

In closing, it must be pointed out that Mitsi's monograph is an important contribution to the study of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century travel writing, which challenges us to revise our ideas about intercultural relations in early modern Europe.

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***Petar Mateev. Avtobiografiya, spomeni, deynost.* Edited by Aleka Strezova and Lyubomir Valentinov Panayotov. Marin Drinov Academic Publishing House, 2017. 326. ISBN 978-954-322-907-9**

Bulgarian historians have devoted a lot of attention to the founders of modern Bulgarian statehood. Predictably, their research has mostly focused on political figures, who occupied key positions in the higher echelons of executive and legislative power. Such political figures have not only been of interest to professional historians but narratives about them have also found their way into history textbooks and are currently shaping public opinion. However, relatively little is known about people, who remained in the background as the modern Bulgarian state came into existence. Their role in Bulgarian political life still needs to be properly acknowledged and researched.

Petar Mateev (1850–1943) belongs to the latter category. For this reason, the publication of *Petar Mateev. Avtobiografiya, spomeni, deynost* (*Petar Mateev. Autobiography, Memories, Career*) is very timely, and the book fills a gap in specialized research and general knowledge alike. The volume includes an overview of Mateev's life, his own autobiography, a bibliography of his published works and, to most readers' surprise, the translation of the cuneiform clay tablets, which he brought to Bulgaria and presented to the museum in his hometown of Kotel. The translator is the Assyriologist Strahil Panayotov. Aleka Strezova is the author of the impressive introduction, which presents Mateev's life, starting with his family background and education in Malta and at Robert College in the Ottoman capital, and including his administrative career and travels, as well as his activities as a diplomat, journalist and functionary of the newly established Bulgarian state.

Mateev was born on 10 February 1850 to a socially prominent family in the mountain town of Kotel. As he himself admits, he was very proud of his family, which went back for ten generations, and five of its more recent representatives had adopted the honorific title of *hadji*. Interpreted as a mark of social distinction, the title was usually bestowed on wealthy people who had made generous donations to Orthodox churches and monasteries. Notables in Mateev's hometown mostly owed their wealth to successful ventures in the Dobrudja region where they initially reared sheep before tapping the full agricultural potential of its plains. His own family must have had close links with Prince Stephanaki Vogorides (Stefan Bogoridi, Istefanaki Bey), who started life in Kotel as Stoyko Stoykov and subsequently became a high-ranking Ottoman statesman. In addition, they were related to the families of the savant Petar Beron, the revolutionary Georgi Rakovsky and the prominent Ottoman civil servant, historian and jurist Gavril Krastevich. Such contacts would eventually open wide vistas for young Mateev. His father, who was himself a graduate of the Phanar Greek Orthodox College in Istanbul, opted for a different type of education for his son: eleven-year-old Petar was enrolled in the Malta Protestant College, a school administered by the Anglican Church, which was also open to young Bulgarians in search of more advanced modern education. Mateev spent about five years at the College, between 1861 and 1865. When it closed in 1865, he transferred to Robert College in Istanbul at which he studied between 1866 and 1869. His Anglo-American education moulded him into the kind of person who did not fit the negative western stereotype of the demi-Occidentalized Levantine. His competence in the English language would be described as "near-native" today. In addition, he possessed a strong character, a sense of responsibility and firmness of purpose, while also not being averse to risk and adventure. It was probably

because of his education and those qualities that the diplomat, writer and historian Simeon Radev would later describe him as “an Anglo-Saxon of the best class.”

Unlike most of his schoolmates, who became leading figures in the Bulgarian National Revival, Mateev opted for a very different career: he was first employed as a clerk by the British postal service in the Levant and was subsequently engaged as an interpreter and travelling companion by an upper-class British woman with a taste for adventure, whom he discreetly refrains from identifying by name in his autobiography. However, his greatest adventure was undoubtedly his participation in the final expedition of the British archaeologist George Smith, renowned for his decipherment and translation of the Chaldean account of the Great Flood. Unfortunately, Smith fell ill with dysentery and died in Aleppo in August 1876. During the expedition Mateev travelled through the whole of Asia Minor, the valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates, Lebanon and Baghdad, and eventually reached the Persian Gulf. While assisting his British employer, he developed a keen interest in archaeology. Significantly, Mateev came very close to Jerusalem during his travels but was not tempted to visit the city and acquire the title of *hadji*. For him the title no longer carried any social prestige. After Smith's death it appeared by far more important to Mateev to complete the dead archaeologist's work and settle accounts with the British Museum, which had provided funding for the expedition. He apparently managed everything to his British employers' satisfaction. During the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–78 he was briefly jailed and spent some time in a Russian prison in present-day Chişinău. In February 1879, Mateev acted as secretary to the British Consul William Palgrave, who attended the Bulgarian Constituent Assembly, convened in Bulgaria's medieval capital of Tarnovo.

Mateev eventually developed a keen interest in the political affairs of his native land. He himself spoke of the late awakening of his sense of national identity, but once the process of awakening had started, there was no going back. Radev sums up Mateev's patriotic attitude in the sentence: “He was one of the most fanatical fighters for Bulgarian independence.” However, rather than settling in Sofia, the capital of the newly established Bulgarian Principality, he opted for Plovdiv, the main city of the Ottoman-controlled province of Eastern Rumelia. Prince Stephanaki's younger son Alexander (Aleko) Vogorides was appointed Governor General of the province, and Mateev became his private secretary because of their shared connection with Kotel. Mateev supported Vogorides's policy of opposition to the attempts of Russian diplomats to impose a pro-Tsarist orientation upon the Bulgarian political elite in Eastern Rumelia.

Mateev took part in some of the events leading to the unification of Eastern Rumelia with the Principality, and this marked his proper entry into Bulgarian political life. Although he was never in the forefront of political debates and decision-taking, he left his mark on most major developments shaping the destiny of the young Bulgarian state. Mateev assisted with the suppression of the Russophile riots in Ruse – in opposition to his own brother. He was involved in the diplomatic manoeuvres, which resulted in the accession of Prince Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg Gotha to the Bulgarian throne. In addition, Mateev represented the Bulgarian government in the purchase of the British-owned Ruse and Varna railway. He also occupied other important positions: Director General of the Postal and Telegraph Services, Bulgaria's first commercial agent in Edirne, diplomatic envoy in Athens, Bulgarian commissioner at the 1904 St. Louis World Fair. His administrative career may not appear very exciting, but it is indicative of the multitude of tasks that the first generation of functionaries of the modern Bulgarian state had to perform. In the closing decades of his life Mateev distinguished himself as a journalist, a notable public figure and a philanthropist, who made generous contributions to worthy causes.

Petar Mateev. Avtobiografiya, spomeni, deynost is a valuable publication which sheds much-needed light on an unjustly neglected Bulgarian public figure. The book also represents Mateev as an active individual with dreams and aspirations, who was motivated by a strong desire to gain knowledge of the wider world and change it for the better. Such a desire is not subject to temporal or political constraints and transcends the simplistic distinction between “small” nations and “great” powers.

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