

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

May I be allowed to record some objections I have regarding Professor Spencer's comment on Dr. Mardin's detailed and fascinating paper, "Some Notes on an Early Phase in the Modernization of Communications in Turkey" (April, 1961)? Dr. Mardin examines the process of the unification of the Turkish language against the framework of a declining empire with refreshing and incisive sociological insight. Professor Spencer, who wallows in vague generalizations, wants to prove that the Turks have no "culture" of their own.

The question with which Professor Spencer begins is interesting enough: Why did the Ottoman "establishment" resist "modernization" from the seventeenth century onwards? But Dr. Mardin's whole paper gives the answer precisely to this question. Modernization, greater literacy, the ideas of the French Enlightenment and Revolution threatened the political balance on which the power of the Ottoman "establishment" and the traditional élite rested. This is why the Palace resisted modern ideas with all the force it could command. And again, this is why, if individual sultans were willing, they were fought against and deposed by the alliance of the *Ulema*, other members of the Palace and the *janissaries* whose positions of power and influence depended upon the traditional order.

And what is Professor Spencer's argument? He asserts that the Turks are "a marginal people", "like the Japanese"—and presumably, therefore, like the English! But they are also nomads and have no culture of their own. "But always, in whatever context, the Turks are imitators and borrowers." So they are "interlopers", "slavish imitators", "parvenu conquerors and converts", and "as is so often the case with converts they become ultra-orthodox" (*loc. cit.*, 274). After having gone through the "rape of Constantinople" (*ibid.*, 273), being marginal culture people, they simply imitated the Arab, Persian and Byzantine cultural forms. But they were "ultra-orthodox" as well so they also resisted all change and just "stagnated"!

What happened then? Professor Spencer's nice theory fits all facts. "The marginal culture seems always to offer the paradox of extremes of elasticity as against those of rigidity" (*ibid.*, 275). How excellent! We can now explain how "the henchmen [sic] of Ataturk" (*ibid.*, 274) who idealized the ancient nomadic life of the Turks, suddenly eradicated the ancient Ottoman society and set up an entirely new order—again without culture.

Sir, this is balderdash. Such theories can only be built upon ignorance or prejudice. Of course the pejorative epithets which Professor Spencer so lavishly uses show his lack of sympathy with the subject matter. But anyone who has considered the history of Turkish society knows that what was represented as a cultural revolution of the first order in the West had its roots deep in Ottoman history. Ataturk's victory was the final outburst of those modernizing pressures which had convulsed the Ottoman polity right through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And as to the assertion that the Turks have no culture and have contributed "little that is distinctive in art, literature or in science", Professor Spencer is entitled to his own prejudices as long as they do not masquerade as scientific anthropological theories.

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To the Editor:

My few remarks on Dr. Mardin's excellent paper appear to occasion some indignation on Dr. Yalman's part. I am sorry, but in spite of wounded feelings, I incline to stand by my guns.

The issue, from my own vantage point, is not of course whether the Turks have culture or even where that culture comes from. Rather, it is the question as to what the Turks have done with the cultural heritage they come to call their own. Remarks on cultural marginality, therefore, hardly reflect opprobrium, as Dr. Yalman seems to think. In my comments on Dr. Mardin's study, I was not reflecting on the social issues which he so ably depicted; I was, however, referring to the nature of Ottoman and modern Turkish culture and considering the type of total cultural integration which had been achieved. In so doing, I saw my task as creating a background in which Dr. Mardin's paper could more readily be fitted and simply assumed that the concept of cultural marginality was one with which virtually every culture historian is accustomed to deal. Unless one still takes seriously Lowie's "shreds and patches" theory of culture (something which Lowie himself was glad to abandon), a culture is a holistic entity capable of generating what has