

## Rival Byzantiums: Empire and Identity in Southeastern Europe. By Diana Mishkova.

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Much Western historical scholarship in the current century has turned away from the emphasis on national identity and the nation-state characteristic of the previous two centuries. The new global history focuses instead on the major transnational empires. Once the early modern empires that covered and defined the Balkans had been replaced by nation states, the modern history of Southeastern Europe does not fit comfortably into a transnational global model.

Diana Mishkova's new book shows that comparative regional history will be able to connect the Balkans and Southeastern Europe across the millennium, as favored by the globalists. Working from her base in the Center for Advanced Studies in Sofia, her book concentrates on the modern region, including Turkey. She tracks the interplay between national identity and transnational aspects. She takes the early medieval Byzantine Empire, which covered most of the region, as a base point from which to compare the historiographies of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, and Turkey. Already in the "Introduction" (p. 2), she presents Byzantium as a model for the multi-ethnic, transnational empire as set down in the Oxford Russian historian Dimitri Obolensky's post-1945 volumes. The chapters that follow detail the varied efforts to revise this version in favor of national identity across the five historiographies. The five chapters in Part I cover the period before World War II, and the five in Part II the postwar years into the twenty-first century.

Mishkova begins with an "Enlightenment" chapter in the late eighteenth century. There we see regional figures sharing Edward Gibbon's and François Voltaire's disdain for Byzantium in favor of the Roman Empire and ancient Greece. The Bulgarian Father Paisiy of the Hilendar monastery found no positive role in his history of the Byzantine regime surrounding two Bulgarin kingdoms. Nor did several Greek writers who called themselves Hellenes. They denied any Byzantine connection to the sacred

legacy of Ancient Greece. Moving into the nineteenth century, Mishkova tracks a new appreciation of the Byzantine Empire but with a romanticist link to national identity. Political activists with a historical interest took the lead: on the liberal side of national and also European identity, we see Nicolae Balcescu of Romania's 1848 movement and Vladimir Jovanović of Serbia's 1860s movement for parliamentary responsibility. Hristo Botev, leader of the Bulgarian revolt against Ottoman rule, favored the earlier Byzantine regime. Romanian appreciation of Byzantium remained primarily tied to the earlier Roman settlement. The Greek reconnection followed as a way of denying the German ethnologist Fallmerayer's denial of any connection between ancient Greece and Byzantium. But Greek leaders of emerging political parties soon expanded the national claim from the territory of modern Greece to virtually the entire Byzantine Empire. Recapturing its huge territory became the 'Great Idea' that dominated Greek politics for the rest of the century. Serbian Minister Ilija Garašanin claimed that Tsar Dušan's brief regime over Macedonia and Greece, as well as Serbia and Kosovo, was a Serbian kingdom. Still, his idea of a Greater Serbia was based on a common language and not on Byzantine borders.

Academically trained historians took over the debate in the early twentieth century and founded chairs or institutes of Byzantine studies in the interwar years. Working from archival evidence, they pursued the evolution of Byzantium as an empire, as we see in the first of Mishkova's two seminal chapters called "In Search of the »Scientific Method«." Her next chapter compares the region's rival studies of Byzantium's subsequent influence into the Ottoman period. The Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga took the lead in pursuing what he called *Byzance après Byzance*. Iorga argued that its agrarian and cultural influence provided a continuing Romanian connection to Roman origins and European civilization, rather than to the Slavic influence. In Sofia, pre-war medievalist Vasil Zlatarski and his successors authored a less positive appraisal of the Byzantine economic influence as binding Bulgarian landholders to a Byzantine Greek set of *pronoia* estates, a precedent for the Ottoman regime. He also dated Bulgarian conversion to Christianity before the Byzantine missionary efforts.

In Belgrade, the medievalist Stanoje Stanojević drew on Russian scholarly connections to lead Serbian historiography away from the romantic version of Tsar Dušan's Serbian kingdom. His critical eye recognized the diverse population in the Tsar's huge empire and saw its Serbian leadership seeking to follow and, subsequently, to replace the Byzantine framework. By the 1920s, Russian *émigré* influence grew with the arrival of the eminent Georgije Ostrogorski. His volumes established the framework of a multi-ethnic empire with an unoppressive Serbian core. Byzantine studies in Belgrade became a model for the wider region, as detailed in Chapter 4. National identities remained the basis of rival evaluations of the Byzantine legacy.

Appropriately including Turkey in Southeastern Europe, Mishkova concludes the pre-World War II section with a chapter on the late Ottoman period and Kemalist Turkey. The initial attention of Turkish historians dismissed the late Byzantine Empire as morally corrupt in contrast to the high standards of the servants of the Sultan's regime. After 1900, trained Turkish historians turned to Turkology. Several appreciated the artistic and archaeological legacy of Byzantium as a Second Rome, as well as the parallel between the two huge imperial frameworks Byzantine and Ottoman. Herbert A. Gibbons, a historian from Istanbul's Robert College, spread the thesis of almost ethnic continuity between the Turks and Byzantine Greeks. The new generation of Turkish historians in the interwar republic were quick to dismiss any such continuity. However, the rising number of internationally trained Turkish historians of the interwar and postwar period did recognize elements of continuity between the Byzantine and Ottoman land regimes and economic institutions. The influential sociologist and Turkologist, Mehmet Fuat Köprülü worked along the same lines but added the concern that Islamic sources were neglected.

The five post-1945 chapters are devoted to the national historiography of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, and Turkey. I depart from that order to address comparable features in Bulgaria and Serbia, and then in Greece and Romania. Turkey included, these chapters provide detailed references to a number of historians and their differences, which is a testimony to rising scholarly standards across the region. In this review, I will concentrate only on the main figures for comparison and contrast.

The two chapters on Bulgaria and Serbia trace the respective paths of their historiography from Marxist criticism to Slavo-Byzantine and Serbo-Byzantine frameworks, respectively. We see the harsher initial view in Bulgaria, where the native peasantry was subjected to the 'slave-based system' of Byzantine estates (p. 221) without a chance for a feudal class to arise. By the 1970s, the prewar and wartime scholarship of Petar Mutafchiev and the postwar work of Dimitur Angelov had restored the thesis of the influence of the Byzantine economic framework on the Bulgarian trade and land regime that had already emerged in the First Bulgarian Kingdom in the seventh to the tenth centuries. Ivan Duychev added the cultural connections formed between the Slavs in general and the Byzantine Empire, discounting a Greek linkage. In Serbia, another Russian *émigré* interwar historian Georgije Ostrogorski also criticized the Byzantine estates for subjecting peasant smallholders to a feudal, although not slave-like regime. He soon toned down this emphasis to address the nature of Tsar Dušan's regime as a multi-ethnic empire and not an assimilationist Serbian kingdom. Other Serbian historians joined the Serbian Orthodox Church in keeping Kosovo as a Serbian religious center. Macedonia's republic status allowed its historians to pursue its separate national identity. The leading postwar Serbian

medievalist Sima Ćirković argued for a Serb core to Dušan's empire, defined by its Byzantine interrelations and ambitions for replacing the entire empire with his own. He saw the major result of the Serb–Byzantine connection not as the origin of a Serbian state but as a joint linkage to European cultural history. Belgrade's Byzantine Institute continued to flourish into the post-Communist period, culminating in a major international conference of Byzantinists in 2016.

Historians in both Greece and Romania asserted their national identity over the Byzantine Empire rather than interrelations. Greek historians had no initial period of Marxist synthesis with the Byzantine land regime beyond the *émigré* publication of Nikos Svoronos in France. In anti-Communist Greece, the reconnection of ancient Hellenism with the Byzantine period proceeded apace. However, led by the Greek American historian Anthony Kaldellis, it rejected the idea of Byzantium as an empire. Instead, he characterized its regime, at least in the territory of modern Greece, as a nation-state. But he did not accept the notion of mass ethnic consciousness the way historians in Greece increasingly did. They saw a Greek national identity proceeding from ancient Hellenism through Byzantium to the modern state. Mishkova takes only brief note of the Roman influence linking ancient Greece and Byzantium. She persuasively argues for its role in Romanian historiography based on the several early centuries of Roman occupation. As late as 1969, an authorized history volume not only emphasized the political framework in Roman Dacia but made no mention of any Byzantine influence. Then the 100-year anniversary of Nicolae Iorga's birth in 1971 obliged the Ceaușescu regime to expand the acknowledgement of the Byzantine influence beyond art and architecture. Thus, interwar medievalists like Constantin Giurescu were allowed to publish on Byzantine political influence. They were soon joined by the younger historians Valentin Georgescu and Iorga's grandson, Andrei Pippidi. The regime kept the gates open to protect its reputation at the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Bucharest in 1980. Afterwards, a restrictive emphasis on the independent Romanian state traced it back through the Byzantine period to the Roman occupation, and even earlier. Mishkova welcomes the full reopening after 1989, citing one Romanian historian who called the Ceaușescu regime's historiography 'neo-Stalinist' (p. 282). I would say, instead, that it is better described as 'neo-nationalist.' This recent publication joins Greek, Bulgarian, and Serbian scholarship in seeing the Byzantine Empire as part of their connection to European civilization.

A final chapter in Part II on Turkish scholarship does not find a European cultural connection. Kōprülü continued to be a major figure after World War II, who again stressed the need to examine Islamic sources. Otherwise, postwar Turkish historiography was distinguished by an emphasis on Ottoman economic history, recognizing a linkage with the Byzantine land regime. First came several *émigré*

historians, led by Halil İnalcık at the University of Chicago through the 1970s. Resident Turkish economic historians like Sevket Pamuk followed, and since 2000 Turkish historiography has overcome a long-standing aversion to Byzantium. A new university has even been devoted to Byzantine studies.

Mishkova's uses her "Epilogue and Conclusions" reverse the usual order. Here she reviews the current state of Byzantine studies across the five countries and expresses her hopes that their younger historians will revive the Byzantine model to escape the confines of single ethnic identities and fixed territorial borders. She understands the challenge to such hopes in light of the recent struggle between Greece, Bulgaria, and Macedonia over the border for what is now North Macedonia. She acknowledges that due to the rise of post-colonial studies in Western historiography Byzantine studies have been set aside in favor of the British and French colonial empires. But she cites the hope of Serbian historian Vlada Stanković, which I share, that regional studies are a better framework for comparison than global history. In conclusion, Mishkova sees promise in the past and present state of Byzantine studies across the region as a point of reference that connects the national narratives with each other and with the mainstream of European medieval history. Her dispassionate account of their rival approaches to Byzantium has given us an instructive comparison of the five evolving historiographies. Despite their differences, we see them all proceeding with the common best practice of European national scholarship.

