

Plamen Mitev, Ivan Parvev, Maria Baramova,
Vania Racheva (Eds.)

EMPIRES AND PENINSULAS

Southeastern Europe between Karlowitz
and the Peace of Adrianople, 1699–1829



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edited by

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PREFACE

The year 2009 marked the anniversary of two important historical events: 310 years since the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699) and 180 years since the Peace of Adrianople (1829). Both agreements frame an important transformative period in the history of Europe that encompassed the entire continent. For Central and Western Europe this was the transition from the *Ancien Régime* to a post-agrarian society, from absolutism to the modern nation-state. For the Southeast and the Balkans, the 18th and the first third of the 19th centuries meant, similarly to the Western “emancipation of mentality,” a new mobility within the Ottoman Empire and a new concept of nationality. The period also witnessed the foundation of new or the resurrection of the old pre-Ottoman states in the Peninsula. For its part, the Ottoman ruling élite began to think seriously about reforming the Empire, more or less convinced that without such “turnover” the empire would perish.

Between 1699 and 1829 Southeastern Europe was of great importance for European diplomacy. The region was the arena where the Habsburg armies fought against the sultan, and where the Eastern Question was born. The Austrian War of Succession had part of its roots in the Balkans. Russia had a traditional interest in the Balkans and the Black Sea and waged several wars against the Ottomans, brandishing the flag of religion and ideology. Russian political dominance in Europe after the Congress of Vienna (1815) had a firm base in the lands of the European Southeast. Some of the conflicts during the Napoleonic Era marched directly through the Balkans. Last but not least, caught in the “space between empires,” in the contact zones and buffer lands between the Habsburgs, the Ottomans and the Romanovs, the new “Balkan élites” enriched their political experience, trying to use the neighbouring empires to achieve a measure of sovereignty and independence. At a later stage they adopted “European models” as a blueprint to reform their society and state.

During these decades the “small” national societies in Southeastern Europe were pushed forward by the “impact of transformation.” The ensuing changes had their European roots, but also included a number of regionally specific features in the spheres of economy, culture and politics. This presents an intriguing opportunity to trace some contemporary parallels, asking the rhetorical question: “Does history repeat itself?”

The term “Common European History,” as controversial as it may be, is undeniably and inextricably linked to the past of the Southeast, not least because the power and influence of the great Continental Empires of Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Modern Era have always been present in this region. The years between Karlowitz (1699) and Adrianople (1829) corroborate this assumption. The docking of the Southeast to modern European civilisation becomes such a clear-cut tendency that

the emergence of the new states in the Peninsula during the 19th century can only confirm the ongoing process of modernisation.

The papers of the Conference hosted in October 2009 by the Sofia University were thematically structured in three main areas. The first focus area was dedicated to the “Societies in Southeastern Europe” with their respective Ottoman, Habsburg and local patterns of evolution. The second point of interest centred around the politics of the European powers and the role of the Southeast as a playing field of Great Power diplomacy and a “weight” within the major “Continental Balance of Power,” but also as a group of “small actors” represented by the autonomous and independent countries in the Balkans with their own aims in regional foreign policy. The third layer of research interest examined the routes of transition in South-eastern Europe, including the transformation of Ottoman society, the arduous and winding road of modern nations and nationalism in the Southeast, and the emergence of new economic, cultural and mental elements in the Balkans.

The publication of the papers of the Conference does not necessarily reflect the editorial board’s agreement with the ideas or the undertone of individual texts. We not always share the views of the authors; quite often the opposite is true. Every colleague will face for themselves the praise or criticism of the academic community. Nevertheless, we are proud and happy that renowned professors and younger scholars from all over the world found their way to Sofia to discuss the multiple facets of “Empires and Peninsulas” outlined above; this in itself, and the publication of this volume, will surely enrich the historiography of Europe and its regions.

Maybe a few closing remarks are in order. During the Conference the discussions after the papers were sometimes more dynamic and interesting than the papers themselves; this is, in fact, one of the reasons why such meetings are organised in the first place. Some interpretations of the Habsburg–Serbian relations during the 18th century, for example, triggered a heated dispute between some of our colleagues, which only demonstrated how important it is for the academic community to have a possibility to talk – and argue – about history, about Empires and Peninsulas and, if you will, the quite controversial umbilical cord between past and present.

We wish to thank all of our colleagues who found the time and the will to come to Sofia and took part in the Conference in October 2009. We hope that we all share the belief that it is much better to study history than to try, no matter the cost, to “live history” in our present day.

We wish to express our special gratitude to the Sofia University Faculty of History for providing the financial support for this publication. We also thank the Centre of Excellence “Dialogue Europe” at the Sofia University who financed the Conference itself. Our special thanks go to Dimana who provided the editorial work on the English version of the papers.

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