

The Bosnian Muslims and the Second World War. By Marko Attila Hoare. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-19-932785-0

Glossary. Maps. Photos. Images. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xxviii, 478. \$120/\$120.00

The question of the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina still is central to all deliberations on the future of the Balkans, although now it is a significant period of time since the appalling bloodshed of the early 1990's war was on television screens and in the newspapers. Although the war ended with the Dayton Accords in 1995, a stable future has been elusive, and among the Western Balkan states B-H remains the furthest away from 'normal' state functioning. But state weakness and instability in Bosnia is not new and in this major work the English historian Marko Attila Hoare traces the contradictions and difficulties that accompanied the birth of the Yugoslav republic during and after World War II. Many of the issues that were contested in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the recent ex-Yugoslav wars were the same as in World War II.

The central question he poses is how Tito and his Partisans were able to operate in Bosnia to seize power, and how the state was always marked by this process. It is both a history of the Resistance to Axis occupation and local power expressed primarily through the puppet regime in Croatia, and also a military history of that movement. Hoare has command of a vast range of documents in several languages, and is able to paint a convincing picture of 'history from the bottom up' with a historical materialist and generally anti-Stalinist but Marxist approach to events. He sees the Western Balkans as the scene of an indigenous Revolution against the occupation, and Yugoslavia and Albania as territory that did not owe its direction post-1945 to the Red Army or Stalin. He has a good understanding of the nature of informal insurgency warfare and makes a very strong case.

He has a masterly grasp of the material and with a clear and lucid style sets out the main currents of events. Hoare's judgement on 'difficult' issues like the nature and modus operandi of the Nazi SS 'Handschar' Division that was recruited from the Bosnian Muslims is relaxed and balanced. It would have improved the quality of political discussion considerably in the 1990's if this book had existed in the wartime period. It is not an easy read for non-specialists, and perhaps more help could have been provided for them to find their way into the text. The shifting patterns of identity formed by differences of religion, ethnicity and class are always there, but exist in sometimes bewildering complexity in the narrative. In my own experience, modern University students and military officers often do not have a very clear grasp of the nature and role of many major pre-1945 institutions, like, for instance, how a Marxist-Leninist party is organised, or what the Comintern was, and although Hoare's English style is a model of clarity, and although the text is well illustrated, it is sometimes short of the local colour, information on the character of places, and biographical background on some of the leading personalities.

But given the nature of the subject, factual accuracy, balance and analytic rigour are the priorities and here Hoare has given us a book that is of the highest quality and is likely to rewrite many aspects of the history of the period. It will pose important questions not only for all historians of the twentieth century Balkans, but also the wider diplomatic and international community concerned with Bosnia. Ever since 1995 their plans have been based on the premise that the Titoist state could in some way be recreated post-war in a humane and democratic form. Hoare's work in this book is bound to call that into question.

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