

The Last Ottomans: The Muslim Minority of Greece 1940-1949. [Series: New Perspectives on South-East Europe.] By KEVIN FEATHERSTONE, DIMITRIS PAPADIMITRIOU, ARGYRIS MAMARELIS and GEORGIOS NIARCHOS. Pp. 368. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2010. £68. Hardback. ISBN: 9780230232518.

The Muslim minority of Western Thrace, the north-easternmost part of Greece, is a legacy of both the area's long Ottoman past and the bloody period of the Empire's collapse. Their fate was determined by a treaty signed in 1923 at Lausanne that signalled the end of the war between Greece and Atatürk's Turkey. The settlement included a provision for the mandatory exchange of inhabitants between the two countries on the basis of religion. Around 500,000 Muslims were deported from Greece and were replaced by 1.2 million Greek Orthodox Christians from Anatolia. Since the Greeks of Istanbul and their Patriarch were allowed to remain behind, the Muslims of Western Thrace were also exempted as a reciprocal measure. Numbering nearly 100,000 and constituting around a third of the local population, the community was geographically, socially and linguistically divided between the 'Turks' of the lowlands, the 'Pomaks' of the highlands, and the nomadic Muslim

Romani. They became a separate legal entity defined in national and international law.¹

There is a significant amount of literature on the minority, which concentrates on their legal status and the attitude of the Greek state towards them, and indicates the country's deteriorating relationship with Turkey. The authors of *The Last Ottomans* focus on the formative decades of the 1930s and, especially, the 1940s. During this period, minority leaders around Europe were attempting to use the war and the initial successes of the Axis powers to renegotiate their status by collaborating with the invaders. Greece was no exception, since minority groups also came into contact with occupying forces. For instance, Macedonian Slavs played a prominent role in the Civil War of 1946 to 1949, aligning with the communists. In contrast, the Muslims of Thrace exhibited a very passive attitude throughout the period. The reasons for their silence form the book's underlying question.

The two introductory chapters offer some information on Western Thrace in the late Ottoman and inter-war periods. In particular, it discusses the stance of the minority in a climate of intense polarization in Greek politics between republicans and royalists; its own division between modernists and traditionalists; and the impact of the rapprochement between Greece and Turkey, which began in 1930 and offers a bridge to the following period. In October 1940, Greece was invaded by fascist Italy. In spring 1941, Germany and Bulgaria joined the war and the country, its defences overwhelmed, was divided into three occupation zones. Western Thrace was given to Bulgaria, which subjected it to a brutal policy of Bulgarization. After Bulgaria's capitulation in 1944, the area was briefly administered by the Greek communist-led resistance organization. Western Thrace became an important battleground as the confrontation between the communists and the old guard of Greek politicians escalated into civil war. The close proximity to communist Bulgaria and the presence of the impassable Rhodope Mountains made it well-suited for guerrilla warfare. Yet, the communists' plans to create an 'Ottoman Battalion' by promising the Muslims greater autonomy came to naught.

The authors have surveyed a wide array of archive sources, including administrative and army records and diplomatic correspondence from Greece and Britain and, to a lesser extent, from Turkey and Bulgaria. Local newspapers, both in Turkish and Greek, were also examined to reconstruct public, or at least elite, discourse on the local level. In addition, a large number of interviews was conducted both with the Greek population and with previous members of the minority who had since left for Turkey. The resulting image is that of an insular community absorbed in its own internal divisions, and at the same time anxious to offer a unified front to the outside. Neither the Bulgarian occupation nor the communists offered the Muslims a viable alternative to the previous situation. The former alienated the locals with its brutality, and the latter preached an ideology too radical to be embraced by the

¹ The ethnic composition of the minority is, and has always been, controversial. In general, the distinction between Turks and Pomaks seems to have lessened as a result of internal migration, intermarriage and Turkish-language minority education. At the same time, the Greek state is increasingly attempting to distinguish between groups and disputes the 'Turkish' character of the minority. This review will follow usage in the book and employ 'Muslims' to refer to the minority as a whole.

largely conservative communities. However, at the same time Turkey seemed keen to respect the pre-war status quo and discouraged Muslim emigration from Greece.

All in all, *The Last Ottomans* offers important insights into a little-known period of a group, which had largely escaped the attention of historians until now. As a result of painstaking research, it succeeds to present the Muslim minority against the backdrop of this dramatic period in Greek history. The focus lies on political and diplomatic history. However, the inner life of the minority and the social and economic networks which sustained it could have been highlighted more. The crucial aspects of the Turkish strategy vis-à-vis the minority are not fully explored, because of restricted access to the Turkish state archives. Hopefully, the book will be the first of many studies on this little-known aspect of Greek history.

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