H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

The Balkan Wars 1912/13. Experience, Perception, Remembrance. International Conference on the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary. Mehmet Hacısalihoğlu, BALKAR/ Yildiz Technical University, Istanbul; Katrin Boeckh, IOS Regensburg / LMU München; Sabine Rutar, IOS Regensburg; Heike Karge, University of Regensburg,, 11.10.2012-13.10.2012.

Reviewed by Stefan Rohdewald
Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (March, 2013)

The Balkan Wars 1912/13. Experience, Perception, Remembrance. International Conference on the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary

The international conference organized by four historians from Germany and Turkey explored the two Balkan Wars of 1912/13 from the perspective of the New Military History. As Katrin Boeckh explained in her opening speech, the venue in Istanbul was intended to encourage scholars to look into the history of these wars from cross-disciplinary angles. In the first of two keynotes, FİKRET ADANIR (Istanbul) focused on those Muslim victims of the wars who fled from the Balkans to Istanbul or Anatolia. He interpreted these migrations as a "turning point" in the ideological affiliation of the main actors in the Ottoman Empire, away from Ottomanism towards Turkish Nationalism. In the second keynote, WOLFGANG HÖPKEN (Leipzig) placed the Balkan Wars at the threshold between traditional and modern European warfare, as they were characterized by many features that were to also become crucial, in an even more radicalized way, of subsequent warfare in the 20th century.

BRUNO KOREA GAJSKI (Zagreb) opened the panel on Diplomacy. He stated that after Russia lost Bulgaria at the end of the second Balkan War, Serbia was Russia's only ally in the region and therefore it had full Russian support. The implications of the network of alliances reduced the Great Powers' possibilities to maneuver in the hope of avoiding a World War. GÜL TOKAY (London / Istanbul) turned the perspective to the Ottoman diplomats. Given the international deadlock after the end of the Austrian-Russian Entente of 1897, Ottoman voices pleaded for a local war in the Balkans to check Serb aspirations. Thus, the Ottomans were as much part of the game as they were victims. After the First Balkan War, the Great Powers advised the Ottomans to stay away; nevertheless, they did participate in the Second Balkan War. M. HAKAN YAVUZ (Salt Lake City) contextualised strategies of Ottoman politicians reacting to the results of the Balkan Wars. Realizing that it was the nation state which seemed the only legitimizing way to organise a modern society, they began to change the concept of Ottoman citizenship first to Islamic Ottomanism and then to national Turkishness. Yavuz stressed the wars' function in modern Turkish nation building processes. KONRAD CLEWING (Regensburg) used the cases of Macedonia and Northern Albania to explicate the ways in which the new Balkan states destabilised the European state system through their war-mongering, contributing to the outbreak of the World War in the region. MICHAEL H. CLEMMESSEN (Copenhagen) outlined the impact the Balkan Wars had on the Nordic states, adding a hitherto unfamiliar facet to the story. He made clear that the war in the Balkans triggered immediate preparations for war in northern Europe. The contributions in this first panel treated the "classic" field in which historiography on the Balkan Wars has hitherto been dealt with.The panelists succeeded in opening paths towards new perspectives in both diplomatic history and the history of international relations.

The second panel ("Demographic / social engineering") started with the analysis of Katrin Boeckh of the effects of Pan-Slavic hopes and illusions for endeavors of social engineering practices. She took the example of the Russian ambassador in Belgrade, Nikolaus Hartwig, who, in supporting Pan-Slavic discourses, significantly contributed to the increasing militarization of significant segments of Russian society. MEHMET HACISALİHOĞLU (Istanbul) gave a concise overview of negotiations and practices of population exchange in the Balkans since the beginning of the 19th century. He made it clear that Muslims were affected as much as non-Muslim populations and put the war's events into a longer durée history of forced demographic changes in the region. Complementary to this, EDVIN PEZO (Regensburg) explained the war-dependent policy changes in both Balkan and

Ottoman societies, which originated from previous experiences of negotiated population transfers during peace time.

Drawing on British and Austrian archival materials, VERA GOSEVA and NATASHA KOTLAR-TRAYKOVA (both Skopje) discussed the situation of the Muslim population in Thessaloniki during the Balkan Wars, especially after the city's occupation in November 1912. Muslim leaders asked for an international investigation, as they considered Bulgarian massacres of the Muslim population what the much-cited Carnegie Report called "Greek crimes". This second panel stressed the long durée perspective of demographic and social engineering practices, as well as the place of these first European wars of the 20th century in the larger European framework of population transfers.

RICHARD HALL (Americus, Georgia) opened the third panel ("Soldiers") with a very vivid analysis of the Thracian theater of war of 1912. Among other things, he made clear how the temporary Bulgarian military success was undercut when they gave in to the temptation to occupy Constantinople, which Bulgarian military leaders idealized as a kind of Orthodox Tsarigrad. Drawing from Ottoman sources, MEHMET BEŞİKÇİ (Istanbul) focused on the failure of Ottoman manpower mobilization in the Balkan Wars. He pointed out that this failure prompted military reforms, implemented by the Young Turks after the war, which led to a much better performance of the Ottoman army in the First World War.

CLAUDIU-LUCIAN TOPOR (Iaşi) drew a line between the Romanian army in the Second Balkan War and its performance in the First World War. He saw the victory in the Bulgarian campaign of 1913 as a sham that led to an overestimation of their military capacities and subsequently to the disaster of Tutrakan (1916). All panelists shed light on actors' perspectives of soldiery, something hitherto little examined in the historiography on the Balkan Wars.

The subsequent panel on "Civilians, Wounded, Invalids" took the same approach. OYA DAĞLAR MACAR (Istanbul) based her research on the British Red Cross's assistance during the Balkan Wars on British and Ottoman primary sources, memoirs of health personnel and newspapers. During the Balkan Wars, the British Red Cross was one of the main suppliers of medical aid. Dağlar Macar vividly illustrated the significance these wars had for medical history; they were the first wars in which doctors could experience first hand both the effects of modern war technologies and new medical treatments. MILE BJELAJAC (Belgrade) focused on the treatment of civilians and wounded enemies by the Serbian army in the wars of 1912/1913. He linked the image of the Serbian army to that of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, attempting to draw a more balanced historical picture of the Serb army's treatment of civilians. IAKOVOS MICHAILIDIS (Thessaloniki) introduced the term "collateral damage" to the Balkan Wars context in his presentation on the fate of civilians in Macedonia. Michailidis shed light especially on the Muslim emigrants from the Macedonian provinces, numbering up to 400,000. EYAL GINIO (Jerusalem) discussed local and diaspora charity initiatives organized by Ottoman Jews during the Balkan Wars, focusing both on the Ottoman Jewish colony in Antwerp and its philantropic activities, and on local initiatives directed mainly towards Jewish refugees from eastern Thrace.

ALEXEY TIMOFEEV (Belgrade) opened the panel "Memories of Victory and Defeat" discussing the role of Serbian irregulars (Chetniks) during the 19th century and up to the Balkan Wars. In giving a new long durée insight into the history of Serb paramilitaries, he maintained that after 1878, Chetniks became closely connected with Serbian military intelligence and were actively involved in the Balkan Wars and subsequent conflicts. It once again became obvious just how much traditional and modern warfare were intertwined in these wars. DUBRAVKA STOJANOVIĆ (Belgrade) in her overview of how the Balkan Wars have been dealt with in Serbian school textbooks since the 1920s argued that given that Serbia gained Kosovo in 1912, despite very different ideological frameworks dominant over the last hundred years, the Balkan Wars have always been an important issue. STEFAN ROHDEWALD (Passau) focused on the significance of religious figures and historiography in national and regional contexts of war-making from the late 19th century to 1944. Furthermore, he studied the shifts in their symbolism and the reasoning behind them, analyzing them as parts of the establishment and militarisation of modern national societies. EVA ANNE FRANTZ (Vienna) analyzed Albanian and Serbian wartime experiences in Kosovo and showed how subjectively the issue has been constructed in the respective historiographies. While Serbs saw the military advances as an act of liberation, for the Albanians it was a military occupation. The panel gave interesting comparative insights into how the Balkan Wars have become a part of cultural memory in different national master narratives in the region.

The last two panels gave a broad overview of issues of contemporary perceptions of the Balkan Wars, now looking at a broader European context. NICHOLAS PITSOS (Paris) discussed the French public and political scenes,

arguing that while nationalists and conservatives saw the wars as an act of emancipation from the imperial oppressor, for the socialists they were proof of the failure of international relations. STJEPAN MATKOVIĆ (Zagreb) concentrated on Croatian perceptions and the role the wars played in strengthening the integration of Croatian nationalism with Yugoslavism. It was with the Serbian war successes that being part of a future Yugoslav state became a real political alternative for the Croats. GÜNTHER SANDNER (Vienna) focused on the Austrian economist Otto Neurath's perception of the Balkan Wars, comparing them to the well-known reflections by Leon Trotsky. Neurath's observations later became an important contribution to the field of the theory of war economy. SABINE RUTAR (Regensburg) illustrated how Austrian Trieste responded to a sharp increase in the construction of warships in the years prior to the Great War. Based on primary sources and memoirs, Rutar showed the heightening effect the Balkan Wars had on the prevailing atmosphere and worries of the dockyard workers, who increasingly perceived themselves as soldiers-to-be. AMIR DURANOVIĆ (Sarajevo) discussed Serbian views in Bosnia and Herzegovina of Albanian independence during the First Balkan War, based on the reports of two daily newspapers. According to Duranović, the media acted as organs of the political parties and opposed anything that collided with the Serbian interests. His presentation offered an interesting parallel to Matković's paper, as it became evident how the reactions differed within two social groups living geographically close to each other in what soon after became the newly-founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. FLORIAN KEISINGER (Berlin) analysed the Balkan Wars as seen by English, German and Irish newspapers and journals. He confirmed Duranović as he too found that most of the editorials were under the influence of political parties or associations with different agendas. BISSER PETROV (Sofia) discussed the treatment of the wars in Bulgarian historiography. He made it clear how they have always been firmly put in the context of the endeavors of the Bulgarian nation state, even as they underwent interpretative changes reflecting the prevailing political ideology. EUGENE MICHAIL (Toronto) gave an overview of the shifting treatment of the Balkan Wars in western historiography (1912-1999), focusing on the French and Anglo-Saxon world. His presentation drew a welcome link from the Balkan Wars to the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, illustrating how little western perceptions of the region altered in the course of the 20th century.

In their concluding remarks, the organizers acknowledged the wide scope of issues addressed during the conference, opening the way to fruitful future research cooperation. They pointed out that fields such as economics, religion, gender, and minorities would need to be added to the agenda - evidently, research here will need to be encouraged in the future. Also, they suggested an intensified discussion on the available sources, as, during the conference, it became increasingly obvious just how many hitherto unexplored materials are waiting in the archives.

To summarize, the focus chosen by the organizers clearly resulted in an impressive sample of what the shift from more traditional military historiography to the new military history could look like. If the wars did not mark a watershed or turning point in the modern history of societies and war, they did contribute to an evolutionary series of growing militarisation, violence and suffering among not only the soldiers, but also broader social groups in a European framework, as was discussed several times during the conference. With the examples of the Ottoman Empire and Southeastern Europe, the conference demonstrated how various aspects of modern warfare and mass violence can be taken into account as a characteristic of modern European history. In this framework, the region discussed did not appear as on the margins of Europe or non-European areas, but as a central theater of processes of pivotal importance for the whole of Europe. A publication of the proceedings is being prepared with the Brill Publishing House (Leiden).

Conference Overview:

Welcome Addresses

İsmail Yüksek, President of Yıldız Technical University

Mehmet Hacısalihoğlu, Director of BALKAR

Katrin Boeckh, Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS)

Keynotes

Fikret Adanır (Istanbul): Ethnonationalism, Irredentism, and Empire: Notes on the Last "Turkish War" in Europe

Wolfgang Höpken (Leipzig): At the Brink of "Modernity"? The Balkan Wars in 20th Century European Warfare

Panel 1: Diplomacy

Chair: Aydın Babuna, Istanbul

Bruno Korea Gajski (Zagreb): European Diplomacy and the Balkan Wars

Gül Tokay (London/Istanbul): Balkan Wars and Great Powers through the Eyes of the Ottoman Diplomats: An Interpretation

M. Hakan Yavuz (Utah): The Connection between War-Making and Nationalism in the Balkans

Konrad Clewing (Regensburg): The War that Did Not End in 1912/13: Violence and Ethnic Politics in Southwestern Macedonia and Southern Albania

Michael H. Clemmesen (Copgenhagen): The Distant Storm and the Final Preparations for the Great War in Northern Europe

Panel 2: Demographic/Social Engineering
Chair: Ömer Çaha, Istanbul

Katrin Boeckh (Regensburg): Hopes and Illusions of Pan-Slavism: Pan-Slavic Actors and their Mobilizing Efforts during the Balkan Wars

Mehmet Hacısalihoğlu (Istanbul): Negotiations and Agreements for Population Transfers in the Balkans (from the Beginning of the 19th Century until 1912)

Edvin Pezo (Regensburg): Violence and Population Movements in the Balkan Wars and after. Dynamics and Entanglements of States and Societies in Periods of Crisis

Vera Goseva / Natasha Kotlar-traykova (both Skopje): The Position of the Muslim Population in Salonica and its Environment during the Balkan Wars 1912-1913

Panel 3: Soldiers
Chair: Taha Akyol, Istanbul

Richard Hall (Americus): The Thrakian Theater of War

Mehmet Beşikçi (Istanbul): Perceiving the Defeat: The Failure of Ottoman Manpower Mobilization in the Balkan Wars and its Reform

Claudiu-Lucian Topor (Iaşi): Forgotten Lessons of the Balkan War: the Romanian Army between the Bulgarian Campaign (1913) and the Disaster of Turtucaia (1916)

Panel 4: Civilians, Wounded, Invalids

Oya Dağlar Macar (Istanbul): The British Red Cross Assistance in the Balkan Wars

Mile Bjelajać (Belgrade): Treatment of Civilians, Wounded and Captured Enemies by the Serbian Army 1912 - 1913

Iakovos D. Michailidis (Thessaloniki): "Collateral Damages": The Fate of Civilians in Macedonia

Eyal Ginio (Jerusalem): Charity and Nationalism in the Home Front: Jewish Philanthropy during the Balkan Wars

Panel 5: Memoirs of Victory and Defeat
Chair: Gencer Özcan, Istanbul)

Stefan Rohdewald (Passau): Figures of National Religious Memory and Their (Ab)Uses in and after the Balkan Wars as a History of Entanglements

Alexey Timofeev (Belgrade): Serbian Chetniks in the Balkan Wars: Cultural, Social and Political Tradition of Irregular Warfare in Serbia

Dubravka Stojanović (Belgrade): The Mould of War Remembrance. The Balkan Wars in Serbian History Textbooks 1932-2011

Eva Anne Frantz (Vienna): Local Albanian and Serbian Experiences and Perceptions of the First Balkan War 1912/13 in Kosovo

Panel 6/1: Perceptions
Chair: Elçin Macar, Istanbul)

Nicolas Pitsos (Paris): Marianne Staring at the Balkans on Fire: French Views and Perceptions of the 1912-13 Conflicts

Stjepan Matković (Zagreb): The Croatian Perception of the Balkan Wars and the Idea of Yugoslav Integralism

Günther Sandner (Vienna): Deviant Perceptions: Leon Trotsky and Otto Neurath on the Balkan Wars (1912-13)

Sabine Rutar (Jena/Regensburg): At the Doorstep to the Balkans: Increased Warship Building and Fear of War in Trieste

Panel 6/2: Perceptions
Chair: Sabine Rutar, Jena/Regensburg)

Amir Duranović (Sarajevo): "An Outlaw and Robber Nation". The Image of the Albanians in the Serb Press in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Balkan Wars

Florian Keisinger (Berlin): Uncivilised Wars in Civilised Europe? The Perception of the Balkan Wars 1912/13 in English, German, and Irish Newspapers and Journals

Bisser Petrov (Sofia): Bulgarian Historiography on the Balkan Wars: Stages and Trends

Eugene Michail (Toronto): The Shifting Memory of the Balkan Wars in Western Historiography: 1912-1999

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: Stefan Rohdewald. Review of , *The Balkan Wars 1912/13. Experience, Perception, Remembrance. International*

Conference on the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. March, 2013.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=38731

Copyright © 2013 by H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author and usage right holders. For permission please contact H-SOZ-U-KULT@H-NET.MSU.EDU.