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BATTLING OVER THE BALKANS:
HISTORIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS AND CONTROVERSIES,
EDS., JOHN R. LAMPE AND CONSTANTIN IORDACHI.
CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY PRESS, BUDAPEST 2020, 331 p.

Reviewed by Anđelija Miladinović*

Battling over the Balkans, Historiographical Questions and Controversies, edited by John R. Lampe, Professor Emeritus at the Department of History at the University of Maryland, College Park, and a Global Senior Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. and Constantin Iordachi, Professor at the History Department of the Central European University and President of the International Association for Comparative Fascist Studies, assembles 37 excerpts from representative works of Balkan scholars. These passages were translated into English from Greek, Serbian, Bulgarian, Croatian, and Albanian, and were arranged thematically into five chapters.

The fundamental idea of this volume is to offer an English-speaking audience interested in Southeast European academic production an overview of contemporary historiographic controversies in regional historiography while overcoming the often stereotyped image of the Balkans. The focus is on a set of specific but controversial questions from the precommunist period. The editors emphasize the significance of Balkan historians' publications about the Balkans as a counterpoint to the dominance of Anglo-American publications. Given how these contentious issues either inspire Western assumptions of endemic ethnic strife requiring intervention or regional assumptions of hegemonic foreign intervention, this volume tries to present a different approach, from the Balkan historians themselves, free of preconceptions that cast the Balkans as the continent's abnormality. This methodology encourages the new transnational emphasis on recognizing common patterns and

impacts over traditional comparative historical distinctions.

The book is divided into five chapters that explore five contested issues: The pre-1914 Ottoman and Eastern Christian Orthodox legacies; the post-1918 struggles for state-building; the range of European economic and cultural influence across the interwar period, as opposed to diplomatic or political intervention; the role of violence and paramilitary forces in challenging the interwar political regimes in the region; and the fate of ethnic minorities into and after World War II. The chapters are introduced by a team of historians functioning as subeditors with brief explanatory essays that either outline the discussion's main points or provide insight into the broader historiographic landscape on the topic matter. Thus, the relevant chapter introductions provide a good inventory of accessible literature as well as insights into the various institutional research structures.

The first chapter (*The Ottoman Balkans and Nation-Building*) examines the political legacy of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, its various aspects, and how it interacted with Balkan nation-building in the 19th century. Roumiana Preshlenova starts the chapter with discussions in Bulgarian historiography concerning Ottoman political legacy, followed by Nadya Danova's excerpt where she analyses religious and historical texts to retrace the usage of terms and images of the Ottoman time, such as

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Ottoman slavery from the end of the medieval Bulgarian state to the present, arguing for a more neutral approach to that period. Roumen Daskalov and Aleksandăr Vezenkov debate their slightly different methods of researching and problematizing the *Bulgarian Revival* and its interconnections with the Tanzimat period in the Ottoman Empire, as well as the concept of *revival periods* in Balkan historiography. Iliya Todev contributes to this debate with his thesis on the Bulgarian Exarchate. The second part of this chapter contains excerpts from Greek historians and their points of view when it comes to the Ottoman political legacy and the role of the Orthodox Church. Vangelis Kechriotis provides an important piece concerning Greek historiography and the role of the Greek Orthodox Church in ensuring the nation's continuity, whereas Eleni Gara offers an overview of recent developments in Balkan historiographies while also questioning the nature of the Ottoman rule, the *Ottoman yoke* metaphor. Elli Skopetea, through literature, diplomatic correspondence, and the press, traces the stereotypes that imbue Western discourses on the East and also the Eastern discourse in the West. Sia Anagnostopoulou addresses the issue of the real aims of the Young Turks and Paraskevas Konortas discusses the perception of the Patriarchate by the Ottoman authorities using royal decrees (*firmans* and *berats*) in his research. This chapter is concluded by an interesting case study by Andreas Lyberatos of the multiethnic town of Plovdiv where he analyses the social and economic preconditions in the emergence of Bulgarian nationalism by tracing the particular circumstances that, within a few decades in the post-Tanzimat era from the 1860s to the 1880s, led to the emergence of opposing camps in the town. Although this chapter covers the majority of the excerpts in this volume, the Ottoman legacy in the Balkans is a topic that demands approaches not only from Greek and Bulgarian historians but historians from every Balkan country. This

broad and informative chapter provides insight into many key works, but sadly lacks works by Serbian, Romanian, and Albanian scholars.

The second chapter (*Struggling with State-Building in Interwar Yugoslavia*) begins with an overview by Vjeran Pavlaković concerning recent Croatian historiography on the interwar period followed by excerpts from Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević and Ivo Goldstein. They both explore the interwar experience of Croatian economy in adjusting to this new framework and the loss of the Austro-Hungarian customs union and currency and the continued predominance of an agricultural economy and population. However, Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević finds only the disadvantages for Croatia in the new framework, while Goldstein sees some advantages, particularly for Zagreb. One cannot help but notice the consistent tendency in these two excerpts to place the blame on Belgrade by selectively choosing the sources. The following excerpt from Aleksandar Jankir is no exception; he draws attention to Dalmatia's experience with Yugoslavism, but rather than providing an objective essay on the subject, he goes out of his way to assign blame for the failed concept of Yugoslavism, in Dalmatia and in general, to the centralizing pressure of the Serb-dominated civic apparatus. The second part of this chapter begins with Vladan Jovanović's overview of recent Serbian historiography on the interwar period, noting that at present, it still pays attention to interwar Yugoslavia which was neglected until the 1980s for various reasons. This part of the chapter was written by Serbian historians and shows a contrasting image compared to the first part. It comprises the excerpts written by Ivana Dobrivojević on regime repression during King Alexander's Dictatorship and Zoran Janjetović, who offered the first thorough synthesis of all Yugoslav national minorities between 1918 and 1941. He discusses strategies for the non-Slavic minorities' political and social integration as well as

some omitted non-Slavic minority data. His method took into account their polyglot ancestry from two powerful empires, the Ottoman and the Habsburg. The chapter ends with Sofija Božić's excerpt about the Serbian community in the town of Osijek during the years 1918-1924 where she emphasizes the feeling of discrimination and intolerance, the violence that they experienced, and concludes that the sources she examined shed a very different light on the thesis of the exploitation of Croats by the oppressing Serbs. She underlines that those claims are works of propaganda rather than a reflection of real circumstances.

In historical accounts of the Balkans, the phenomenon of irregular, or paramilitary, violence has long played a significant role. The following chapter (*Irregular Violence: Bandits, Guerrillas, and Militias*) analyses this phenomenon that has been recognized by both historians from the West and the Balkans. The first part of this chapter consists of four excerpts by Tasos Kostopoulos, Dmitar Tasić, Vladan Jovanović, and Veselin Yanchev. These passages are organized to provide insight into case studies involving paramilitaries in Greece, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia, as well as a comparison between the three. The second section of this chapter, which examines fascism in the interwar Balkans, is made up of multiple excerpts, such as the one by Mario Jareb, who analyzes the Ustaša-Homeguard movement and pinpoints the key characteristics such as the lack of a strong domestic Ustaša organization, close ties between individuals and groups and the Ustaše abroad, the unauthorized transfer of personnel, weapons, explosives, propaganda material, and assassinations. Ivo Goldstein in his excerpt, however, provides a detailed description of the emergence of the Ustaša movement, and how it appealed to the *common man*, but only to support his initial claim that it was the brutal suppression of national freedoms and identities by the Yugoslav government that provoked an extremist reaction embodied in the Ustaša

movement, thus failing to observe the gravity and the consequences of this problem. Nikolai Poppetrov's contribution to this chapter is his analysis of the development of fascism in Bulgaria, and Constantin Iordachi provides very thorough research concerning fascism in interwar Romania, personified in the Legion of the Archangel Michael (Iron Guard).

The fourth chapter (*European Influence and Reaction: Economics and Culture*) seeks to shed a light on topics that have only received limited attention: foreign economic and cultural influence. Ivan M. Becić examines the initial years of the new Yugoslav economy, how access to extensive French credit from Serbia's wartime ally was not forthcoming, and how its absence made the challenge of establishing a single financial framework across previously unconnected territories more difficult. Two very extensive analyses of Bulgaria's twentieth-century economy were provided in excerpts by Roumen Avramov and Dimitar Dimitrov. The course of the dinar and foreign exchange policy in the kingdom of Yugoslavia is the title of the excerpt by Goran Nikolić where he explains the trials of the Yugoslav National Bank in Belgrade to maintain the international stability of the dinar. When it comes to cultural influences, Roumaina Preshlenova and John R. Lampe lay the groundwork for the following sections on cultural influences. Additionally, they reference some of the most significant works of literature concerning this topic. This mixture of external influences is explored in the following excerpts. The first excerpt by Ranka Gašić compares the set of British and German influences that joined the major French presence; the Russian anti-Bolshevik influence on the high culture of both Belgrade and Sofia is presented in the excerpt by Miroslav Jovanović, and German cultural influence in Sofia is tracked by Milcho Lalkov. Roumaina Preshlenova and John R. Lampe speculate how these influences were a kind of promise of integration into the

wider European community. However, this conclusion can be viewed as partial because cultural influences on the Balkans cannot be interpreted without a complete understanding of complex and elaborate processes intertwined with Balkan history.

The final chapter (*The Jews and Other Minorities during World War II*) examines the treatment of ethnoreligious minorities and the topic of the Holocaust during World War II. The question of the Holocaust was primarily discussed in Yugoslavia in the context of the history of World War II and the country's diplomatic relations with Nazi Germany; later, the discussion shifted to the history of interethnic relations, which was closely related to the Yugoslav wars of succession. Constantin Iordachi and James Frusetta provide a summary of current historiographical developments in the history of minority issues in the Balkans during World War II, with a focus on the Jewish question and the Holocaust. During the communist period, local discussions regarding the nature of the region's interwar and wartime administrations overshadowed the study of minority policies during World War II in Southeastern European historiography. This introduction is followed by the report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, highlighting the dangers of "comparative trivialization," i.e., abusing comparisons to minimize the gravity of the Holocaust or condition the memory of this tragedy. This chapter contains significant research on the subject, including an excerpt by Lyá Benjamin, who contends that Antonescu's anti-Semitism was not an unorganized response to a particular international scenario but rather a broad political program based on both traditional and contemporary anti-Semitic clichés, refuting the claims of the academic literature that it was a result of outside pressure or the strategic imperatives of the war. Notable contributions to this chapter are also excerpts by Yosif Ilel about Jews in Bulgaria during World War II and their rescue and

by Mikhail Gruev about Bulgarian Muslims and the political regime after World War II. The last two parts of this chapter are contributions of Albanian historians. Artan Pluto discusses the plans for the emigration of Jews in Albania when the Italian Fascist state pressured the Albanian government to adopt discriminatory policies against Jews, where the Albanian government complied formally with the Italian request but never actually implemented it; and Valentina Duka who summarizes the debates in Albanian historiography on the contribution of the Albanians to saving the Jews in Albania during World War II.

In summary, the goal of this collection is to elucidate controversial Balkan issues by translating the writings of renowned Balkan historians and creating a window into significant Balkan literary works. Most of the excerpts in this book have been published in the past and are well-known to most Balkan historians, so it is evident that this volume is published with Western readers in mind. Furthermore, despite the initial concept's aspirations to be „The Balkans from the Balkan perspective,“ the selection process reveals a somewhat constrained approach to these topics. Even though the editors provided a few conflicted perspectives, rather than multifaceted chapters, since these important topics demand that kind of approach, many chapters only offer a few viewpoints. However, we may anticipate that this type of publication will serve as a foundation for future volumes compiled from even more works by Balkan historians on these complicated issues, with a broader perspective, as well as a counterbalance to the dominance of Anglo-Saxon publications and one-sided nationalistic publications.

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