

**Demeter, G. and Bottlik, Zs.: Maps in the Service of the Nation: The Role of Ethnic Mapping in Nation-Building and Its Influence on Political Decision-Making Across the Balkan Peninsula (1840–1914).** Berlin, Frank & Timme, 2021. 310 p.

This concise study by Gábor DEMETER and Zsolt BOTTLIK (with contributions from Krisztián CSAPLÁR-DEGOVICS) is a rather rare example of a genuinely critical history of a discipline written by the representatives of the discipline. Contrary to recent publications by Steven SEEGEL (SEEGEL, S. 2018) or Vedran DUANČIĆ (DUANČIĆ, V. 2020), the book by DEMETER and BOTTLIK is a voice of geographers on geography's past. This characteristic feature springs to one's mind immediately; not only is the authors' focus centered upon cartographic techniques rather than the biographies of main actors, or academic milieus of their time, but the narrative is intercepted by numerous tables and maps. The book is furthermore amended with over fifty carefully designed maps aiming at an alternative presentation of historical data. There are, however, no historical maps reproduced in the volume, as they are mostly known to specialists in the field. All of them have been made accessible on a dedicated website (<https://balkanethnicmaps.hu/originalmaps.html>), although their resolution is not always satisfying. The outspoken goal of the authors is to identify the methods of manipulation with data

and cartographic visualizations on the one hand, and producing a more reliable representation of the Balkan's ethnic structure on the other hand.

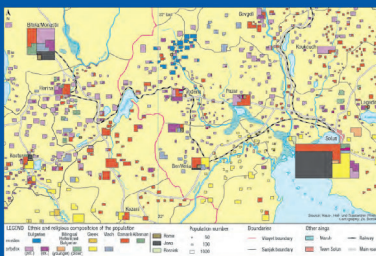
The book is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 offers a general introduction into the history of ethnic mapping and political history of the Balkans. Chapter 2 is a history of Balkan cartography divided into three main phases: (i) the early maps in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mostly authored by specialists in Slavic studies; (ii) increasingly politicized cartography of the latter part of the century; and (iii) propaganda cartography generated by all sides of the conflict in the context of the First World War. Chapter 3 discusses methodological problems of mapmaking and the Balkan censuses while Chapter 4 consists of the aforementioned modern maps produced by the authors. The book is amended with lists of maps, tables and figures, and a Bibliography.

As it becomes clear from the construction of the narrative, *Maps in the Service of the Nation* consists of two elements that rarely coexist within one book. The first is the history of Southeastern Europe seen from the perspective of ethnic cartography. The authors offer a convincingly rich outline of a complicated reality, discussing dozens of maps in their historical contexts. Their knowledge of relevant sources is impressive and they skillfully, if sparingly, make use of the critical literature on the topic (studies by Justin MCCARTHY and Ipek YOSMAOĞLU in the first place).

The second building block of the narrative is a re-evaluation of ethnic (i. e. linguistic, denominational or combined) statistics. Authors confront 19<sup>th</sup> century patch maps with rarely used Ottoman registers and censuses. Their modus operandi is to compare their own maps based on the existing statistical data with historical cartographic material in hope that, even though numbers rarely match, similar proportions of ethnic groups would help to identify the most reliable among the historical maps. Such an approach partly exonerates cartographers of the past who, biased as they mostly had been, still occasionally succeeded in producing at least partly proper representations of reality.

Is such an ambitious approach destined to be a failure? The answer depends on the perspective. There can be no doubt that an adequate, even large scale picture of the ethnic composition in the Balkans during the 19<sup>th</sup> century cannot be achieved. Leaving aside the plethora of historical maps and mutually exclusive interpretations, the lack of consistent data from any longer period of time makes such an undertaking unrealistic. Authors frequently refer to the Ottoman statistics but they perfectly realize that ethnic and other categories used in them cannot be translated into modern terms, nor do they cover any region systematically.

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## Maps in the Service of the Nation

The Role of Ethnic Mapping in Nation-Building and Its Influence on Political Decision-Making Across the Balkan Peninsula (1840–1914)

Gábor Demeter / Zsolt Bottlik

Beyond that, mass migrations and border changes significantly influenced realities on the ground. In sum, the reader of this book will not necessarily feel that his/her knowledge of the ethnic structure of Southeastern Europe grew significantly higher.

In lieu of such an unfulfilled dream of accuracy BOTTLIK and DEMETER offer a couple of consolation prizes of considerable value. Methodological considerations is surely one of them. The authors do not dismiss all historical data altogether. In their eyes, through the combination of various sources at minimum some general idea of ethnic or religious divisions can be achieved. The precondition for future historians of Southeastern Europe would be, to follow BOTTLIK's and DEMETER's advice, not to "fell into the trap of considering one of the sources only as primary and reliable" (p. 230). In the case discussed Ottoman censuses had been such a dismissed source. Acknowledging their (be it limited) credibility opens the way for a comparison with other statistics. The combination of such data results in a considerably improved ethnic map. Not an exact one, but meticulously following all available data.

Cartography and, especially, cartographic techniques are another 'winner' of the history told in the book. Most of the historical maps that have been discussed by the authors (without, however, being reproduced in the book) were simple patch maps. Their main value, that is their simplicity, was at the same time their main vice. Incapable of illustrating complicated relations they proved completely useless when confronted with the Balkan mix of ethnic and religious groups. Deficiencies of patch maps had been noticed, even though not seriously challenged, by the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century cartographers themselves. Some of them, to mention Jovan CVIJIĆ whose oeuvre gets a fair but, at times, caustic treatment, excelled in generating new mixed ethno-religious categories (such as 'Albanised Serbs') designed to more precisely express local identities. DEMETER and BOTTLIK see this cartographic technique as inadequate and highly susceptible to propagandistic manipulations. Their alternative is various forms of pie chart maps. Their main asset is that they allow to reliably illustrate data variability. Given doubts surrounding most (or all) of Balkan ethnic statistics such a possibility allows cartographers to achieve a considerable level of clarity and credibility.

While the concept of the book and the approach of the authors are fascinating in their combination of critical history of (politicized) science on the one hand, and cognitive optimism on the other hand, *Maps in the Service of the Nation* offers no easy reading. The history of Balkan cartography is narrated in an extremely condensed fashion, while the decision to exclude historical cartography does not help to visualize the problems discussed therein. It is also a pattern throughout the book that meaningful informa-

tion that should be integrated into the text gets transferred into the footnotes. Imminently, such a style occasionally leads to oversimplifications: at times the authors squeeze sophisticated realities into short formulas; a procedure that not always brings fruits. So, for example, the references to 'Slavophilia' of some of the cartographers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century offer rather little substance given the vagueness of the term. In this case BOTTLIK and DEMETER seem to fell victim to their own oversimplification as they struggle to interpret František ZACH's approach to the region's ethnic divisions (apparently without knowledge of the latter's links to Prince CZARTORYSKI's 'diplomatic service' in the Balkans – pp. 64–65). There are instances, too, where the authors seem to follow the language of their sources too closely; hence mention of a map that "mutilated North Albania" (p. 95). A more relaxed, less condensed narrative would perhaps help to avoid such awkward formulations.

Yet another problem related to the concise narrative is weak contextualization. History of cartography in general is embedded in the political history, cultural history and history of science. Balkan cartography requires even more attention and a larger surplus of information in order to be properly understood. To name but one example: wavering international sympathies and antipathies in Western Europe (pro-Greek, pro-Bulgarian etc.) occasionally get a mention in the narrative but nowhere do they expand beyond very short notes.

These deficiencies of the narrative result in the authors' stepping over the major problem of a complex relation between cartography and propaganda. The latter seems to be personalized by CVIJIĆ, whose flexible handling of ethnic identities clearly (and understandably) frustrates the authors. Yet, besides being politically motivated, CVIJIĆ has been widely acknowledged the best Balkan geographer of all times. The challenge faced by historians of geography is not necessarily to dethrone the Serbian scholar, nor to unmask him as a skillful manipulator, but rather to explain how science and propaganda could coexist within single high quality cartographic work, how they intermingled and influenced each other. Such an attempt is absent.

All aforementioned weak sides of the book leave the reader not fully satisfied, but not disappointed either. The authors deserve credit for their impressive knowledge while they not always succeed in making this knowledge accessible to the reader. Still, there are many wise and thought-provoking fragments worth scanning through the whole narrative. Such as this short explanation of the meaning of the chosen ethnic category for a cartographic representation of the region:

"In fact, it was the category of Muslim Slavs who were able to shift the balance: if they were counted as Muslims, a relative Muslim majority was observable

in the Empire; if they were considered Slavs, a Slavic majority was the result. As not only the result, but the approach was different (one a religious categorization, the other linguistic), the results were incomparable and from a certain point of view are equally reasonable (or unreasonable). This is the paradox of Balkan ethnic mapping” (p. 157).

MACIEJ GÓRNY<sup>1</sup>

#### REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> Polish Academy of Sciences, Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History, Warsaw, Poland.  
E-mail: mgorny@ihpan.edu.pl