

UDC 930.85(4-12)

ISSN 0350-7653  
eISSN 2406-0801

SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS  
INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

# BALCANICA

## XLVIII

ANNUAL OF THE INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

Editor-in-Chief

VOJISLAV G. PAVLOVIĆ

Director of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA

Editorial Board

JEAN-PAUL BLED (Paris), LJUBOMIR MAKSIMOVIĆ,  
ZORAN MILUTINOVIĆ (London), DANICA POPOVIĆ, DRAGAN BAKIĆ,  
SPYRIDON SFETAS (Thessaloniki), GABRIELLA SCHUBERT (Jena),  
SVETLANA M. TOLSTAJA (Moscow)

BELGRADE  
2017



FRANZISKA ZAUGG, *ALBANISCHE MUSLIME IN DER WAFFEN-SS: VON „GROSSALBANIEN“ ZUR DIVISION „SKANDERBEG“*. PADERBORN: FERDINAND SCHÖNINGH VERLAG, 2016, 347 p.

Reviewed by Rastko Lompar\*

In a book on international volunteers fighting for Franco during the Spanish Civil War, Judith Keene has sought to pinpoint what drove hundreds of people from France, Britain, Ireland, Romania and all of Europe to join the cause of the Spanish nationalists. She claims that they saw the Spanish Civil War not as an internal struggle of the Spanish people, but as a continuation of the Manichean battle between Left and Right beginning in 1917 and continuing into the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Therefore many of those who had supported Franco later continued the “crusade” and joined the Waffen-SS to fight the “reds” on the Eastern front. The nature of their motives has been a matter of debate. Was this engagement an example of transnational fascist solidarity, which challenged the solidarity monopoly of the Left, as the French right-wing philosopher Alain de Benoist claimed,<sup>2</sup> a result of personal pragmatic interests or a deliberate collaboration aimed at furthering own national goals?

The question of motivation is central to Franziska Zaugg’s book *The Albanian Muslims in the Waffen-SS*. In this monograph the author strives to answer a plethora of questions, such as what motivated Albanian Muslims to join the SS, what techniques were employed by the Germans to bolster their ranks with Albanian recruits, and what was the image of Albanians in contemporary German public opinion and military assessments. Although the book is

primarily about Albanian enlistment in the Waffen-SS, the author chose the subtitle *From “Greater Albania” to the “Skanderbeg” division*, since without Albanian irredentism and bloody inter-ethnic violence the SS would not nearly have had such an appeal. The book is divided into three main parts, the first being an extended introduction to interwar Albanian history, the subsequent Italian occupation, the Second World War and, finally, the German occupation. The second part of the book revolves around the SS division “Skanderbeg”, and the third focuses on the image of Albanians in contemporary German discourse. One is impressed with the breadth of Zaugg’s research. This book is based on German, Italian, Yugoslav and Albanian documents, as well as the relevant literature in English, German and Italian. The use of Albanian documents is all the more important since they were sealed until 1990 and therefore virtually unknown to the majority of readers.

The introduction (pp. 33–40) outlines the developments in Albanian history from the earliest days to the Italian occupation. It is followed by the chapters on the Italian (pp. 40–87) and German (pp. 88–132) occupations. Zaugg shows how the very utility of the occupation was a controversial question for the Italian ruling elites given that Albania was, as Vittorio Emanuele III put it, mere “four rocks” (pp. 47–48). In the end, the fascist regime followed its imperial ambitions and Albania was quickly occupied. From that moment Zaugg follows the main dichotomy of Albanian society, namely the one between collaboration and resistance. She shows that regional and

<sup>1</sup> Judith Keene, *Fighting for Franco: International Volunteers in Nationalist Spain during the Spanish Civil War* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2001), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Alain de Benoist, *Komunizam i nacizam: 25 ogleđa o totalitarizmu u XX. stoljeću* (Zagreb: Naklada Zlatka Hasanbegovića, 2005), 54.

\* PhD student, Department of History, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

confessional differences among the Albanians played a key role in making one or another choice. Northern Roman Catholic tribes were more eager than their southern compatriots in collaborating with the Italian occupiers. Likewise, the North remained virtually immune to the allure of communism, which was much more common in south and central Albania due to the suspicious "Slavophilia" of the new doctrine (p. 68). The Italians set the example, which was later followed by the Germans, in recruiting the Blackshirt militia. They successfully instrumentalized the inter-ethnic struggle, and focused on Albanians from the fringes of the newly established "Greater Albania". They were trained to be ruthless in fighting their neighbours, and they knew that the demise of the occupying force would spell doom for their hopes of unification into a greater Albanian state. The German reports on the Italian battles on the Greek and Yugoslav fronts are a testimony to the ruthlessness of the new recruits. After the occupation of Yugoslavia a puppet-state of "Great Albania" was created, and both the Italians and Germans aimed at gaining the support of the Albanians. The northern part of Kosovo, which was occupied by the Germans, became a safe haven for all anti-Italian nationalistic Albanians. Also, the Germans had a clear reason for turning a blind eye to the pogroms of Serbs committed by their new allies, since they rightly saw numerous Albanian Muslims in Kosovo as a potential source of manpower.

With the Italian capitulation and the subsequent German occupation the situation only slightly changed. The Germans promised that Albania would be more self-governed and sought to out together a new Albanian government. Zaugg offers a detailed overview of the key German occupying authorities and their mutual conflicts and quarrels, which also plagued the German occupiers in Serbia and elsewhere. She highlights the primarily economic interests in the occupation and concludes that

Kosovo was indeed better integrated into the German economic domain than Albania. Zaugg also points to the occupiers' fear that poor economic conditions in Albania might bolster the ranks of the emerging communist movement, and to their assessments that this situation resulted from the "lazy nature" of Albanians (p. 115).

The next chapter (pp. 135–192) looks at the activities of high-ranking Albanian nationalists such as Xhaver Deva and Rexhep Mitrovica, who were instrumental in the process of recruiting Albanian Muslims to the Waffen-SS. They had been active since 1941 in oppressing the Serbian population by "massacres and plunder" (p. 143). In organizing the Waffen-SS "Skanderbeg", the Germans were aware of the shortcomings of a similar project, namely the Waffen-SS division "Handzar". They realized that Albanians and Bosnian Muslims could not be successfully integrated into a military unit and, more importantly, that deploying such a unit away from its homeland would inevitably result in mutiny and low morale. Therefore the SS "Skanderbeg" was created as an all Albanian, all Muslim unit to be used only in Kosovo and the surrounding regions. The key motivation for joining the unit was inter-ethnic hatred and the dream of living in a single ethnic state. Therefore, the fear of reprisals by Chetnik and Partisan forces was often employed in German propaganda, as were the sufferings of fellow Muslims in Bosnia, Herzegovina and Montenegro. The book contains a very detailed description of the division and its strength, both in manpower and in equipment. There is also a list of major military operations in which it participated. A special place is accorded to the establishment by the unit of the concentration camp in Priština.

The third part of the book (pp. 293–310) shows how propaganda and ideology clashed with cultural prejudice in the depiction of the Albanians by German writers, journalists and soldiers. Starting her overview of the image of Albanians from

Karl May's *Durch das Land der Skipetaren* to the last military reports at the end of the Second World War, she convincingly shows how the initial euphoric portrayal of the Albanians as "natural born warriors" and a noble and freedom-loving people makes way to the less favourable reports of late 1944. In them, the Germans, faced with desertions and the inefficiency of SS "Skanderbeg", bitterly brand the Albanians as undisciplined Oriental tricksters who see war merely as plunder.

Answering the initial question of motivation, Zaugg concludes that Muslim Albanians were drawn to the SS because they believed that German victory in the war would be the only way to "accomplish the Greater-Albanian project". Their reasons, therefore, were more pragmatic than ideological. They did, however, share some values with the Germans, namely anticomunism, which, however, was somewhat "instinctive" and stemmed from traditional conservatism.

Despite all its strengths the book somewhat suffers from an oversimplified view of ethnic/state relations in the Balkans, which is inherited from the sources the author used. For instance, the author draws an ethnic distinction between Serbs and Montenegrins while the distinction at that time was purely regional. Likewise, Zaugg classifies all inhabitants of the Bulgarian occupation zone of Yugoslavia as Bulgarians. An example of this unfortunate choice is the description of one victim of Albanian terror as a "Bulgarian of Serbian decent".

In conclusion, *The Albanian Muslims in the Waffen-SS* is a valuable addition to the scholarship about the SS division and volunteers in the Balkans. It points out the key aspect of both the Italian and German occupation, and presents the dilemmas of both occupiers. It highlights the intensity of inter-ethnic violence and its aftermath. Zaugg provides the readers with a thorough and balanced overview of the Waffen-SS division "Skanderbeg".

BORIS MILOSAVLJEVIĆ, SLOBODAN JOVANOVIĆ – *TEORIJA* [SLOBODAN JOVANOVIĆ – *THEORY*]. BELGRADE: BALKANOLOŠKI INSTITUT SANU, 2017, 651 p.

Reviewed by Vojislav Pavlović\*

Most years since the beginning of the twenty-first century the Institute for Balkan Studies, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, pursued its publishing activity under the committed and caring guidance of Dušan T. Bataković. Among the last monographs he signed as editor before his premature death was a book by Boris Milosavljević devoted to Slobodan Jovanović.

The title of this book does not quite reveal all that it has in store for the reader. The author was not inclined to the contemporary practice of turning book titles into short abstracts and chose a terse one instead. But awaiting inside its covers is a journey into a world long gone but not forgotten by its aficionados. Tracing the roots of the

Jovanović family, the author writes about the cities of Ruma, Novi Sad, Šabac, Belgrade, about leaders of the First Serbian Uprising (1804), merchants, catechists, civil servants, high state officials, army officers, professors bound together by kinship, patriotism and earnest concern for the well-being of their country and society. It is a world which is no doubt familiar to the author, he feels respect and appreciation for it, and seeks to evoke it for the readers with exemplary scrupulousness; one might even say that he hopes his readers will grow fond of that relatively small, close-knit Serbian milieu.

\* Institute for Balkan Studies SASA