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KİTAP İNCELEMESİ – BOOK REVIEW

BYZANTIUM AND THE PECHENEGS: THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE PROBLEM*

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ERTUNÇ GENÇAY**

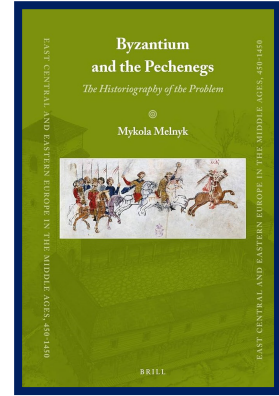
Mykola Melnyk's *Byzantium and the Pechenegs: The Historiography of the Problem*, translated into English by Yaroslav Prykhodko, was published by Brill on 22 February 2022 as volume 79 of the history series called *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450-1450*, edited by Florin Curta and Dušan Zupka.

The work consists of 4 main chapters: 1. *Byzantium and the Pechenegs: Vasilievskii to Moravcsik*, 2. "Poised Perception" *Trans-Danubian Turks in the Historiography of the Balkan-Danubian Countries*, 3. *Eastern European Historiography since 1945*, 4. *International Byzantine and Oriental Studies* and finally the author's conclusions.

In the Introduction, the author sets out the goals of the book. Accordingly, the book aims to present a broad analysis of the historiography of the past 150 years since Vasilii Vasilievskii's *Byzantium and the Pechenegs*¹, including written, archaeological, numismatic, and linguistic sources.²

As the author himself states, the book is structured on two main levels. The first level is purely 'factual', emphasising names, dates, places, idioms, the nature and course of events. It aims to show how factors such as source criticism, the discovery and analysis of archaeological finds, and the interpretation of coin and seal finds have shaped the understanding of the history of the region in terms of Byzantine and Pechenegs relations. The second level of analysis in the book is what the author calls the 'ideological' and conceptual level. At this point, he analyses how the historical interpretation of the Byzantine-nomadic relations developed and how the ideologies of states and territorial disputes between countries influenced historiography. The study also aims to evaluate academic developments in the field, focussing on the study of Byzantium's relations with the nomads of the North Pontic steppes, the development of Byzantine Studies as an academic discipline, and the paradigm shift in historiography.³

When examining the chapters, the first one begins with a detailed analysis of Vasilii Vasilievskii's *Byzantium and the Pechenegs*. The author then proceeds to analyse the historiographical research of scholars on the medieval nomads of the Russian Empire before 1917. The author concludes that the studies carried out in this period were not only academically motivated but also in line with the political ambitions of the Russian Empire. In this chapter, the author then analyses Hungarian and Turkish historiography with examples and examines the emotional and political subtext of Hungarian scholars' view of the nomads. In another sub-section of this chapter, the author analyses the views and debates of Romanian (e.g. Nicolae Ioarga, Nicolae Bănescu) and Bulgarian (e.g. Vasil Zlatarski, Petăr Mutafchiev) scholars on the nomadic groups in the Lower Danube region in the 10th and 12th centuries. The next subheading analyses the Russian and Ukrainian historiography between 1920 and 1940. The theme of opposition between sedentary and nomadic ways of life was prominent in the Russian and Ukrainian



* Mykola Melnyk, *Byzantium and the Pechenegs: The Historiography of the Problem*, trs. Yaroslav Prykhodko, East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages Series, 450-1450/1872-8103; volume 79, gen. ed. Florin Curta and Dušan Zupka, Brill, Netherlands, 2022, ISBN 978-90-04-50522-3 (e-book), 398 p.

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¹ Vasilievskii, V. G., *Vizantiya i Peçenegi (1048-1094)*, Jurnal Ministrestvo Narodnavo Prosveteniya, P.164, pp.116-165 i 243-332, 1872.

² Melnyk, *ibid.*, p. 4-5.

³ Melnyk, *ibid.*, p. 5-6.



historiography of this period. In Soviet historiography, the hostile view of nomadic history was abandoned and researches began on the archaeological remains of medieval nomads. The last subheading gives examples of the scholarly contributions to the history of Pechenegs by scholars such as Karl Dieter, Carl Neumann, Carlile Aylmer Macartney, and Gyula Moravcsik. The translation and study of contemporary ancient sources and the use of sciences such as archaeology, numismatics, and sigillography to illuminate Byzantine relations with the nomads of the northern Black Sea steppes are also highlighted in this section.⁴

The second chapter discusses the influence of Marxist methodology on scholars in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. The archaeological excavations carried out by Hungarian, Romanian, and Bulgarian scholars, the translation and study of the sources of the period, the perspectives, and interpretations of the scholars are broadly presented to the reader. As we see in the book, the inadequacy of written sources in constructing the early history of the Hungarians has led Hungarian scholars to interdisciplinary work. The fifth subheading of the chapter emphasized the fact that researchers in Greece, Türkiye, Serbia, Albania, and Northern Macedonia have not done much research on the history of the nomads in the Balkan-Danubian region. The author believes that this may be due to the fact that nomads here have little connection with the national history of these countries.⁵

The third chapter examines the state of East European historiography after 1945. The Soviet and post-Soviet works and historical interpretations of Mikhail Artamanov, Svetlana Pletnyova, and many other scholars are reviewed. Methodological approach and classification, the interpretation of nomadic graves, horse burial analyses, funeral rituals, differences between Pecheneg and Uzes burials, dating of Pecheneg presence, geographical distribution and ethnic markings of Oghuz and Pecheneg burials, language and nomenclature of nomadic communities, nomadic economy, and social structures come to the forefront in the studies. At the same time, the impact of administrative, social, and political events on the archaeological heritage in Soviet geography is also discussed by the author in the chapter. Finally, alternative historiographical tendencies of the new states that emerged with the collapse of the Soviet Union are also mentioned.⁶

The last chapter is devoted to the institutions created for Byzantine studies, the conferences organised, the sources studied and unstudied, the works of orientalists such as Peter B. Golden and Omeljan Pritsak, the interpretations of historians on the chronological problems in the struggle between the nomads and Byzantium, and their thoughts on the economic and cultural integration of the nomads and Byzantium.⁷

In conclusion, most of the studies on the Byzantine Empire's relations with the nomads north of the Black Sea and in the Balkans are mentioned in this book. Translations of important Ancient Greek, Latin and Muslim sources of the period into various languages and research on these contemporary sources, archaeological studies, numismatics, linguistics, sigillography, and the contributions of many disciplines, including climate, to nomadic studies and Byzantine studies are among the important topics emphasised in the work. At the same time, the studies of the historians of Eastern Europe and the Balkan countries on their peoples and their relations with nomads are also mentioned and a large pool of resources has been created for the reader. While the bibliography on the subject is developed with the help of footnotes, the historiographical volume of the work is expanded by presenting the same and close visions and disagreements of scholars both in the text and with the help of footnotes. The new theories and research methods developed by scholars on Byzantine history and its relationship with the nomads are also underlined by the author.

The most important theme in the book is, maybe, how world wars, ideological movements, and radical political changes have affected history, linguistics, archaeology, and historiography. The book is also intriguing in its exploration of how nations liberated from oppressive regimes use history and historiography to construct their own 'we-consciousness', and how this influence is reflected in historiography.

At the end of the chapters and in the concluding section, the author does not neglect to offer solutions to the historiographical problems he has identified, and, at the same time, he provides study suggestions for researchers, indicating the materials that have been overlooked or have not yet been studied.

In summary: this book successfully fills a gap in the historiography of the Byzantine world and the relations with the nomads of the northern Black Sea region by providing a comprehensive pool of information. The views and works of experts in the field are analysed in detail, and their contributions to historiography are arranged chronologically in the book, making it an easy-to-follow guide for researchers. In this respect, this book should be consulted by the researchers who wishes to study or investigate the relationship between the Byzantine world and the nomads. This book, which offers an extensive bibliographical and historiographical memory, will also serve as an important guideline for students just beginning their studies in this field.

⁴ Melnyk, *ibid.*, p. 7-62.

⁵ Melnyk, *ibid.*, p. 73-176.

⁶ Melnyk, *ibid.*, p. 190-252.

⁷ Melnyk, *ibid.*, p. 265-310.



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