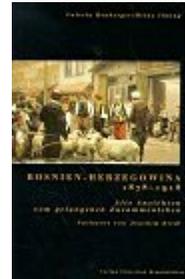


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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Valeria Heuberger, Heinz Ilming. *Bosnien-Herzegowina 1878-1918: Alte Ansichten vom gelungenen Zusammenleben*. Vienna: Christian Brandstätter Verlag, 1994. iii + 144 pp. DM 56 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-85447-553-8.

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Images of a Dreamworld

Valeria Heuberger and Heinz Ilming's *Bosnien-Herzegowina 1878-1918. Alte Ansichten vom gelungenen Zusammenleben* is a work that falls between categories. It is not an academic work. No one should approach this work expecting to find a general history of Bosnia-Herzegovina under Habsburg rule or – given its extended title – a series of discussions on social relations in Bosnia. Nor is this an attempt to do what Michael Lesy did in his *Wisconsin Death Trip* (1973, note 1) for the American West – deconstruct period photographic images in order to get at the stark realities of place and time. Neither is this an attempt to analyze travel memoirs and travel photos in the manner of Paul Fussell.

This work is, as its jacket copy makes clear, a kind of extended meditation on an “old Osmanli proverb” holding that “an ounce of peace is more valuable than a ton of victory”. It is a work whose ultimate aim is to invoke the image of a lost Bosnia of peaceful ethnic coexistence in the hope of restoring a vision of ethnic peace – a vision of a postwar Bosnia where, as the jacket copy claims, “the ounce can once more outweigh the ton”.

Historians are no less subject to “world-we-have-lost” romanticism than anyone else, but one might note here that the authors of this work, Valeria Heuberger and Heinz Ilming, are not historians but a folklorist and art historian (Heuberger) and an art historian and conservator (Ilming). Joachim Riedl, who provides the book's afterword, is a journalist whose academic background is in literature and sociology. The book comes with a brief bib-

liography of two dozen works, including such basics as Peter Sugar on Bosnian industrialization, Ernst Bauer on Habsburg administration in Bosnia, and Robert J. Donia on the Bosnian Muslims. The authors, however, seem to have given little attention to the substance of many cited works. Heuberger's brief historical overview offers no proof that she has gone into her bibliography very deeply at all. The economic disruptions caused by the transfer of Bosnia from the Ottoman to the Habsburg economy are brushed off in a single sentence; the long internal debates over exactly how the new Habsburg administration should “develop” the newly-occupied provinces are simply ignored.

More to the point, the romanticism and the (quite laudable) effort by the authors to invoke a past of peaceful ethnic coexistence blinds them to the darker realities of life in the two provinces. Joachim Riedl tosses off the remark that “brave Bosnians die young”, a thought perhaps better considered after a close reading of, say, Milovan Djilas' *Land Without Justice* (note 2). Whether in Montenegro or Bosnia, at the end of the nineteenth century the brave died young because they died in a world of endemic local violence, a world where heroism or “nobility of soul” was all too often expressed in mere banditry given a veneer of tribal or “national” conflict. Heuberger presents a very *alt-oesterreichisch* portrait of the four Bosniak regiments of the *k.u.k* army (“the Emperor's most loyal soldiers”). While treating the outstanding combat record of the Bosnian regiments in 1914-18, she does not mention the panicky and ill-considered

purge of Bosnian Serb soldiers in 1914 or the disdain with which many Austrians treated Bosnian Muslim soldiers (“Turks” in German nationalist speech) before the war. This disdain underlay the violence in Graz in 1897: during riots by German nationalists a patrol of Bosniaks (“black-yellow Muslim mercenaries”) fired on a hostile mob, killing one rioter and prompting months of outraged speeches by local politicians against the presence of “Turks” and “foreigners” in their city.

The authors try to incorporate a post-Edward Said (note 3) perspective by making passing mention of the “colonial” position of Bosnia-Herzegovina within the Monarchy and attempting at times to put an ironic gloss on travelers’ fascination with the exotic and Oriental image of Sarajevo. But they are far too committed to constructing their own dream of Bosnia to analyze travelers’ “orientalism” or the colonialist attitudes of Habsburg “culture pioneers”.

At the heart of the work is a collection of some sixty postcard views of Bosnia, many of them hand-colored, taken throughout the two provinces between 1878 and 1918 and captioned with descriptions by travelers of the era. The images themselves are quite often beautiful and evocative, and they show the authors’ vision of a past Bosnia whose daily life is free of overt violence, where marketplaces are filled by members of all ethnic groups, where Habsburg buildings flank minarets and newly built railway bridges meet Ottoman-era aqueducts. In the light of the last four years, this is very much a world we have lost. Yet too many of the images – even allowing for the limitations of relying on photos intended originally for a tourist market – are obviously chosen for their sentimental value. Heuberger and Ilming do not seem to have contemplated Susan Sontag’s cautions on the belief that photos reveal the truth, nor have they sought out surviving photo archives from the period that might give a less posed view of daily life. The captions are allowed to stand without comment – captions far too often of the “mysterious East” variety.

One can hardly fault the intentions of the authors here, and it is well to remember that the idea of ethnic cleansing, of the presumed impossibility of even living in the same suburb as members of other ethnic groups,

dates back only two generations and – even admitting the presence of local vendettas – not into the distant past. Joachim Riedl’s afterword, “The Survivors of Sarajevo”, a treatment of the fates of several Sarajevo families from World War II up to late 1994 and the second winter of the Serbian siege, is powerfully written and indeed deserves to stand on its own as a depiction of how a city and its people can be destroyed. And indeed Heuberger’s 55-page introduction to the history of Bosnia from the coming of the Ottomans through 1918 is certainly no worse (and often better) than the treatments found in many popular histories. Yet this is a book that offers little to scholars other than the visual pleasures of the assembled photo postcards. It is more than a coffee table book but far less than a scholarly treatment.

The work itself is a product of the post-1992 horrors in Bosnia, an effort to undermine present nationalisms and indeed present-day hopelessness about the presumed intractability of ethnic violence in the region (e.g., Robert D. Kaplan’s *Balkan Ghosts*, note 4) by invoking a vanished past with the intention of shaping a future of ethnic coexistence. Yet the authors have been unable to grasp the Bosnian past in its complexity. By making Habsburg Bosnia a distant and mysteriously conflict-free land inhabited by strangely-costumed and banished peoples, Heuberger and Ilming do no service to either history or the cause of present (and future) Bosnia.

NOTES

1. Michael Lesy, *Wisconsin Death Trip* (New York, Pantheon Books [1973]).
2. Milovan Djilas, *Land Without Justice* (New York, Harcourt, Brace [1958]).
3. Edward W. Said. *Orientalism*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
4. Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993).

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