

Jacques, Edwin E.: The Albanians, an ethnic history from prehistoric times to the present.
Jefferson NC & London: McFarland 1995. xviii + 730 pp.

English-speakers interested in a comprehensive history of Albania have had to content themselves up to the present with *The history of Albania from its origins to present day* (London & Boston 1981), edited by Stefanaq Pollo and Arben Puto. This volume, which was translated from the French, very much reflected the ideals and blatant mendacity of the Albanian Party of Labour, proving uncritical, superficial and in its later chapters only serving to glorify the Hoxha regime.

The year 1995 has seen a veritable flurry of monographs on Albanian history, the longest of which is the present work by Edwin E. Jacques. A retired missionary, Jacques was a teacher in Korça from 1932-1940, and both his work as a missionary and his stay in Korça find their reflection in the pages of his book. The work is divided into five parts: 1) *Primeval Albania colonized by the Greeks and its civilization (to 168 B.C.)*; 2) *Developing Albania subjugated by the Romans and its Christianization (168 B.C. - A.D. 1503)*; 3) *Christian Albania occupied by the Turks and its Islamization (1503-1912)*; 4) *Muslim Albania governed by feudalists and its nationalization (1912-1939)*; and 5) *Nationalist Albania seized by the Marxists and its communization (1939-1985)*.

Although *The Albanians* offers an impressive compilation of material, it takes a much more popular than scholarly approach to history, and the critical reader is soon at a loss to know what he or she can believe. Jacques approaches the past as would an early nineteenth-century historian. In the early chapters he cites ancient Greek and Roman sources and then comments upon the 'Pelasgian parentage of the Illyrian and Albanian languages' and offers reflections on the presence of the Pelasgians in Homer's Iliad. Indeed it is primarily his identification of the Albanians with the Pelasgians that gives the book a very questionable start.

Jacques makes the fundamental mistake, as do many scholars from Albania itself, of confusing the history of Albania as a geographical entity with the history of the Albanian people as we know them today. Anyone making such lengthy and definitive statements about the history of the Albanians before they first appeared out of the mists of history in, let us say, the eleventh century A.D., about a period virtually devoid of relevant historical documents, must be accused of naivety or wishful thinking. Without wanting to delve into the politically delicate question of Albanian autochthony or into the constrained and superficially devised theory of Illyrian continuity, which was raised to the level of state ideology in communist Albania, one must wonder whether it would not have been preferable to leave the first 150 pages of the book blank.

Subsequent chapters of *The Albanians* are a substantial improvement. Even though they are traditionalist in outlook and composition, they nonetheless present a wealth of valuable material previously inaccessible to the English-speaking reader. Here again though, historical realities are at times veiled by popular legendry and the various sacred cows of Albanian tradition.

Particularly disturbing throughout the book is Jacques' obvious inclination for dubious secondary sources, such as obscure Korça newspapers from the 1930s, rather than to primary documents and material.

With the use of the title *The Albanians, an ethnic history*, one might have hoped, by the way, that the 730-page monograph could have made more than passing reference to the other half of the Albanian nation. As in so many works from Albania itself, the Albanians of Kosovo with their long and complex history are conveniently overlooked here. The index entry for Kosovo offers only two brief references to *Kosova, Battle of (1389)* and the *Kosova Committee*

(1918). This is rather like writing a history of the Korean people and completely ignoring anything that every happened north of the demarcation line.

Is *The Albanians* to be recommended as worthy reading? Very definitely. It offers the reader a pleasant and elucidating stroll through Albanian history as well as an impressive amount of detail and information, in particular about the communist period. The critical reader and the serious student of Albanian history must, however, be warned to use this book only in conjunction with a more cautious and scholarly monograph on the subject, such as that recently published in German by Peter Bartl, *Albanien, vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Regensburg: Pustet 1995), to which a separate review must be devoted.

Robert Elsie
Olzheim / Eifel