

BOOK REVIEW

Amzi-Erdoğdular, Leyla. *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe: Muslims in Habsburg Bosnia Herzegovina*

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023. Pp. 332.

Amila Kasumović

Department of History, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Email: amila.kasumovic@ff.unsa.ba

As Robert J. Donia emphasized in his book *Islam under the Double Eagle* (Boulder, CO, 1981), Austria gained power in Bosnia in the shadow of two violent events: the 1875–78 uprising and the resistance to the Austro-Hungarian occupation led by the local Muslim population (1878). There are varying perceptions of the year 1878 in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina: it was a turning point, a year that brought about a change in its administrative paradigm, the beginning of modernization; but it was also a rupture, a sudden break with the old customs of the Ottoman period.

To date, historians of Habsburg Bosnia have not made a methodological and epistemological effort to observe the period of Habsburg administration (1878–1918) and its relationship with the Muslim population through the lens of continuity and discontinuity of the influence of empires on Bosnian society and the transimperial experiences of Muslims therein. In this regard, Leyla Amzi-Erdoğdular, an assistant professor of history at Rutgers University Newark, has taken a significant step forward with *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe: Muslims in Habsburg Bosnia Herzegovina*. The book brings a very interesting approach to the attitudes of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires toward Bosnia, especially toward the Muslim population. The Treaty of Berlin (1878) and the April Convention (1879) left the legal position of Bosnia unresolved: the Sultan was still its sovereign, but *de facto* Austro-Hungarian rule was established in the country. Both the Ottomans and Habsburgs attempted to capitalize on this very undecided position of the occupied area to strengthen their influence, especially *vis-à-vis* the Muslim population. For the Ottoman government, Bosnian Muslims represented a loyal element they could count on in case a change in political circumstances allowed the Ottoman Empire to reestablish power in Bosnia. On the other hand, the Austro-Hungarian Empire understood the importance of the Muslim element, especially its elite, in Bosnia and made every attempt to cut them off from the influence of Istanbul. To attract Bosnian Muslims, the Austro-Hungarian Empire emphasized its multi-confessionalism, whereas the Ottoman Empire touted its role as the religious community's protector.

As Amzi-Erdoğdular notes, however, Bosnian Muslims were not passive recipients of Ottoman or Habsburg influences but rather actively shaped their everyday life in a very complex reality at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By focusing her research on how Bosnian Muslims reacted to the new circumstances in their homeland and navigated between two empires, simultaneously playing the card of loyalty to Ottoman and Habsburg rulers, the author fills the historiographical lacunae. Until now, historians have largely ignored the efforts made by Muslims in Bosnia to find their way in new circumstances while maintaining their identity and redefining their relationship with Istanbul, the center from which Bosnia was once governed.

Muslim response to the Austro-Hungarian presence in Bosnia was twofold: some moved to Ottoman territory, while others remained in the country to fight for the preservation of their community and Islamic identity, trying to preserve ties with the Ottoman Empire while simultaneously accepting the secular education that Austria-Hungary insisted upon in an attempt to demonstrate the compatibility of Islam and modernization. Bosnian Muslims, moreover, were exposed to other

influences with which they had to learn to cope: pan-Slavism, pan-Islamism, and the nationalisms of neighboring countries.

Amzi-Erdoğdular keenly observes that Bosnian Muslims, aware of Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman aspirations to foster or preserve their loyalty, found opportunities, most often in the emigration of Muslims, to strengthen their negotiation strategies with the imperial centers of Istanbul and Vienna. In this, the author sees their aspiration to remain politically, economically, and socially relevant and to make their lives and activities in Bosnia meaningful. These were transimperial subjects, she emphasizes, whose identities were conditioned by local customs, culture, sympathy for certain national options, or pure pragmatism.

In six chapters and 332 pages, Leyla Amzi-Erdoğdular opens up the critical questions of the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian government in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the very unclear position of the occupied area and the legal anomaly in which this area found itself until the annexation of the country (1908) as well as later, to some extent, given that Bosnia was not incorporated into the architecture of the Dual Monarchy, and the response of Muslims to the turbulent events in Bosnian society after 1878. The author also follows, which is particularly significant, the homogenization of the Muslim corpus and its positioning toward the Habsburg and the Ottoman empires, and the transformation of Bosnian Muslims' ties with Istanbul after the 1908 annexations. The epilogue of the book is exceptionally interesting because it deals with Bosnian Muslim intellectuals who accepted the ideas of Islamic reformists and followed the modernization of the Ottoman Empire but also absorbed the positive influences of the Habsburg monarchy.

Amzi-Erdoğdular's methodological innovation is found in her novel use of heretofore overlooked Ottoman sources, wanting to show the mechanisms developed by the Ottoman Empire to continue to leave its imprint on the life of Bosnian Muslims. The author utilizes a wide range of historiographical findings and published sources in various languages; she pays special attention to professional terminology and meticulously analyzes and interprets her sources. The result is a thorough, well-conceptualized, and well-written study.