

## BOOK REVIEW

"DEATH AND EXILE: THE ETHNIC CLEANSING OF OTTOMAN MUSLIMS" by JUSTIN McCARTHY, 1821-1922, Princeton NJ, The Darwin Press 1995

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In the 1860s, the conquering Russians forcibly banished the Muslim Circassians from their ancestral home in the Caucasus and shipped them to the Ottoman Black Sea ports where they died in great numbers of smallpox, typhus and scurvy. The French representative at the Istanbul International Board of Health in a report to his minister in Paris called this mass migration "one of the biggest calamities of this century" and estimated that of the 300,000 refugees who sought shelter in the Ottoman lands in the final months of 1863, two-thirds had died by the end of 1864.<sup>1</sup> The official historiographer of the Ottoman Empire, writing some thirty years after these events dismissed the plight of the refugees in a single sentence lost under an innocuous heading 'Some miscellaneous matters' (Baz\_ mevadd-i müteferrika)<sup>2</sup>. This diffidence on the part of Ottoman historiography may account for the fact that one of the most harrowing stories of human distress and misery—the story of the deportation and death of millions of Muslims in the nineteenth and early twentieth century as the Ottoman Empire receded and lost territories and populations to Russia and newly-founded Christian states in the Balkans—has remained largely unrecorded. The events on Chios are more widely known than the plight of the Turks thanks to poets like Victor Hugo and only a handful of specialists are aware that thousands of Turks were massacred in cold blood in April 1821 in the Morea (the Peloponnese) when the Greek revolt started and that Turkish women were taken as slaves by rich Greek families in Missolonghi (where Lord Byron died).

Dr. Justin McCarthy, Professor of History at the University of Louisville in the USA and a specialist of late Ottoman historical demography sets out to put the record straight.<sup>3</sup> But he is careful to point out that though his present research concentrates on the history of Muslim mortality and forced migration, "the horrors and sufferings catalogued here took place in wars in which all suffered" but yet "a corrective is needed to the traditional one-sided view"<sup>4</sup> of the Christians as sufferers and the Turks as perpetrators of massacres.

Starting with the Greek War of Independence in 1821 and finishing with the Turco-Greek War of 1920-22, this book is a gloomy chronicle of misery which can be best summarised by a table which appears in the book (p. 339) listing the mortality and migration of Muslims in various wars which took place in that 100-year span. The book covers the Turco-Russian war of 1828-29, the expulsion of the Nogay Tatars from the Crimea in the late 1850s, that of the Circassian tribes from the Caucasus in 1863-65, the Turco-Russian war of 1877-78, the Balkan Wars in 1912-13, World War One and the Turco-Greek war of 1920-1922. Over five million people were killed and another five million were uprooted and forced to migrate. The author relied mainly on Western consular reports, eye witness accounts by foreign observers on the spot and secondary sources; he was unable to tap the resources of the Ottoman Archives but it is unlikely that these would reveal much that is new. A few books—two of them making extensive use of Turkish archival sources—published after Dr. McCarthy had completed his own research only confirm his findings.<sup>5</sup> The files of the Refugee Commission (Muhacirin Komisyonu) set up to help relocate refugees after the Turco-Russian War would afford an interesting insight into Ottoman administrative policies on what was essentially a humanitarian issue. The resettlement of the Caucasian refugees in the late 1860s is the subject of much ongoing research.

However what is sorely missing—and this is not expected to be found in a book on historical demography—is a portrait of the main actor of this story: the refugee. Going through the extensive bibliography listed by Dr. McCarthy, I failed to identify a single record written by a refugee depicting his ordeals. To my knowledge there is only one such account, written by the mufti of Zagra (Stara Zagora), Bulgaria, who gives graphic descriptions of the flight of the Muslim community of this small town facing the advance of the Russian army during the 1877 War.<sup>6</sup> This is in contrast to the considerable literature produced by Christians who underwent similar predicaments and

loudly publicised their plight. Their Muslim counterparts were more resilient and passed on scarcely no record of their misery and we are left to make use of accounts written by consular officials, foreign newspapermen and observers to reconstruct their fate in the face of ethnic cleansing and massacre.

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1 *'Rapports sur l'émigration circassienne en Turquie pendant les années 1863 et 1864' par le Dr. A. Fauvel, médecin sanitaire à Constantinople, Recueil des travaux du comité d'hygiène publique, volume 6 (Paris 1876) p. 290.*

2 *Vak'a-Nüvis Ahmet Lütfi Efendi, Tarihi Vol. X, Ankara 1988, p. 103.*

3 See also his *'The Population of Ottoman Europe Before the Fall of the Empire'* in Hattox, R.S. and Lowry, H.W. (eds.) (1989), *Proceedings of the Third Congress on the Social and Economic History of Turkey, Istanbul, Isis, pp. 275-298*, and *'Muslim Refugees in Turkey: the Balkan Wars, World War I, and the Turkish War of Independence'*, in Lowry, H.W. and Quataert, D. (eds.) (1993), *Humanist and Scholar. Essays in Honor of Andreas Tietze, Istanbul, Isis, pp. 87-111.*

4 *ibid. p. xv.*

5 *Halacoğlu, Ahmet (1994), Balkan Harbi Sırasında Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri (1912-1913), Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu; Şek, Nedim (1994), Rumeli'den Anadolu'ya Türk Göçleri (1877-1890), Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu; and Toumarkine, Alexandre (1995), Les migrations des populations musulmanes balkaniques en Anatolie (1876-1913), Istanbul, Isis.*

6 *Hüseyin Raci bin Hac Hüseyin, Tarihce-i vaka-i Zagra, Istanbul 1326/1910.*