12 Σεπτεμβρίου 2011

Smyrna 1922

Ξένες γλώσσες / In English / Πολυμέσα - Multimedia

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WHEN Smyrna—modern Izmir—fell to the Turkish army in 1922, and much of it was destroyed by fire, the city’s role as a bastion of Greek and Christian culture, going back nearly 2,000 years, came to an abrupt end. Before that, the port had been home to a diverse and cosmopolitan population; by the standards of the region, it was a beacon of tolerance and prosperity.

In addition to the Greeks, Armenians, Jews and Turks, there were also Americans and Britons and what Giles Milton calls the “Levantines”, rich families of European descent, who spoke half a dozen languages and occupied vast villas. Their dynasties dominated the trade and industry of the region. Some (like the Whittalls) retained British nationality over generations of Ottoman life, and it is their English-language diaries, letters and documents that provide Mr Milton with his best material. Although this slant is unrepresentatively British and privileged—lots of parties and picnics—it allows the author to be fair towards the Greeks and the Turks, who still blame one another entirely for the disaster.

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