

‘The Rumanians have made a very good bargain for themselves, which was at the bottom of all their impotunity. It is also an arrangement favourable to Turkey and Great Britain, for it gives them a seacoast which would have been Bulgarian (Russian) but which now belongs to an Anti-Slav race’. Despite the cynicism of this judgment, it was not far from the truth.

Abounding with references to documents which were still unpublished or unknown to historians from our part of the world, this book not only gives a sound account of Disraeli’s understanding (or misunderstanding) of South-Eastern Europe: it is stimulating to an immediate taking up again of the research.

Andrei Pippidi

Milena TAFROVA, *Tanzimatut. Vilaetskata Reforma i Bulgarite. Administratsija na Dunavskija Vilaet (1864–1878)*, Sofija, IK Gutenberg, 2010, 237 pp.

The topics of the Ottoman legacy in South Eastern Europe incited polemics amongst historians first, then amongst other scholars as well in social sciences¹. The inability of Balkan national states to adopt the Western political institutions after the demise of the Ottoman Empire found in this legacy one explanation/justification. Nevertheless, a different perspective showing more insight made conspicuous some effective and even positive consequences of the Ottoman period.

Tafrova’s enquiry has attempted to keep this balance in approaching one historical turn point in the life of the Ottoman Empire, the Tanzimat reforms, looking at how they took place in one of the main parts of that empire, the Danube vilayet². The author bases her analysis mostly on first hand data, archives, statistics, and newspapers of that time. This close familiarity with the real facts helps her to achieve a fertile neutrality, the notion she points out to since the volume’s introduction. Tafrova banishes the idea that these reforms were short sighted and chaotic as some scholars misrepresented them. On the contrary, the radical change in administration and politics brought by the Western inspired Tanzimat finally provided chances for the non-Muslim population, Bulgarian chiefly, to ascend in the hierarchies of their native society. The latter subject is so important that Tafrova reassesses it separately in the book’s last chapter.

The volume is divided in three chapters. The first of them casts a glance at the reforms beginning with November 1839, the date of the Hatisherif that proclaimed the Tanzimat, to the end of 1864 when the Danube vilayet was founded. In the second chapter, which contains the chronological continuation of the events, Tafrova writes about the vilayet’s administration, its structure and institutions. As I said above, in the third chapter the presence of non-Muslims, mostly Bulgarians, in the various councils and bureaucratic bodies of the province is emphasized and their activity scrutinized. The volume ends with one short section of Conclusions (pp. 202–206) and with an Appendix with lists of names of the non-Muslim representatives in the administrative and judicial councils of the province during the years 1868–1876.

The book begins with a picturesque description of the scene in the Gulhane garden where the Hatisherif that announced the Tanzimat was proclaimed. Not by chance, the author has chosen this image. The symbolism of the Sultan power sharply contrasts with the presence of the representatives

¹ See for instance Roger Crampton, „Bulgarian Society in the early 19th century”, in Richard Clogg (ed), 1981, *Balkan Society in the Age of Greek Independence*, Barnes&Noble Books, Totowa, New Jersey, pp. 157–204; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1997, chapter 7; Alina Mungiu Pippidi, Wim van Meurs (eds), *Ottomans into Europeans. State and Institution Building in South-East Europe*, Hurst&Company, London, 2010.

² This province became an administrative unit in 1864 by including all smaller units, sandjaks, on the right bank of the Danube, from West to East, Nish, Vidin, Tymoovo, Ruschuk, Varna, and Tulcha, as well as Sofija.

of foreign states in Istanbul. However, what characterized this inauguration was not an ambiguity, but the duality that the meaning of the word Tanzimat fully conveys. Tafrova explains this in a footnote, recording the Arab meaning of the Tanzimat which is 'restructuration'/'reorganization' (Bg.: *reorganizatsia, preustroistvo*). Setting the cards out on the table, the Tanzimat intended to manifest that the Western shape of the new institutions had to cover up the 'ancient customs' (p.22). In fact, the basic principles of the Tanzimat, civil and political equality of all 'subjects', regardless of their religious faith, secular law, fiscal and administrative reforms, encompassed specific bodies of procedures and regulations only many decades later and in circumstances that weakened the central power as was the defeat in the Crimean war in 1856³. The reforms occurred gradually, sometimes contradicting the traditional patterns. For instance, the juridical and commercial innovations had to cope with the opposition of the representatives of the religious law/shariat, (pp. 32–34). However, important consequences of the basic principles expressed in the 1839 Hatisherif were made possible. One of these is the founding of the local councils, medjilis, imitating, says Tafrova, the French model, where the places were equally shared between Muslims and non-Muslims. Their members were elected, which meant another decisive change. The chapter ends with some general considerations about the birth of the Bulgarian national movement during that period. The liberalization of the economy provided the Bulgarians with opportunities, but we found somehow difficult to see the link of that underground process with the Tanzimat reforms.

In the second chapter Tafrova gets into the details of the organization of the Danube vilayet. She dismisses the idea that the law of November 1864 was a part of one wider administrative reform of the empire and argues instead that this was rather an 'experimental' change. However, the 'experiment' proved to be successful and further laws in 1867 and 1871 extended that administrative structure in the other vilayets. The statistics of the population and geographical limits of the vilayet oscillate fairly. For instance, the population estimations shift from 1,200 000 to more than 2,000 000 (p.88). More precise are the decisions and plans of development of the province set out by Midhat pasha, who was the first governor of the vilayet. The Western model is once again obvious. In order to provide the local economy with facilities, 3,000 km of new roads were built as well as the railway Ruschuk – Varna. The urbanization of the new capital of the vilayet, Ruschuk, was made also by imitating the Western model. In the fields of education and public space there were improvements like the founding of state schools with mixed Muslim and non Muslim attendants, or allowing newspapers to be published, among them the official gazette Dunav. Such investments loaded yet the local budgets, as Tafrova points out. These led to discontent of the local middle class and protests. In addition, the short stay of Midhat Pasha, little more than three years, left all these plans in suspension. The chapter ends with an excellent account regarding the elections, structure and tasks of the local councils and institutions. The proceedings to elect the councils from the villages to the upper units, nahya, kaza, sandjak, and vilayet, are closely examined. Basic principles that had originally been established since the beginning of the Tanzimat era were respected. The administrative institutions become separated from the juridical ones and the latter divided in commercial, civil, and criminal courts. The parity of Muslims and non-Muslims in the councils was the ground principle of political representation, while other innovations appeared like the beledye, the town councils, where special places were consented to Armenians and Jews.

The third chapter focuses on the Bulgarians' participation to the councils and local administration. As a consequence of the larger participation of the population to elections, which included now all people aged at least 18 who paid one minimal state tax and had the right to vote, non-Muslim representatives entered in the local councils. Furthermore, above the level of kaza unit, the places of non-Muslim representatives were divided according to ethnic criteria. We find there the Bulgarians of course, but also Greeks and Romanians especially in the kazas of Dobroudja or in the towns on the Danube bank. Although the laws didn't require this, the councils were elected in the

³ Tafrova observes that the issuing of the Hatihumayum in 1856, when Sultan Abd-ul Medjid reasserted and updated the content of the 1839 Hatisherif, was the straight effect of the defeat of the Ottoman empire in the Crimean war.

towns too, according to the mahale/suburbs. As these overlapped with parishes, the priest had his reserved place, the eleven others being assessed by election. However, the law regulations were often broken as the practice of the elections was still at the beginning. Tafrova records the misuse of election rules which has been noticed by the official journal *Dunav* and by other newspapers. The Bulgarians succeeded yet to occupy important places in the administration. In fact, Tafrova says, the core issue is whether this native 'bureaucracy' had as incentive its own self interest or they acted to the well of the public interest.

The subject of the building up of the Bulgarian nation, although it is not openly expressed among the theoretical premises of the book, is so fundamental that, at least here and there it is present. We know the misrepresentations that were brought up by the intersection of the contrasting topics of Ottoman legacy and Bulgarian national movement⁴. Notwithstanding, the present book is a serviceable work concerning the local history of Northern Bulgaria. It continues the worthy tradition of Bulgarian historians like Strashimir Dimitrov, Hristo Gandev, and more recently Slavka Draganova or Teodora Bakurdjieva. Last but not least, the parameters set out by Tafrova would be useful for a comparative approach to cross border areas like the Danube valley region or Dobroudja, bringing thus one important contribution to the Balkan studies.

Stelu Șerban

Petar PETROV, Katerina GEHL, Doroteija DOBREVA, Klaus ROTH, Gabrielle WOLF, *Nashata Evropa. Bulgariski predstavi za svoeto i chuzhdoto 1870–1945*, Sofija, Ciela, 2011, 361 pp.

The volume is the outcome of a research project financed by the German Agency for Scientific Research. The project took place between 2001 and 2006 at the Munich University and a German version of the book was published in 2007. Professor Klaus Roth records all these details in the short introduction. The research plan developed around the multiple images of 'Europeanization' in Eastern and South-Eastern countries, with emphasis on Bulgaria, in the years that followed the gaining of independence. Europe as divided between centre and periphery is present in those 'Europeanization' images. The original feeling of an exotic periphery overlaps with the backwardness, the rurality, and the reluctance to change that ordinary people in these countries have shown and still show (as it can be seen in the case of Greece despite the 25 years of her belonging to European Union, Roth notices). However, the core issue of the project does not regard such outsiders versus insiders interpretations of the European model, but the dissents and everyday prejudices that the Europeanization planted in the modernizing countries. In the case of Bulgaria for instance, the hasty modernization at the end of 19th century led to the birth of an urban culture in towns like Ruse, Shumen, Sofia, and Plovdiv, isolating them from the vast majority of the population, rural and 'backward'. That culture showed the multifaceted images of country Europeanization. Its 'pop' expressions, like theatre plays, caricatures, daily press, are described by the authors of other articles collected in the volume.

The content of the volume is quite unbalanced. Three articles that cover more than 200 pages are authored by Petar Petrov with Katerina Gehl, whereas they sign separately other two articles. George Bernard Shaw and his 'imagined Bulgaria' are the subject of two articles. In the first one, Petrov and Gehl are fully occupied with the context and circumstances of two of the plays written by Shaw. These are *The Arms and the Man*, and *Androcles and the Lion*. Both plays, when they were represented as well as long time later, did hurt the national pride of the Bulgarians who answered with sharp criticisms. *The Arms and the Man* humorously evoke the Bulgarians' involvement in the 1885 war with Serbia, when Eastern Rumelia was united to Bulgaria. The play was first put on the stage in

⁴ Karpat H. Kemal, "Introduction", in Kemal H. Karpat (ed.), 1990, *The Turks of Bulgaria*, ISIS Press, Istanbul, pp. 1–22; Maria Todorova, "Bulgarian Historical Writing on Ottoman Empire", in *New Perspectives on Turkey*, vol. 12, 1995, pp. 97–118.