HISTORY OF THE BALKANS
EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES
VOLUME I
HISTORY OF THE BALKANS

Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

VOLUME I

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Preface

This narrative concerns the history of the people of five modern Balkan states – Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and Yugoslavia – over approximately three centuries. Although the Balkan peninsula has played a major role in history, the area has been subject to less intensive study than any other European region. To the outside observer the Balkans often appear to be a puzzle of confusing complexity. A geographic region inhabited by seven major nationalities, speaking different languages, it has usuallyImpinged on the Western consciousness only when it has become the scene of wars or acts of violence. Long characterized as the “powderkeg of Europe,” the peninsula has indeed lived up to its reputation. The Crimean War, the major European engagement in the century after 1815, had its origins here; the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914 was the immediate cause of World War I. After 1944 the Balkan events were a major factor in initiating the Cold War; the Greek civil war was the occasion of the reorientation of American foreign policy with the Truman Doctrine. Although it is certainly true that crises such as these have received thorough study, particularly in their world significance, much less attention has been paid to the study of the area on its own terms. Western historians, hindered by language difficulties and limited access to archival materials, have only recently begun to examine in detail the many aspects of the Balkan experience.

Yet this area, because of both its past contributions and its present importance, certainly deserves a larger place in modern historical studies. Part of former ancient Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Habsburg lands, and situated at the convergence of Europe, Africa, and Asia, the peninsula has felt the weight of the convergence of alternate imperial drives and competing ideologies. Here at various historical periods major political and cultural borderlines have intersected – for instance, the boundaries between the Eastern (Byzantine) and Western Roman empires, between Islam and Christianity, between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, and today between the military blocs of the North Atlantic Treaty and the Warsaw Pact, alignments representing conflicting social, political, and economic systems. Subject to rival external influences, as well as internal pressures, the area is in a very real sense
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a testing ground for alternative systems. Thus in the past two centuries the Balkans have been a laboratory in which some of the more elusive aspects of national and liberal forms of political organization and economic development could be observed; at present the socialist regimes offer similar opportunities for investigation. In addition, for both the North and the South American reader, an examination of Balkan history has the added appeal of dealing with the national homeland of millions of emigrants to the New World.

This survey is designed to introduce the reader to the dramatic and fateful history of the Balkan peninsula in the years from the Treaty of Karlowitz (Sremski Karlovci) of 1699 to the beginning of the 1980s. The aim is to present a balanced picture, based on recent research and on the standard histories and monographs, of the development of this region in the modern era. The major theme will be the process by which the Balkan nationalities broke away from imperial control, both Ottoman and Habsburg, established independent national states, and then embarked on the even more arduous road to economic and social modernization. The Treaty of Karlowitz, whose terms were a major permanent setback to Ottoman control, is a convenient landmark at which to begin our story. The subsequent period witnessed the commencement of the movements that were to lead the Balkan people away from the imperial, ecclesiastical organization of the Ottoman government toward the national, secular, state system. The national revolutions, as we shall see, were carried through on an individual basis with comparatively little cooperation among the Balkan nationalities. Nevertheless, the activities of the separate groups shared certain common characteristics. For instance, each national movement was associated with a cultural revival that involved the formulation of a literary language and a renewal of interest in the pre-Ottoman history of the people. Similarly, all of the national leaders organized and carried through armed insurrections, whether successful or not, and they shared a similar vision of the political and economic goals for the future.

The road to political transformation was to be long. The slow pace of the weakening and gradual withdrawal of Ottoman control made the process more difficult. Under the absolute rule of the sultan, internal national and religious rivalries had been muted, and European influences were confined to the periphery of the peninsula. With the increasing inability of the Ottoman government to defend its possessions, the Balkan lands became prizes coveted by other great powers. In the eighteenth century the Russian and Habsburg empires competed both with the Ottoman Empire and against each other for predominance. In the nineteenth century the region moved to the center of the diplomatic stage; the Eastern Question, involving all of the European great powers, became the major continuous diplomatic issue until the commencement of World War I, a conflict whose immediate origins were deeply rooted in Balkan problems. Unfortunately for the Balkan people, during the period of the national liberation movements their lands thus became
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the focus of international attention. Here the increasingly dynamic imperial drives of Britain, France, and Russia crossed and conflicted. Later the newly united Germany and Italy joined in the battle. By the beginning of the twen
tieth century the Habsburg Empire, like the Ottoman, was faced with rising national antagonisms within its own boundaries. Nevertheless, this state too attempted to carry through a strong Balkan policy. Although the peninsula declined in significance as a center of diplomatic conflict between the two world wars, its importance as an object of international rivalry revived after 1945, with an altered list of combatants.

Living in a region of international tension, the Balkan people naturally found themselves under constant pressure from abroad. Unwilling to accept the substitution of the rule of other powers for that of the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan national leaderships fought against any outside attempts at annexation or domination. At the same time they were enormously attracted by the material and cultural achievements of the European states. Thus, despite the fact that the national movements were directed toward what was in fact the revival of pre-Ottoman political organizations, their leaderships accepted European political institutions and often justified their actions on the basis of contemporary Western ideologies of liberalism and nationalism. In the nineteenth century the great powers determined the form of government, the person of the ruler, and the boundaries of most of the new Balkan national states. However, their decisions, often based on progressive political concepts, in general reflected the convictions of the majority of the Balkan leaders. In the twentieth century socialist and communist political programs, drawn both from the Soviet Union and from Western Europe, have attracted similar support among some groups.

Until Ottoman control was removed and the national governments were formed, internal political issues and foreign policy received the principal attention of the Balkan leaders. The parallel process of social and economic change went forward at a much slower pace until after 1945, when it became a predominant consideration in Balkan affairs. Until very recent times the bulk of the population has consisted of an impoverished and largely illiterate peasantry living under extremely backward conditions. Although some of its members rose to form the political leadership of the national governments, the greater number witnessed the gradual erosion of their economic and social position under the pressure of the new conditions. Despite their preocupation with political and diplomatic issues, the Balkan leaders were well aware of the implications of their weak economies, particularly in questions involving general state interests such as national defense. A major aim of all the national governments was thus modernization – including the development of industry, the improvement of agriculture, the introduction of an advanced educational system, and the acquisition of the traits and amenities that were so admired in Western European societies. In this effort, too, the ambivalent attitude toward foreign influences was clearly shown. Although
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the Balkan states, lacking the necessary capital, resources, expertise, and experience, needed assistance, they feared foreign exploitation or imperial domination.

The theme of the conflicting attraction to and rejection of foreign political, ideological, and economic influence has thus been a constant element in Balkan history. However, although Balkan societies, either willingly or under duress, have accepted much from the outside world, it must be emphasized that even where foreign institutions and ideas were adopted, they were subsequently molded and changed to fit national traditions and prejudices. Certainly, the major element in Balkan life is that drawn from the long historical experience of the people and their own unique reactions to the outside interferences to which the peninsula has been so vulnerable.

This work was prepared as part of a program organized in 1972 by the Joint Committee on Eastern Europe of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council to provide histories of Eastern Europe. Professor Peter F. Sugar of the University of Washington was the chairman of the special committee that prepared the original proposal; Professor Michael B. Petrovich of the University of Wisconsin became chairman of the supervising committee and was responsible for the subsequent organization. This Balkan history has received generous funding from the Office of Education, including grants that allowed the author the free time necessary to complete the writing and funds to assist in the preparation of the volumes for publication. Dr. Gordon B. Turner, Vice-President of ACLS until 1980, and his successor, Dr. Jason H. Parker, contributed valuable suggestions and assistance. The author is also greatly indebted to Julia A. Petrov of the Office of Education for her advice and support.

As stated in the original project, this book is designed as an introduction to Balkan history; it assumes no prior knowledge. Major European events and political, philosophical, and economic theories necessary to the narrative are also covered. Because of the complexity of the developments being treated, some subjects are touched on in more than one section. This area has played a major role in world affairs. Consequently attention is directed not only to internal Balkan events, but also to the great international conflicts in this period. The book thus covers both Balkan developments and the place of the peninsula in history.

Because of the dual aspect of the text, numerous maps have been included to help clarify both the internal problems and the crises caused by the involvement of the great powers in the region. The illustrations are designed to cover these and other aspects of Balkan history. Almost all are prints prepared in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire in general attracted the interest not only of statesmen and generals, but also of writers, poets,
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and artists, who were drawn to the area by the extreme beauty of the landscape and by what was to them an exotic and romantic atmosphere. The peninsula itself was little known; there were many misconceptions. As is shown in the map prepared in the early eighteenth century by one of the best British cartographers, Herman Moll, until the middle of the nineteenth century it was generally believed that a lofty and almost impenetrable east–west mountain range crossed the entire peninsula. The illustrations make particularly clear the impression left upon the artists by the wild and mountainous nature of the lands.

The narrative has been divided into two volumes, which, with some limitations, can be read separately. The first commences with a general introduction on the major historical events through the seventeenth century, but discusses in detail the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Here the themes of the nature of Ottoman and Habsburg rule and the subsequent national movements have been emphasized. The volume concludes with the achievement of Greek, Montenegrin, Romanian, and Serbian independence and Bulgarian autonomy and the organization of their new governments. In international relations Volume I covers the events from the conclusion of the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699 to the signing of an agreement on the Balkans between Russia and the Habsburg Empire in 1897.

Volume II concerns principally the events of the twentieth century to 1980, although some background on the political developments in the previous decades is included. The major themes are the completion of the territorial unification of the modern states; the great wars and their consequences; and, in particular, the measures taken to meet the enormous political, social, and economic problems faced by these nations in the modern world. The difficulties caused by constant outside great-power interference and domination, issues that were very important in the previous centuries, also carry over into the recent period.

The multiplicity of languages and the varieties of spelling used over the past centuries provide certain difficulties for the historian of the area. In this book the attempt has been made to adopt in the spelling of personal names and geographic points the form that is most commonly used and that will be most familiar to the reader. Standard systems of transliteration have been used for Greek and Bulgarian; Serbian words and names appear in their Latin spelling. Complete consistency has not been possible. In addition, names of rulers and Ottoman statesmen and many first names have been anglicized.

Dating also provides some problems, since the Balkan people used three separate calendars until after World War I. The Muslims dated events from the Hegira in A.D. 622. The Orthodox used the Julian, or Old Style, calendar, whereas the Catholics and Protestants adopted the Gregorian, or New Style. In the eighteenth century the Julian calendar ran eleven days behind the Gregorian; in the nineteenth century this number increased to twelve; and in the twentieth century it reached thirteen. All dates in this book are in
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the New Style. The difference in dating produces difficulties principally when a particular day or month is associated with an event. For example, the April Uprising of 1876 in Bulgaria occurred in May under the New Style. When these complications arise, they are explained in the text.

For the most part the footnotes have been limited to identifications of the sources of quotations and of some of the statistical information. The capitalization and spelling of quotations from old sources have been changed to conform to the style of the text. The bibliography is designed to provide the reader with a list of books on various aspects of Balkan history. Books in languages other than English and all articles are excluded, although, of course, these have been used extensively in the preparation of the book.

The author is greatly indebted to her friends and colleagues, specialists in the field, who kindly consented to read the manuscript. Their expert comments and criticisms greatly assisted in the preparation of the final version of the book. All or a major section of the work was read by Professors Richard V. Burks, Wayne State University; Dimitrije Djordjević, University of California, Santa Barbara; Rufus Fears, Indiana University; John V. A. Fine, Jr., University of Michigan; Keith Hitchins, University of Illinois; Halil Inalcik, University of Chicago; John R. Lampe, University of Maryland; Thomas A. McInerney, York University; John A. Petropoulos, Amherst College; Michael B. Petrovich, University of Wisconsin; Dennison I. Rusinow, American Universities Field Staff; Traian Stoianovich, Rutgers University; and Peter F. Sugar, University of Washington. In addition, this work is in fact the product of the collaboration of the author with her husband, Charles Jelavich, who contributed not only suggestions and criticisms, but also the results of his own research.

The author would like to thank Debbie Chase, who typed the final copy, and Janis Bolster, whose excellent editorial reading and valuable suggestions added much to the manuscript in its final stages of preparation. She also compiled the index. The maps were prepared by William Jaber.