

Giuseppe Cossuto, *Tracce turche in Europa medievale. I popoli delle steppe in Europa dalla comparsa degli Unni alla nascita della Turchia* (Rome: Aracne, 2009)

This is probably particularly true for Italy, despite the geographical proximity and the many cultural, linguistic and historical relations between the peoples of the two Mediterranean regions. Therefore every book that is published in Italy or in any other country outside the Turkic world is an important contribution to help non-Turkic people to discover the many interesting aspects of Turkology. This is particularly true for the book “Tracce turche” in Europa medievale (Turkish traces in Medieval Europe), subtitled *I popoli delle steppe in Europa dalla comparsa degli Unni alla nascita della Turchia* (The peoples/nations of the Steppes in Europe from the arriving of the Huns to the origin of Turkey). Its author is Giuseppe Cossuto, a scholar educated between the University of Rome “La Sapienza” (PhD in Islamic Civilization), Bucharest (studies at the Centrul de Studii Otomani), Istanbul (researches at the Basbakanlik Osmanli Arsivi) and many other cultural and educational institutions of Central and Eastern Europe (Hungary, Albania, Bulgaria, Russia and Tatarstan). Cossuto dedicated all his academic life to the study of the history of the steppe peoples and the historical identity of the Turks and Tartars in Eastern Europe and of different Muslim minorities in the Balkans. He wrote his PhD dissertation on the human and political history of Mirza Kan Temir (Kantymir Murza, d. 1637, ruler of the Crimean Khanate) and the juridical status of Moldavia, Walachia and Crimea as vassals states of the Ottoman Empire).

Cossuto’s book would not reach as many Italians as one TV program or any article in one of Italy’s main newspapers. Nor is the Italian version of the very beautiful photographic travel magazine called “[Cornucopia](#)”, entirely dedicated to Turkish culture. Nevertheless, it has the potentiality to become an important bibliographical instrument for Italian speakers/readers. Every library that wants to offer to its Italian-reading users the possibility to look into ancient and Medieval European history should purchase a copy of this book, which is freer from the traditional, stiff and mechanical ways of looking at cultural facts, i.e. according to a language-centered hierarchy, where the center is occupied by Western Europe and its so-called “Indo-European languages”.

The book is divided in two parts: *L’Europa come periferia dell’Eurasia* (Europe as periphery of Eurasia) and *Le confederazioni* (The confederations). The first part is divided in two chapters: “Spazio” e “tempo” nomade in Europa (Nomadic space and time in Europe) and

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“Indoeuropei” e “Turanici” (Indo-Europeans and Turanics). This first part of the book describes the main common characteristics to all the “peoples of the Steppe”, called by Cossutto “Turanic”. Cossutto suggests – backing adequately his suggestion – to employ more widely the word “Turanic” in order to avoid the risk of letting it be confined to the usage of pan-Turkic and pan-Uralo-Altaic chauvinistic ideologies.

The second part is a very analytical presentation of the main Turkic military confederations that entered European history, how they functioned and how they interacted with the other political and ethnic entities of Western Eurasia. Specific chapters are dedicated to the Huns, the Avars, the Bulgars, the Khazars, the Hungarians (called here Magyars), the Pechenegs and the Oʻuzi, i.e. the Oghuz Turks, ancestors of the Seljuq dynasty, the Turco-Persian Sunni Muslim dynasty that established in Anatolia the Sultanate of Rum (Rome) and were a target of the First Crusade.

One of the most interesting fact that we can read in the book is that all these confederations had a strong relation with Eastern Danubian Europe, from modern Bulgaria and Romania to Serbia and Hungary. Reading Cossutto’s book we can really understand how important was the role that Danubian regions had in European history. These regions gave to Rome some of its greatest emperors (from Diocletian to Constantine and Justinian) and are described by Cossutto as the main area of interaction between the peoples of the Steppes and the Mediterranean-Latin world. From there, in fact, Attila’s “barbaric” confederation (mainly made of Hunnish, Iranian and Germanic tribes) attempted to reach control over Italy and the whole *pars occidentalis* of the Roman Empire. Attila’s plan is accurately reconstructed by Cossutto’s book, together with the intense relations that Turkic ethnic groups had with Rome. One of the most important examples of these relations is related to the history of the last “Western” Roman Emperor, Romulus Augustulus, who was the son of Orestes, a Roman citizen from Pannonia, who served both as a secretary and diplomat for Attila and as high-rank officer of the Roman army.

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Based on a large bibliography (from ancient, medieval and folkloric sources to modern scholarly literature in Turkish, Romanian, English, French, German, and Italian), with its useful chronology, the book has the non-secondary quality of presenting very complex sets of problems and data in a very readable way. It is a good reading for everybody interested in early European history and late Roman history.

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