

Evgenia Davidova, *Balkan Transitions to Modernity and Nation-States: Through the Eyes of Three Generations of Merchants (1780s–1890s)* [Balkan Studies Library volume 6]. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013, xvii+223 pp.

The approximately hundred years covered in this book overlapped with the emergence of nation-states in the Balkans and reforms in the Ottoman Empire. Many studies on the Balkans during this period focused on nationalism and captured the transition to modernity within a national framework. Merchants in the region as a category of social analysis have been researched mainly with reference to national or diaspora contexts. Moreover, less attention has been paid to their inter-ethnic collaboration and multiethnic networks.

Balkan Transitions to Modernity and Nation-States, however, sheds new light on these relatively unstudied multiethnic networks of merchants in the Ottoman Balkans from the end of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century and approaches the complex process of modernization. In contrast to research on elites or “history from below,” Davidova offers an approach that can be called “mesohistory” or history from middle up and down. She focuses on (semi)educated actors, especially three generations of Balkan merchants. By generational and network analysis of the traders’ voices, this book successfully illustrates the versatility involved in the merchant’s profession and multiple dimensions of modernization. The focus of the study is on commercial networks mainly among inland traders in the central Balkans. The chronological framework starts with the 1780s, which was the beginning of turbulent times in both Europe and the Ottoman Empire, and ends up with the 1890s, the period of the assertion of the major Balkan nation-states.

This book comprises seven chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. The first three chapters trace histories of merchant families from various localities and different ethnic groups. Davidova analyzes business activities of families through three generations—fathers (1780s–1820s), sons (1820s–1860s), and grandsons (1860s–1890s)—and reveals features of each generation. The life story of the Tüpçilıştov family from Kalofer, Bulgaria, is shown as a key example. The subject of the fourth chapter is women’s economic role, which has been prone to be ignored in traditional historiography. The final three chapters present materials related to several topics, which show varieties of merchants’ lives and practices in the Ottoman Balkans: the social perceptions of space and time, national loyalties, business ethics, sociability and lifestyle, and public image.

Throughout the book, Davidova addresses three main themes: the multifaceted nature of merchants’ profession, the interrelationships of economic interests and political loyalty, and the notion of modernity. First, she reports that merchants were not a homogenous group. They not only had their diversified business but also various ethnic, religious and social identities. For the fathers’ generation, it was common to combine different occupations such as craft production, long-distance trade, and the putting-out system. Local and inter-regional trade within the Ottoman Empire stimulated multiethnic business cooperation. The activities of this generation were characterized by multiple occupation, high mobility, and multiethnic commercial networks. Their sons basically continued their fathers’ activities, but also engaged in tax farming, state deliveries, and international trade. The disbanding of the Janissary corps in 1826 and the tax and administrative reforms around the 1840s impacted the sons’ genera-

tion. Many non-Muslims began to fill the local economic and political vacuum, and interethnic collaborations between non-Muslims and Muslims were formed in every economic region. While the educational level of the first generation was not very high, many sons received some degree of education, mostly within the Empire. The grandsons' education was better and more diverse, often including a specialized commercial education and foreign languages even outside the Balkans, which made their inclusion into the new state bureaucracies easier.

Second, Davidova examines the standard narrative that merchants were loyal supporters of national revolutions. This book illustrates that it is difficult to see this issue in black and white. While the fathers' generation lived in the Ottoman, non-national world – characterized by multiethnic networks, multilingualism and cosmopolitanism –, most grandsons carried out their work in the name of nation and modernity. A majority of them were integrated into the new modern bureaucracies because the economies of the new nation-states were not offering many choices. In the transition from Empire to nation-states not only territorial redistribution but also the disappearance of the multiethnic coalitions occurred.

Finally, the notion of modernity is redefined throughout the book. Davidova reveals that the process of modernization was multifaceted and often brought out deeper social stratification, which notably marginalized women's economic agencies. It also means that the author challenges the traditional assertion on the economic role of women during the period. As detailed in Chapter Four, women in the late eighteenth and nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire carried on more prominent business activities than previously assumed. Although there was social stratification among women, high mobility of the merchants and their absence encouraged their wives and sons to participate in economic life. This business model of mother and adult son shows that a woman, and a man as well, has more than one face in her/his life, following the changes of the stage, for example, daughter, wife, mother, or widow. This pre-modern trend was, however, diminished in parallel with increasing industrialization and modernization. Imported Victorian models of domesticity withdrew women from the economic realm.

Balkan Transitions to Modernity and Nation-States contains valuable lessons, which can help us to understand the economic and social life of the Ottoman Balkans in the age of nationalism. It also makes a valuable contribution to the development of gender history in this region, where there is increasing interest in gender issues recently.¹ This book is useful reading for scholars and students from various scientific fields like economic and social history of the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans, studies on nationalism, and women's and gender history.

MATSUMAE MOYURU

1 "Forum" in the magazine *ASPASIA: The international year book of Central, Eastern, and South-eastern European Women's and Gender History*, in 2012 and 2013 provides brief overviews of women's and gender history in the countries in this area.