

ROBERT J. DONIA & JOHN V. A. FINE, JR., *BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA. A TRADITION BETRAYED*, NEW YORK: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1994. Pp. 318.
ROBERT J. DONIA, *SARAJEVO: A BIOGRAPHY*. ANN ARBOR: UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS, 2006. Pp. 435.

Reviewed by Miroslav Svirčević*

The civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992–1995 has drawn the attention of many Western politicians, diplomats, historians, sociologists, political scientists and journalists: they have tried to offer some answers to many controversies burdening the history of this part of the Balkans. Two monographs reviewed here, one co-authored by Robert J. Donia and John V. A. Fine, the other written by Donia, attract attention for at least two reasons: 1) both offer a number of quite bold theoretical propositions, although most of these, and this is an understatement, are historically unfounded, inadequately defined in scholarly terms and not to difficult to disprove; 2) the propositions offered emanate clear political messages, which suggests that the authors' motives may have been other than scholarly.

The central thesis of the co-authored book on a "tradition betrayed" is that ever since the creation of the medieval Bosnian state, Bosnia has been inhabited by a religiously mixed population calling themselves Bosnians regardless of their different religious allegiances. This population, the authors claim, belonged to the Orthodox Christian, Roman Catholic and Bosnian churches and never saw themselves as Serbs or Croats. They mixed with one another and converted from one religion to another, but that did not affect their ethnic or regional self-identification. The

ethnic terms Serb and Croat, the authors claim, were completely unknown in Bosnia until the modern age, more precisely until the second half of the nineteenth century, when they were imported into Bosnia and Herzegovina under the influence of nationalist propagandas from two neighbouring lands, Serbia and Croatia. It was then that the Orthodox Christians began to refer to themselves as Serbs, the Roman Catholics as Croats, while the tradition of the Bosnian name was only maintained by the population that had converted to Islam under Ottoman rule.

The authors challenge what was taken as an axiom in Yugoslav historiography and particularly popular among Muslim-Bosniak intellectuals. The axiom in question consisted of three widely accepted but as yet unverified theses: 1) the Bosnian Church was Bogomil; 2) most of Bosnia's population belonged to the Bosnian Church; 3) most of Bosnia's population converted to Islam to evade the violence that the Roman Catholic Franciscan order and the last Catholic kings of Bosnia used against the local non-Catholic population. The authors claim that the Bosnian Church was neither Bogomil nor Patarin nor neo-Manichaean, but a distinct religious organization accepting the belief in

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one God, the Trinity, the cross, the cult of the saints, and religious images. They also claim that the adherents of the Bosnian Church were not a majority; on the contrary, they were not many and, consequently, their religious or political influence was much weaker than that of the Catholic and Orthodox Christians. Finally, the authors question the thesis about the adherents of the Bosnian Church converting to Islam in consequence of the hostile attitude of the Catholic Church and the Bosnian Catholic kings, and argue instead that they also used to convert to Orthodoxy and Catholicism, just as one Christian group used to convert to another and to Islam.

In keeping with this line of thinking, the history of medieval Bosnia is shown as completely independent from the histories of other medieval states, such as Serbia, Byzantium, Hungary and the Ragusan Republic (Dubrovnik), the purpose being to suggest that we are dealing with a tradition and culture in its own right, a distinctive entity which can be justifiably viewed independently of its neighbourhood. The authors make a selection of quotations in order to prove that Bosnia has always been a harmonious and tolerant multicultural and multireligious environment with no tradition of drastic and systematic discrimination on the grounds of religion or culture, a harmony to a large extent inspired by the legacy of Ottoman culture and, especially, by the period of Austro-Hungarian rule 1878–1918. All major rebellions, upheavals and wars, such as the rebellion against Ottoman rule in Herzegovina in 1875, outbursts of anti-Serbian violence after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914, atrocities under the Croat fascist Ustachi regime 1941–1945 and, finally, the tragic civil war 1992–1995 were, in their view, an exception. Multiethnic harmony is a rule, the instances of strife and intolerance are exceptions instigated by Serbia and Croatia.

It follows, therefore, that Bosnia and Herzegovina is not an artificial creation, as it is described by “Serbian and Croatian nationalists”; but rather, it has a cultural identity of its own, centuries-old and utterly different from those of Serbia and Croatia. The term “Bosnian” is a generic one (regional rather than ethnic, though) and all inhabitants of Bosnia can readily identify themselves with it regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliations: Muslim Bosniaks, Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats, Jews and everybody else.

These claims need to be examined in order to see how fact-based they are.

For example, is the assertion correct that the terms Serb and Croat do not occur in Bosnia and Herzegovina until the second half of the nineteenth century?

The earliest surviving medieval reference to a people in what now is Bosnia and Herzegovina found in historical sources is a reference to Serbs. According to the Byzantine scholar emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (905–959), in the ninth and tenth centuries Bosnia formed part of Serbian polities; it was only later divided into “unchristened Serbia” (i.e. Bosnia) and “christened Serbia” (Rascia). For the Roman Catholic Church the whole region was known as *regnum Servilliae quod est Bosnia* (Kingdom of Serbia that is Bosnia). The surviving medieval agreements regulating the legal status of Ragusan merchants in case of their disputes with subjects of Bosnia concluded in 1235, 1240 and 1249 between the ruler of Bosnia, ban Matija Ninoslav, and the Republic of Ragusa confirm the Serbian name for Bosnians, the same as fifteenth-century documents, such as a donation charter of Juraj Vojsalić of 1434 (cf. F. Miklosich, *Monumenta Serbica spectantia historiam Serbiae Bosnae Ragusii* [Vindobonae 1858]).

It should be emphasized that the most powerful ruler of medieval Bosnia Tvrtko, of the Kotromanić family (ban 1353–1377; king 1377–1391), was Serb,

even if his entourage consisted of Roman Catholic priests. He was a female-line descendent of the Nemanjićs: king Dragutin of Serbia was his grand grandfather. As a matter of fact, Tvrtko's kinship with the Nemanjićs and rule over a large portion of the territory previously held by the Nemanjić dynasty was his basis for claiming the "double crown" (*sugubi vijenac*) reuniting Serbia and Bosnia. Tvrtko was crowned "king of Serbs, Bosnia, the Littoral and the Western Parts" at the monastery of Mileševa in October 1377 before the relics of St. Sava (Nemanjić), founder of the Autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church. The coronation was performed according to the Orthodox rite, apparently by the metropolitan of Mileševa and with the knowledge of the patriarch of the Serbian Church. The use of the term "Serbs" (rather than Serbia) in Tvrtko's title is a striking evidence of his ethnic affiliation, given that the rest of the title simply lists a string of regional territorial names.¹

Not that the authors fail to mention all this. What they fail to mention is how king Tvrtko (and his successors as well) identified himself. They simply refer to him as a "Bosnian" who, by sheer force of circumstance, became a Serbian king. The ethnic term Serb has been known in Bosnia ever since its emergence as a feudal Christian state (as shown by the charters issued to Dubrovnik), while the term Bosnian denoted a regional, political, rather than ethnic allegiance (for more, see V. Ćorović, *Historija Bosne*, vol. I [Belgrade: SKA 1940]). It should also be noted that the name Herzegovina comes from the

title "*herzeg* [duke] of St. Sava" borne by the Serbian magnate Stefan Vukčić Kosača, who ruled this area in the fifteenth century (S. Ćirković, *Stefan Vukčić Kosača i njegovo doba* [Belgrade: SANU, 1964]). Throughout the medieval period, most of eastern Herzegovina, the native land of the Nemanjić dynasty, more often formed part of Rascia or Serbia than of Bosnia as a separate polity.

It was only with the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia that attempts began to be made to promote this regional identity into an ethnic concept. That all such attempts failed is confirmed by the administrator of Bosnia and Herzegovina Benjamin von Kállay's abortive policy of promoting the idea of "a single Bosnian nation" comprising Muslim Bosnians, Orthodox Bosnians and Catholic Bosnians. Any attempt of the kind only aggravated the situation and led to further divisions along ethnic and religious lines. Donia and Fine, however, argue that the term "Bosnian" has always functioned as a true melting-pot comparable with the similar mechanism in the USA. This ideological construction with all elements of a political utopia gives the term "Bosnian" meanings that considerably deviate from their real historical context. The leading interwar British authority on the Balkans, Robert W. Seton-Watson, described the population of Bosnia in the following way: "In Herzegovina and Bosnia, to which the revolt [1875] speedily spread, unrest had been chronic since the beginning of the [nineteenth] century. The two provinces have been hermetically sealed from the outside world ever since the final Turkish conquest in 1483. Of purest Serbian blood, the population was divided between Moslem, Orthodox and Catholic, the big feudal lords having in the first instance accepted Islam to save their lands and having imposed their new religion upon a certain section of their serfs" (R. W. Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone*

¹ It is quite interesting that the Bosnian Muslims adopted in 1991 the purple coat of arms with golden fleurs-de-lis, originally the coat of arms of the Bosnian Serb Kotromanić family derived from the Nemanjić tradition.

and the Eastern Question [London: Frank Cass, 1971], 17). Furthermore, the explicit goal of several insurrections against Ottoman rule in both Herzegovina and Bosnia during the nineteenth century was unification with two Serbian principalities, Montenegro and Serbia: "Two petitions signed by more than 1500 Bosnian Serb leaders and elders and sent to the Russian Emperor, the first on St Vitus Day (*Vidovdan*) which commemorates the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, the second in March 1878, during the closing phase of the Bosnian insurrection [1875-1878], stated that it was the 'lasting desire... of the people [to become] a part of the Serbian principality', stressing, among other things, the fact that the 'inhabitants of these lands all speak Serbian'" (D. T. Bataković, *The Serbs of Bosnia & Herzegovina. History and Politics* [Paris: Dialogue, 1996], 60).

The Roman Catholic population in Bosnia was exposed to Croatization, mostly through the influence of the Catholic Church. According to the reports of the Austro-Hungarian agent and army officer Alfred Babic, the influence of Zagreb was not felt beyond Slavonski Brod. From Slavonski Brod, "both the Catholics and Eastern Orthodox only find the Serbian idea legitimate". This was one of the reasons precipitating the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even so, the Croatization of the Catholic population ran at a slow pace. For example, Stjepan Radić, a prominent interwar leader of the Croat Peasant Party, emphasized that out of 3,353 Catholics in Mostar (Herzegovina) registered by the census of 1895 only 250 were ethnically aware Croats. This number may be taken as indicative of the process of Croatization as a whole: 13.5 percent of the Catholic community in Bosnia and Herzegovina (cf. analysis based on Austrian primary sources in T. Kraljačić, *Kalajev režim u Bosni i Hercegovini 1882-1903* [Sarajevo

1985]). Later the process was intensified, mostly through Franciscans activity, and eventually the entire Catholic population in Bosnia became Croat.

The available historical documents show that Bosnia and Herzegovina was populated mostly by Christian Orthodox Serbs. It was under the influence of Ottoman cultural legacy, Austro-Hungarian actions and strong Catholic campaigning that they became divided into three separate nations along religious lines: Bosniaks (Muslim), Croats (Catholic), and Serbs (Serbian population that resisted religious conversion remained Christian Orthodox). Therefore, due to shifting alliances and territories at different periods, the history of medieval Bosnia cannot be viewed in isolation from medieval Serbia. This was obvious even to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers of history, and such an approach is observable in Franjo Ksaver Pejačević (Pejacsevich)'s *Historia Serviae* (1799), Johann Christian Engel's *Serbien und Bosnien* (1801), Miklosich's *Monumenta Serbica* (1858) or, finally, in Medo Pucić, a learned Ragusan aristocrat who published two volumes of medieval documents from the Archives of Dubrovnik, including those relating to Bosnia, under the title *Serbian Monuments from 1395 to 1423* (1858 and 1862). All these examples clearly show that the medieval history of Bosnia and Serbia constitutes an indivisible whole and, consequently, that Donia and Fine, by depicting Serbia as an alien factor in relation to Bosnia, in fact perform their artificial separation.

As for the origin of the Bosnian Church, its teachings and its influence on the political and everyday life of the inhabitants of Bosnia, one may say that it grew out of a heresy known as *Bogomilism*, which apparently originated in Bulgaria in the tenth century. It took root in Bosnia after its priesthood and adherents had been expelled from Serbia under Stefan

Nemanja, and continued to develop there for another two centuries, and then began to decline and to lose significance because of both the activity of the Roman Catholic and Serbian Orthodox churches, and the advancement of Islam. No significant traces of its activity have survived in Bosnia. The famous grave markers known as *stećci*, ascribed under Austro-Hungarian rule to the Bogomils, have been convincingly shown to be a local feature rather than a confessional marker.

The authors insist that the Ottoman cultural legacy, the period of "Europeanization" under Austro-Hungarian rule 1878–1918, and the socialist period under the regime of Josip Broz Tito, simply firmed up the tradition of religious tolerance and multicultural society, the civilized values forever cherished in Bosnia and Herzegovina and occasionally disrupted under the influence of belligerent nationalist propagandas from both Serbia and Croatia aimed at partitioning Bosnia. This calculated and far-fetched simplification is supposed to divert attention from the main causes of strife among the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the modern history of the Balkans. Historical facts suggest that ethnic tolerance was an appearance, a form of social mimicry concealing mutual distrust, to which many political actions of the great powers have given a significant contribution.

Every attempt to enforce a system favourable to only one of the ethnic-religious groups unfailingly led to a conflict verging on extermination among Bosnian Serbs, Croats and Muslims. Ever since the Ottoman conquest and the Islamization of Bosnia, Bosnian society has been torn apart along religious and ethnic lines, while the appearance of unity has been maintained by an external supreme authority.² That is how it was under Otto-

man and Austro-Hungarian occupation and under the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and that is how it is now under the patronage of the UN and EU. In Bosnia, the centrifugal force of ethnic separation has always predominated over the centripetal force of politically forged unity. The supreme authority with almost unlimited powers changed, but the structure of Bosnian society has remained more or less the same, heavily burdened by ethnic and religious divisions, social rivalries and distrust, of which the only Serbian Nobel-prize laureate in literature Ivo Andrić wrote wittily, wisely and lucidly. Closing the eyes to the fact that the concept of a unitary Bosnia poses a serious threat to peace both in Bosnia and in the region, as it leads directly to Muslim dominance over Croats and Serbs, Donia and Fine blame the hegemonist policy of both Serbia and Croatia for the civil war. But they fail to take three significant facts into account.

Firstly, still a federal unit within Yugoslavia in 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to its own Constitution, was not entitled to declare independence without the consent of all three constituent peoples; moreover, not even minimum requirements for international recognition were met, as observed by Christian Hillgruber in 1998: international "recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina did not function merely as a refutable assumption that the criteria of statehood were met; it actually served as a substitute for these features, which were obviously missing" (quoted after R. Caplan, *Europe and the Recognition of New States in Yugoslavia* [Cambridge University Press, 2005]).

A. Barre, *La Bosnie et Herzegovine. Administration autrichienne de 1878 à 1903* (Paris 1904); cf. also Ehli-Islam, *Bezakonja okupacione uprave u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Novi Sad 1901), as well as P. M. Tomić, *Pravoslavolje u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Belgrade 1898).

² For additional information and interpretations based on first-hand experience, see

Secondly, the referendum on independence was not legitimate, because only Muslim Bosniaks and Croats took part, while Serbs, reluctant to secede from Yugoslavia, boycotted it. This is to say that the referendum was boycotted by more than 36 percent of the population (Serbs and “Yugoslavs”). A stark example of illegitimate majority rule over an entire constituent nation, it practically opened the door to the civil war. In a state such as Bosnia and Herzegovina was in 1992, composed of three constituent nations, key decisions cannot be majority decisions but ought to be made by the consensus of the democratic representatives of all constituent nations. It was obvious even then that Muslim Bosniak and Croatian political leaders violated this rule.

Thirdly, the authors fail to mention that there was a plan which might have prevented the civil war, brokered by the Portuguese diplomat Cutileiro in February 1992. At first the plan was signed by the representatives of all three constituent nations, but at the end of the day Alija Izetbegović, the representative of Muslim Bosniaks, rescinded his signature at the suggestion of the US ambassador to Yugoslavia Warren Zimmermann (W. Zimmerman, *Origins of a Catastrophe: Yugoslavia and its Destroyers—America's Last Ambassador Tells What Happened and Why* [Toronto: Random House, 1996], 190–191).

In conclusion, one can only say that Donia and Fine's book has little scholarly value. It abounds in ideological theses and lacks the necessary in-depth analysis. Conceived as a brief historical account of Bosnia and Herzegovina understandable to the Western public, it in fact takes a biased stance in favour of the position and policy of the Muslim side in the lamentable conflict of 1992–1995.³

³ For example, the very introduction to the book claims that on the eve of the war Serb

The other book, devoted to Sarajevo and its history, was authored by Donia and published in 2006. Given almost identical conclusions and political messages, it is in fact a sequel to the book on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Just as the latter was supposed to offer “scholarly” evidence for Bosnia-Herzegovina being an inherently harmonious society marked by a high level of interethnic and religious tolerance, this one aims to prove the same, but on the micro-level of a city, from the earliest historical reference to it in 1544 until its current situation in post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although being a much better book than the earlier one, it paints an almost idyllic picture of the Bosnian capital. Its main thesis is that ever since its creation as a typical Turkish *kassaba*, Sarajevo has been open to all cultures and ethnic groups (Muslim Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats, Jews etc.), developing harmonious neighbourly relations and a distinctive cultural identity so typical of the Bosnian mentality. However, Sarajevo's society (and Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole) has been multiethnic and harmonious on the surface, while remaining divided along ethnic and religious lines in practice. In spite of what Donia and many other Western observers like to believe, that society has never developed into a Western-style civil one. Were Donia right, could Sarajevo under the pro-Nazi Independent State of Croatia have been the seat of the archbishop Šarić, a fervent clerical fascist supporter of the Ustachi regime calling for the extermination of Sarajevo's Serbs and Jews (cf. V. Novak, *Magnum Crimen: Pola vijeka klerikalizma u Hrvatskoj* [Zagreb 1948]). Or, could

paramilitary forces fired on the civilian protesters who gathered in front of the parliament of Bosnia-Herzegovina to demand a peaceful solution to the severe state and interethnic crisis. As it was confirmed later, the incident was caused by Muslim military forces.

Sarajevo have produced Vojislav Šešelj, a communist turned Serb extremist who threatened his hometown with destruction during the last war. Finally, could Sarajevo have produced Alija Izetbegović, a tacit supporter of the fundamentalist Young Muslims (*Mladi muslimani*) during the Second World War and a lifelong advocate of an Islamic state? In his *Islamic Declaration*, used as his electoral manifesto in 1990, Izetbegović wrote: "The first and foremost conclusion is certainly the incompatibility between Islam and non-Islamic systems. There can be no peace or coexistence between the Islamic faith and non-Islamic social and political institutions... By claiming the right to organize its world by itself, Islam clearly denies the right of action on its soil to any alien ideology. There is no secular principle, then, and the state should be an expression and supporter of the moral concepts of religion" (A. Izetbegović, *The Islamic Declaration: A Programme of the Islamization of Muslims and Muslim peoples* [Sarajevo 1990], 78 p.; cf. also his other pamphlet with similar threatening messages, *Islam between East and West* [Sarajevo 1988]).

All these political figures were products of Sarajevo's intellectual climate at different times. What they had in common was their powerful influence on the public. Had Sarajevo really been a society

committed to protecting each individual, would it not have been able to curb the activity of such harmful individuals in an organized way? None of these questions is answered by Robert Donia. In a simplified black-and-white perspective, Donia puts all blame for the suffering of the citizens of Sarajevo during the latest civil war on Serbian nationalists round the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), without so much as mentioning the crimes against the Serbs of Sarajevo or other crimes perpetrated by Muslim forces across Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in doing so, he makes use of information that have remained controversial until this day.⁴ This too suggests that the purpose of this biography of Sarajevo is political rather than scholarly: it calls for revising the 1995 Dayton Agreement in line with a unitary Bosnia and Herzegovina, purportedly the only state model capable of sustaining the traditional cultural diversity of Bosnian society.

⁴ Donia presents as fact that the Army of Republika Srpska fired grenades on the queue for bread on Vase Miskina St, killing several people, and that Serbs killed a number of people at the Markale market. To judge from many reports by observers, however, there is no conclusive evidence as to the culprit in either tragic event.

DOKUMENTI O SPOLJNOJ POLITICI KRALJEVINE SRBIJE 1903–1914. KNJIGA II ZA 1906. I 1907. GODINU [DOCUMENTS ON THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE KINGDOM OF SERBIA 1903–1914. BOOK II FOR THE YEARS 1906 AND 1907]. BELGRADE: SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS, 2004 AND 2006.

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The Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, more specifically its Department of Historical Sciences and the Committee for Compilation and Publication of Documentary Material on Foreign Policy of Serbia 1903–1914, have started in 1972 a project of systematic compilation of rel-

evant material of diplomatic and political significance, and publication has begun in 1980. Projects of that kind require systematic and painstaking search through

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