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Encounters with Civilizations: From Alexander the Great to Mother Teresa

Gezim Alpion

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Encounters with Civilizations is a broad-ranging work, uniting sweeping themes such as history, culture, the media, social issues, and politics. Building around comparative analyses of aspects of Albanian, Egyptian, British, and Indian cultures, Alpion addresses the problems people experience in their encounters with civilizations different from their birth cultures.

The course of history has made the confrontation and comingling of different cultures inevitable. It has also engendered ambivalence toward the cultures involved, including a desire to emulate the new culture, or resentment, or conflicting attitudes toward the relative strength or weakness of both birth and new cultures. Alpion describes how Egyptian culture and politics have been shaped by foreign domination while retaining ancient customs at the social level. In comparison, Great Britain has been an imperial power whose cultural preeminence has shaped the images of smaller countries in the eyes of the world. Alpion writes of English images of his native Albania and offers a penetrating analysis of Mother Teresa as a Christian missionary in Hindu and Muslim India, focusing on her cultural presentation via the media and the cult of celebrity.

Whether discussing the customs of Egyptian coffee houses or Alexander the Great as a defining figure in Western and Eastern culture, Alpion grasps the impact of these cultural encounters. He makes us aware that understanding and resolving such differences involves considering ultimate issues of life and death.

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