

BOOK REVIEW

Milena Petkova, *Meždu Anatoliya i Rumeliya. Yurutsite i stopanskoto rayonirane na časti ot Tsentralnite Balkani, sredata na XV – sredata na XVI vek*

[Between Anatolia and Rumelia. The Yuruks and the Economic Zoning of Parts of the Central Balkans, Mid-15th – Mid-16th Century]. Sofia: Izdatelska Kašta "Gutenberg", 2021, 150 p., ISBN 978-619-176-182-1

Mehmet Hacısalihoglu*

Milena Petkova, a prominent Bulgarian historian specializing in the Ottoman history from Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski", focuses on the socio-economic history of Bulgaria during the early modern period (Ottoman era). In her present book, she explores the transfer of economic models by the Yörüks (Muslim nomadic or semi-nomadic groups) from Anatolia to the central Balkans.¹

* Prof. Dr., LMU Munich / Yıldız Technical University (Istanbul)
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4287-1296, E-mail: mehmethacisalihoglu@gmail.com

Submitted: 06 June 2025, Accepted: 23 June 2025

¹ For other publications by Milena Petkova on the topic, see: Milena Petkova-Encheva, "Administrirane na selishta v Trakya prez XVI vek – edna hipoteza za yuzhnata granitsa na Shishmanova Balgaria spored informatsiyata ot osmanskı danachni registry ot XVI vek." [Administrative System of the Settlements in Thrace during 16th c. – a Hypothesis on the South Border of Shishmanova Bulgaria according to the Information Preserved in Ottoman Tax Registers], in: Iz praktikata na osmanskata kantselariya. Sbornik materiali ot mezhdunarodnata konferentsiya "Osmanskite registry – izvor za istoriyata na Balkanite – Sofia 23 oktomvri, 2009 [From the practice of the Ottoman state office. Selected materials from the international conference "Ottoman registers – source for the Balkan history – Sofia, 23rd October, 2009]. Sofia, 2011, 186-197; ibid, "Poselishna mreza i gastota na naselenieto v

The book is structured into three main chapters. The first chapter examines the ecological conditions and the migration of Yörüks from Anatolia to Rumelia (the Balkans). The second chapter focuses on the settlement of Yörüks in Eastern Upper Thrace and the region of Karaman in Anatolia. The third chapter discusses the sedentarization of these nomadic groups and their economic profiles, comparing the processes in Karaman and Upper Thrace. The book also includes a conclusion, a bibliography, and an extended English summary (pp. 144–149, six pages).

Petkova utilizes Ottoman register books (*tapu tahrir*) containing valuable information about the migration of Yörüks from Anatolia to the Balkans, particularly to Eastern Upper Thrace, during the 15th and 16th centuries. She convincingly demonstrates how the settlement of Muslim nomadic groups transformed the region's economic life. According to her study, Yörüks established seasonal settlements at altitudes of up to 1000 meters, bringing this model from Anatolia.

The book also investigates the sedentarization of the Yörüks as a result of Ottoman taxation policies. They were registered in *kariye* (village) settlements, and the favorable conditions in Thrace facilitated this process. The study compares the economic activities of the Yörüks in the Balkans with those in Anatolia—particularly in Karaman—and finds notable similarities.

Although difficult to control from the perspective of the central Ottoman authority, the Yörüks played a crucial role in the colonization of Balkan territories. Petkova argues that the colonization and settlement of Yörüks in Eastern Upper Thrace (formerly part of the medieval Bulgarian

Iztochnia dyal na Trakiyskata nizina prez parvata polovina na XVI vek (kazite Stara Zagora, Chirpan, Nova Zagora i Haskovo)". [Settlement Network and Population Density in Parts of Eastern Upper Thrace during the First Half of 16th c.]. in: *Etnicheski i kulturni prostranstva na Balkanite*. [Ethnic and Cultural Spaces in the Balkans]. Sofia, 2008, P.1, 244-308; *ibid.*, "The Settlement Network in Upper Eastern Trace: Case Study of the Kaza of Hasköy During the Second Half of the XVth Century." – In: *Dünden Bugüne Batı Trakya Uluslararası Sempozyumu*. İstanbul, 2016, 327-335; *ibid.*, "Land Property in Ottoman Rumeli - Case Study on Land Possession System in Parts of Paşa Sancak (Ottoman Rumeli) (Copies of Huccets and Sinirnames Preserved in Ottoman Taputahrir Defters of 16th century)", 2nd International Archive Congress on Ottoman Lands, editor/s: Hatice ORUÇ, Mehmet Yıldırım, Songül Kadioğlu, 2019, 779-790; Milena Petkova, "The Process of Sedentarization of Semi-nomadic Groups of the Yoruks in Parts of 16th Century Ottoman Rumeli: Migration Control or Tax Control?", *Journal of Balkan and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 3, 2019, 25-43; *ibid.*, "Reclamation of Agrarian Space of Ottoman Rumeli, 15th – 16th centuries. Case study of the Kaza of Eskihisar Zağra", *Journal of Ottoman Civilization Studies*, Vol. 6, 2021, 20-29; *ibid.*, *Tsentralnite Balkani i osmantsite. Demografsko razvitie i agrarna ikonomika v Iztochniya dyal na Trakiyskata nizina prez XVI vek*. [The Central Balkans and the Ottomans. Demographic Development and Agrarian Economy in Eastern Upper Thrace during the 16th century]. Sofia 2020.

kingdom) were even more successful than in western Anatolia. In Thrace, they found marginal and uninhabited areas suitable for both farming and herding - economic practices they brought from Anatolia. The Thracian plain, situated between the Sredna Gora, Rila, and Rhodope mountains, became a key area for Yörük economic activity.

Petkova also analyzes the settlement patterns of Yörüks during the sedentarization process in the second half of the 15th century. The term *kariye* had multiple meanings in this context: one type referred to settlements with tax revenues but no registered taxpayers; another described villages incorporated into larger settlements. Many *kariye* served as winter pastures for Yörüks in the plains. Due to the fluid nature of nomadic life, establishing clearly defined Yörük settlements was challenging, and often only a few households (typically 5–6) were formally registered. These villages also contained *mahalles* (neighborhoods), but many Yörüks continued to reside in *mezra`as* (uncultivated lands), organized as *cemaat* (communities) within the boundaries of a *kariye*.

Petkova suggests that population growth in the 16th century accelerated the sedentarization of many nomadic groups. As part of this transformation, subsistence agriculture gained importance relative to herding. She convincingly argues that environmental factors influenced this shift. Ultimately, the Yörüks became “ordinary Muslim sedentary taxpayers,” abandoning their nomadic lifestyle and losing their traditional tax exemptions.

In her conclusion, the author emphasizes that the Yörüks introduced a new economic model to the Balkans, which came to dominate the Thracian region.

Milena Petkova’s book represents a significant contribution to the economic and social history of the Balkans during the Ottoman period. Given that nationalist and anti-Ottoman narratives still prevail in much of Balkan historiography, Petkova’s work stands as a model of rigorous, scholarly Ottoman studies. Compared to other Balkan countries, Ottoman studies in Bulgaria are particularly robust – not only due to a larger number of specialists but also because of the high quality of research. This book is a recent and notable example of that strong tradition.