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A. L. Macfie. *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923.* London and New York: Longman, 1996. vii + 141 pp. $11.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-29195-9.

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The Eastern Question Re-Examined

A. L. Macfie's concise survey of the complex Eastern Question ably fulfills the objectives of Longman's Seminar Studies in History, a series of brief introductory works on major themes in British, European, and world history. The author's expertise is in British and Middle Eastern history. He has published extensively on the Straits Question, Great Power diplomacy in the late Ottoman period, and the formation of modern Turkey under Ataturk. The work under review lucidly explains the intricate diplomacy of the Eastern Question from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, and the primary sources in the documents section illustrate perspectives and issues addressed in the text. Students and scholars will find Macfie's succinct study a welcome introduction to the more detailed and elaborate work of Matthew S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923* (London, 1966), long considered a classic in the field of European and Near Eastern diplomatic history.

The Eastern Question is the term used in diplomatic and historical writing for the question of the Ottoman Empire's political status and continued viability, a question of no small importance in view of the Empire's strategic position astride the Balkans, Near East, and eastern Mediterranean. Dated conventionally from tsarist expansion toward the Black Sea in the reign of Catherine the Great (1762-1796) to the demise of the Ottoman Empire in 1923, the Eastern Question revolved around four intersecting issues: the decline of the once-mighty Ottoman Empire, precipitated by military defeat and breakdown of administrative and financial institutions; the ultimate failure of Ottoman modernizing reform to rejuvenate the "sick man of Europe," as the Ottoman Empire came to be known in the nineteenth century; the rise of nationalism among Ottoman subjects, especially Balkan Orthodox Christians, Arab Christians and Muslims, Armenians, and Turks; and the rivalries of the Great Powers (Britain, France, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Germany, Italy) for commercial, diplomatic, political, and strategic leverage in the Ottoman Near East.

Macfie's chronological approach examines Great Power involvement in the Near East from the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774 to the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Twelve short chapters treat such Eastern episodes as tsarist expansion in the Black Sea area, Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, the Greek War of Independence, Mehmet Ali and the Egyptian Question, the Crimean War, the Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878, the Bosnian Annexation of 1908, the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, the Great War, and the Peace Settlement of 1918-1923. The documents section includes clauses of landmark treaties, such as Kutchuk-Kainardji (1774) between Russia and Ottoman Turkey; decrees by government ministries and committees on Great Power reactions to Eastern crises; and reports by diplomatic and consular officials on the status of the Ottoman Empire.

The strengths of Macfie's study are several. The author clearly demonstrates that the Eastern Question actually embraced "many eastern questions," most prominently the various territorial arenas of Great Power competition. Imperial Russia and Austria-Hungary clashed in the Balkans; Britain and France were rivals in North Africa, Egypt, and the Levant; Britain sought to maintain unchallenged mastery over Mediterranean routes to India; and Britain and Germany competed in Ottoman Mesopotamia with the building of the Berlin-Baghdad Railroad. All the Great Powers, but especially Russia and Britain, struggled for influence in Constantinople and the strategic waterways of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles

(the Straits).

On the whole, the author is even-handed and balanced in his treatment of Great Power strategies and reactions. A good example is his judicious handling of the Franco-Russian quarrel over the Holy Places in Jerusalem, a major dispute which provoked the Crimean War, the only occasion when an Eastern Question issue triggered a European-wide conflict. Macfie sorts out the tangled web of contradictory agreements by the Triple Entente in the First World War, when the Ottoman Empire fought with Germany and Austria-Hungary. We are reminded that conflicting agreements and promises made by Britain, France, Russia, and Italy regarding the partition of Ottoman-ruled lands represented a departure from traditional policy. In virtually every Eastern crisis until 1914, the Great Powers worked individually or collectively to maintain the independence and integrity of the sultan's domains. Despite frequent partition proposals put forth by diplomatic officials, the Great Powers generally adopted a defensive and conservative stance predicated on the goal of preserving a fragile balance of power that included the "sick man of Europe."

Nevertheless, the Great Powers took actions either individually or collectively that undermined the status quo, exacerbated Ottoman decline, and made the balance of power more precarious. British, French, and Russian naval action against the Ottoman fleet at Navarino in 1827 helped seal the victory of Greek independence. A series of wars between Russia and Ottoman Turkey (1768-1774, 1787-1792, 1806-1812, 1828-1829, 1853-1856, 1877-1878) advanced Russia's trade and strategic position in the Balkans and Constantinople. Britain's occupation of Cyprus and Egypt, Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Italy's seizure of Tripolitania–such were some of the blows struck by the Great Powers against the Ottoman Empire. So perhaps World War I agreements by the Triple Entente on the fate of the Ottoman Empire did not represent a dramatic departure from the tradition of Great Power interference and territorial claims.

My few points of criticism are minor and do not detract from what is an exceptionally fine and important work. For clarity and organization I would begin an exploration of the Eastern Question by specifying the various interests and aims of the Great Powers. These objectives eventually emerge in the author's discussion of particular crises, but they need to be detailed or at least identified early in the text. For instance, it is not until chapter 9 ("The First World War, 1914-1918") that we find mention of Russia's "historic mission" and "age-old dream" to secure possession of Constantinople, "the source and inspiration of their [Russia's] Orthodox faith and culture."[1]

Any scholar who assumes the challenge of crafting a succinct introduction to the Eastern Question in eighty pages can hardly be expected to master all the available primary and secondary sources, and A. L. Macfie is to be commended for his adept handling of works on British policy and strategy. His treatment of tsarist policy, however, is not as sure or as nuanced as his sections on Britain or France. This observation is reinforced by a glance at the author's bibliography, which omits several recent as well as older studies of tsarist activity in the Balkans and Near East.[2] Ottoman decline sparked Balkan unrest and revolt, which threatened to embroil the Great Powers in Eastern conflict, none more so than Russia in view of its geographical proximity and religious ties to the Eastern Orthodox lands of the Near East. Such crises as the Greek War of Independence and the Bosnian and Bulgarian revolts invariably confronted the Russian government with the dilemma of intervention or neutrality. Safeguarding Orthodox Christians provided an opportunity to advance imperial state interests, yet the pursuit of strictly Russian national goals risked Great Power hostility, balance of power disruption, and squandered resources in costly war and sacrifice. Eastern disturbances thus found Russia delicately poised between preserving the "sick man of Europe," cooperating with other Great Powers, and restructuring the Balkans into a Russian protectorate. Tension between preservation of the status quo and intervention on behalf of fellow Orthodox Christians was particularly prominent in the reigns of Alexander I and Nicholas I, a period when Metternichean legitimacy jostled with defense of Orthodoxy and with rectifying Russo-Ottoman treaties violated by Ottoman reprisals against Balkan insurgents.

Chapters 10 and 12, on the Peace Settlement of 1918-1923 and the aftermath of the Eastern Question, might have benefited from David Fromkin's *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York, 1989). Seeds of contemporary conflict in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, and Turkey were planted when Britain and France reconfigured the post-Ottoman Middle East by creating new states, drawing new borders, and importing western political concepts. Cultural and political imperialism of this sort often disregarded long-standing ethnic, religious, tribal, and linguistic frontiers in the Middle East. Ethnic and religious antagonisms in Turkey, Iraq, Bosnia,

and Cyprus today comprise one of the bitter legacies of Great Power diplomacy in the Eastern Question. Macfie might have clarified why and how Europe's complicated relationship with the Ottoman Empire serves as a bridge and a framework for understanding unresolved questions and disputes which make up the Eastern Question in its current phase.

Scholars and students of Eastern Question history need to re-examine the subject in several ways. Traditional interpretations such as Macfie's focus almost exclusively on Great Power diplomacy and geopolitical strategy and pay insufficient attention to trade, culture, education, religion, and philanthropy. These, too, were key facets of the Eastern Question for all the Great Powers. Study of the Ottoman-European nexus requires a wide angle of vision encompassing not just diplomatic correspondence, partition proposals, and state treaties, but also the various endeavors organized by educational, religious, and philanthropic societies on behalf of Balkan, Arab, and Armenian Christians of the Ottoman Empire.[3] Macfie touches on the Catholic-Orthodox dispute as backdrop to the Crimean War, but more systematic treatment of trade, religion, and other aspects of Great Power interaction throughout the period covered in his survey would offer perspective on the history of the Eastern Question.

For example, a shared Eastern Orthodox faith and Byzantine culture shaped Russia's perceptions of the Eastern Question and influenced tsarist policy in any number of ways from Catherine II to Nicholas II. Although protection and defense of the sultan's Orthodox Christian subjects never took precedence over such tangible aims as security of the southern frontier, expansion along the northern and eastern shores of the Black Sea, political leverage in the Balkans, trade in the eastern Mediterranean, and control of Constantinople and the Straits, Russia's religious ties to Balkan Orthodox subjects imparted a sense of mission to tsarist strategy in the Near East. Along similar lines, probably the most significant legacy of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 was the "opening of the Levant" to Western trade, secular ideas, and modernizing reform, the very basis of Mehmet Ali's transformation of Egypt, which in turn helped provoke the Egyptian Question of the 1830s and 1840s.

The impact of domestic politics in shaping Great Power responses to disputes and rivalries in the Ottoman Empire constitutes another dimension of Eastern Question history that needs further investigation. Macfie alludes to Western philhellenic zeal for the cause of Greek independence in the early 1820s, but does not explore the question of how or to what extent enlightened public opinion might have influenced official policy toward the Greek revolt. Russia also had an active philhellenic movement, manifested in relief aid campaigns for Balkan Orthodox victims of Ottoman reprisals and in poems dedicated to Greek freedom by Pushkin and other writers.[4] In virtually every Eastern crisis powerful domestic factors either restrained or incited Great Power involvement, such as Russia's vocal and influential pan-Slav movement, which urged tsarist action on behalf of Balkan Slavs in the 1870s, and Austria-Hungary's Magyar co-leadership, which sought to avert war in the 1908 Bosnian Crisis.[5]

Domestic politics may help explain why Great Power reactions and approaches to Eastern disputes often reflected divided opinion in policy-making circles. Macfie accurately points out rival moderate and forward voices in the British government during the Bosnian and Bulgarian revolts of the 1870s, and this type of divided counsel in the Foreign Ministries of France, Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Germany deserves a larger place in Eastern Question scholarship. Debate between "hawks" and "moderates" in formulating Great Power policy reinforces our sense of the Eastern Question's complexity and importance for European policy-makers.

Russian and British rivalry in the Near East extended to the Muslim khanates of Central Asia, where Russia and Britain struggled for commercial, political, and strategic advantage in the Great Game. Tsarist and British reactions to particular crises in the Eastern Question might be re-examined in light of their imperial moves and countermoves in the Great Game. Gains or setbacks in the Near East invariably influenced strategy in Central Asia, and vise versa, as evinced in Russia's renewed Central Asian thrust after the Crimean debacle and in Britain's victory in the Second Afghan War on the heels of Russia's triumph in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878.[6] Relating Great Power competition in the Near East to the Anglo-Russian "tournament of shadows" in the Caucasus and Turkestan not only compounds the intricacy of Eastern Question history, but places the subject in a wider geopolitical context where instructive parallels can enrich our study of both the Near East and Central Asia.

A final way to re-examine the Eastern Question is to tap the valuable and extensive resources now available for scholars working in the archives, manuscript collections, and libraries of the former USSR. Moscow's Archive of the Foreign Policy of Russia (AVPR), to which

Western historians have only recently been granted unrestricted access, is unsurpassed for its rich holdings on tsarist diplomatic, political, commercial, and religious ventures in the Near East. St. Petersburg's Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), the largest single repository of state records from 1801 to 1917, houses additional material that sharpens our picture of the variety of Russia's activities in the Ottoman East.[7] Eastern Question sources in Russian archival and manuscript collections may not dramatically alter our understanding of tsarist policy, but new details will invariably deepen our knowledge and open new lines of scholarly inquiry on trade, religion, diplomacy, and other facets of Great Power involvement in the Eastern Question.

Notes

[1]. A. L. Macfie, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), p. 58.

[2]. David Goldfrank, *The Origins of the Crimean War* (London and New York: Longman, 1994), which utilizes newly released archival documents from Moscow's Archive of the Foreign Policy of Russia; Hugh Ragsdale, ed., *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Press; Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Barbara Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements, 1806-1914* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Andrew Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans: Inter-Balkan Rivalries and Russian Foreign Policy, 1908-1914* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1981); Norman Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean, 1797-1807* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Alan Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea, 1772-1783* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Charles Jelavich, *Tsarist Russia and Balkan Nationalism: Russian Influence in the Internal Affairs of Bulgaria and Serbia, 1879-1886* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958).

[3]. On aspects of Imperial Russia's cultural diplomacy in the Near East, see Stephen K. Batalden and Michael D. Palma, "Orthodox Pilgrimage and Russian Landholding in Jerusalem: The British Colonial Record," in Stephen K. Batalden, ed., *Seeking God: The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia* (Dekalb, Il.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), pp. 251-263; Theofanis G. Stavrou and Peter R. Weisensel, *Russian Travelers to the Christian East from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Century* (Columbus, Oh.: Slavica Publishers, 1986); Derek Hopwood, *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine, 1843-1914: Church and Politics in the Near East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); Theofanis G. Stavrou, *Russian Interests in Palestine: A Study of Religious and Educational Enterprise* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1963).

[4]. Theophilus C. Prousis, *Russian Society and the Greek Revolution* (Dekalb, Il.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994).

[5]. Jelena Milojkovic-Djuric, *Panslavism and National Identity in Russia and in the Balkans 1830-1880: Images of the Self and Others* (Boulder: East European Monographs; New York: Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1994); David MacKenzie, *The Serbs and Russian Panslavism, 1875-1878* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967); Michael Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Panslavism, 1856-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956). F. Roy Bridge, *From Sadowa to Sarajevo: The Foreign Policy of Austria-Hungary, 1866-1914* (London and Boston: Routledge and K. Paul, 1972); Barbara Jelavich, *The Habsburg Empire in European Affairs, 1814-1918* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969).

[6]. Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kodansha International, 1992).

[7]. Theophilus C. Prousis, "AVPR and the Orthodox East," *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 12 (1996), forthcoming; Prousis, "RGIA Resources on the Eastern Question: The Dashkov Fond," *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas* (1997), forthcoming.

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