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Constanța Vintilă, Giulia Calvi, Mária Pakucs-Willcocks, Nicoleta Roman, and Michał Wasiucionek. *Luxury, Fashion and Other Political Bagatelles in Southeastern Europe, 16th–19th Centuries*. Translated into English by Iuliu Raţiu and James Christian Brown. Bucharest, Humanitas, 2022. 426. ISBN 978-973-50-7731-0.

This collective study totals 426 pages and is the work of five authors, who approach south-eastern European material culture from a variety of critical perspectives. The key concepts through which the book is organized are luxury, fashion, and social status in south-eastern Europe between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. As a branch of the study of the region's history, the field of consumption studies has been developing intensively over the last twenty-five years or so, as is borne out by the publication of *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550–1922*, edited by Donald Quataert, in 1999, and the multitude of other texts on related subjects that followed within the next two decades. Relevant publications include *Ottoman Costumes: From Textile to Identity* (2004), edited by Suraiya Faroqhi and Christoph K. Neumann, and Rossitsa Gradeva's article "On 'Frenk' Objects in Everyday Life in the Ottoman Balkans: the Case of Sofia, mid-17th – mid-18th centuries" (2007).

As indicated above, luxury is one of the key concepts in the volume under discussion. Luxury is not an easy concept to define. It is often linked to decadence but may also be seen as the engine of the modern consumer economy. Luxury may take various shapes and forms, regardless of the degree of economic development, and is part of the lifestyle of elite groups that demonstrate their social status through the acquisition of luxury goods. From this perspective, the history of luxury is a history of power.

Employing research methods from cultural history and other areas of the humanities, the authors of the volume under discussion analyse luxury and fashion as components of material culture. They concentrate on the Christian elites of Ottoman-dominated south-eastern Europe in the early modern period and provide insights into the ways in which they defined their social identity. Significantly, the contributors to the volume interpret south-eastern European modernization not only as a process conditioned by the spread of the ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, but also as involving changes in material culture that were the outcome of western influence in the fields of luxury and fashion. Such an approach enables them to re-assess the perceived time lag between Europe's "core" and south-eastern Europe, as well as the development of political thought and social change in the context of the region's "Europeanization." In addition, some of the contributors to the volume explore the history of trade and the trade routes of luxury objects.

One of the volume's merits is that it helps us gain a new understanding of luxury and its consumers throughout the period designated in the title. The book's chapters are similar in structure with each starting with a theoretical section, followed by several case studies providing specific examples. The bibliography that follows each chapter is impressive. The high-quality images collected from European museums, archives, and libraries are also among the volume's attractive features.

The volume's focus is above all on the material culture of the three principalities of Wallachia, Transylvania, and Moldova. One should not forget, however, the difference between the official status of these principalities and the rest of south-eastern Europe. Large parts of the region were under complete Ottoman control and there were various restrictions that even local elites had to reckon with. Nevertheless, commerce flourished throughout the region and the volume's authors provide numerous examples of the transactions of Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, and Albanian merchants.

The authors criticize a tendency that was prevalent among south-eastern European historians under state socialism: "Balkan societies [were often presented] in black and white, conjuring a vision of a

neatly divided world, where a privileged upper class of wealthy people exploited a lower class of backward peasants" (Vintilă14). In addition, "the 'Ottoman Yoke' …

was held responsible for a good part of the cultural and economic gaps and lags in the region" (Vintilă 14). Rather than reproducing the clichés of the past, the volume's authors aim at projecting a multifaceted image of the region that fully acknowledges the complexity of its social dynamics during the period designated in the title (14). According to the authors, the region's "social categories were diverse and relations among them largely depended on the cultural, social, and economic context" (Vintilă 14).

The volume examines a wide variety of luxury commodities: from costume albums and portraits as sources for studying the history of luxury, through fabrics, shoes, jewels, Turkish carpets, sugar, coffee, and spices as indicators of luxury. Medicine and architecture are also discussed as signs of wealth, prestige, and social status. The issue of south-eastern European modernization is discussed through an opposition between "old" fashion "new" fashion.

Special attention is paid to the meanings conveyed by the fabrics and textiles from which clothes were made in the Saxon towns of Transylvania. Other features, such as size, the width of the ribbons, or the height of the velvet toque hats (cylinders) specific to the Saxon dress, were also meaningful (Pakucs-Willcocks 197). Apparently, the citizens of the Transylvanian towns were divided into "well-defined categories or social classes based on similar professions and comparable incomes" (Pakucs-Willcocks 197). Historians have drawn attention to the adoption of sumptuary laws that were intended to limit imports of expensive fabrics and objects and to stimulate local textile production (Pakucs-Willcocks 198). Thus, around the middle of the eighteenth century, officials from Brașov "advised their 'beloved townspeople' not to buy luxury or opulent goods, such as velvet, gold and silver threads, fox furs, or any other imported products" (Pakucs-Willcocks 198).

The volume provides a number of examples from the Bulgarian lands as well, which may be of special interest to Bulgarian readers. Such is the one with the fresco of Zahari Zograf (Zahariy Hristovich Dimitrov, 1810–1853), "The Frenchified Women" (1840), which presents, in vivid detail, the cultural-aesthetic clash between traditionalists and "liberals" who adopted central and western European ("French") fashions in the nineteenth century (see Vintilă 371–375). Despite all opposition, however, imported ("Frank"/"Frenk") fashion articles, reading, and travel visibly transformed south-eastern European societies. Traditionalist voices, especially among the clergy, tried to attach negative connotations to the changes taking place by using one of the most important tools of progress: the press.

The authors also highlight the region's hybridity: for instance, western decorations, "Oriental" weapons, and traditional costumes all played an important role in the visual representations of military leaders in the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, such representations prove the double commitment of such leaders: to the space of their origins, from which they derived their power, and the space of European diplomacy, with which they were in dialogue (Roman 404–407).

Overall, this is a valuable collection of well-written and meticulously researched essays that sheds much-needed light on significant aspects of the history of material culture in south-eastern Europe – an area of historical studies that cannot be ignored.

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