



BOOK REVIEW

To Die for the Emperor and the Homeland!

Meldin Kešetović
Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo
kesetovicmeldin1914@gmail.com

Book review

Received: October 10th, 2022

Accepted: October 27th, 2022

The historiography of Bosnia and Herzegovina through its various administrative units – referring to the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and socialist Yugoslavia – had long been waiting for a work that, with a critical-objective judgment and scientific principle, would deal with the issue of Bosnian units in the Great War. Namely, Blašković, Fritz, Henz and Fabricius dealt with similar topics, that is to say personal experiences of immediate war events. At the beginning of the new millennium, more precisely, at the beginning of the first decade, at the Department of History of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Sarajevo, Dr. Zijad Šehić, now a full professor, defended his doctorate on the topic “Bosnian and Herzegovinian Land Units in the Military Organization of the Habsburg Monarchy 1878-1918”, on April 19, 2002, in front of a commission composed of: Prof. Dr. Iljas Hadžibegović, academician Dževad Juzbašić, Prof. Dr. Ibrahim Karabegović and Prof. Dr. Arnold Suppan. The book itself represents a reworked doctoral dissertation, which, since its publication, has been titled *To Die for the Emperor and the Homeland! Bosnians and Herzegovinians in the Military Organization of the Habsburg Monarchy 1878-1918*. Sarajevo-Publishing was the publishing house that made sure that the book be published.

At the same time, the work, when it comes to its characteristics, consists of an introduction, four chapters, each of which has its own special parts, a conclusion and appendices. At the very end, there is a list of used sources and bibliographic units, as well as a register of personal names and geographical terms, which significantly facilitates the transparency of the work. In the introduction, the author points out the issue of the unexplored role and status of Bosnian-Herzegovinian land units in the military organization of the Habsburg Monarchy (1878-1918), although the literature on the issue was numerous, but until then had never been unified. It also refers to important events that preceded the First World War as its precursors.



The author cites the reconstruction of the role of Bosnian-Herzegovinian units in the Great War and the Habsburg Monarchy as the goal of the research. In addition to the abovementioned aspects, it was important to process military, political, economic, economic and other factors.

The Organization of the Army and the Police in the Bosnian Eyalet Vilayet in the Last Decade of Ottoman Rule is the title of the first chapter. This chapter represents the introductory part of the matrix of the book and takes as the center of consideration the role of Bosnian-Herzegovinian military units in the military organizations of the Ottoman Empire in the twilight of Ottoman rule over the areas of the Western Balkans at the time of major crises. The author touches on the Great Eastern Crisis, that is, the part that affected the Bosnian Vilayet, that is to say the Herzegovinian Uprising, about which he provides a rough analysis based on the collected bibliographic units. It is important to note the good treatment and honor, enjoyed by the units of Bosnia and Herzegovina. First of all, taking into account the treatment of Muslim soldiers, their way of dressing, performing religious services. Before moving on to the second chapter, the author tried to give a short but concise insight into the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

The second chapter, entitled *Neither Sultans nor Emperors! – Bosnian-Herzegovinian Land Units in the Military Organization of the Habsburg Monarchy 1878-1914*, represents a whole of research and a chronological review of the incorporation of Bosnian-Herzegovinian military forces into the units of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. At the very beginning, the need of the new occupying forces to secure their rule in the new territories through economic, cultural-political and social measures is highlighted. The author dealt with the issues of the construction of Bosnia and Herzegovina's military units, primarily focusing on the changes in the new military organisation of the army, on the new layout and forms of warfare, as well as on everything that comes and will come with the new occupier. The author divided the chapter into two parts. In the first part, he tried to concentrate on the dynamics of changes that affected the new military organisation, while in the second part, the author highlights the conditions in the military ranks during the crises that directly preceded the beginning of the Great War, including the Bosnian Crisis¹, the First

1 Translator's note: The term 'Bosnian Crisis' or the 'Annexation Crisis' refers to the First Balkan Crisis of 1908, after the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy proclaimed the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was formally under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire, but under administrative rule by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy since 1878.



and Second Balkan Wars. In the continuation of the book, in the next two chapters with several shorter sub-chapters, the issue of war events from 1914 to 1918 is portrayed, covering the greater part of the work.

The third chapter is entitled *Bosnian-Herzegovinian Land Units in the Military Organisation of the Habsburg Monarchy from the Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914 to the End of 1916*. The chapter deals with the direct participation of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian military units of the Habsburg Monarchy in the period of the Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand² until the end of 1916, the second war year. The military, moral, political and social profile of the soldiers and the conditions in which they operated are reviewed, while referring to a wide range of bibliographic units. The author concludes: in order to understand the comprehensive military aspect, it is important to initially enter the so-called logistics sphere. In order to more clearly reflect the situation on the front, it is important to carefully process the issues of convocation and repartition of certain categories of conscripts, wartime care of refugees and other difficulties that war brings, beyond the front lines and fronts. In the second part of the subchapter, the author points out, based on reference literature, the role of Bosnian military conscripts during the second and third years of the war, as well as the new conflict with Italy and the already existing war problems on the Eastern Front and the Balkan Front³³. The author gives a special insight into the losses of Bosnian military units in the first years of the war and gives a short analysis of the cross-section on the fronts towards the end of 1916 with a special aspect about life at the front and the care of war invalids and the families of the mobilized conscripts.

The Fourth and Fifth War Years, 1917/1918 is the name of the last, fourth chapter, which talks about the conditions in the background, the state of the army at the front, discipline among soldiers and the situation in the Monarchy, and other elements that had a correlational effect on the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Army. At the beginning of the chapter, the author reviews the circumstances in the Monarchy at the beginning of 1917, the changes on the throne and the impact of the mentioned events on the front. Based on the critical evaluation of the used bibliographic

2 TN: The 'Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand' is referred to in the original text as the 'Sarajevski atentat' or the 'Sarajevo Assassination' in English, but was translated in this way for reasons of clarity.

3 The 'Balkan Front' refers to the Balkan theatre of war in the First World War, which is called the 'Serbian Front' in the original text.



units, primarily those of a statistical nature that came from various military, private, national and other archives, they have the most significant role in researching the issue of armed formations. In the second half of the chapter, the author gives his insight into the last year of the war, the problems that befell the Monarchy in the form of an “internal front”, rebellions, desertions and similar troubles that ultimately marked the death of the Dual Monarchy. In the final subchapter of the chapter, the author gives his observations on the basis of analyses, made on the basis of official data and provides a lot of information of exceptional importance for military potential from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina who were engaged in the largest world conflict until then.

The last part of the book is devoted to the author’s conclusion, in which he gives a final insight and a cross-section of the previously presented data. After the conclusion, there is an enriched chapter of appendices that give a broader statistical picture from the establishment of the new military law in 1912 through the mobilization of members in the first year of the war to losses, military awards and holders of gold medals for bravery from the Bosnian units. With his reworked doctoral dissertation and, ultimately, a book on the contemporary history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, for the first time, on the basis of comprehensive and unified literature in one place, Prof. Dr. Zijad Šehić provides a comprehensive portrayal of the participation of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian military potential in the period from 1878 to 1914. In the book, the author used a clear and precise methodology, while not yielding to subjective impulses.

At the same time, Šehić made a step forward in dealing with this topic and can certainly be considered a pioneer. Today’s historiography considers Dr. Šehić’s book, or reworked doctoral dissertation, as the starting point in the study of the issue of Bosnian units and the role of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the First World War. The significance for contemporary historiography is mostly reflected in the book by the mentioned events that affected the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina as an immediate war zone, after the Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, which had not been the case in previous publications and scientific literature. Šehić left behind a great legacy and a huge task for future historians and scientists who decide to deal with the mentioned issue. It is to be hoped that the Bosnian scientific community, and above the entire historiographical community, will follow in his footsteps.