

Klaus Buchenau, Auf russischen Spuren: Orthodoxe Antiwestler in Serbien, 1850-1945.

Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011 (Balkanologische Veröffentlichungen: Geschichte-Gesellschaft-Kultur, no. 51). 519 S., ISBN 978-3-447-06276-3, € 98, -

Buchenau's book is much more than yet another historical monograph. The title does it little justice given the range of topics it covers based on materials explored in archives from Russia and Ukraine to Serbia and Germany, hundreds of journals and memoirs surveyed and an impressive connoisseurship of secondary literature on practically the whole modern history of Serbia that this book is in dialogue with. In this originally a habilitation thesis Buchenau singlehandedly achieves more than recently popular team projects or previously whole history institutes. For this reviewer, in terms of new sources used and insights gained, Buchenau's study is possibly the most important work in the historiography of Serbia in the last couple of decades.

Buchenau traces origins and analyses thought patterns of anti-Westernism among Serbs. Anti-Westernism, he defines as the criticism of the principles which are either practiced in the West or are associated with the West and/or promoted by those who declare as anti-Westerners (p. 11). This is a very important and recently pressing topic because large segments of the Serbian elites and political forces put blame on the West for Yugoslavia's disintegration and all Serbian recent troubles. Buchenau demonstrates a history of this kind of thinking and explains that the Serbian anti-Westernism, as any other ideological trait, is not rooted in tradition but was formed in response and as consequence of various influences and historical contexts. The chief among them were that of the Russian Slavophile intelligentsia and Russian Church while the most flourishing context was that of multireligious Yugoslavia in its short and precarious interwar years. Serbia's two most prolific authors and preachers from that period were theologian Justin Popović and bishop Nikolaj Velimirović. Largely forgotten during the Communist rule in Yugoslavia these two champions of anti-Westernism were revived during the resurgence of the Serbian nationalism in the 1980s. Their works were republished and celebrated and the ensuing cult that emerged culminated in the decision of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) to proclaim them saints.

Buchenau must be given credit for a very nuanced and detailed treatment of these developments and personalities. Carefully avoiding simple solutions and a monolithic perspective Buchenau is against one sentence thesis and does not let him be reduced to one line of thought. In the best tradition of transnational history we get a detailed analysis of Russia's 19th century intellectual milieu and an excellent case study of the spiritual academies run by the Russian Orthodox Church exemplifying multiple ideological trends and practical problems the wider society was confronting. From there on Buchenau explores the acquisition of ideas and modes of thinking current in Russia by Serbs which is his major task. While links date back to the Middle Ages, strong bonds between Russians and Serbs emerge in the early 19th century with the Russian involvement in the Serbian struggle to gain independence from the Ottoman Empire and create a modern state. In addition to diplomatic, political, and military relationships the most influential linkage and the most effective and beneficial for ideological transfer was education. In contrast to many works on the transfer of Western models and ideas, Buchenau is exploring virgin ground by turning to students in Russia. Especially given that the two greatest Serbian historical figures, long term Prime Minister Nikola Pašić and future King Alexander I Karađorđević, both studied in Russia. But the bulk of Serbs studied at Russian Church Academies and later became priests or professors at Serbian schools and universities while some rose to episcopacy and Varnava Rosić and Gavriilo Dožić became patriarchs.

In the late 19th century the key figure in Russian seminaries and a trend setter when it comes to anti-Westernism was Antony Khrapovitsky, future metropolitan of Kiev and after the Bolshevik revolution the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church in exile. But before the Russian Church it was the Slavophile intelligentsia which, while by no means unanimous in their worldview, condemned what

it saw as corrupting westernizing influences in Russia and lay ground for future anti-Westernist thought. Despite his meticulous research into the workings of seminary education, Buchenau comes to the conclusion that the most influential force for the Serbian priests and intellectuals alike was that of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and his writings. Stereotypically limited and stretched beyond its context Dostoyevsky's ideas shaped even few of those Serbian clergymen who did not study in Russia like bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, not to mention the ranks of secular intelligentsia. Buchenau also shows that the Serbian students were eager recipients because many came to Russia already as Russophiles, nationalists and critically oriented towards the West because of rampant anti-Catholicism in the Balkans.

The strong Russian influence further intensified after the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution, when thousands of Russians fled to newly created Yugoslavia where many eventually settled. Now the influence extended to all spheres of life. Russian exiles were generally well educated and, as Buchenau details, up to 30 % of university lecturers were Russian. Among exiles from the fiercely anti-religious Soviet Union were many priests who were taken into the ranks of the SOC and made up 10 % of its clergy. Most chose to settle in Yugoslavia (and not France i.e.) because of the Orthodox link, King Alexander I Karađorđević's patronage of émigrés and strong anti-Communism. In the same vein the exiled Russian bishops chose Serbia for the Russian Church new headquarters further contributing to unmatched influence Russian clergy, monks and theologians exerted on the SOC. In the newly created multireligious Yugoslavia the SOC sought to re-assert itself as the state church, the role it enjoyed in the previous Serbian state. Although Yugoslav Vidovdan Constitution foresaw the equal footing of all faiths, many in the Serbian Church believed that its historical role and the high price it paid for the creation of Yugoslavia should be translated in privileged status and opportunity to mission among all South Slavs. Interestingly and paradoxically given his later actions, Buchenau shows how bishop Nikolaj opposed highly centralizing and Serbianizing policies in Macedonia (p. 227). Internally, the Church embarked on a traumatic centralising path, destroying the diversity of customs and modes of organization that existed among the Orthodox Serbs formerly under various ecclesiastical jurisdictions. All the power previously enjoyed by lay people and lower clergy were surrendered to bishops. Externally, toward other confessions and the society at large many in the Church behaved aggressively, putting pressure on the responsible Ministry and continuously using connections with the Serbian politicians who dominated the country. Not surprisingly this caused much resentment from other religious communities and ethnic/confessional based political parties. The SOC primacy in interwar Yugoslavia has already been described by Maria Fallina as a Pyrrhic victory given that the Church itself was ridden with internal conflicts, poor state of educational facilities, dying monasticism...¹ Buchenau furnishes further evidence how radical, overambitious and self-assured bishops reinforced by the Russian exiles, especially during the anti-Concordat campaign, failed to strengthen the Church and actually made it more vulnerable. Soon followed the WW2 Golgotha and post-war repression that led to almost complete extinction of the SOC in some areas (such as in Macedonia or Montenegro) or paralysis in its core regions of Serbia, Bosnia and parts of Croatia.

Back to two figures which epitomize anti-Westernism and are often lumped together. Buchenau actually threads many important differences. Justin Popović, who taught in theological schools between wars, was a spiritual child of Khrapovitsky and adopted his religious version of Slavophilia, whereby the Orthodox notion of Christ as the God-Man enables the Orthodox followers to elevate their humanity into divinity is opposed to Western Man-God principle which spans from papal primacy to Nietzsche's Übermensch and relativization of everything by secularists and atheists. Nikolaj Velimirović, on the other hand, did not develop consistent theological outlook. He was confined during the WW2 occupation of Yugoslavia for his pro-British leanings and towards the end

¹ Maria Fallina, *Pyrrhic victory : East Orthodox Christianity, politics and Serbian nationalism in the interwar period*, PhD thesis Central European University, Budapest, 2011.

of the war the Nazis even brought him to Dachau together with the Serbian patriarch Gavrilo. Paradoxically, it was there bishop Nikolaj wrote his most notorious and widely known anti-Semitic text. Buchenau resolves numerous polemics about this piece by interpreting bishop Nikolaj's blame on Jews for all European evils in anti-Western key that has coloured his writings and preaching for two decades before. Bishop Nikolaj's nationalist application of Slavophilia was to regard his own people, the Serbs, as the future of a redeemed humanity once they cast off Western spoils spread by Jews among others.

Beyond the main line of Buchenau's narrative his frequent excursions actually provide us with a comprehensive recent history of the Orthodox Church in Serbia, especially the challenges and failures it faced in attempts to modernize as seen through the prism of outdated religious educational facilities or decaying monasteries. With his polycentric search for sources Buchenau even managed to overcome the fact that the SOC does not allow the use of its archive, which it conveniently blames on the inaccessible condition of papers. Further, with his detailed contextualisation of the Serbian intellectual milieu from which the anti-Westerners stemmed and to which they returned, in a mixture of prosopography and critical discourse and literature analysis, Buchenau offers the closest of what we have as history of ideas in Serbia during almost a century long period. Just like Dostoyevsky is heavily explored in Russian context we learn about the celebrated Serbian writer Miloš Crnjanski and many other mostly conservative Serbian intellectuals of the interwar period. In addition, within this book there are definite article-length studies on 1) Dimitrije Ljotić and his fascist Zbor movement, the only willing Nazi collaborators in Serbia during WWII; 2) The lay protestant inspired *Bogomoljci* movement which bishop Nikolaj for most part managed to transform into the Orthodox Church devotees and Serbian nationalists whereas some became Zbor sympathisers; 3) The Concordat crisis that displayed all the fragility of interwar Yugoslavia and especially the role of the SOC in undermining it. Buchenau depicts how Prime Minister Stojadinović's attempt in 1936-1937 to negotiate with Vatican the contract defining the position of the Roman Catholic Church was used as canvas for expressing political and other grievances. Bishop Nikolaj played a key role in mobilising increasingly radicalised clergy and faithful in what looked like a grand finale of the interwar struggle between Serbs and Croats and an antechamber to the WW2 slaughter. Finally, 4) Buchenau discusses collaboration and resistance during WW2 in Serbia with a special focus on the SOC.

However, a huge span of topics over a century means overstretching and sometimes losing the main thread of the narrative to the myriad of digressions. In dissecting Ljotić and his ideology for example Buchenau barely connects it to the Russian track and even explicitly denies any link. If this is the case then its purpose in the book can only be to provide a wider political and ideological context for Buchenau's main interest, the Russian inspired anti-Westernism. This seems as a huge imbalance of context versus subject not to mention imbalance within the context itself as Ljotić's was only one of the many right wing ideologies at the time, as Buchenau admits. Others are glossed over like the plethora of leftist ideas. Ljotić's contacts with bishop Nikolaj might justify this lengthy section but given they clearly diverged politically (p. 388) we are nonetheless left wondering about his inclusion. At times Buchenau's anti-Westernism is too vague and all-encompassing to be helpful. Elsewhere it is overlapping with generally considered leftist ideas of Agrarian Socialist and Narodniki. Other sources of ideas among Serbian anti-Westerners are not sufficiently explored except for Oswald Spengler and Charles Maurras. Bishop Nikolaj names Dimitrije Mitrinović as his only teacher but Buchenau contemplates only his Oriental mysticism.

Buchenau's erudite narrative is almost flawless. Serbian Patriarch Gavrilo was not hanged in South Serbian Brus, as stated, but in the Ottoman Anatolian capital of Brusa (p. 68). Rebecca West could not visit bishop Nikolaj in Ohrid in 1920s, as her three visits took place from 1936-1938 (p. 142). Monastery Miljkovo is not near Požarevac but Svilajnac (p 284) and it should have been noted that

the future saint John Maximovich of Shanghai took his monastic vows there in 1926. There are minor terminological imprecisions such as implying the conflict between Hesychasts and Palamites (p. 82) when Gregory Palamas was the greatest defender of Hesychasm or the use of outdated term “Serbian-Byzantine” for a late Byzantine architecture style (p. 25). Buchenau’s comprehensiveness and depth in approach and mastery of the source material in the multitude of languages have a down side too. His thorough and detailed footnotes occasionally become too lengthy and extensive. The text too suffers from verbosity. Numerous anecdotes and overlong quotations make this book a very demanding read that requires a lot of prior knowledge and take away some of this great book’s appeal.