

**Miloš Ković**, *Disraeli & The Eastern Question* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), translated by Miloš Damnjanović xxiii+399 pp. Notes. Maps. Figures. Bibliography. Index. £60.00

During the nineteenth century, immediately after the Crimean War, the Eastern Question became one of the prominent themes in British politics. Along with the insurrections of the Ottoman Christian subjects in Balkan territories, the Liberals and Tories argued over the dilemma regarding the objective for British foreign policies against the Ottoman Empire. Conservative politician Benjamin Disraeli was one of the key advocates for the support of the traditional policy to protect the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire.

In a recent publication, a book based on a doctoral thesis, Miloš Ković has made a substantial contribution to the existing literature on the political life of Disraeli and his role in the Eastern Question. Beginning with the early life of the Conservative Prime Minister, Ković's intent is to demonstrate the vital importance of the Eastern Crisis during Disraeli's period of political life. In accomplishing this objective, Ković portrays the basis of a young Disraeli's thoughts and assessments of the East during his grand tours of the Middle East and Ottoman Empire. Moreover, Ković emphasises the impact on the future politics of Disraeli from traditional Tory Radicalism which emanated from Disraeli's predecessors like George Canning and Robert Peel. Importantly, Ković includes the famous rivalry between Disraeli and William Gladstone as well as commenting on the potential impacts of the East during the Crimean War. The value of Ković's work comes partly from the author's consideration of a wide range of sources including the Disraeli Papers, speeches, letters and his policies during the Eastern

Question, as well as Hansard Parliamentary Debates, and diplomatic correspondence between Queen Victoria, Gladstone, Lady Bradford, Lady Chesterfield and Lord Granville. Although he primarily employs primary sources in the majority of his research, the well-researched and applied secondary sources of this critical historical period for British diplomacy will be welcomed by the specialist reader.

The introductory chapters detail the basis of the policies of Disraeli in consideration of the Eastern Crisis, while the second part of the book primarily focuses on the pivotal events which occurred during the years 1875-1878. These correspond to the rising of the events connected to the Eastern Question during the second premiership of Disraeli. It is also significant that Ković focuses on the foreign policies of Disraeli and criticises the end results. While Ković characterises Disraeli as ‘a pragmatic politician’ due to his alliance with Russia in the uprising in Herzegovina, he also criticises his ‘tactical errors’ as shown during the Bulgarian atrocities. Moreover, the chapter titled ‘The Shaken Prime Minister’ is essential for examination of the rivalry between Disraeli and Gladstone during the Eastern Question. The ensuing chapters include the debates of Disraeli with Salisbury and Derby that related to the policies of the Disraeli cabinet until the end of the Russo-Turkish War. Contrary to previous academic analysis regarding the impact of Disraeli’s Judaism in his politics, Ković argues that the policies and prospects of Disraeli changed gradually during the Eastern Crisis, along with his sympathy to the Ottoman Empire. Ković further portrays how public opinion stood against the Eastern Question in 1876, and he reinforces this stance with opinions from reputed historians such as Richard Millman, Asa Briggs and Robert Seton-Watson.

Although Ković devotes little attention to the evaluation of Victorian society and Disraeli's perception of the Ottomans, he observes every detail of the policies and perspective of Disraeli during the Eastern Question. He reinforced his analysis with the prospects of major statesmen like Salisbury and Derby, as well as the arguments of the pamphlet authors of the period and Disraeli's own correspondence with Queen Victoria. Ković contrasts the lives of Disraeli and Gladstone throughout and portrays the contradiction between the rise of Gladstone and the fall of Disraeli in the eyes of the public. The references and citations from Disraeli's own books are particularly valuable for they emphasise the perceptions of such a prominent British statesman with regard to the Eastern Question.

Ković argues that during the Eastern Crisis, under Disraeli's leadership, Britain was fighting for international prestige and the preservation of the existing balance of power (p. 209). Conversely, he concludes by arguing that the Balkans had a direct influence upon Disraeli's life experiences and the milestones he reached during his political life. As Ković notes, Disraeli was born in the year in which the Serbian Revolution began; his first novel *Vivian Grey* in 1826 was published at the time of the Greek Revolution; he travelled through the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire a year after the Peace of Adrianople; at the time of the Crimean War he was the leader of the House of Commons; and he finished his career as British representative at the Congress of Berlin (p. 307). Although Ković states that there is no clear information how Disraeli viewed the Eastern Question (p. 307), the author informs the reader of the main reasons behind Disraeli's policies concerning the Eastern Crisis, and how they were implemented. This well-researched book is highly useful for diplomatic historians who research the efficiency of foreign policies in British party politics. It will also be of value to those who wish to criticise the milestone events of the Eastern Question in the 1870s from the

perspective of not only Disraeli, but also from the perspective of William Ewart Gladstone.

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