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# Rosetta

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Rosetta **18**: 65 – 70

<http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/issue18/Bamford.pdf>

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**Gábor Kármán & Lovro Kunčević (ed.s). *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage, no. 53. (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2013). Pp. x & 449. 4 monochrome maps (pp. 170, 318, 344, 357). ISBN 978-90-04-24606-5 (Hardback). \$203.00 / €146.00 [£115.00 approx.]**

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These essays are the fruit of a 2009 conference held in Dubrovnik and they have been edited by the two conference convenors. The intention was to build an international scholarly network in order to reassess the relationships between the Ottomans and their various vassals from a comparative perspective. The present volume is 'based on material presented at the conference', but has been 'completed with additional studies' (p. 2).

The editors concede that 'most contributions focus on the history of single tributaries and use the comparative method only tangentially', but they insist that the essays 'most certainly enter into conversation with each other and thus provide a more comprehensive view of the tributary states' history than that previously available'. So, they are satisfied that 'the volume can thus serve as the first stage of a more ambitious project to address the hitherto neglected comparative history of Ottoman satellites and provide valuable new insights into the functioning of the empire as a whole' (p. 5).

There are four topical sections on (1) legal status, (2) diplomacy, (3) military co-operation and (4) the 'composite' nature of the Ottoman Empire. Sections One, Two and Three all include chapters on Transylvania and Ragusa (modern Dubrovnik), as well as the Romanian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia. Sections One and Three add chapters on the Crimean Tatars, while 'Section

One' also includes a chapter on the Ukrainian Cossacks. 'Section Four' comprises two conceptual essays, which further scrutinise the relevant terminology and broaden their scope to include all of the various Ottoman vassals, tributaries and different varieties of provincial administration in both Europe and Asia.<sup>1</sup>

Cross-referencing with the conference programme reveals that the 'additional studies' are the result of substitution rather than expansion.<sup>2</sup> The authors of the conference papers on the legal status and diplomacy of Ragusa have swapped roles for the book by writing new papers.<sup>3</sup> The book chapter on Transylvanian military co-operation is a replacement for a German language conference paper on the same topic by a different author. It is a shame that a further substitution was not made: Victor Ostapchuck or Dariusz Kołodziejczyk could have been usefully employed in filling the historiographical lacuna identified by Gábor Kármán with a summary of Ottoman-Tatar diplomatic relations (p. 164 n. 24).

Aside from substitutions, there have actually been significant cuts, since the topics of five conference papers have been omitted altogether. 'Section Four' of the book has only two essays, but these are drawn from the final conference panel, which had four papers. An extra three-paper panel on economic relations has also been shelved.<sup>4</sup> This last omission is particularly regrettable, since the payment of tribute is obviously a fundamentally economic relationship. Indeed, the importance of economic relations haunts the book (e.g. p. 48.ff, p. 255, p. 291.f, p. 399.ff). If cuts needed to be made in order to limit this collection to a single volume, then economics should have taken precedence over military links.

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<sup>1</sup> Full contents details can be found at the E. J. Brill website:

[http://www.brill.com/european-tributary-states-ottoman-empire-sixteenth-and-seventeenth-centuries#TOC\\_1](http://www.brill.com/european-tributary-states-ottoman-empire-sixteenth-and-seventeenth-centuries#TOC_1)

<sup>2</sup> Ágnes Drosztmér (Central European University, Budapest), *AHF-Information*. 2009, Nr.251 URL: <http://www.ahf-muenchen.de/Tagungsberichte/Berichte/pdf/2009/251-09.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> At least one of these two conference papers appears to have been published as a journal article under a different title: Lovro Kunčević, *The Rhetoric of the Frontier of Christendom in the Diplomacy of Renaissance Ragusa (Dubrovnik)*, *Dubrovnik Annals*, vol. 17 (2013), pp. 37 - 68.

<sup>4</sup> János Szabó (p. 307 n. 19) refers to one of these papers as being due for publication in a separate collection: Mária Pakucs-Willcocks, *Oriental Trade and Merchants: Economic Relations Between the Ottoman Empire and Transylvania in the Sixteenth Century*, Robert Born & Andreas Puth (ed.s), *Osmanischer Orient und Ostmitteleuropa*. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014) [no chapter or page number details available].

The general absence of comparative method is presumably the reason why the conference subtitle of 'A Comparative Perspective' has been quietly dropped. At least Kármán has led by example in venturing well beyond his own specialist research area in search of comparative material. Otherwise, the only systematically comparative essay is the one by Sándor Papp. Indeed, Papp's scrupulous and efficient taxonomy should really have served as an introductory guide for all the other contributors, rather than being cobbled together with the more selective musings of Kołodziejczyk in *lieu* of a proper conclusion.

Incidentally, a proper conclusion would have been an appropriate place for the editors to substantiate their emphatic insistence that the essays 'enter into conversation with each other'. Kármán (p. 157 n. 7), Papp (p. 381 n. 13) and János Szabó (p. 308 n. 21, etc) make some cross-references, but these merely acknowledge the existence of other chapters and do not engage with any specific evidence or arguments. Otherwise, the authors seem to talk past each other, so both agreements and disagreements remain unacknowledged.

The most obvious disagreement is that the title of the book refers to 'tributary states' rather than 'vassals', even though neither the Crimean Tatars nor any of the Ottomans' other Muslim vassals paid tribute (pp. 48.f, 64, 278, 375). Indeed, Papp insists that Ottoman relations with Muslim and non-Muslim vassals 'originated from different legal and historical sources' and must therefore be treated separately (p. 377, p. 418).

In light of this, Kołodziejczyk is wrong to dismiss his own comparative table as 'absurd', since it actually divides neatly into two halves: Christian vassals paid tribute and Muslim vassals mentioned the Ottoman Sultan in their calls to prayer (*hutbe*), while both Christian and Muslim vassals may or may not have been required to provide military assistance. However, he remains blind to this clear distinction and claims that his table casts doubt on 'the viability of such "objective" criteria by which modern historians like to depict and classify early modern political organizations'. He then mocks the 'fetishisation of state

sovereignty' as useless 'if one aims to describe the more nuanced political mosaic that was typical for the early modern world' (p. 430).

Kołodziejczyk's essay ultimately degenerates into crass contemporary parallels in which he considers the government of the USA to be equivalent only to the governments of China and North Korea in the extent of its sovereignty. He then remarks favourably on the 'stability without statehood' allegedly provided by the EU (p. 431 n. 35). However, he does offer one sensible suggestion: 'Instead of asking whether such political entities [...] were sovereign or not, it seems more reasonable to discuss the degree of their sovereignty in a given sphere and in a given period by examining not merely formal, legal criteria, but also such aspects as their political and military ability [...], the strength of their economic links [...] and [...] their participation in a shared imperial culture' (p. 431).

Natalia Królikowska's essay on Tatar legal status has already admirably fulfilled the requirements set by Kołodziejczyk, while Ostapchuk's essay on Cossack double-dealing cocks a snook at the inadequacy of 'merely formal, legal criteria'. So, it is a shame that Viorel Panaite's chapter on Moldavia and Wallachia was not similarly enhanced and does not take into account the 'major change' in relations under the 'Phanariote' regimes (p. 247), the kind of cultural and ideological factors examined so carefully by Radu Păun or the fourteenth century evidence mentioned by Ovidiu Cristea (p. 257, contra p. 15).<sup>5</sup>

Kołodziejczyk asks why historians claim Yemen was inside the Ottoman Empire, while placing Poland, Venice, the Habsburgs and Russia outside, since the latter four paid tribute and the former did not (p. 427). Kunčević has already confronted this problem. He emphasizes that Ottoman relations with Christian rulers were 'established across a civilizational border, between two sides that had *totally different legal and political cultures*' (p. 99). This indiscriminate imposition of vassalage was 'due to the Ottoman legal fiction of the sultan's

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<sup>5</sup> Kármán, Păun, Cristea, Królikowska and Madunić have all contributed further essays to a separate collection, which was published simultaneously with the volume under review: Gábor Kármán & Radu G. Păun (ed.s). *Europe and the 'Ottoman World': Exchanges and Conflicts (Sixteenth to Seventeenth Centuries)*. (Istanbul: The Isis Press / Center for Ottoman Diplomatic History, 2013).

universal rule' as caliph (p. 99 n. 18). However, Kunčević leaves unanswered his own rhetorical question regarding historians' inconsistent attitude towards the Ottoman view: 'Why precisely should one believe it regarding Ragusa and completely reject it in relation to Venice, Poland or France?' (p. 117).

The answer surely lies in the folly of considering legal questions in hermeneutic isolation from the *de facto* situation. The ruler 'beareth not the sword in vain' (Romans 13: 4) and the credibility of any legal decision rests on both the desire and power to enforce it. The Ottoman view of Ragusa held sway, because the Ottoman ability to impose their will on Ragusa was overwhelming, unlike their limited power over larger states further away.

The admirable intentions of the editors have been further undermined by two contributors who depart significantly from their assigned topics. The title of Teréz Oborni's essay implies that it will consider the legal status of Transylvania from both Habsburg and Ottoman perspectives and the editors maintain this pretence (p. 3). However, Oborni's introduction states bluntly that she will not actually examine Ottoman vassalage 'because several studies have considered it already' (p. 68). It is rather contrary to dispense with Ottoman vassalage in a volume of studies explicitly dedicated to the subject, while Oborni's justification is disingenuous, because several studies have already considered relations with the Habsburgs as well, not least Oborni's own studies, as helpfully referenced by Szabó (p. 305 n. 14).<sup>6</sup> A more balanced synthesis would have had more comparative value. Finally, Domagoj Madunić's detailed inventory of Ragusan defences is rather less germane to the topic of military co-operation with the Ottomans than the disappointingly brief considerations of tensions with Venice (p. 342), conflict with the Uskoks (pp. 343 – 348), Ragusan logistical aid to the Ottomans (p. 369) and the remarkable deterrence value of Ragusa's modest navy and artillery train (pp. 369 – 371).

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<sup>6</sup> These include an English language essay in an edited collection that gained the significant publicity of being reviewed in the *Journal of Early Modern History*: Teréz Oborni, *From Province to Principality: Continuity and Change in Transylvania in the First Half of the Sixteenth Century.*, István Zombori (ed.), *[The] Fight Against the Turk in Central Europe in the First Half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.* (Budapest: METEM (Magyar Egyháztörténeti Enciklopédia Munkaközösség), 2004), pp. 165 – 180; cf. Kate Fleet, 'Book Review', *Journal of Early Modern History*, vol. 9, no.s 3 – 4 (2005), p. 405.

Hopefully, future collaborations will be characterized by a more determined commitment to the convenors' intentions. This may result in a lot more hard work and a few bruised egos, but it will surely result in more tangible progress and gain the wider readership this subject deserves.