

Buturović, Amila (2015). *Carved in Stone, Etched in Memory: Death, Tombstones and Commemoration in Bosnian Islam since c. 1500*. London and New York: Routledge. 256 pp. Hb.: \$89.23/£72.00. ISBN: 9781472432605.

Book review by

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In four chapters framed with the *Introduction* and the *Conclusion*, followed by *Appendix* (*A visual and reflective travelogue thorough the deathscapes of Bosnia and Herzegovina*), Amila Buturović, after her book *Stone Speaker: Medieval Tombstones, Landscape, and Bosnian Identity in the Poetry of Mak Dizdar* (2002), returns to the topic of death in the Bosnian context. In this study, she explores Bosnian Islamic funerary culture, the memory that shapes and restores the relationship between the dead and the living, and various commemorative practices embodied in rituals, funerary inscriptions, and images. Although from the subtitle we could mistakenly assume that the book is focused only on older historical practices, Buturović presents to us an overview reaching up to contemporary Bosnian and Herzegovina commemorations of the most recent war victims (1992-1995). As Buturović herself emphasises, 'the Bosnian Islamic funerary culture offers important clues on identity formation and group demarcation' (p. 205). Besides giving a very thick and detailed description and explanation of Islamic funeral culture in general, specifically Bosnian Islam, and then framing that within specific Bosnian and Herzegovinian historical, religious, cultural and social contexts, the book has one, for me, very important agenda—to show, once again, that there are no simple answers when we are talking about Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Funerary practices that are so distinct in different religions and cultures in Bosnia have to be clearly contextualised because, as Buturović concisely argues, the changes in fu-

nerary culture were a process that lasted for centuries. According to the author, the key aim of this book was to examine how funerary markers shape the culture of death in Bosnian Islam. The emphasis is placed on practices of funerary commemoration but also representational values given to deathscape. One of the important focuses is on how deathscapes are used to construct zones of inclusion and exclusion, starting with the transformation of the religious fabric after Bosnia and Herzegovina, were incorporated into the Ottoman Empire in the mid-15th century. She approaches this topic by using and analysing religious, folkloric, literary, and ethnographic writings, epigraphic texts, but also by doing an extensive field survey that is presented in the above-mentioned Appendix. It seems that there are no cemeteries and/or graves that Buturović has not visited. Her starting point is that tombstones are material triggers, markers, and guardians of memories (p. 4), and from that perspective she approaches the research and interpretation of the dead and living communities in Bosnian Islam, but also their interactions with other ethno-religious communities. Her study investigates mostly grave-stones found in rural cemeteries and burial sites because she considers them to reflect highly localised customs and practices, to present the process of transition into Islam, and to speak about the lack of uniformity at least in the beginning of Islam in Bosnia. Taking this as the setting, she explores beliefs and rituals and their material manifestations, which have proven to be especially durable and indicators of interaction between the normative and the non-normative, the religious and the secular, the spiritual and the material, the formal and the poetic, etc. (p. 32). There is one thing she tries to avoid: to observe Islamic funerary tradition as syncretic. She thinks that syncretism suggests a lack of authenticity, awareness, and conscious manipulation of official religious norms. According to her, Islam is commonly dismissed by biased scholars and appreciated only if it includes considerable borrowings from Christianity. However, for her, the fact is that most religions have origins in pluralistic environments that compel them to negotiate different forms of religiosity before defining orthodoxy. Buturović emphasises that the lack of uniform belief within Christian communities before Ottoman times and the institutionalisation of different Christian denominations under the Ottoman affected how Islam was spread and shaped (p. 17). Because of these facts and the long process of Islamisation of the population, Buturović, based on her research of graveyards and tombstones starting from 15th century, concludes that, like the living, the dead continued to mingle, and neither Islam nor Christianity dominated funerary memory and set the dead apart. Translation and conversion are a complex process in which old meanings and values are not abandoned but reconfigured (p. 137). Buturović clearly shows how the first generation of Bosnian Muslims was rarely segregated from non-Muslim dead.

Outside of the urban cemeteries, it is rare to find exclusively Muslim cemeteries. The situation gradually changed and, by the 18th century, the shared cemeteries give way to the need to separate the dead. Distinctly Islamic cemeteries became the norm. The lines of territorial demarcation among specific cemeteries became more pronounced. Cemeteries became spaces recognisable as Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish.

This takes us to contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina commemorations, also covered by Buturović. 'Remembering some of the dead and forsaking others is a powerful method of co-opting the past into the struggles and contestations of the living and entangling ancestors into various political, social and economic interests' (p. 97). This statement introduces the topic of post-war (1995) Bosnia and Herzegovina's different ways of remembering the war dead. All around the country memorials have been erected as testimonials to national grandeur, says Buturović. Because of the administrative division of Bosnia and Herzegovina, war memorials present contested nationalist narratives, and thus three separate armies, the Croatian HVO, Serbian VRS, and Bosnian Muslim ARBiH, are monumentalised in the territories under corresponding administrative jurisdiction. Buturović mentioned an exception in the town of Brčko where all three monuments exist side by side. Although Brčko is truly an exception, as Buturović present it, this issue, as always, is more complex. According to the Brčko district law, there should be no commemorative monuments in the city; however, since one of the ethno-religious communities erected their monument, in order not to forcefully remove it, the Brčko district government allowed the other two communities to erect their own nearby. The contemporary commemorative practices and monuments in Bosnia are also not a simple matter. In the Posavina region (northern Bosnia) since there was no ARBiH, all Muslim conscripts were a part of the Croatian HVO army, which resulted with commemorative monuments that are both for Croatian and Muslim fallen soldiers (like in the city of Odžak and Orašje). These monuments witness to the complexity of Bosnian Herzegovian society that can be traced back to the 15th century.

This insightful, well-written, and very detailed monograph on Bosnian Islam death, tombstones, and commemoration is more than that. It illustrates the transition of the Bosnian society between Medieval Bosnian identity to Ottoman Muslim identity and traces the results of that process in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina. A book with that kind of focus, interpretation and conclusions is most welcomed and, in fact, needed for modern Bosnia and Herzegovina society. When all three ethno-religious communities are rereading the past, especially pre-Ottoman and then recent past, and inscribing new meanings to different aspects of Bosnian and Herzegovinian heritage, especially

newly proclaimed UNESCO list *stečke* tombstones, someone must put funerary culture and practices into the right perspective and interpretational framework. What Dubravko Lovrenović did with his book on medieval tombstones, Amila Buturović continued with her book on the post-medieval period and up to contemporary times. These two books together make an important tool in understanding different contexts and processes that influenced Bosnian and Herzegovinian funerary culture and society in general. *Carved in Stone, Etched in Memory* is must-read literature if you want to better understand Bosnia and Herzegovina from a serious scholar. It is not just a book about the past—it is also about the present, and should set the track for future research and interpretations.