

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

Christo Ognjanoff, *Bulgarien*. Glock und Lutz Verlag, Nuernberg, 1967. Pp. 496.

There has been a serious and acknowledged lack of scholarly writing in recent years in the field of contemporary Bulgarian history. Ognjanoff's book thus appears in a virtual intellectual vacuum. Both the strengths and the weaknesses of the book are associated with its singular position in the professional literature.

Ognjanoff's volume is part of the "Culture of Nations" series published by Glock and Lutz. The focus of the series is broad, and the volume on Bulgaria follows this pattern. Ognjanoff sets out to provide a history of the Bulgarian nation, its people, its culture, its economy and its politics. To do this in 484 small-format pages is a considerable challenge. It is perhaps inevitable that a degree of superficiality is present in Ognjanoff's work. The author's purpose, indeed, is to reach and inform a wide circle of readers "for whom ... any substantial knowledge of Bulgaria may not be assumed." (page 483). Thus the book is a general historical survey and is properly viewed and evaluated as such. There is little that is new for the specialist in Balkan affairs with the possible exception of Ognjanoff's treatment of Bulgarian scientific life and the "new Bulgarian literature." Broadly viewed, however, the book is an excellent introduction to Bulgarian history. If its contribution to the professional literature is somewhat limited, its value as a survey text is very considerable.

Because the book is thrust into the plethora of non-communist literature on Bulgaria, its worth rests substantially on the research and communicative skills of the author. Christo Ognjanoff is one of the best known contemporary scholars writing in the Bulgarian language. As the very short bibliography and the total absence of footnotes suggests, the author was forced to rely heavily on his own research and experiences in writing the book. Indeed, most of the items listed in the bibliography clearly are secondary sources. Further, a minimum of material published in post-1944 Bulgaria has been used. The informational base of the book is thus somewhat difficult to characterize, or to evaluate.

Ognjanoff has divided his work into twenty sections which vary considerably in length, importance, and type of emphasis. For example, the section on "the new Bulgarian literature" contains 147 pages while the section on the economy is 15 pages long, and the section on political parties, only 12 pages. The development of the Communist regime in Bulgaria is given only four pages. This sharply inconsistent emphasis reflects the author's major interests, and is perhaps broadly consistent with the orientation of the series in which the book appears; viz., toward a history of "culture." Still, if "culture" is thought of as including the values, belief patterns and attitudes of the people, the importance of studying the economy and polity seems clear. It is not enough to assert that "Bulgarian culture manifests itself most strongly in the literature." (page 403).

Relatedly, Ognjanoff's handling of political history is not always without normative overtones. That the author is negatively oriented toward post-1944 developments in Bulgaria seems clear. To cite only one example of a seemingly unnecessary critical comment: on page 167 the author mentions the reconstruction of the Bulgarian system on the Soviet model, "without the slightest concern for the special characteristics of the country." Similarly, Ognjanoff characterizes the period since September 9, 1944, as the "gray decades." That the author's evaluative posture toward Bulgarian communism may be widely shared outside Bulgaria does not excuse such a posture in a scholarly work.

Several more specific comments might be made regarding the principal sections of the book. In the section on medieval history, the author stresses the way in which Bulgaria became a nation with a separate identity, "a Slavic nation with non-Slavic names." Again, there is little that is surprising in this section of the book, with the possible exception of the author's discussion of the findings of archaeological and historical research conducted in Bulgaria in the last two decades.

The second historical chapter deals with the five-century-long Turkish political domination, as well as the intellectual and spiritual domination of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The central question raised is whether the preservation of the Bulgarian nation can most meaningfully be traced to special qualities of the Bulgarian people, or to the characteristics of the temporarily-dominant Turkish culture, or Greek spiritual institutions. Broadly, the author asserts that the Greek intellectual and spiritual yoke was much more threatening to indigenous Bulgarian institutions than was the political-economic dominance of

the Turks. Yet while the Greek Patriarchate might well have erased the distinguishing features of Bulgarian institutions, it somehow did not. The explanation, says Ognjanoff, rests in the notion that the Greek Patriarchate was most interested in a rapacious plundering of the people and of the church in Bulgaria, and had no real interest in developing a denationalization policy which would have obliterated the special features of Bulgarian culture. There is, of course, considerable scholarly debate concerning the intentions and effects of the Greek Patriarchate in Bulgaria. Ognjanoff's conclusion may well be challenged.

The author's contention is that the preservation of the Bulgarian nation was mainly attributable to special qualities of the Bulgarian people, whom he characterizes as "a freedom loving, warlike people which never stopped striving for an independent life in its own country and in the bosom of its own church." (page 108). The maintenance of these qualities can be largely traced to the efforts of intellectuals and writers as well as of the churches and cloisters in Bulgaria.

Ognjanoff devotes a special section to the rebirth, or "Renaissance," of Bulgarian culture. He finds it possible to connect almost every significant event between 1762 and 1876 to this reawakening of a Bulgarian cultural identification. Thus this section of the book is substantially a history of social, intellectual, and political events which seem closely related to the realization of the goal of national independence. Emphasis is placed on the awakening of the Bulgarian national conscience (through the publication of the first Bulgarian history in 1762), the struggle for Bulgarian schools and instructional curricula, the loosening of the ties which bound the Bulgarian church to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the April rebellion of 1876, and the culmination of the drive toward Bulgarian independence in the Treaty of Berlin (1878).

In general, this section is well written and characterized by objective treatment of the subject matter. It might be argued that some events have been over-emphasized, given the author's desire to convey a sense of purposeful striving toward the goal of independence. Relatedly, when Ognjanoff talks about national heroes and their physical and spiritual struggles, his words often seem full of emotion, suggesting a feeling of great sympathy for the tasks to which they had committed themselves. Thus Ognjanoff is not a dispassionate observer of this period in Bulgarian history; nor might we expect him to be such.

The historical section dealing with "modern Bulgaria" is sometimes interesting and informative, but often superficial and distressingly

uneven. Great emphasis is placed on the Third Empire period (1878-1944). Agonizingly little attention is given to post-takeover conditions in Bulgaria. In portraying the Third Empire, Ognjanoff paints the image of a small country, forced almost as a pawn to be responsive to fluctuating power relationships in Europe. Ognjanoff clearly believes that Bulgaria had no real opportunity to formulate a foreign policy of its own, or to design domestic programs which might have minimized internal conflict and maximized the popularity of the ruling political and economic strata. In short, Ognjanoff suggests that Bulgaria did not really have a chance to shape its own destiny during the period of the Third Empire.

In the three sections dealing with the economy, political parties, and the press, Ognjanoff places distracting emphasis on isolated illustrations, and does an inadequate job of painting the broad picture. It is unfortunate, for example, that the author did not make greater use of the aggregate statistical data available to characterize the state of the Bulgarian economy between the World Wars. Even more serious is the absence of any meaningful reference to recent economic reforms undertaken by the communist regime in Bulgaria. In the section on political parties the author's personal political perspective seems unwittingly to emerge. Thus the Democratic Party is characterized as an "exemplary Democratic Party of western shaping," which had "noble democratic and national impulses." (page 187). Relatedly, the author finds in the person of Stefan Stambolov all of the finest attributes of a great statesman, and sees him as the "incarnation of the independence tendency and the national dignity of the Bulgarian people." (page 186). Broadly, the author is more concerned with evaluating the political groupings which existed in Bulgaria during this period, than he is interested in explaining the differences among them.

The section on the press, though somewhat vague and general, is broadly adequate. One worthwhile addition might have been more specific reference to the dominance of foreign language publications in Bulgaria, and to the shifting composition of the country of origin of these foreign language publications over time. The statistics on library holdings tell an interesting and impressive story about the rising influence of German language publications during the 1930's, and about the rapidly-enforced pre-eminence of Russian language publications after 1947. Unfortunately, these statistics were not included in Ognjanoff's book.

In my opinion some of the most worthwhile material in the book is to be found in the author's sections on school life and scientific life in Bulgaria. Very little has been published on these subjects in any western language previously, and Ognjanoff exhibits a thorough and balanced appreciation of the changing nature of educational and scholarly life in his country. There is more explicit concern with the formal and informal structures in this chapter on the educational and scientific systems, than is the case in other sections of the book.

But the most impressive section of the book is that dealing with the "new Bulgarian literature." Much of this section is new material and it is presented in a clear and well-organized way. Ognjanoff convincingly supports his contention that a "new golden age" of literature developed in Bulgaria between 1870 and the beginning of the Second World War. This literature was "new according to content and form, new according to spirit and cultural alignment, and new according to its own exclusive performance." (page 318). The author provides a very useful classification of Bulgarian writers of this period, and does a creditable job of characterizing them in such a way that they can be evaluated alongside other European authors of this same period. Relatedly, the brief history of Bulgarian art is very well done. One could only have hoped that Ognjanoff might have extended this section.

I began this review by suggesting that Ognjanoff's book might well be evaluated simply as a general introductory history of Bulgarian culture. Much of the comment here is based implicitly on a different kind of perspective toward the book, i.e., criticisms often deal with the book's contribution to the professional literature. It is impossible to avoid this kind of perspective, for the author is an established scholar of considerable reputation, and the book has been projected into a genuine vacuum in its field. Broadly, then, specialists on the Balkan area might well have hoped for a more thorough, detailed, dispassionate effort. Yet the author, judiciously and realistically, did not set out to write that kind of book. Within the framework of his own self-defined goals, the book is generally very well done. Ognjanoff has written a lively, interesting, and unique history of many aspects of Bulgarian culture. This is an important volume, and one that should be read and used widely.