

BOSNIA AND HERCEGOVINA A TRADITION BETRAYED



Robert J. Donia

John V.A. Fine, Jr



This book examines Bosnia's rich historical traditions in light of the conflict that erupted there in 1992. The authors explain the origins of Bosnia's major ethnonational groups in the religious conversions of the Middle Ages and under the Ottomans as a prelude to the transformation of its principal religious communities into twentieth-century nationalities. The roles of Bosnia's Muslims, Serbs, and Croats in the events affecting the Yugoslav peoples in the twentieth century and then as Yugoslavia disintegrated in the early 1990s are vividly presented.

Donia and Fine take issue with the widespread perception of Bosnia's history as consisting of perpetual violence and tribal hatred among the Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. In contrast, they emphasize that a rich tradition of diversity, pluralism, and toleration developed over many centuries and flourished until very recently. This tradition in everyday life was reflected in politics by coalition building and a habit of pragmatic compromise. *Bosnia and Hercegovina: A Tradition Betrayed* shows how the forces of extreme nationalism undermined Bosnia's multiethnic tradition—first in World War II and now in the current conflict. Unfettered extremists proceeded to destroy much of Bosnian society and to kill or drive out many of its people.

For a note on the Authors, see back flap.

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***BOSNIA AND HERCEGOVINA:
A TRADITION BETRAYED***



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*BOSNIA AND HERCEGOVINA:
A TRADITION BETRAYED*

ROBERT J. DONIA JOHN V.A. FINE, JR.

With maps by John C. Hamer



PUSTAKA PERDANA



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*For the innocent victims
of a tragic war*

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April 1994

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Guide to Pronunciation

THE LANGUAGE OF Bosnia and of the neighboring states of Serbia, Croatia, and Montenegro is Serbo-Croatian. It is a single language (with, of course, dialectical differences) written in two alphabets, Latin for Croatian and Cyrillic (the alphabet used also for Russian) for Serbian. We are rendering names in the Croatian form. The letters with unusual pronunciation for speakers of English are:

c	ts as in the word <i>tsar</i>
č	ch (soft), found regularly at the end of proper names
ć	ch (hard)
dj	j as in <i>jet</i>
dz	similar to <i>dj</i> , but a bit harder
h	guttural, as in the Scottish <i>loch</i>
ij	y as in <i>yes</i>
š	sh
ž	zh as in <i>leisure</i>

To make matters more accessible, we have rendered Turkish words used in Bosnia with Serbo-Croatian spellings. Thus *sandzak* and not *sancak*. Since adding English plurals to certain Serbo-Croatian words is quite awkward, on a few occasions we use Serbo-Croatian plurals. Nouns ending in *a* have a plural ending in *e*, thus the plural of *Ustasha* (we also use this form as the adjective) is *Ustashe*, and the plural of *Kosaca* is *Kosace*. Nouns ending in a consonant have a plural ending in *i*; thus the plural of *Pavlovic* is *Pavlovici*, and the plural of *Miloradovic* is *Miloradovici*. Inhabitants of Sarajevo are referred to as *Sarajlije*.



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Introduction

On April 6, 1992, a crowd of demonstrators estimated at over 50,000 gathered in front of the Bosnian Parliament building in Sarajevo to demonstrate for peace in Bosnia and Hercegovina. The demonstrators were members of all three of Bosnia's largest nationalities: Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Muslims. Directly across the street, from the upper floors of the ultra-modern Holiday Inn built for the 1984 Winter Olympics, heavily-armed Serbian militiamen fired randomly into the crowd, killing and wounding dozens of the peace demonstrators. This cavalier killing spree quickly dispersed the crowd and marked the demise of the few remaining hopes that moderation and compromise might prevail in Bosnia and Hercegovina.

The Sarajevo massacre of April 6 contained many elements that would recur in the Bosnian war in subsequent weeks and months. The victims were unarmed civilians who hoped for the preservation of a multiethnic Bosnian society which had roots and traditions dating back many centuries. The perpetrators were nationalist extremists, organized and heavily armed by political and paramilitary leaders intent on destroying Bosnia's multiethnic society and replacing it with the national supremacy of a single ethnic group, in this case the Serbs. Symbolically, the Sarajevo massacre stilled the voices of peace and mutual tolerance; the shrill shouts of ethnic hatred and national divisiveness triumphed by force of arms.

The war that began in Bosnia in 1992 encompassed death, atrocities, and terror on a scale unknown in Europe since World War II. The perpetrators of the Bosnian war seemed to know no bounds in the cruelty, brutality, and havoc they wrought on their adversaries and on the innocent inhabitants of the land. Television cameras captured some of the killings and brutality, and daily newscasts revealed the awesome depravity of the conflict. Viewers around the world saw starving prisoners, victims of systematic rape, mutilated corpses, calculated destruction of homes and cultural monuments, mortally wounded victims of random shelling, and the results of ethnic cleansing. The daily images of warfare, coupled with the reality of United Nations troops in the area and the prospect of deepening involvement by NATO and the United States, were hauntingly reminiscent of the Vietnam War in the 1960s.

Bosnia, however, is no Vietnam: it is not a far-away land about which we, collectively, know nothing. The argument for “collective ignorance,” so persuasively advanced by both critics and supporters of US intervention in Vietnam, is simply not valid for the lands of the former Yugoslavia. Inspired by Cold War fervor, the US Congress appropriated many millions of dollars in the decades after World War II to fund research centers and exchange programs so that Americans could know more about the lands where Communism held sway.

Yugoslavia, with its open borders and accessibility to outsiders, became the destination of choice for hundreds of Western students and scholars who studied all aspects of Balkan history and civilization. Some of the best studies of Yugoslav and Bosnian society and history have been prepared by Western specialists and published in English. Many leading scholars and political leaders of the former Yugoslav lands have studied and

taught at American universities. At the height of the Vietnam War, with 600,000 US troops engaged, the number of Southeast Asian specialists in the United States did not begin to approach the number of knowledgeable scholars in the 1990s who are familiar with the history and culture of Southeast Europe.

Despite a substantial reservoir of Western knowledge about Bosnia and Southeast Europe, public debate about policy options in the former Yugoslavia appears to us to be deeply mired in false dichotomies, flawed analogies, gross historical exaggerations, and well-worn shibboleths with little foundation in historical reality. Many of these myths are the product of nationalist propaganda spread by Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian Muslim publicists, but they have been endorsed and repeated by those who mold or influence policy. Propaganda, historical precedent, and superficial analogies have been harnessed to justify a particular policy action or inaction. To those who oppose Western intervention, the analogies advanced are Vietnam, Beirut, and Northern Ireland. Bosnia is another “Vietnam quagmire,” a hopelessly insoluble problem with no conceivable positive “endgame” for the United States and the West. For others, principally those favoring a more assertive Western role, the relevant analogy is Neville Chamberlain returning from Munich having deceived himself and others into believing that appeasement would bring lasting peace.

Bosnia lends itself to few simple analogies and no easy answers. Even so, one need not despair of understanding the roots of the conflict or of evaluating prospective policy alternatives to American and European involvement in Balkan affairs. In the search of understanding the complex situation and arriving at guideposts for action, an examination of historical

traditions and past behavior provides insights into the sources of current events and illuminates potential solutions. At the very least it should help dispel falsehoods spread by propagandists and enable policy-makers to avoid foolhardy missteps.

Our intent in this volume is to explore the historical roots of Bosnian society from the arrival of Slavic tribes in the 6th and 7th centuries AD to the breakup of socialist Yugoslavia, and to identify the traditions and patterns of social and ethnic relations that have characterized Bosnian society throughout its history. We describe the major historical processes that account for the present-day ethnic composition of Bosnia: religious conversions in the medieval and early Ottoman periods; the subsequent evolution of distinct ethnoreligious communities; and the rise of political nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries. We also trace the origins of the present conflict in Bosnia and describe, in overview, the course of the Bosnian war.

The history of Bosnia and its inhabitants intersects and sometimes blends with that of other South Slavs, so some of our inquiry leads us to treat Bosnia's relations with its neighbors. In the twentieth century, the development of a South Slav state — Yugoslavia—and its subsequent disintegration have profoundly influenced the lives of all inhabitants of Bosnia. Some of our account necessarily centers on Yugoslavia, for Bosnia's experience over the past seventy years is incomprehensible without an appreciation for its Yugoslav context.

As two historians who have studied the history of Bosnia, and who lived in Sarajevo at different times in the 1960s and 1970s, we have drawn upon our personal observations and experiences from that time as well as our historical research into the area. We are specialists on the medieval (John Fine) and modern (Robert Donia) periods of Bosnian history. Our



account, although historical in approach and broadly chronological in organization, frequently reaches back and forth in time to draw comparisons and identify long-standing historical traditions. Chapters 1-4, dealing primarily with the medieval and Ottoman periods, were written by John Fine; chapters 5-11, treating the modern era (1875-1994), were written by Robert Donia.

This is not a conventional history. We have sought to discern patterns rather than merely describe events, to characterize developments rather than chronicle episodes, and to identify the long-term traditions that transcend a single historical era. Furthermore, while we have not set out to provide a detailed history of the war, our account is intended to shed light on the sources of the Bosnian conflict that began in early 1992. We fervently hope that the war, which continues at the time of writing (April 1994), will end in peace for Bosnians of all ethnic groups.

*A Misunderstood Society:
Bosnia's Tolerant Past Betrayed*

THE CONFLICT THAT began wracking Bosnia in early April 1992, when the international community recognized Bosnia's declaration of independence from a crazed and self-destructing Yugoslavia, has only partly been an ethnic one. The government of Bosnia, though often called in the press the Muslim government, has been representing those who want to keep Bosnia the entity it was as a republic within Yugoslavia. Promising equal rights to all nationalities and religions, it has been supported by much of the urban population of all ethnic groups. At the time of this writing in April 1994, most of the Sarajevo Serbs I know are, to the best of my knowledge, still in the city, supporting the Bosnian government. The Bosnian cabinet as of February 12, 1993, contained nine Muslims, six Serbs, and five Croats. One third of the Territorial Defense Forces then defending Sarajevo was Serb. Thus Serbs (and Croats too) have been on both sides. In so constituting itself, the Bosnian government has been representing a tradition of tolerance and coexistence that goes back many centuries. We shall explore the roots of that legacy in the following pages.

Croat and Serb chauvinists have wanted to depict the present conflict as an ethnic war to justify the territorial expansion of Serbia and Croatia, the two neighboring states that have both been actively involved in the warfare. The involvement of these two expansionist neighboring states has made the conflict

an international war as well. But to call the Bosnian warfare “ethnic” demeans the Bosnian cause by making it seem as if the “Bosnians” too were just one more narrow ethnic group; moreover, labeling the Bosnians “ethnic Muslims” not only ignores the Serb and Croat Christians in the Bosnian ranks as well as the centuries of a common Bosnian identity that has continued to be felt by many under siege, but also helps stir up among ignorant locals unfounded fears of the Turkish (or Ottoman) past and of Muslim fundamentalism.

It is also important to underline the wrongness of all the proposed solutions along lines of partitioning Bosnia between its aggressive neighbors or of transferring populations to make three mini-states based on ethnicity out of Bosnia’s territory. Throughout its long history (medieval, Ottoman, and modern) Bosnia has had its own very distinct history and culture, and this culture has been shared by people of all its religious denominations. Their famous and enormous medieval tombstones (the so-called Bogomil tombstones or *stecci*), for example, were built by members of all three of the Christian denominations then existing in Bosnia. And though Bosnia did interact with its Serb and Croat neighbors over the centuries, it had a very different history and culture from them.

Bosnia enjoyed its own medieval state and was a separate and legally defined provincial entity during its 400 years under Ottoman rule. It also maintained its own special status both under Austrian rule and as part of Yugoslavia. As an integral territory, including Hercegovina, Bosnia has had more durable and widely recognized borders through the centuries than either Serbia or Croatia. Serbia and Croatia have been laying claim to parts of Bosnia on ethnic grounds. However, at the various times when these neighbors were independent states or were

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