



THE POWER OF A NAME: ETHNONYMS AND AN OTTOMAN MAP OF 1904

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ABSTRACT

The main idea of the text is to present how the use of certain names, in this case ethnonyms, can actually shape the history. It starts with a description of a map of the Balkan Peninsula issued by the Ottoman Empire in 1904, written in Ottoman language, with Arabic script. The map itself seemingly does not show anything new, only the known outcome of the Balkan rebellions until the last one for that time. But the author then shortly repeats again the known events that resulted in the constellation shown on the map and then dwells on the interest of the one of the Great Powers for the last of the countries that raised a rebellion: why, when supporting it, it backed its attitudes with a long forgotten ethnonym, which by the way was wrongly used? The text then concentrates on the historical use of that ethnonym and the factors that brought it to its revival, leading to an interesting question: does its use and its history reveal a possible 'power behind the power'?

The text ends with a conclusion containing rather an unusual fact: that a use of an ethnonym can represent a carefully shaped policy and that names, in this case ethnonyms, can have a power to define history.

Key words: historical map, Balkan Peninsula, uprisals, Great Powers, ethnonyms, revival of old policies, power behind powers

Introduction

Historical maps of countries and regions do not only serve simply to depict geographic boundaries of specific countries at a specific time. If analyzed correctly, they reveal the forces or factors that influenced the period leading up to the constellation they depict and established the boundaries shown at the time of issuance.

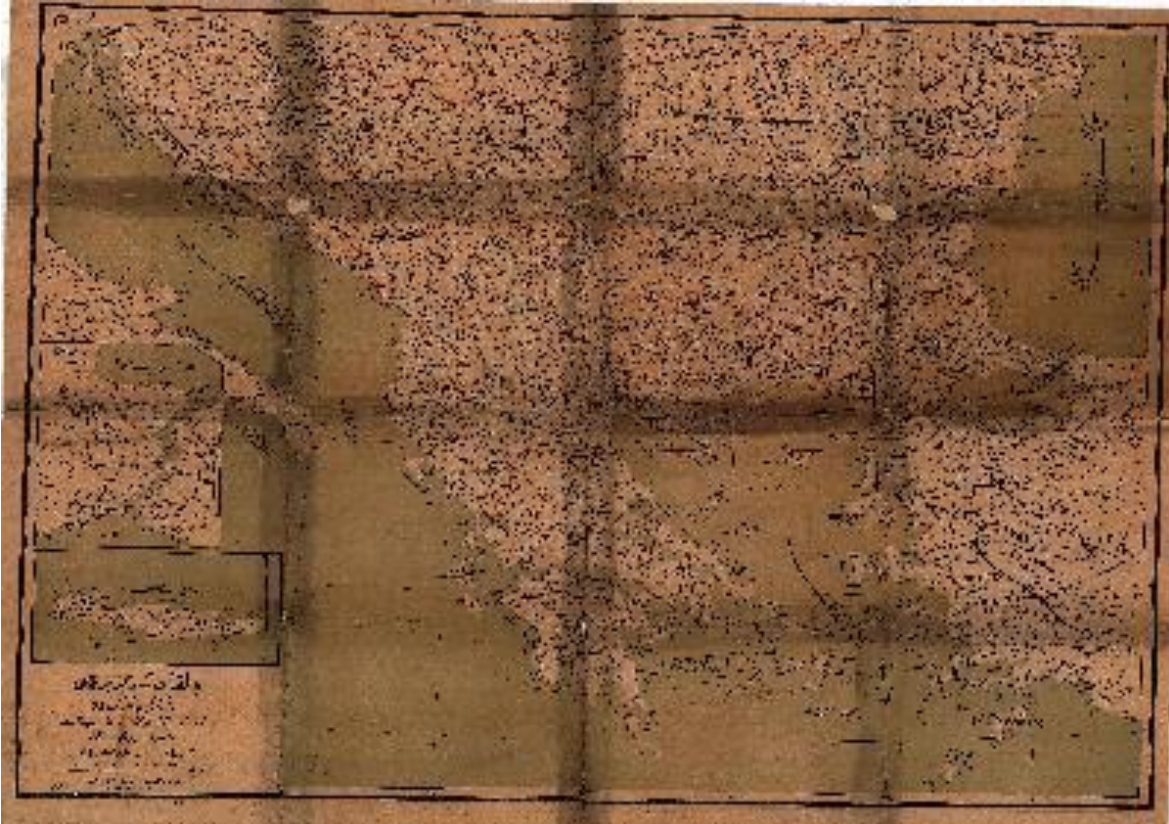
Apart from it, they can also symbolize a brief pause when forces that shaped the history regrouped to continue their flow in the intended direction.

In that sense, this text analyses an Ottoman map of the Balkans issued at 1904th. Since the boundaries in it are known to have resulted from known political events and their driving forces, the analysis begins by describing the map and its boundaries and then examines the events that shaped the political constellation it depicts.

But afterwards, when those events are explained, or rather only exposed, the text focuses on a quite surprising aspect of the events in question: could the use of a certain ethnonym related to them reveal a power behind the powers?

The Map and its Boundaries

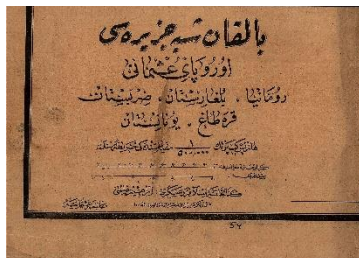
The Ottoman map in question is the following one.



Ottoman map of the **Balkan Peninsula**, issued at 1904th.

It has been taken in the 2006th year from the archive of *Atatürk Kitaplığı*, which at least at that time was located in the Istanbul's quart of *Gümüş Suyu*. As far as we could see at the archive's web site nowadays, its current address is *Miralay Şefik Bey Sok. No: 6, Taksim, Beyoğlu – İstanbul*. Its website is *ibb.gov.tr*.

The map's lower left corner contains its title:



The title of the map

In Ottoman Turkish, according to the readings we got¹, it says: *Balkan Şibh-i Ceziresi // Avrupayı-Osmaniye // Romanya, Bulgaristan, Sirbistan, Karadağ, Yunanistan*. This would mean “*Balkan Peninsula, European dominions of the Ottoman Empire, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Greece*”. The title of the map, of course, informs which countries are shown in the map. As it can be seen, starting from the North towards the South, they are *Greece, the Ottoman Empire, Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Croatia, Romania, Slovenia* and *Hungary*.

The boundaries of the part of the Balkans that is still under the *Ottoman Empire's* control, as it has been shown in the map, in the North start from the *Adriatic Sea*, somewhere at *Ulcinj*. In to-day *Serbia* its North boundary swerves all until the city of *Nish*, or perhaps the place known as *Ristovats* and then returning back, continuing towards the *Black Sea*, more or less until the to-day *Primorsko* in *Bulgaria*. The Southern boundary starts from the *Ionian Sea*, somewhere at *Lefkada* and goes all until *Volos*. After *Volos* it proceeds accross the sea, including the legs of the *Halkidiki Peninsula* and further there is no boundary, because the territory continues into the *Ottoman Empire* towards *Asia*. As it can be seen, there are still not *Albania* and *Macedonia*, and the territory unobstructedly continues from the *Adriatic Sea* in the West all until the *Black and Aegean/ Sea of Marmara* in the East.



The part of the map showing the last *Ottoman* possessions in the *Balkans*

Again as it can be seen, until that moment the countries that liberated from the *Ottoman Empire* were *Greece, Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Croatia, Romania, Slovenia* and *Hungary*. And, the map shows a certain period of time which was practically a period of stance and of a reposition to what was to follow further: the final clash with the *Ottoman Empire* some several years later (in 1913), when three of the Balkan countries (*Serbia, Greece* and *Bulgaria*) allied and together drove the Empire out of the *Balkan Peninsula*, afterwards tearing up the part of the *Balkans* that was left as a last possession of the *Empire* among themselves.

This is the map and its boundaries and that is the specific moment of time it shows. Our first question regarding its analysis will be: "What events and forces led to the outcome shown

¹ The consulted office was Alo Translate, İvedik OSB Mah. 1392. Cd. No:1/27 Başak Plaza Ankara/Türkiye

on the map and afterwards to the *Ottomans* being expelled from the Balkans and their remaining territories being divided?"

The Events and Forces before the Outcome on the Map

The last *Balkan* country that liberated from the *Ottoman Empire* was *Bulgaria*. We will start from the events that brought to its liberation.

The story of the *Bulgarian* liberation in short goes like this: After an unsuccessful rebellion known as *April Uprising* in 1876 (Strashimirov 1907: 266), *Russia* started a war against the *Ottoman Empire*, known as *Russian-Turkish War* (Jelavich I 2006: 386), which ended with the Peace Treaty known as the *San-Stephano Treaty*. With this treaty, *Bulgaria* liberated itself, but besides its own territory it got a considerable part from the former *Ottoman* territory². This was not deemed acceptable by the other *Great Powers* and now they forced *Russia* to a new treaty, known as *Berlin Treaty*, with which *Bulgaria* lost its previous benefits and remained only with its own territory, known as *Bulgarian Principality*. But *Bulgaria* still managed to win one more piece of territory, which was geographically located just under this *Bulgarian principality*, claiming that it was also populated with *Bulgarian* population. This part, known as *Eastern Rumelian Principality*, from its very beginning only *de facto* remained in the frames of the *Ottoman Empire*. Soon it tore off and joined the *Bulgarian Principality* (Kuyucuklu 1987: 35).

That is how modern *Bulgaria* formed and that is *Bulgaria* shown on this map. The Northern part is the *Bulgarian principality*, the Southern one that *Eastern Rumelian Principality*.

Two facts are worth to point out here: 1) that *Russia* was ready to open a whole new war in favor of *Bulgaria*, and 2) that the *San Stefano Treaty* shaped the further policy of the then new state of *Bulgaria*, by raising their appetites for a territory huge nearly as half of the *Balkans*. This further led to the subsequent *Balkan Wars* and remained perhaps the main axis of revolving of the modern *Bulgarian* policy for a long time.

The Events and Forces behind the Bulgarian Liberation

So, from this short summary of the *Bulgarian* liberation presented in the previous paragraph, in our opinion, it can be supposed that *Russia* most probably stood behind the *April Uprising* as well, that most probably it worked in *Bulgarian* favor even lot earlier that that, and that it ultimately did not work only in the favor of *Bulgaria*, but also against the *Ottoman Empire* and in its own favor; of course, the liberated *Bulgaria* afterwards had the potential to serve as its extended hand on the *Balkans*.

However, what was the pretext for its help to the *Bulgarian* people – especially as seen in the *San Stephano Treaty*? That the rest of the *Slavic* population in the *Balkans*, which was not *Serbian*, *Montenegrin*, and of course, which was not *Greek*, was *Bulgarian*. In other words, that all the rest of the *Slavic* population which was in that moment still under the *Ottoman* domination, was *Bulgarian*.

Nevertheless, for example, that '*Bulgar*' is not a *Slavic* ethnic name at all in the first place.

So, to sum it up, *Russia* backed its claims with the old use of the ethnonym '*Bulgarian*', which by the way was historically mistaken.

That is why now we will shortly dwell on the meaning and the use of the ethnic name '*Bulgars*'. And we will analyze it according to its known historical use, i.e. we will take a short

² Referred to by Jelavich (I: 2006: 388) as Macedonian.

glimpse separately at its original meaning, its shifted meaning and in what we consider its use in the *Byzantine* times.

The original meaning of the ethnic name 'Bulgars'

It is a *Turkic* ethnic name (Kafesoğlu 2004: 198), which comes from the *Turkic On Oğur*, i.e. 'Ten Oghurs', or more precisely 'the ten Oghur tribes', attested if nothing else in the name of one of the countries of these people, known as 'Onoguria' (the contry of the 'on Oghurs, i.e. of the 'ten Oghur tribes').

And it is the same ethnic name as *Oguz*, with the ending difference being a result of a phonetic change ($r > z$), example of which we can see in the words *tokur* and *dokuz* for the number 'nine', as witnessed in the *Old Bulgarian* historical documents VS the modern *Oghuz Turkish*, for ex. (Tekin 1987: 25).

However, it was used in its original sense only from 7th to 11th centuries, when it was marking its original ethnicity - the *Turkic Bulgars* who had come to the *Balkans* from the *Pontic-Caspian Steppes* and the *Volga region* under the leadership of a khan known as *Asparukh*.

After the 11th century, the state this people formed in the *Balkans* disintegrated and the original *Turkic Bulgars* assimilated into the local *Slavic* population. However, although the people in a way lost, the ethnic name preserved its use.

The shifted meaning of the ethnic name 'Bulgars'

After the 11th century, the term did no longer convey its original meaning. Its use shifted to 1) the *Slavic population* in the *Balkans* (and we will say here – for the time in question to *the whole of the Slavic population*) and 2) to the *states and empires* that formed in the following centuries more or less in the same part of the *Balkans*.

The shift goes like this. From the *Oghur Bulgar Empire*, justly or not, backed with strong historical evidences or not, it started to be used for the *Empire of Samuil*, which arose more or less in the ending years of the *Oghur Bulgar Empire*. From there, first it passed to the people of the *Empire of Samuil* and then to the following dynasties and Empires that arose in that part of the *Balkans*: the *Asenids* and their Empire and much later the *Royal House* and its Empire.

In this way, the shift of the meaning went into two directions. The first is to denote the *Slavic* people as *Bulgars* and the second is to describe the dynasties and empires that came later in the Eastern *Balkans* as *Bulgar* ones.

We will not enter here into the reasons why this shift has taken place. But it is obvious that this use is not justified, because the people of *Samuil* were doubtlessly *Slavic*. It is known from their names (his voevods were *Ivets*, *Nikolitsa* etc.), it is known from their dynastic model (of Greek (baptized) and *Slavic* name – *Georgi Vojtech*, *Gavril Radomir* etc., cf. *Dynasties* 2024) and it is known from many other things. And it is not justified also for the following *Empires* in the more or less same region – the *Empire of Asenids* was of *Cuman-Pecheneg* (not *Oghur*) or *Cuman-Wallachian* origin – cf. *Vasary* 2008), and the dynasty that led the Empire that arose in the 19th century, was of *German* origin.

We said that we will not enter in the reasons for this shift. However, we will state here two historical examples regarding the shift to the Slavs, which in our opinion shed a new light on the shifted use of this ethnic name.

The *example No. 1* is a citation from a medieval Greek chronicle from the 17th century regarding *Bosnia*. It goes like this: "Then he started a war against *Bosnia*; they speak *Bulgarian*. Its biggest city is called *Jajce*." (*Byzantine Empire, Europe and the Early Ottoman Sultans, 1373-*

1513, *An anonymous Greek chronicle from 17. century, Codex Barberinus Graecus 111*, New York 1990:87). The citation is regarding *Mehmet II Fatih's* conquests of *Bosnia*.

This of course does not prove that the *Bosnians* are also *Bulgarians*. But in our opinion, it shows that the name for some reason shifted to the whole of the *Slavic* population in the *Balkans* from that time³.

The *example No. 2* is a citation from the 19th-20th century historical study from a historian that was himself in the *Balkans*. It goes in this way: „During the first months of my sojourn among them (the ‚*Bulgarians*‘), my answer to their constant question whence I came, was ‚From *Frankistan (Europe)*‘. ‘You are happy, brother’, they exclaimed, ‘there are none but *Bulgarians* in your country’. ‚*Bulgarians!* I never saw a single one there’. ‚What! No *Bulgarians* in the country of the *Franks*? And what are you? Are you not a *Bulgarian*?’ ‘Not at all’. When I said this, they hung their heads sadly, and uttered not a word. It was not until after many repetitions of this dialogue I became aware that to their minds *the name of Bulgarian is significant of all the Christian nations in contradistinction to those of Islam*“ (Clark 1900: 450-451).

In our opinion, this shows that in the time in question it was no longer an ethnic term; amongst others, it bore a religious meaning, as well⁴.

Nevertheless, be that as it may, mistaken or not, this ethnic term still managed to preserve its use throughout history. How and why, it is not known. But perhaps, the reasons for the shift and its steady use can be found in the *Byzantine* solution for one of their main menaces for that time – the *Slavs*.

The Byzantine policy regarding the Slavs

The *Slavs* were a historically underestimated menace for the *Byzantines* because they were perhaps the only ones who were able to conquer and tear off such vast territory as the whole *Balkans* (and in addition the whole of *Central Europe*) from them. Furthermore, they came in such an enormous number that it was almost not possible to expel them, thus presenting themselves as a potential eternal menace. How were the *Byzantines* supposed to deal with their number superiority?

In our opinion, the solution to conquer them was to use other peoples as allies against them. And after they would be conquered, to use client states to maintain control over them.

And the use of the term was, after they were defeated, to present the *Slavs* as part of the peoples of their client states, so that they would be both invisible in the history and ruled by their client states.

We cannot say anything specific about the *Oghur Bulgars*. But we do think that some of the peoples who settled in the *Balkans* in the times after the *Slavs* occupied it, have come on *Byzantine Emperors'* invitation. And after the *Oghur Bulgar Empire* disintegrated, the *Empire of Samuil* arose, which if it was a *Slavic* one, it was far more considerable problem for the *Byzantines*: considering the former *Slavic* principalities in the region and their number of people, the *Byzantines* could have expected to lose the whole *Balkan Peninsula* in no time again. And that would probably have meant two centuries of effort to subjugate them in vain and perhaps a permanent loss of the *Balkan* dominions to the *Slavs*.

³ Otherwise, it could be indeed used to claim that even the *Bosnians* are *Bulgarians*.

⁴ Otherwise, it could be understood that not only the *Slavs* but the *Europeans* in whole are also *Bulgars*.

That is why we think that the shift of use of the ethnic name for the *Empire of Samuil* and the *Slavs* in the *Balkans* might have been deliberate act of the *Byzantine* policy. Being deprived of historical proofs of their real nationality, they would not have a ground to claim right to have freedom, right to have their own separate countries; they would always be labelled as separatists, traitors to their imposed nationality etc. On the other hand, the client countries that imposed the fake nationalities over them would always have the ground to claim that they are part of them and on that basis to suffocate every attempt for liberation.

Although in the reality, neither the *Slavs* in question were parts of those peoples, nor those peoples were really those peoples. In this case, i.e. regarding the Eastern part of the *Balkan Peninsula*, neither the *Slavs* were '*Bulgars*', nor the state of the *Asenids* and they themselves were really '*Bulgars*'.

Let alone that in such a constellation they have more than one enemy to deal with and that it gives time to the *Byzantines* to devise other solutions for the problem: expulsion, assimilation, etc., etc.

That is why in our opinion, such use of the ethnic names (in this case '*Bulgar*') was an important political means of the *Byzantine Empire*.

However, if it was of the *Byzantine Empire*, it could have been "in force" only until the 14th century or so (while the *Byzantine Empire* lasted). And anyway, it was of the *Byzantine Empire*. Why would *Russia* follow it? Especially having in mind that the *Russians* are already *Slavs* and did not need that premise?

Russia prior the Events that Shaped the Map in Question

Perhaps because a *Minister of Foreign Affairs* of the *Russian Empire* in that time was a person of non-*Russian* origin; what is more, a descendant of the old *Byzantine* aristocracy (Jelavich I 2006: 230). In other words, it was a person for whom we may assume that he was acquainted with the above-described *Byzantine* practice.

This person was, as it is well known, *Ioannis Kapodistrias*. And that is not all, what is very indicative, that same person, a diplomat of a career, was later the first *prime minister* of *Greece*, when it formed as a modern country (Jelavich I: 2006: 246).

So, from what we have stated above, we think that it comes out that *Russia's* revival of that use of the term actually may have meant a revival of the medieval *Byzantine* policy regarding the *Balkans* in general. And more particularly, that this *Russia's* use of the term was neither accidental nor it was an original *Russian* device. Namely, it is logically to expect that the descendants of the old *Byzantine* nobility might have been acquainted with such subtleties of the old *Byzantine* policy; but it is less expectable that the *Russian* or any other *European* nobility would have had such detailed insight into those questions. That, in our opinion, presents a fine basis for a skillful management of the policy of much greater powers in a way that would actually suit the ones who advise them.

Of course, we can still think it was accidental, but in that case the following question would be interesting. *Kapodistrias* later became the prime minister of the country that in many ways can be considered as a legal successor of the *Byzantine Empire*. Whose extended hand would be then the newly established *Bulgarian* state in the *Balkans* (if it was at all) in that case? *Russia's*? Or of the country that in many ways replaced the *Byzantine Empire*? Or perhaps of them both?

That opens one more interesting aspect of the question: has the *Byzantine nobility* restored its medieval policy even before it formed its country (or should we say a country from

which it could freely operate)? In that sense, we might shortly follow the same line of thinking regarding the other *Great Powers* of the time as well.

The Other Great Powers prior to the Events that Shaped the Map

The defeat of the *Ottoman Empire* in the *Balkans* and its expulsion from there in many ways looks like a result of unison efforts of all the *Great Powers* to cut off parts of the *Empire* one by another by liberating *Balkan* peoples and thus pushing the *Ottoman Empire* away. In that sense, each of the *Balkan* countries had its supporter, and usually, after being helped by that supporter, partly served as extended hand to its policy in the *Balkan Peninsula*. For example, the *Bulgarians* were supported by the *Russians*, the *Albanians* by the *Italians* etc. Thinking in the line of our previous line of thought, could we reason in the direction that in all the *Great Powers* in that time there perhaps were skilled diplomats who were descendants of the old *Byzantine* nobility like *Kapodistrias* himself in *Russia*? And that they all, in unison, primarily worked for the goals of their future country (i.e. they counseled skillfully so that things would move in the direction of the revival of the medieval *Byzantine* policy regarding the *Balkans*)?

And in the light of what we have said above regarding the *Byzantine* solution for the Slav menace, perhaps it would be interesting to add only this more. The ethnic composition of the part of the region which the *Ottomans* managed to maintain as the last one (i.e. the part of this map shown as *Ottoman Dominions*), was in that time as follows: in the West end of this region were the *Albanians*, and in the East one rather mixed population with lot of different *Turkic* layers and other peoples (*Old Bulgars*, *Cumans*, *Pechenegs*, perhaps *Wallachians* etc.). Between these two ends were the *Slavs*, the old menace, who in the Early Middle Ages advanced all until the end of the *Peloponnesus*, but until this time were pushed by the *Albanian* demographic expansion to this part. So, the old menace again, being given the same old wrong ethnic name again, and they were the only ones who did not have any ally among the *Great Powers*, since the outcome that came for them some ten years after is known. While all the other *Balkan peoples* (and countries) had an ally, for which it is doubtful whether they have asked for it themselves.

The question that could be asked here is the following: was all of that a skillfully led policy against the *Slavic* number supremacy with centuries? And were all, or most of the *Great Powers* actually Powers with which the *Byzantine Empire* was on good terms even before it disintegrated?

Conclusions

The text presents a historical map of the *Balkans* issued by the *Ottoman Empire* in 1904th, which itself, in our opinion, is a precious contribution to modern science. The historical maps show, or can show, new aspects of questions from the past, especially if they refer to regions with such a complex and unclarified history as in this case the *Balkan Peninsula*. However, we tried not to limit only to the presentation of the map itself, but to enrich the topic with an issue that in our opinion has not been specifically enquired. That is the use of the ethnic name '*Bulgar*' (and we deliberately use this form here, because '*Bulgarian*' is the name of the modern country and the ethnic name for its people, but it is a modern form; in the Middle Ages, the original form was '*Bulgar*'). This name presented and rather still presents many disputes both in historical science and in the wider social discourse. And it presents those disputes in the sense that some are sure about the validity of its use and do not question it at all, while others challenge it, with historical facts that according to them make a solid base for their claims. In

our opinion, those facts may be valid, but still not enough researched to show the whole picture; and we think that the whole picture would be surprising for both – and all – sides.

The traditional view on the use of this ethnic name is that it had a continuation from the oldest time it was used in the *Balkans* until newest. From the *Oghur Bulgars* of *Asparukh*, through *Samuil's Empire* to the *Asenid Empire* and then, although there was a gap of several centuries, to the *Bulgarian principality* from the 19th century and then to modern *Bulgaria*. Together with these Empires go the peoples they ruled, too, regardless of their ethnic origin. However, this view is indeed not sustained in many aspects – although it is claimed, or even known from the historical sources, that *Samuil* assumed the *Bulgarian* crown, there is no clear historical evidence or source that actually explains how and when it happened. In the same way, although it is claimed that *Samuil's dynasty* descends from the *Oghur Turkic dynasty*, there is no clear evidence and solid historical proof for that also. The use of the ethnic name '*Bulgars*' for the *Slavs* is not even explained; it is taken for granted only because such use there indeed has been historically attested. However, nobody asked why *Slavic* peoples would be denoted with non-*Slavic* ethnic name; what would be the reason for that.

On the other hand, there are and there can be valid historical explanations that view this historical fact as simply accidental. For example, *Samuil* (for whatever reason) assumed the *Bulgarian* crown; since the Middle Age concept of nations was based on the crowns (Vasary 2008:46) the name passed onto his state and his people also; this remained so in the history; and *Russians* just assumed that centuries later and by the name of *Bulgars* they simply understood '*Slavs*'. That is why they took that course to protect all the remained *Slavs*, although they were known under the name '*Bulgars*' in that time. But some of these explanations are simply rather naive. The concept of the nation may have been as it has been, but it would hardly have an impact on people's everyday life. It would hardly be believable that individuals would take it for granted that they suddenly changed their nationality just because the concept of the nations in general was as it was. This was related to the written use. And on the other hand, the *Russians* are people with long tradition. And at the same time, *Slavic* people. It is a little bit illogical that they would confuse these terms.

And finally, as to our knowledge, apart from in the *Turkish* history, until recent times there was even not a common agreement on the genuine meaning of this ethnic name (in the sense which people it actually denotes); there were many suppositions, but none commonly accepted.

So, in that sense, many issues in traditional history remain to be not satisfactorily explained.

Unlike that, our opinion is that its use was never accidental but always deliberate and that the use of this ethnic name shaped history in the way it is now. But that this shaping was always invisible; in the Middle Ages, its use was deliberately falsified in the historical sources, and its use by the dynasties may have been falsely claimed. In the 19th century it was revived, but again, from behind other powers. On the surface, in our example, *Russia*, but equal benefit of its use may have been utilized by *Greece*, too. In this way, modern history could have been carefully shaped in the way it is today by a power behind the powers; the medieval *Byzantine* policy has been restored, the main *Byzantine* problem – *Slavs* – have been rather successfully dealt with, by a power behind the powers.

And in that way, the only population that had no ally in the *Great Powers* in the times when the *Ottoman Empire* was being pushed away from the *Balkans* was the population in that

part that remained last under the *Ottoman* government, in this map shown as *Ottoman Dominions*. No *Great Power* took under its protection this population. And the *Great Powers* were also enemies to the *Ottoman Empire*, so the *Ottoman Empire* and this population seemed to be on the same side. But what happened, happened. That is also one of the aspects of our opinion that was carefully shaped politics in question.

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