**BOOK REVIEWS**


The first edition of Stratis Doukas’s *A Prisoner of War’s Story* (*Istoria enos Aíhmalotou*) was published in 1929.1 Doukas’s novella follows the adventures of a certain Nikolas Kazakoglou, an Anatolian Greek from the village of Kirkintzes (modern-day Şirince), who was captured by Turkish troops in September 1922 and spent several months first in captivity and then in hiding before he could find his way to Greece and reunite with his family. The story begins with Kazakoglou and his brother being arrested at the port of Izmir and brought to a staging area along with other prisoners. They are sent to Manisa, but on the way there, many prisoners succumb to exhaustion, thirst, and the guards’ violent treatment. Conditions get slightly better after the prisoners reach their destination, with the survivors sent to different villages nearby to help them rebuild. Separated from his brother, Kazakoglou vows to escape and, along with a fellow captive, makes his way back to their village, but they find it abandoned and ransacked. Kazakoglou and his comrade spend the winter hiding in nearby caves but suffer deprivations and live in constant fear of capture. They decide to split off and disguise themselves as “Turks.” Under the name of Behçet, Kazakoglou finds employment with Hacı Ahmed, a nearby shepherd. He earns his patron’s trust through hard work but soon learns that his comrade was discovered and hanged. By keeping to himself and avoiding public spaces and especially mosques, Kazakoglou manages to evade capture for several months. When Hacı Ahmed proposes to marry him with his niece, Kazakoglou asks for a leave of absence so he can put the affairs of his family in order. Thanks to paperwork procured for him by Hacı Ahmed, Kazakoglou makes his way to Izmir, smuggles himself onto a passing boat, and convinces the captain to make a stop in Mytilini, where he is reunited with his family.

Kazakoglou’s adventures lasted about a year, a period that coincided with the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. His arrest occurred in September 1922, in the closing days of the Turkish War of Independence, after the Greek army had evacuated the city of Izmir and as the Turkish troops entered the city. As he was led towards Manisa, hundreds of thousands of Ottoman Greeks went the other way, crossing to the Aegean islands or the relative safety of Istanbul, to avoid Turkish reprisals. While Kazakoglou was in hiding, the Grand National Assembly declared itself the only legal representative of the Turkish nation, and Sultan Mehmed VI was forced into exile. By the time the narrator made his escape to Mytilini, the Lausanne Treaty had put an end to all hostilities and finalized the post-imperial borders of Turkey (soon to be declared a republic), at the same time signaling the international recognition of Atatürk’s Ankara government.

It should not be surprising, however, that *A Prisoner of War’s Story* prioritizes an alternate

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1 The book has been translated into many languages, including Turkish, by Osman Bleda in 1987, and English, by Petro Alexiou in 1999.
reading of this dramatic period. Even though both Doukas and Kazakoglou had been born Ottoman subjects, their story takes place outside an imperial framework. In the Story, there are Greeks and Turks, as well as Albanian, Macedonian, and Cretan refugees, Armenians, and Jews—but no Ottomans. Similarly, the narrator’s geographic imagination is local in character: His world includes his village and the surrounding mountains, with their nomadic yörük shepherds, and Tire and Izmir, as the biggest local cities. In this context, the crucial identifier is religion. It functions as the driving force of the conflict, pitting the local Christians against Muslims and Jews. It is a boundary that proves impassable: Even though Kazakoglou and his friend can pass as “Turks,” their ignorance of Islamic religious practices betrays them. The escapees join in public demonstrations of faith, but are unaware of what exactly happens inside the mosque during prayer, which is how Kazakoglou’s comrade is recaptured.

In this particular historical narrative, common in both Greek historiography and literature, the demise of the Ottoman Empire is overshadowed by another violent rapture that took place in parallel and hit closer to home: the Asia Minor Catastrophe, i.e., the destruction of the Greek Orthodox communities in Anatolia during the final stage of the Turkish War of Independence. Many memoirs written in the aftermath of this process describe its different stages, starting with an earlier period, where prosperous and self-sufficient Greek communities coexisted peacefully with their Turkish neighbors. That harmony is disrupted by the arrival of outsiders, refugees from Crete or the Balkans, and the growing intolerance of the Ottoman authorities, leading to a wave of persecution and atrocities during WWI. Doukas focuses on the climactic end of the story, the collapse of the Greek army in Anatolia in August 1922. Hundreds of thousands of civilians were left exposed to violent reprisals at the hands of Turkish regular and irregular forces, forcing them to evacuate their towns and villages and seek refuge on the other side of the Aegean. Still, A Prisoner of War’s Story shares many tropes with other contemporary memoirs and fictional narratives, albeit in a condensed and inverted format. The lush orchards in the region and the valuables looted by the neighboring villagers stand as testimony to the former wealth of Krikintzes. Kazakoglou uses his family’s good relations with the neighboring Turks (they had frequent transactions with the semi-nomadic yörüks; the tax collector stayed at their house) to perfect his disguise but at the same time lives in constant fear that one of their former acquaintances might recognize him.

The events of 1922 represent a violent rupture in modern Greek history. During the long 19th century, the Greek elites had been confident they could translate their financial and cultural influence in the Eastern Mediterranean into a dominant political position, either within the Ottoman framework, taking advantage of the empire’s modernizing reforms, or by supplanting it through the territorial expansion of the independent Greek state. The Ottoman collapse, first in the Balkan Wars and then in WWI, lead to the short-lived triumph of this Megali Idea of Greek nationalism. As such, the subsequent defeat not only came with a very high human cost but discredited what had been until that point the official national ideology. It necessitated the emergence of new ideas that would negotiate between modernity and the Greek nation. These were propagated by a new generation of artists and writers, many of whom, like Dukas, had arrived in Greece from Anatolia or the Greek

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2 Doukas was born in 1895 in Moschonisia (modern-day Alibey Adası).
3 While working for Hacı Ahmed, Kazakoglou partakes in the Ramadan fast to celebrate the victory over the Greeks.
They were inward-looking, as befitted a nation that needed to recuperate from ten years of war and to resettle more than a million refugees in its territories. They prioritized popular over high culture, preferred *demic* Greek over the more archaic *katharevousa*, and looked for elements of modernism in religious art and Byzantine tradition.

In that context, Doukas approached Kazakoglou’s account first and foremost as a living monument of popular speech. His story was a testament of a more innocent period, before the Anatolian communities were destroyed by ethnic and religious conflict. For that reason, Doukas initially played up the memoir aspect of the story—he had only recorded it as he heard it from Kazakoglou himself when he encountered him in the mountains of Northern Greece, where he and his family had been settled. On the other hand, it is impossible to ignore the author’s agency here, starting with the language: The Greeks of Kirkintzes were Turkish-speakers, which accounts for Kazakoglou’s fluency, and his first accounts must have been in Turkish, of which Doukas only retained some words and stock phrases, especially in the dialogue. Besides that, Doukas changed some of the events in the story. In every subsequent edition, he expanded the text in length and changed the language to match his evolving literary preferences. In the postwar years, as the Anatolian refugees became integrated into Greek society and the “Asia Minor Catastrophe” was recognized as a tragic point in the nation’s history, *A Prisoner of War’s Story* was transformed from one man’s adventure to an allegory about a national tragedy, part of the canon of modern Greek literature.

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4 For an overview of this process, see Antonis Kotidis, *Modernismos kai paradosi stin elliniki techni tou Mesopolemou* [Modernism and Tradition in Greek art during the Interwar years] (Thessaloniki, 1993).
6 The second escapee, who is discovered and hanged in the *Story*, actually made it out alive and complained to Doukas in person. See Doukas, *Diavazo* 74 (July 1982).
7 Most prominently, after the second edition, Kazakoglou was renamed Kozakoglou.