

# Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

An International, Interdisciplinary, Bilingual, Online Journal  
Međunarodni, interdisciplinarni, dvojezični, online časopis

## IMAGINING BOSNIAN MUSLIMS IN CENTRAL EUROPE Representations, Transfers and Exchanges

František Šitek

The main purpose of this book is to highlight the importance of the rich encounters, transfers and exchanges between the peoples of Central Europe and the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the development and transformations of modern Bosnian Muslim identity and its representations from the nineteenth century until the present. It also provides evidence of how the history of relations with the Bosnian Muslims shaped attitudes and policies towards Muslims and Islam in general in the Habsburg Empire, among its various peoples, and also in the post-Habsburg successor states of the region. The representations and conceptualizations of the Bosnian Muslims, constructed by Central European authors and observers of various national and social backgrounds, did not remain without effect on the Bosnian Muslims themselves, their self-conceptualizations, and the wider process of 'reordering the universe' in the radically different post-Ottoman era and the turbulent twentieth century. From the Central European perspective, the autochthonous Slavic Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina represented the closest Muslim population, a rare outpost of the Orient on European soil. The occupation of the Ottoman province of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with its relatively sizeable Muslim community, by the predominantly Roman Catholic Austria-Hungary in 1878 set the scene for a series of unique policies and modernization efforts with the aim of pacifying, controlling, accommodating and modernizing the Bosnian Muslim society, especially Muslim elites and institutions. Partly as a legacy of Habsburg colonial rule over Bosnia and Herzegovina (1878-1918), but also because of geographic proximity and other factors, namely the influx of refugees as a result of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-95), the peoples of Central Europe and the Bosnian Muslims have maintained intense contacts and ties in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

This collective monograph devotes considerable attention to representations and conceptualizations of the Bosnian Muslims and their development from the nineteenth century onwards. The peoples of Central Europe played an important (indeed in many ways a pioneering) role in the real as well as discursive discovery of the Slavic Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Until the end of the twentieth century, when the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was receiving global attention that generated a wave of similarly global academic and media interest, a significant part of what could be termed general (European or Western) as well as scholarly knowledge about Bosnia and Herzegovina and its Muslims arguably originated in Central Europe, or was

filtered and channelled through Central European sources and interpreters. Bosnia and Herzegovina has often been conceptualized in a somewhat patronizing way as 'our' (Habsburg, Central European, Slavic) piece of the Orient, and its Muslims increasingly as 'our' (European, secular, tolerant) Muslims rather than exotic aliens and hereditary enemies of Christendom. Since the nineteenth century, Central European authors and observers - officials, diplomats, travellers, scholars, journalists, artists and tourists - have produced a wide range of representations and conceptualizations of Bosnian Muslims. Apart from the mainstream, Habsburg, or common Central European discourse on the Bosnian Muslims, this book pays special attention to specific national discourses on the Bosnian Muslims developed within the Habsburg Monarchy and its successor states (e.g. Czech, Slovene, Croatian). Far from celebrating the self-proclaimed Habsburg 'civilizing mission' and the results of the cultural work achieved by Austria-Hungary, this collective volume presents a more critical and ambivalent but hopefully also a more balanced view of the complex history of transnational encounters between the peoples of Central Europe and the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It provides representative samples of different types of Central European contributions to conceptualizations and representations of Bosnian Muslims, and it discusses the formative influence of Habsburg imperial policies on education and the transformation of Islamic institutions, as well as the very recent experiences of Bosnian Muslims as immigrants in Central European countries and the ongoing reinterpretations of Bosnian Muslim identity within the context of contemporary debates on the integration and coexistence of Muslims in Europe.

**IMAGINING BOSNIAN MUSLIMS IN CENTRAL EUROPE** Representations, Transfers and Exchanges, Edited by František Šístek

The preceding text is copyright of the author and/or translator and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.