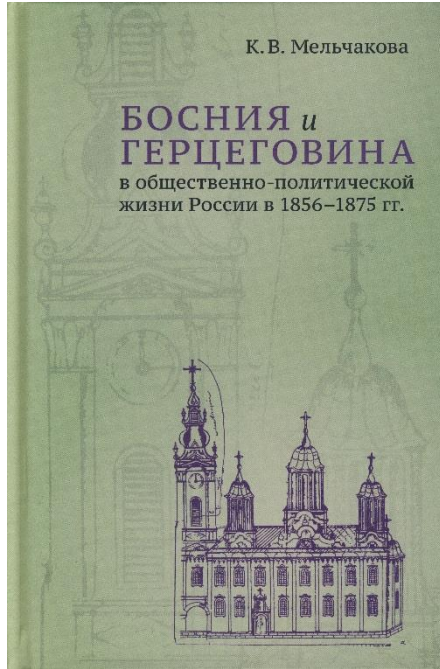


Ksenia V. Melchakova, *Bosniya i Gertsegovina v rossiyskoy obshchestvenno-politicheskoy zhizni v 1856–1875 gg.* [Bosnia and Herzegovina in Russian Social and Political Life, 1856–75], Indrik Moscow 2019), 432 pages, ISBN 978-5-91674-537-5.

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The last decade has seen the publication of several monographs on the Ottoman period based on new archival research, many of which can be recommended as valuable additions to the existing body of literature on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Among them, Ksenia Melchakova's monograph focused on the formation and development of Russian-Bosnian relations in the 1850-70s is especially noteworthy.

Melchakova's book *Bosnia and Herzegovina in Russian Social and Political Life 1856-75* consists of five chapters. In the first chapter, "The Consulates of the Russian Empire in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1856-75", the writer traces the history of the Russian diplomatic missions. Melchakova pays close attention to the activities of Alexander Fyodorovich Hilferding (1831-72) - the scholar, Slavophile, and first Russian consul in Sarajevo, whose "duty was to give the fullest picture of the region"

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(p. 67). The writer describes the routines of the diplomatic service: the consulate's day-to-day activities, its employees' salaries, and special characteristics of the contacts with local authorities, colleagues from other countries, high-ranking clerics, etc.

In the second chapter, "The Bosnian Question and Russian Society, 1850–70s", Melchakova focuses on the activities of Russian benefactresses led by Antonina Dmitrievna Bludova, as well as the Most Holy Synod and the Slavic Charitable Committee. Speaking about the stirring of Russian interest in Bosnia, Melchakova again addresses Hilferding's activities, only in this case focusing on his efforts to organize a humanitarian assistance program for Bosnians. When discussing assistance to Slavic communities outside Russia, one cannot ignore the activities of Protoiereus Mikhail Fyodorovich Raevsky. Melchakova offers a solid account of his role in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is difficult to imagine philanthropists who do not engage with the general public, and this is demonstrated through an analysis of periodicals where Hilferding, as Melchakova reveals, was the most prolific opinion writer.

The main highlight of the chapter "How Russia Provided Assistance for the Christian Orthodox Church and Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1856–75" is Melchakova's detailed account of the travels of the clerics to the Russian Empire to raise funds for the church. The writer illuminates the role of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Most Holy Synod, the Slavic Committees, and, of course, the Russian people in the Christian Orthodox church construction project in Sarajevo.

As an example of Russians' contribution to the local educational scene, the monograph traces the history of Staka Skenderova's school for girls and highlights the role of Russian diplomats and philanthropists. The monograph contains the first ever Russian-language account of Skenderova's life and her unique school, which, located in a province of the Ottoman Empire, was open to girls from all religious backgrounds. The last section of the third chapter addresses the history of Bosnians and Herzegovinians educated in Russia. Working in Russian archives, the writer found new information about such famous figures as Jovan Pičeta, Vasa Pelagić, and others.

In the fourth chapter, "The Bosnian Question in Russian-Serbian Relations, 1856-75", Melchakova addresses the root causes of one of the most

complicated problems of the Balkans – Serbia’s interest in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1860s. The writer pays special attention to such a controversial figure as Matija Ban, the head of the secret Committee for the Liberation of Bosnia. The writer relates episodes of collaboration between the consuls, Bosnians educated in Russia, representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Serbian authorities, and explains the goals Serbia’s government pursued in Bosnia and Herzegovina: “Schools were to become [...] centers for training *chetnik* guerilla units, and teachers, potential commanders of guerilla units” (p. 320). As Melchakova discovered, the correspondence of schools’ organizers who were Serbian agents passed through Russian consulates. Quite interesting is the conclusion that the Serbian agents, having opened schools in areas where fighting was to be expected, would send to Russia requests for assistance precisely for these schools, and that the charities’ chiefs knew about it. Finally, the fourth chapter also addresses the situation of the Orthodox clergy and their contacts with Serbian religious and political leaders.

In the fifth chapter, “A Different Angle: Russia’s Plans vis-à-vis Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Context of the Policies of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires”, the writer takes a look at Bosnia and Herzegovina as a part of the contact zone between the East and the West, and as a far-flung province of the Ottoman Empire. The chapter presents statistical data, from Russian sources, concerning population, migration, and conversion to other religions. The writer also touches on the problem of how the Ottoman authorities carried out the Tanzimat reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1860 and 1870. The writer ends the chapter with a characterization of the Habsburg Monarchy’s policies in the province.

In the “Conclusion” Melchakova provides a brief summary of her findings. First, Russia felt responsible for the state of the Christian Orthodox world, and this was “not just a cover for the implementation of the government’s international strategy, but a stance adopted due to genuine convictions” (p. 394). Second, Russia’s attitudes to Serbia’s plans vis-à-vis Bosnia and Herzegovina changed over time, from support for the idea of paving the way for a liberating uprising to the belief that the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the young principality would be a premature move. Third, neither Serbia, Russia, nor Austria-Hungary were interested in, or took into account, the aspirations of Bosnians and Herzegovinians themselves. The writer ends the book with notes on the ambiguity of Russia’s foreign policy during the Eastern crisis of the late 1870s.

Melchakova's monograph is a priceless contribution to the body of work on the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The narration is enhanced with portraits and other illustrations. A valuable feature of the book is the inclusion of Hilferding's drawings, which are printed for the first time here. The author made a commendable decision to include in the book unique photographs from the album of Pyotr Pavlovich Pyatnitsky, who traveled across Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1867, taking pictures of peasants, Christian Orthodox monks, dervishes, military men, and monasteries. This photo album is of great value for historians of the region: until now there were no known photos of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1860s.

A strong emphasis on events and facts related to the activities of Russian diplomatic corps and the civic-minded public in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the author's decision to place the description of the situation in the region as an Ottoman province at the very end of the monograph, create the impression that Bosnia and Herzegovina were discovered by the Russians. This impression fits in with the description of the subject under review – Bosnia as *terra incognita* for Russian society, and how Russians came to know the region. The writer's approach, therefore, belongs to the tradition of Slavic studies as practiced in twentieth-century Russia – viewing the region not as a part of another empire but as an independent region with a Slavic population, which was politically important only to Russia or Serbia. In the past, such choice was conditioned, in particular, by the fact that Russian researchers of Bosnian and Herzegovinian history had access to Russian, and rarely other, archives. Modern historians, meanwhile, have uncovered many documents from Ottoman, British, and other archives.¹

Reliance on the traditions of Soviet historiography dampened the researcher's interest in employing other approaches and ideas and narrowed the range of academic tools they could use to analyze and explain the processes afoot in Russian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian society, or the interaction between Russia and Orthodox Christian believers living in the Ottoman Empire, amongst others. The researchers, meanwhile, would have profited from the use of social anthropology as it applies to study of poly-

¹ For instance: Zafer Gölen, *Tanzimat dönemi Bosna isyanları, 1839-1878*, Alter, 2009; Fatma Sel Turhan, *The Ottoman Empire and the Bosnian Uprising: Janissaries, Modernisation and Rebellion in the Nineteenth Century*, I.B. Tauris, London 2014; Edin Radušić *Bosna i Herzegovina u britanskoj politici od 1857. do 1878. Godine*, Institut za istoriju Sarajevo 2013, etc.

ethnic and poly-confessional communities, including in the Balkans, and especially from the use of modern theories of nations and nationalism. Otherwise, a historian would only reconstruct facts and events but not explain them, letting the reader draw conclusions from the presented material. Meanwhile, the researcher's hypothesis that by the mid-nineteenth century Bosnians no longer had a sense of ethnic unity while religious affiliation became a marker of nationality (p. 11) is not corroborated either by references or by a convincing analysis. Still, if we presume that the main objective of the author was to retrace the chain of events (using primary sources and with maximal fullness), it has certainly been achieved.

The studies in political history produced by previous researchers enabled Melchakova to address the other aspects of Russian-Bosnian relations and approach them from a different perspective. Therefore, it is all the more interesting that the writer used documents that were left out of the Soviet publications on Bosnian history.² One becomes aware that the books published in the Soviet period present a somewhat rose-colored account of the brotherly Slavic nations and Russia's foreign policy. Using documents that her predecessors elected not to publish and introducing material that she discovered in archives, Melchakova presents a novel picture of Russia's presence in the Balkans through the prism of the life stories of specific individuals and their daily lives. The monograph brings into sharper relief the interaction between the government and civil society: the consuls simultaneously played the roles of diplomats, aid distributors, and intermediaries between Serbia's government, Russian public figures, and Christian Orthodox believers from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The researcher also writes about such instruments of influence in the region as the secret committees, and it is at this point that her account acquires some of the features of a crime novel. The writer discovered in the archives keys to ciphers used by Slavophiles' secret committee (pp. 26, 306). This information casts an utterly new light on the correspondence between the Slavic committees and the Bosnian leaders. It turned out, in particular, that books referred to in the letters meant guns; the school commission, Serbia's government; the correspondent, the agent; etc. (p. 306). Therefore, one can conclude that the Slavophiles in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina played a much more

² *Osvoboditel'naya bor'ba narodov Bosnii i Gertsegoviny i Rossiya. 1850-1864. Dokumenty* [Bosnia's and Herzegovina's Struggle for Freedom and Russia. 1850-1864. A Collection of Documents], Nauka Moscow 1985; *Osvoboditel'naya bor'ba narodov Bosnii i Gertsegoviny i Rossiya. 1865-1875. Dokumenty* [Bosnia's and Herzegovina's Struggle for Freedom and Russia. 1865-1875. A Collection of Documents], Nauka Moscow 1988.

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active role than previously assumed. When a researcher chances upon documents that allow reconsidering long-held assumptions, it is indeed a great blessing.

By way of conclusion, it would seem appropriate to remark that Ksenia Melchakova's book is not only a presentation of new information and an important contribution to academic research but also a fascinating account of the lives and adventures of people living in the nineteenth century.