη γ?ρω απ? την καταστροφ? της Σμ?ρνης και τη λ?ξη της Μεγ?λης Ιδ?ας, με μια διαφορ? μ?νο: ο συγγραφ?ας ε?ναι Βρεταν?ς και επομ?νως ρ?χνει το β?ρος του στην καθημεριν?τητα πριν και στις συν?πειες μετ? στη ζω? των Λεβαντ?νων της Σμ?ρνης. «Η λεβαντ?νικη κοιν?τητα ?ταν μακρ?ν η πλουσι?τερη της π?λης. Ευρωπα?κ?ς καταγωγ?ς, αλλ? ?χοντας αφομοι?σει τους τρ?πους της Ανατολ?ς, τα μ?λη της ζο?σαν στην Τουρκ?α απ? τα χρ?νια της βασιλε?ας του Γεωργ?ου Γ? [1801-1820]» (σελ. 37). Ο συγγραφ?ας βασισμ?νος σε ημερολ?για, αυτ?πτες μ?ρτυρες, απογ?νους ανθρ?πων που ?ζησαν τα γεγον?τα κυριολεκτικ? στο πετσ? τους, ?γγραφα, διασταυρ?νει, μελετ?ει, υποστηρ?ζει, καταγρ?φει και παραδ?δει μια εμβριθ? μελ?τη για την εποχ? και την π?λη.

Παρ' ?λο που η ματι? του ε?ναι φιλοδυτικ? και δεν αναφ?ρεται σχεδ?ν καθ?λου στη ζω? της ελληνικ?ς κοιν?τητας, το ευρ?τερο ιστορικ? πλ?σιο και οι πρωτεργ?τες της Μεγ?λης Ιδ?ας και καταστροφ?ς (Βενιζ?λος, Χατζαν?στης, Κωνσταντ?νος Β?κ. ?.) περιγρ?φονται εξ?σου αντικειμενικ?. Σ?γουρα το ?νειρο της Σμ?ρνης ?ταν ελληνικ? και η λ?ξη του Πρ?του Μεγ?λου Πολ?μου βρ?κε την Ελλ?δα να διεκδικε? πατρ?δες αι?νων, επομ?νως ?ταν λογικ? ?νας ιστορικ?ς να μην μπορε? να παραλε?ψει αυτ? τα γεγον?τα. ?τσι, η καταγραφ? της λεβαντ?νικης ζω?ς ?ταν ?μεσα συνδεδεμ?νη με τα α?τια και τις αφορμ?ς των διπλωματικ?ν χειρισμ?ν της ελληνικ?ς πλευρ?ς. Και ως αναγν?στης και μελετητ?ς του συγκεκριμ?νου ζητ?ματος δε βρ?κα λ?θη, παραλε?ψεις ?

ανισομ?ρειες. Τα γεγον?τα εκτ?θενται ?πως ?γιναν, οι πρωταγωνιστ?ς του δρ?ματος καταγρ?φηκαν τεκμηριωμ?να, τα περιστατικ? ακολουθο?σαν το ?να το ?λλο με διασταυρωμ?νες λεπτομ?ρειες και η καταστροφ? της Σμ?ρνης ξεδιπλ?θηκε μπροστ? στα μ?τια μου μ?ρα τη μ?ρα. Το μ?νο σημει?ο που με εκνε?ρισε και ?κανε ολοφ?νερη την πλευρ? απ? την οπο?α κατ?γραφε ο συγγραφ?ας ?ταν η εκφ?νηση της δυστυχ?ας πως η οικογ?νεια Ου?τταλ αναγκ?στηκε να διωχτε? απ? μια ζω? τρι?ν αι?νων! Τι να πουν, κ?ριε Μ?λτον, και οι δ?λιοι ?λληνες που ζο?σαν εκε? απ? τουλ?χιστον τον 1ο αι?να π. Χ.;

Διαβ?ζοντας κανε?ς μια βιογραφ?α ε?ναι δ?σκολο να τη διαβ?σει διεξοδικ? και ολ?κληρη απ? την αρχ? ως το τ?λος, αν την επιλ?ξει ως αν?γνωσμα και ?χι ως μελ?τη για μια εργασ?α του. Εδ? ?μως ε?ναι τ?τοια η ρο? του λ?γου, η επιλογ? των χωρ?ων και των τεκμηρ?ων, η εναλλαγ? των σκην?ν που παρασ?ρθηκα και δεν μπ?ρεσα να αφ?σω ο?τε σελ?δα (εντ?ξει, αδιαφ?ρησα για την εκτεν?στατη περιγραφ? του τρ?που ζω?ς των λεβαντ?νων αστ?ν, τα κ?τερ? τους, τα αν?κτορ? τους κλπ.). Η συνθ?κη των Σεβρ?ν, η κατ?ληψη της Κωνσταντινο?πολης, η κακομαθημ?νη συμπεριφορ? των Ιταλ?ν που θ?λανε ντε και σ?νει τη Σμ?ρνη, κ?τι που αν?γκασε τους Συμμ?χους να τη δ?σουν ελαφρ? τη καρδι? στην Ελλ?δα, η απ?βαση του ελληνικο? στρατο?, η ?ττα του Βενιζ?λου και η αρχ? του τ?λους, η ανεδαφικ? σκ?ψη για κατ?ληψη της ?γκυρας, η πορε?α στην Αλμυρ? ?ρημο, ο Ατατο?ρκ, ?ριστος γν?στης των καταστ?σεων και ικαν?ς ηγ?της σε μια πατρ?δα και ιδεολογ?α που αργ?σβηνε, η κατ?ρρευση του μετ?που, οι σφαιρ?ς, η πυρπ?ληση της Σμ?ρνης κατ?πιν διαταγ?ν, το α?μα, η σφαιρ? («συνωστισμ?ς» κατ? ορισμ?νους ανιστ?ρητους θερμοκ?φαλους), εμπλουτισμ?να ?λα και με χαρακτηριστικ?ς φωτογραφ?ες, συναποτελο?ν ?να γλαφυρ? αν?γνωσμα, που θα λ?σει πολλ?ς απορ?ες για ?σους δε γνωρ?ζουν και θα θυμ?σει γεγον?τα και καταστ?σεις σε ?σους μελετο?ν αυτ? το κομμ?τι της σ?γχρονης Ιστορ?ας. Αν εξαιρ?σουμε τη μονομ?ρεια και τον ελλιπ? φωτισμ? για τους υπολοιπους κατο?κους της Σμ?ρνης, αν αγνο?σουμε πως ο συγγραφ?ας αναφ?ρεται στην τ?χη ανθρ?πων που ?χασαν περιουσι?ες εν? υπ?ρξαν ?λλοι που ?χασαν και την ιδεολογ?α τους και τα ?νειρ? τους για μια μη διακοπ? της ιστορικ?τητας της περιοχ?ς, ο «Χαμ?νος παρ?δεισος» ε?ναι ?να καλ? υλικ? για τη βιβλιογραφ?α της μικρασιατικ?ς καταστροφ?ς

George says

?λα ε?ναι ιστορ?ες. Ο παππο?ς αρνι?ταν να γυρ?σει στην Τουρκ?α με κ?ποια απ? τις εκδρομ?ς που γ?νονταν ?ως το χωρι? του, ο?τε ?θελε να ξαναδε? την παραλ?α της Σμ?ρνης ?που ?ρτι «ηρραβωνισθε?ς» ε?χε ανο?ξει μικρ? παντοπωλε?ο μια μ?ρα πριν απ? την επιστρ?τευση... Οι παιδικ?ς αναμν?σεις των προσωπικ?ν του διηγ?σεων για τον π?λεμο, ?ως την ?σχατη προ?θηση προς την ?γκυρα, και την καταστροφ?, και στις δ?ο ακτ?ς του Αιγα?ου, δεν μ' αφ?νουν ποτ? να διαβ?σω χωρ?ς κ?μπο οποιοδ?ποτε σχετικ? βιβλ?ο, ακ?μη κι αν ε?ναι η επ?τομη ιστορ?α της μικρασιατικ?ς εκστρατε?ας της Διε?θυνσης Ιστορ?ας Στρατο?... Κι αυτ? το βιβλ?ο δ?νει πιο σφιχτ? τον κ?μπο.

Ε?χα κι ?ναν λ?γο να το 'αντιπαθ?': φ?λος αρχα?ος ιστορικ?ς, Εβρα?ος της Αμερικ?ς, Φ?λιππος στο ?νομα (και με ...Αλ?ξανδρο τον μεγ?λο γιο), δεν το ?φηνε απ? τα χ?ρια του σε καλοκαιριν?ς μας διακοπ?ς -ε, ε?παμε docti, αλλ? μας περ?μεναν το Λυβικ? Π?λαγος και ?λλα πιο ευχ?ριστα πρ?γματα. Μ?λις ε?χε βγει το βιβλ?ο, και καταλαβα?νεις π?σο πετυχημ?να αφηγ?ται την παλι? ιστορ?α του ?ταν δεν στρ?φεις τα μ?τια στην τρ?χουσα ιστορ?α ?, αλλι?ς, at a beach full of art I'd still stare at ...

Δικα?ως ?χει επισημ?νει η ιστορικ? κριτικ? ?τι επιμ?νει υπερβολικ? στην ιστορ?α των Λεβαντ?νων

της Σμύρνης, δεν δίνει πόντα εστοχά το γενικ? ιστορικ? πλάσιο και την πορεία προς την καταστροφή?, ?πως δεν αξιοποιε? κ?ποιες ελληνικ?ς πηγ?ς (αν και ?χει ψ?ξει και βασ?ζεται σε πολλ?ς, ιδια?τερα των Λεβαντ?νων), φωτ?ζει μερικ?ς μ?νο πτυχ?ς και αιτ?ες των γεγον?των. ?νας ιστορικ?ς θα ε?χε πολλ? να προσθ?σει και, ιδ?ως, το ευρ?τερο εξηγητικ? πλάσιο της καταστροφ?ς. Πιθαν?ς, ?μως, το ξ?νο κοιν? που δεν γνωρ?ζει σχεδ?ν τ?ποτε για ?να τ?σο σημαδιακ? γεγον?ς, με ?να τ?τοιο βιβλ?ο να μ?θει (γρ. ?μαθε) αρκετ?, εν? το ελληνικ? κοιν? –που ?χει συνηθ?σει να θεωρε? το μικρασιατικ? μ?νο μ?σα απ? τη δικ? του οπτικ?– θα βρει στο βιβλ?ο αυτ? μια διαφορετικ? προσ?γγιση.

Το?των δοθ?ντων (?τι δεν πρ?κειται ακριβ?ς για ιστορικ? μελ?τη) και ανεξ?ρτητα απ? τα shortcomings, που λ?με και στις τυπικ?ς βιβλιοκρισ?ες, ε?ναι ?να καλογραμμ?νο βιβλ?ο, που επιλ?γει και αφηγ?ται, ?χι εντελ?ς παρατακτικ?, μικρ?ς προσωπικ?ς και μεγ?λες ιστορ?ες. Κι αν δεν εξηγε? επαρκ?ς, συγκινε? με το παραπ?νω –στο κ?τω κ?τω δεν παρουσι?ζεται ως βιβλ?ο που θα επιλογ?σει την ιστορικ? ?ρευνα και θα αποδ?σει ιστορικ? δικαι?συν?η. Κι αν ε?ναι αρκετ?ς φορ?ς επικριτικ?ς προς την ελληνικ? πλευρ?, η εσωτερικ? κριτικ? του προς τη στ?ση της Βρεταν?ας ε?ναι αναμφισβ?τητη (ε, κ?τι γν?ρισαν κι οι Βρετανο? απ? lost empire).

?λα (σχεδ?ν;) τα στοιχε?α της, κατ? τον συγγραφέα, «πρ?της μεγ?λης ανθρωπιστικ?ς καταστροφ?ς του 20ο? αι?να», ε?ναι εδ?. Γλαφυρ? δοσμ?να: η πολυεθνικ? Σμύρνη με το κυρ?αρχο ελληνικ? στοιχε?ο, η πολ?χρωμη και φανταχτερ? ζω? της, η σχετικ? ε?κολη επιβ?ωσ? της μ?σα στον Α? Παγκ?σμιο Π?λεμος, το κ?ρδος του Βενιζ?λου (ο Παρ?δεισος) – ο ελληνικ?ς στρατ?ς στη Σμύρνη, το α?μα στην προκυμ?α και η αναταραχ? στην ενδοχ?ρα, η επισφαλ?ς ελληνικ? εκστρατε?α και η απ?λπιδα δι?βαση της ερ?μου (τα ερπετ? στον Παρ?δεισο) – και το μεγάλ?τερο μ?ρος του βιβλ?ου, η μ?ρα με τη μ?ρα αφ?γηση της καταστροφ?ς της Σμύρνης, απ? την Τετ?ρτη 6 Σεπτεμβρ?ου ?ως το Σ?ββατο 30 Σεπτεμβρ?ου (ο χαμ?νος Παρ?δεισος). Αυτ?ς τις τελευτα?ες 150 σελ?δες, μυθιστορηματικ?ς και ωμ?ς, τις δι?βασα σφιγμ?νος και απνευστ? –δεν αντ?χεται η σ?ψη και η αποφορ?, τ?σων ανθρ?πων, μιας π?λης, εν?ς πολιτισμο? (?σο κι αν, ιστορικ?, κατανοε? τις αιτ?ες των γεγον?των). Δεν αντ?χεται η συμπυκνωμ?νη συστηματικ? θηριωδ?α και η απ?θεια –?σο κι αν ο Μ?λτον προσπαθε? παρ?λληλα να αναδε?ξει ηρωκ?ς πρ?ξεις βο?θειας των ξ?νων.

Π?ρα απ? το συγκεκριμ?νο. ?πως σε μια εποχ? που το Νο?μερο του Βεν?ζη δεν συνιστ?ται υπερπροστατευτικ? ως πολ? splatter για το νεανικ? κοιν? (?που «ο καλ?τερος» ?χει σκοτ?σει μερικ?ς εκατοντ?δες στο Call of duty και στο Grand Theft Auto), που οι ιστορικ?ς διηγ?σεις γεγον?των λ?γων δεκαετι?ν, πολλ? μ?λλον εν?ς αι?να, οδηγ?ν σε βαθι? χασμουρητ?, που τα σχολικ? εγχειρ?δια ιστορ?ας επιμ?νουν να αποστηθ?ζουμε τον αριθμ? δωματ?ων των προσφυγικ?ν σπιτι?ν της Επιτροπ?ς Αποκαταστ?σεως, αυτ? που δ?ναι ακ?μη να μας συναρπ?ζουν ε?ναι βιβλ?α που ?χουν ισχυρ? αφηγηματικ? κορμ? (και ?χι «ευκολομνημ?νευτα» bullets). Τ?τοιο ε?ναι και ο Χαμ?νος Παρ?δεισος του Μ?λτον, βιβλ?ο που νομ?ζω ?λοι αξ?ζει να διαβ?σουμε.

«Κ?νατε και σεις, ?μως, δι?φορα στην περιοχ?», παρατ?ρησε, χωρ?ς πρ?θεση συμψηφισμο?, ο φιλλ?ληνας φ?λος εκε?νο το καλοκα?ρι. Δεν μπορο?σα να μην το δεχτ?, ο?τε να του απαντ?σω ?τι «κι εσε?ς βασαν?ζατε τους μα?ρους» –αυτ? ε?ναι η ιστορ?α μας. Κι οι δυο, π?ντως, συμφων?σαμε ?τι τ?ποτε πιο σημαδιακ?: ?νας Milton να (ξανα)γρ?φει τον *Paradise Lost* στον 21ο αι?να, τον χαμ?νο παρ?δεισο της ιστορ?ας, για ανθρ?πους που μ?λλον δεν ελπ?ζουν στον *Paradise Regained*, που δεν υπ?ρχει πλ?ον και κ?ποιος να τον (ξανα)γρ?ψει. Μηδ?ν ?γαν. Εξ?λλου απ? την ταβ?ρνα της Αγια Φωτι?ς κατευθυν?μασταν ?δη στην Αγ?α Γάλ?νη κι ο συνωστισμ?ς προβλεπ?ταν μεγ?λος.