

The Balkan History. The XVIIIth Century

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“The Balkan History. The XVIIIth Century” is a literary work that can be useful to historians and generally to everybody who is interested in the Balkan Peninsula and its history of development. The book describes the period of the XVIIIth century as well as prior events that served the reasons of the facts depicted to appear. It is the first edition devoted to this complex period of the Balkan states development in the connection to the whole European historical panorama.

The book was published in Moscow in 2004. The editor-in chief is Vladilen Vinogradov, he collaborated with Irina Makarova, Grigory Arsh and other authors.

The first issue that was arisen in the book is the decline of the Balkan states role in the European political arena in the XVI-XVIIth centuries. The Ottoman invasion had gradually lessened the importance of the Balkan states by the XIXth century, thus, this long period turned to be a crucial epoch of the Balkan development. The XVIIIth century is shown as a preparation step to the following mass-scale events, namely, 1st and 2nd Serbian, Wallach peasant vaults and the Greek revolution.

The book consists of two parts. The first one presents the European panorama as a whole and the Balkan states are described in the second part. Besides, there is one chapter about the developmental steps of the Ottoman Empire (The Ottoman Empire: From Sophisticated Heights to the Fall, pp. 7-26). With the help of this part it is easier for the reader to understand the sequence of the interdependent historical events, which are the rise of the Empire and the weakening of the states on the Peninsula.

The processes taking place in European countries at that very period are presented in the part “European Panorama”. All the chapters are written by V.Vinogradov. They are titled: The Last Crusade of the Christian Europe (pp. 28-41), The Hardships of the Russian Access to the Black Sea (pp. 42-54), The Tragedy on the Prut River (pp. 55-63), Prince Eugene of Savoy at the Summit of Glory (pp. 64-69), The Balkan Issue in the Epoch of Peter’s Successors (pp. 70-83), Elisaveta Petrovna and Maria Theresa in the curves of European Policy (pp. 84-111), Catherina the Second and Russia’s Breakthrough to the Balkans (pp. 112-135), Catherina and Joseph: From Rivalry to Collaboration (pp. 136 - 145), The War of 1787-1791 and Russia’s strengthening on the Balkans (pp. 146 – 161), General Bonaparte’s Eastern Romance and Emperor Pavel’s Balkan Dreams (pp. 162 – 176) . The part is approximately twice smaller than the second one, but many peculiarities are mentioned and described, i.e. European Crusades, monarch personalities in European countries, Russian historical development ways and the influence of Russia on Europe and the Balkan states.

The great advantage of the book is that there is a lot of analytical information and logical explanations of historical data, their causes and consequences. So, in the chapter "The Hardships of the Russian Access to the Black Sea" the main topic is the reason for the military conflict based on the attempt to gain the access to the coastline territories, but not only the Russian-Turkish war itself when Russia made that way. "It was Golytsin who raised the question about the access to the Black Sea. Peter the Great only caught it and worked it out". "The vast territories were occupied by Crimean Khanate. In 1475 Turkish troops came to the Crimea, the Khanate turned into an Ottoman vassal, and the Black Sea became the Empire's lake" (p. 43). The quotations are clear; the language is simple which creates a kind of openness to a non-historian.

Undoubtedly, Russian authors first of all emphasize the role of Russia in all the international events described. The first part of the book portrays the XVIIIth century as the time when crusades stop, the Russian Empire and European states hold aggressive foreign policies while struggling with Turkish forces; political ties are being built and Christianity strengthens.

The second part of the book, "The Balkan Panorama", is closely linked with the first one. While describing the histories of European countries, their political systems and interconnections, V. Vinogradov in "European Panorama" reveals inner forces of events development, rather than just describes the events. The authors of the second part often mention these ideas to build historical parallels and to create the full picture of the time studied.

Mainly, the second part of the book presents a description of the events from the side of the Balkan countries. The reader is put on the peninsula and sees the international and national arena from the inside. As is said, the most part of the invaded territory did not hold any military fortresses and edifices, the Turks didn't make much attempt to inhabit the land leaving the priority only to the taxation and recruiting for the Turkish army. For the whole XVIIIth century the Ottoman Empire was involved in devastating wars that were ruining its financial system. This became the chief reason for the Empire's degradation. The money losses were compensated by means of the taxes, but it still led to the crisis. More than that, there appeared one more serious factor, a kind of religious discrimination. Christianity was often persecuted. The peoples of Moldavia and Wallachia suffered from Muslim oppression which led to grievance among the population. In some cases there were even attempts to set free by means of the help of the Russian army, but these actions in the XVIIIth century were failures. Only the weakening of the Ottoman government at the turn of the century made the Turks lose their ruling positions. Earlier, in many regions of the peninsula the power was given to those men who could provide the Ottoman Dynasty with a profit. The power was given only for three years, and then the person was sent to another region or lost his title at all.

By the way, one of the family members of such a power representative was kept prisoner according to a medieval tradition. Later, the rulers were Turks themselves who were sent to govern Moldavia and Wallachia for three years. The second part of the book gives detailed descriptions of immense taxation, revolts, harassments and migration.

Precisely, the chapters of the second part are called: Autonomous Danube Princedoms Twice Oppressed (pp. 178 – 198), Socio-Economic Development of Wallachia and Moldavia Princedoms in XVIII (pp. 199 – 215), The Culture of the Danube Princedoms (pp. 216 – 229), The Crisis of the Ottoman Military-Feudal System (Social and Economic Development of Bulgaria Territories in the XVIIIth Century) (pp. 230 – 247), On the Way to Feudal Anarchy (pp. 248 – 266), Spiritual Revival (pp. 267 – 288), Serbian People at Ethnic Division (pp. 289 – 299), Serbs in Turkey and Venice (pp. 299 – 315), Serbian People's Socio-Cultural Development (pp. 315 – 330), Montenegro as a Slavonic Basis. Society and State Development (pp. 331 – 382), The Mix of Three Religions: Bosnia and Herzegovina (pp. 393 – 406), Greece: Aristocracy, Citizens, Islanders, Diaspora (pp. 407 – 421), Greece: Trade. Enlightenment. War 1768-1774. Morea Vault (p. 422 – 444), Greece after Treaty of KüçükKaynarca (pp. 445 – 446), Mysterious Albania (pp. 467 – 479), Albania: Separatism Rise (pp. 480 – 496), Albania: Mahmud Bushati and Ali Pasha of Ioannina (pp. 497 – 514), The Last Century of The Republic of Ragusa (pp. 515 – 517), Russian Subjects of Turkish Sultan (pp. 518 – 527).

The conclusion appears as the idea that the XVIIIth century is the period of the Balkan turning back to Europe, adjustment of the Balkan peoples to European history and culture. The authors claim that they are going to publish one more book about the period before the Crimean war.

The book also contains a thesaurus and a list of personalities mentioned in the narrative, which is rather convenient for a reader whether s/he is a historian or not.

In general, the book must be necessarily interesting for those who study the histories of the Balkans, Russia, Turkey and Europe. Unfortunately nowadays it is difficult to boast a vast number of contemporary works about the Balkans, but this attempt to gather different materials in one publishing project is supposed to be rather successful and of a great use for those who are involved in the process of the Balkan study.

Reference

История Балкан : Век восемнадцатый / Отв. ред. В.Н. Виноградов; Ин-т славяноведения. – М.: Наука, 2004. – 546 с. – ISBN 5-02-010261-X (в пер.).