

Introduction

The Ottoman Empire influenced the policy of the Balkan Peninsula for almost six ages. Since the 14th century, the Turkish rules were the source of the Balkan social models, lifestyle, and culture—the Ottomans are the reason why the South-East is different than the rest of the Old Continent. It is obligatory to combine the history, policy, and culture of the Balkans with the Ottoman heritage because it helps us analyse the most crucial processes took place in the past. What more, we notice the effects of those processes even nowadays.

There were two general visions of the Ottoman rule in South-Eastern Europe. The Balkan researchers usually talk about the “Turkish yoke”—the alien and oppressive occupation linked with the discrimination of Christians, even the physical destruction. On the other side, there are Turkish researches, who presented this period as the idyllic commonwealth of people of different faiths and cultures, lived side by side in peace by centuries under the tolerant sultans’ rule. The visions of the “Turkish yoke” and “Ottoman commonwealth” contain as much truth about the Ottoman Balkans as the false and distortions, arising from the simplifications or ideological motivations. As the American researcher of Balkan origin, Ali Eminov said: “The Ottoman rule in Bulgaria was not a golden age of tolerance and equality. However, it was not a centuries-long dark age of unrelieved cruelty toward Bulgarians either.”¹ These words can be applied to the whole region, not only Bulgaria. The vision of the “commonwealth” fits the general description of the ethnic relations in the Ottoman Balkan during the peace and stabilization, however, the “yoke” can be related to the crises, wars, uprising, and times of anxiety, which was dramatic to the Christian subjects of sultan (but Muslims as well). In that way, in the Balkan cultures and mentalities, there is a place for the contradictory stereotypes of the Turks and Muslims. On the one hand, they are “cruel tormentors”, on the other—“good neighbor”, which—with a wider historical perspective—can be translated into the historiographical visions of the “Turkish yoke” and “Ottoman commonwealth.”

The articles collected in the volume present the history and culture of the Ottoman Balkans from the arrival of the Turks to the Peninsula through the 19th until 20th century and the present reception of the Ottoman heritage in the region. Nevyan Mitev writes about the Bulgarian resistance against the

¹ A. Eminov, *Islam and Muslims in Bulgaria: A Brief History*, “Islamic Studies” 1997, Vol. 36, No. 2–3, p. 221.

Turkish invasion in the 14th and 15th century. The same period is the topic of the next article written by Krzysztof Dobosz, who tried to answer the question “Why were the Balkans so important for the Ottomans in the first half of the 15th century?” We moved to the 19th century, which is opened by text by Aleksandar Zlatanov, who presents the project of the Christian army of Sultan led by a Polish writer, political agent, and renegade Michał Czajkowski—Sadık Paşa. Mateusz Seroka analyses the relation between Croatian and Bosnian Muslim elites in the 19th century. We move ones again to the Eastern Balkans to see the effects of the collapse of the Ottoman rules and Muslim mass migrations on the Bulgarian countryside after 1878, which is analyzed by Krzysztof Poppek. In the next article, Monika Skrzyszewska presents the stereotypes of *poturice* in the Serbian nationalistic discourse from the 19th to the 1920s. Agata Pawlina takes us in a little different reality of the “Turkish Five”—a group of composers whose works set out the direction for modern Western-style Turkish art music at the beginning of the 20th century. Paweł Michalak focuses on the image of Turkey in the public discourse of interwar Yugoslavia. Piotr Mirocha analysis the semiotics of the Ottoman bridge, focusing on the works of the Yugoslavian Nobel laureate – Ivo Andrić. The last but not least article by Angelika Kosieradzka is a reflection about the place of the Post-Ottoman architecture in the contemporary spaces of Bulgarian cities.

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