Murder in Salonika, 1876: A Tale of Apostasy and International Crisis. Berke Torunoğlu. İstanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık Ticaret Ltd, 2012. P/bk 136 pp. ISBN 978-605-43265-25. Price TL 25.

Well written histories often draw their readers into smaller but fascinating events that ultimately help illuminate larger historical inquires. Berke Torunoğlu's recent book, *Murder in Salonika, 1876: A Tale of Apostasy and International Crisis*, is one such history. He recounts how an obscure, young, Bulgarian girl's interest in leaving Christianity in order to convert to Islam ultimately led to the murder of the French and German Consuls in Ottoman controlled Salonika, located in the southern Balkans. These murders led to a dispute between the Ottoman Empire and the Great Powers of nineteenth-century Europe. Through this regional and internal history, Torunoğlu offers the reader insights into larger topics: the value and role of religion within both Western civilization and the Middle East; relations between Christians and Muslims in the Ottoman Empire; as well as the dynamics of the relationship between the Great Powers and the Ottoman Empire throughout the Tanzimat period.

Torunoğlu's first chapter presents a concise and general overview of those aspects of nineteenth-century European and Ottoman history that are germane to this tale. He explains the significance of the Tanzimat reforms, which put non-Muslims living within the Ottoman Empire on an equal footing with Muslims. Torunoğlu also shows how conversion to Islam worked in the nineteenth century, emphasizing the structural checks within Islam meant to prevent coerced conversion, which was certainly not the case in this instance. There is also a discussion of the Ottoman Empire's joining the Concert of Europe, the Crimean War, and of course, Russia's interest in the Balkans. While readers do not need to have specialized historical training to grasp the overall significance of the plot, specialists in the topic might have appreciated more explanation in places, such as a reference to the insurrections of Janissaries, or the significance of Bismarck in nineteenth-century international politics.

The reader subsequently learns that Stephana (the young apostate) traveled to Salonika to become a Muslim with her Christian mother in tow. Once there, things escalated when Greek Christians answered the frantic mother's cries for Christians to help her "save" her daughter.

Following this public and forceful abduction of the would-be-convert by her mother and Christian strangers, Stephana and her mother "drank coffee and relaxed" (56). Unfortunately, the Muslims who witnessed this Christian intervention were not informed of Stephana's safety and seeming willingness to accompany her mother. As such, a growing number of Muslims, angered over the kidnapping and under the impression that Western officials in the city were holding Stephana, eventually rioted once the French and German consuls arrived on the scene. Throughout the messy turn of events, Torunoğlu succeeds in painting such a vivid and full picture of the miscommunications and tensions that readers will clearly see how both the Christians and Muslims involved came to think and act as they did.

The book finishes by showing how the Great Powers, especially France and Germany, used the consuls' murder as an excuse to berate the Ottoman Empire — often called the "Sick Man of Europe" in the nineteenth century — which lacked the power to refuse their continued calls for greater and quicker monetary compensation and stronger, more humiliating punishments for those involved. The role of the Great Powers in furthering Ottoman decline by demanding more than proper recompense is perhaps Torunoğlu's strongest concluding point.

Murder in Salonika is well researched, based on a variety of primary sources from archives in the Republic of Turkey, Britain and the United States. The book contains a selected bibliography listing some of his secondary sources as well. It is remarkable that Torunoğlu managed to produce such an academically rigorous work that is simultaneously something of a page-turner. This story compels you to continue reading: a strange tale that should have been a minor event for a family living under Ottoman rule, yet turned into murder and international tension. In doing so, it reveals the complexities of diplomatic relations between the West and the Ottoman Empire, and how the former used this event to take advantage of the latter. One small question still looms in my mind, however: whatever happened to Stephana? While it is implied that she underwent her conversion to Islam, she assumes less and less importance in the story. That is, of course, not an academic concern, but my curiosity remains.

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