



<https://doi.org/10.18778/2084-140X.13.12>

Ethno-Cultural Diversity in the Balkans and the Caucasus,

ed. IOANA AMINIAN JAZI, THEDE KAHL,

Austrian Academy of Science Press, Vienna 2023

[= *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historischen Klasse*, 927], pp. 394.

It could be said that the concept for the volume was conceived a decade ago¹ and was realised, among other things, through the organisation of a conference under the patronage of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in 2015, as well as the publication of the first volume in a series on religious and migration issues in 2017². The book presented here is another result of the activities mentioned above. In the introduction to the publication (p. 9–20), Ioana Aminian Jazi and Thede Kahl introduced the basic premise of the book, gave an overview of the history of its creation and presented summaries of the individual articles. In addition to the fifteen articles, the book concludes with brief information on the individual authors (p. 385–389) and a moderately extensive index of basic proper names (geographical, names, and religious phenomena, p. 391–394).

In the first text, Keith Hitchins set out to compare the situation of the Balkan peoples, primarily the Bulgarians and Romanians, and the Caucasian peoples, the Georgians, in the context of the nineteenth-century rivalry over their territories between the two empires, the

Ottoman and the Russian (p. 21–35). The thesis presented here is interesting in that there are documented instances of the intellectual elites of the aforementioned nations seeking some form of closer contact with Western Europe and the ideological currents flowing from there as a way out of the adverse geopolitical situation that left them with virtually two options to choose from. This observation can be applied to the situation of Poland at the time. In the second article, Patrik Tátrai made interesting remarks on the methods of preparing, or rather manipulating (with the help of appropriately adjusted size or colours) maps presenting ethnic divisions in the Balkans and the Caucasus (p. 37–55). The text is more concerned with issues of contemporary nationality conflicts, but nevertheless the conclusions of the reading can be taken by the historian as a methodological guide to the manipulation of material he will encounter in his work. Similar issues were also addressed by Victor A. Shnirelman, who, using the example of the Ossetians, Chechens, and Ingush, analysed how historical (and supporting – archaeological and ethnological) narratives changed with regard to the way the history of the Caucasian peoples was presented (p. 57–80). Among the reasons for the narrative changes one could list: the emergence of theories that set back the development of research such as Nikolai Marr's Marrism, historical events (the deportation of Chechens and Ingush), ideology (internationalism, emphasising elements of co-operation where there may not have been any at all, and at the same time korenization, which

¹ Cf. Th. KAHL, *Ethno-cultural Diversity in the Balkans and the Caucasus as an Objective for Comparative Research*, [in:] *The Balkans and Caucasus. Parallel Processes on the Opposite Sides of the Black Sea*, ed. I. BILIARSKY, O. CRISTEA, A. OROVEANU, Cambridge 2012, p. 172–187.

² *Sakralität und Mobilität im Kaukasus und Südosteuropa*, ed. T. DARIEVA, Th. KAHL, S. TONCHEVA, Wien 2017 [= SPHK, 882].

led to the awakening of national ambitions, also by seeking confirmation of the uniqueness of a given nation in history). The theses presented in this article will be of great help to those who are embarking on their 'adventure' with Russian and Soviet historiography, a kind of road map on how to navigate among the texts on the history of the Caucasian peoples, so as not to be misled by the often cleverly prepared manipulations of facts in the name of one or another ideology. A continuation of the themes presented above can be found in the work prepared by Babak Rezvani, who addressed, among other things, the functioning of the terms Azeri, Azerbaijani, and Azerbaijan in relation to the areas north of Aras, which in the Middle Ages were known as Shirvan (p. 81–104). Pointing to the intertwining political interests of both nationalist organisations, linked to some extent to the Young Turk movement, or the later use of the name for political purposes by representatives of the Soviet Union (thus expressing claims to southern Azerbaijan proper, *de facto* located in Persia-Iran), he discusses how the name came to be attached to the territory of the present-day republic. The second part of the text, dealing with more modern issues, deals with the strategies adopted by the authorities to officially reduce the number of national minorities living in Azerbaijan. Thus, we are in a way introduced to the next two texts, the first of which by Christoph Giesel presents information on the Bosnian minority that found its way to present-day Turkey as a result of the migration of *muhajirs* from the territories occupied by the Austrians (p. 105–142). The text helps to better understand how complex is the internal ethnographic structure of the Turkish people, composed of many minorities who arrived in Anatolia during the declining period of the Ottoman Empire. In the second article, the duo Fahri Türk and Kader Özlem discussed the legal and social situation of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, primarily pointing out examples of rights violations, such as in the terms of language teaching, the use of Turkish in public, or changes to Turkish town names (p. 143–157). The authors have also provided a fairly comprehensive historical background of the fate of the Turkish minority

in Bulgaria, with a particular focus on the communist period and attempts to assimilate Turks.

In the next part of the book, we return to historical subjects. Stéphane Voell has made an interesting comparison between communities living in the Balkans, in the northern part of Albania, and the Svans (from Svaneti, Georgia) in the context of the formation of autonomous institutions among them in relation to the central centres of power, with a particular focus on traditional law (p. 159–176). One should consider as important the author's remarks in relation to the process of building autonomy of northern Albania on the foundation of *kanun* – traditional law, which, according to her, was the result of Ottoman policy – the creation of a *de facto* loophole caused by the lack of real, not declared, interest in exercising legal and political control over these territories. This is important insofar as it provides inspiration in the context of research on other groups who retained autonomy due to the natural conditions in which they lived, not only in the modern era but also earlier. To the writer of these words, what naturally comes to mind are the Dagestan *jamaats*, free communities living according to the *adat*, but it seems that we would find more such examples, in Central Europe as well. A certain polemic with the theses presented above is the next article of the volume, by Florian Mühlfried (p. 177–191). The text deals with Tushetia, a high mountainous border region located between Georgian Kakheti and Chevsuretia and Chechnya and Dagestan, practically cut off from the rest of Georgia. According to the author's research, despite the difficult geographical conditions, numerous examples can be found of efforts made by its inhabitants in the seventeenth century to forge cooperation with the dominant centres of political power in the region, moreover, on the basis of a certain reciprocity and equal exchange of benefits. The author compares the actions of the people of Tusheti, developing military and diplomatic cooperation with Moscow or the Georgian kingdoms, with similar steps taken by representatives of the Dagestan *jamaats*. Indeed, the aim of the article was to challenge the thesis according to which it is sometimes assumed that mountain peoples

willingly cut themselves off from taking political or diplomatic action, taking advantage of their geographical location in order to achieve full independence. Often, it is precisely their activity in the above-mentioned spheres that can ensure autonomy.

The longest article in this volume is another work by Christoph Giesel, intended as a comprehensive study of the issue of the existence of Alevite minorities in the territories of today's Balkan states (p. 193–292). The author, however, discusses both the issues of the emergence of this religious community, elements of its history, theological issues (with emphasis on the problem of syncretism between Sunni and Shi'ite elements) and sociological issues (self-identification). A small part of the article is devoted to statistical data on contemporary Balkan Alevite communities in countries such as Albania and Macedonia. Through the text of Marieta Schneider's article (p. 293–320), we return to the issue of the appropriate reading of writings produced during the communist period, which has already been addressed in the book. The author has taken up the issue of the encounter between the Cherkesses returning from the territory of present-day Kosovo, who appeared there during the period of the migration of the *muhajirs* from the Caucasus to Ottoman Turkey, and those who remained in the Caucasus, which occurred in the late 1990s during an attempt to transfer some of the Cherkesses remaining in this over a century long emigration to the country of their ancestors. However, these observations are, for all intents and purposes, only a prelude to the development of an essay on the changes that the Soviet era brought to the life of the remaining Cherkess communities in the Caucasus in terms of culture and its perception. Similarly, the experiences of the Cherkesses from Kosovo are relevant, in the context of their staying close to other Muslim communities (e.g. Albanian) and the influence of the latter on the adoption of new customs, which, however, are considered indigenous. The observation of the phenomenon of raising ethnic issues, understood as folk culture, while at the same time neutralising or silencing their political dimension in cultural works, should serve as

a warning in relation to current historical research, which may be falsified by the influence of literature produced during the communist period with a specific purpose and thesis in mind. In the following section of the book, we can read two historical texts by Walter Puchner – the first discusses the cultural influence of the Greeks on the cities of the northern Black Sea coast at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (p. 321–334), while in the second the author takes up the issue of the cultural (especially theatrical) activities of the Greeks in the Danubian principalities (p. 335–344). The texts are summaries of the author's previous research, synthesising the theses presented so far in German and Greek-language publications. The last three articles deal with linguistic issues. Victor Friedman's intention was to provide a comparative analysis between the meaning of Arumunian and its influence and connections with Albanian, Greek and Slavic languages and the linguistic situation in Dagestan (p. 345–359). Helmuth Schaller, in turn, dealt with Slavic expressions preserved in modern Romanian, also attempting to outline the significance of historical events for the emergence of this linguistic phenomenon (p. 361–367). In the final text, Diana Forker presented an analysis of the meaning of enclitics in such Nach-Dagestan languages as Avar and Andean (p. 369–384).

A few remarks not necessarily critical but inspired by the reading of the individual texts. The first of these, by Keith Hitchins, lacks an elaboration of the passage concerning the first historiographical attempts made by the representatives of the nations discussed in the text. It would have been worthwhile to compare the conclusions of such an extended analysis with the findings presented in the article on the search for contacts in Western Europe or the role of religion and national churches for the construction of regional identity. In the context of Victor A. Shnirelman's article, it is worth adding that the interpretative problems presented there do not, after all, concern only the communist era, but also the period after the collapse of this system in Central and Eastern Europe. Neither do they refer only to the Caucasus, but also to many nations, where 'parallel historiographies'

of numerous interpretative problems, which seemed to have been solved long ago, concerning especially the early Middle Ages, were created³. Regarding Victor Friedman's article – the subject of actual languages that may have acquired the status or aspired to the level of inter-ethnic, e.g. the Avar war language 'bolmats' ('bolmacl', 'bolmaclcl') is unfortunately not addressed here⁴. While not questioning the linguistic competence of Helmuth Schaller, who gives in his work a number of interesting examples from Romanian, which are quite a surprise for a person who does not know this language but speaks (better or worse) several Slavic languages, it should be noted that the rather shallow treatment of historical issues, such as the complex history of Slavic migration to the Balkans, seems worrying in this article. There is also no reflection on the possibility of the loanwords presented in the text either in the late medieval period and the possible influence of, for example, liturgy conducted in a common Slavic language, or in the modern period, related to close relations with the Ruthenians or the later influence of the Russians. Quite surprisingly, the bibliography of this article is also limited to works from the interwar period and the Second World War. I mentioned in my introduction that the monograph was intended to

be the result of a deliberate organisational effort, from the presentation of the premises, through the conferences, to the publication of successive volumes presenting various aspects of the parallels between the Balkans and the Caucasus. Therefore, one may be puzzled by the lack of any breakdown of the content presented in the book. Although we can guess that the first part of the book consists of articles covering topics from a historical perspective, the second part deals with more contemporary issues, and the last part is devoted to linguistic issues, this is not explicitly stated. Exceptions to the above can also be found, so it is difficult to ascertain what the specific key to the ordering of the individual texts was, which is clearly a problem with many joint publications. As far as technical notes are concerned, it is unclear why the index was not included in the table of contents. It is somewhat puzzling that the volume contains exceptionally one text in German, despite the fact that the rest is in English (as are the indexes, biographies, etc.), especially as it takes up practically a quarter of the volume. Perhaps, however, such were the requirements of the project or grant from which the publication was funded.

In spite of the reservations presented above, the publication in question should be regarded as an exceptionally valuable contribution to comparative research into the history of the Balkans and the Caucasus. From the perspective of the author of these words, the observations presented here were particularly important in relation to the way in which contemporary historical narratives concerning the prehistory of some of the Caucasian peoples were constructed, data manipulated and propaganda messages created, as they confirmed his own observations of specific examples of such activities, both in the communist period and today⁵.

Translated by Łukasz Pigoński

³ For example one could mention Bulgarian experiences concerning *de facto* falsifying of information on their earliest history: А. НИКОЛОВ, „Параисторията” като феномен на прехода: преоткриването на древните българи, [in:] *Историческият хабитус: предметната история, сб. в чест на 65-годишнината на доц. д-р Р. Донков*, ed. Ю. ТОДОРОВ, А. ЛУНИН, София 2013, p. 24–63; or Croatian and the local so-called Iranian theory: J. MOLAS, *Teoria o irańskim pochodzeniu Chorwatów – rozwój, funkcje i geneza*, [in:] *Problemy tożsamości kulturowej w krajach słowiańskich. (Jej formy i przemiany)*, vol. II, ed. J. GOSZCZYŃSKA, Warszawa 2003, p. 7–33. In Russia the issue concerns not only the Caucasus but also the Volga region: С. ЦВИКЛИНСКИ, *Татаризм vs. Булгаризм: “Первый спор” в татарской историографии*, trans. А. КАПУНОВСКОГО, *Абл* 3, 2003, p. 361–392.

⁴ More elaborate treatment and Russian secondary literature: В. СЕСОТА, *Historia kaukaskich Awarów w średniowieczu. Wybrane zagadnienia*, Piotrków Trybunalski 2022, p. 29–32.

⁵ Cf. В. СЕСОТА, *Partu Patimat – kilka słów i obrazów o dagestańskiej historii pamięci*, [in:] *Kobieta na przestrzeni dziejów*, vol. IV, ed. IDEM, P. JASIŃSKI, A. SĘDERECKA, Piotrków Trybunalski 2022, p. 47–73; IDEM, *Anży-name, czyli o „chazarskim dziedzictwie” Kumyków*, [in:] *Człowiek a historia*, vol. VIII, ed. IDEM, P. JASIŃSKI, A. SĘDERECKA, Piotrków Trybunalski 2022, p. 93–127.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CECOTA B., *Anży-name, czyli o „chazarskim dziedzictwie” Kumyków*, [in:] *Człowiek a historia*, vol. VIII, ed. B. CECOTA, P. JASIŃSKI, A. SĘDERECKA, Piotrków Trybunalski 2022, p. 93–127.

CECOTA B., *Historia kaukaskich Awarów w średniowieczu. Wybrane zagadnienia*, Piotrków Trybunalski 2022.

CECOTA B., *Partu Patimat – kilka słów i obrazów o dagańskańskiej historii pamięci*, [in:] *Kobieta na przestrzeni dziejów*, vol. IV, ed. B. CECOTA, P. JASIŃSKI, A. SĘDERECKA, Piotrków Trybunalski 2022, p. 47–73.

CVIKLINSKI S., *Tamarizm vs. Bułgarizm: „Pervyj spor” v tatarskoj istoriografii*, trans. A. KAPLUNOVSKOGO, “Ab Imperio” 3, 2003, p. 361–392, <https://doi.org/10.1353/imp.2003.0094>

KAHL Th., *Ethno-cultural Diversity in the Balkans and the Caucasus as an Objective for Comparative Research*, [in:] *The Balkans and Caucasus. Parallel Processes on the Opposite Sides of the Black Sea*, ed. I. BILIAJSKY, O. CRISTEA, A. OROVEANU, Cambridge 2012, p. 172–187.

MOLAS J., *Teoria o irańskim pochodzeniu Chorwatów – rozwój, funkcje i geneza*, [in:] *Problemy tożsamości kulturowej w krajach słowiańskich. (Jej formy i przemiany)*, vol. II, ed. J. GOSZCZYŃSKA, Warszawa 2003, p. 7–33.

NIKOLOV A., „Paraistorijata” *kato fenomen na prehoda: preotkrivaneto na drevnite bǎlgari*, [in:] *Istoričeskijat habitus: opredmetenata istorija, sb. v čest na 65-godišninata na doc. d-r R. Donkov*, ed. Ju. TODOROV, A. LUNIN, Sofija 2013, p. 24–63.

Sakralität und Mobilität im Kaukasus und Südosteuropa, ed. T. DARIEVA, Th. KAHL, S. TONCHEVA, Wien 2017 [= *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historischen Klasse*, 882].

Błażej Cecota (Piotrków Trybunalski)*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4746-0325>

* Piotrków Academy in Piotrków Trybunalski

