

Andrew Robarts. *Migration and Disease in the Black Sea Region: Ottoman-Russian Relations in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. xii + 280 pp. \$114.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4742-5949-1.

Reviewed by Lucien J. Frary

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Recent studies by Virginia Aksan, Brian Davies, Mara Kozelsky, Victor Taki, and Will Smiley demonstrate that the Russian-Ottoman wars produced results of vital importance, not only for the two imperial adversaries but for Europe as well. The wars decided the fate of the Black Sea region. They resulted in the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and completed the integration of Ukraine and Transcaucasia into the Russian Empire. The wars threatened Ottoman control over the eastern Mediterranean and encouraged Europeans to intervene in the so-called Eastern Question. And the wars led to the colonization of the southern steppe, where Russia extended the broader foundations for empire. Andrew Robarts's new book explores two vital yet neglected elements inherent to the wars: human migration and the threat of disease. In doing so, the book succeeds in bringing the Russian-Ottoman confrontation more fully into comparative world history.

Drawing on Bulgarian and Turkish printed sources, supported by archives in Russia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Turkey, the book compares the strategies that the Russian and Ottoman Empires pursued to address the problems of population transfer and disease, especially during the decades surrounding the Russian-Ottoman War of

1828-29. Territorially, the focus is the western middle ground between the two empires, roughly present-day Romania and Bulgaria, southern Russia, and the northern shore of the Euxine. Fluid identities were common in these borderlands where most of the Russian-Ottoman antagonism and conflict took place. Trans-imperial subjects (renegade soldiers, spies, agents, and prisoners of war) served as mediators and agents of information for regional governors, who faced the major problems wrought by warfare and resettlement. Brigandage, disease, destruction of territory, famine, and depopulation were common during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the region experienced extraordinary levels of disruption. *Migration and Disease in the Black Sea Region* deepens our understanding of the consequences of the Russian-Ottoman antagonism.

Robarts's study of Bulgarian migration patterns after the Russian-Ottoman War of 1828-29 highlights the structural connections that enhanced return migration. Ripped from their hearths by disease, politics, and war, the same people were pushed back to Ottoman lands by fear of enslavement and the frequent bouts of plague and cholera that struck southern Russia and Bessarabia in the 1830s. This study of

refugees and population movement—involving hundreds of thousands of people—illuminates the innovations in travel and identity documentation generated by the refugee process as well as the duties of the provincial-level authorities involved.

The core of *Migration and Disease in the Black Sea Region* surveys the settlement of southern Russia and Bessarabia and the connection between migration, state programs, and economic development. According to Robarts, the Russian border control and migration management system was ineffective and weak, and a variety of factors hampered the Russian state's ability to fully absorb Bessarabia into the empire. In contrast, the Sublime Porte's flexible policy incentivized the return of subjects, including prisoners of war and former rebels. The prospect of tax exemptions convinced many Crimean Tatars, Old Believers, Cossacks, and Bulgarians to remain loyal subjects of the sultan. Robarts provides evidence about how the existence and functioning of the Ottoman sultan's government made life in the Balkans preferable to life in southern Russia.

The final third of the book explores the spread of epidemic disease (plague and cholera) in the Black Sea region and the antidisease initiatives of the two empires. A review of the evolution and institutionalization of quarantine practices, as all-purpose border checks, and a discussion of the passport system shed light on travel at this point in history. Here (and elsewhere) the author might have dug deeper into the published accounts of travelers, which might have provided a wealth of highly relevant information and insight. The final chapter of the book details joint Ottoman-Russian initiatives to control migration and halt the spread of disease in regions where it was difficult to assert state authority.

The fluidity of the region and the state administrative efforts to impose some semblance of control make the subject of this book challenging. Before, during, and after the wars, the Russian and Ottoman top-ranking officials in the borderlands

experimented with new techniques in population and disease management, with mixed success. The book confirms the basic point that “the Ottoman and Russian states struggled to effectively police their imperial peripheries” (p. 5).

As a whole, Robarts succeeds in reconceptualizing the nature of Ottoman-Russian relations during the period, based on original evidence. The book emphasizes the value of the study of local and municipal-level state authorities as managers of migration and disease. Yet the individual sections of the chapters predominate over the whole, and a richer, more integrated story is here to be told. Despite the author's claim to “give voice to the individual experiences of migrants on the move” (p. 180), the human dimension is limited to the demographic data assembled from the documentation. The question of religion and religiously tinged identity is left aside, and the author might have better incorporated the recent studies on intermediaries and transnationals. Somehow, Alexander Bitis, *Russia and the Eastern Question: Army, Government and Society, 1815-1833* (2006), is missing from the bibliography. In sum, however, this is a solid work of scholarship and a welcome addition to Russian-Ottoman relations and the study of war, resettlement, and disease in modern history.

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