

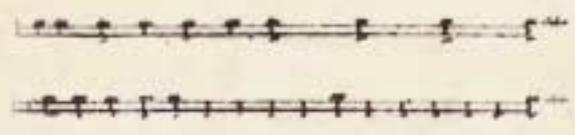
Mostar.

aufgenommen von
Lieutenant Hergen Sirmang
und
Cadet-Offizier-Stellvert. Carl Stadler.
autographirt
Lieutenant Ludwig Sale de Strizhar.
1878.



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Original Stadt



A SHORT HISTORY OF MOSTAR

Amir Pašić

*Indescribable is Mostar's most perfect beauty
Are you surprised at the language used by this lover of Mostar?
Not in all the universe, not even in Paradise
Could one ever find the air and the water of Mostar....*

Dervish Pasha Bajezidagić



Above: the Stari Most in a photograph taken at the beginning of the twentieth century. Built in 1566 between two pre-Ottoman towers, the bridge replaced a wooden structure across the Neretva River.

Left: plan of Mostar drawn in 1881. The survey shows the city at the end of the Ottoman period, three years after the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian administration. Commercial, religious and administrative functions were located on the east side of the river, with industry and agriculture on the western sides of the flat plain.

Centuries before the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia, Mostar was a small hamlet situated at a strategic crossing of the Neretva River. Its hinterlands consisted of a broad agricultural plain on the west bank and steep terraces on the east bank surrounded by barren mountains. Mostar was a representative multi-ethnic and multi-cultural settlement in Bosnia, which had possessed an independent political identity since the twelfth century. By the fifteenth century, most of the lands that would later become part of modern Yugoslavia were inhabited primarily by peoples of the same south Slavic heritage.

OTTOMAN MOSTAR

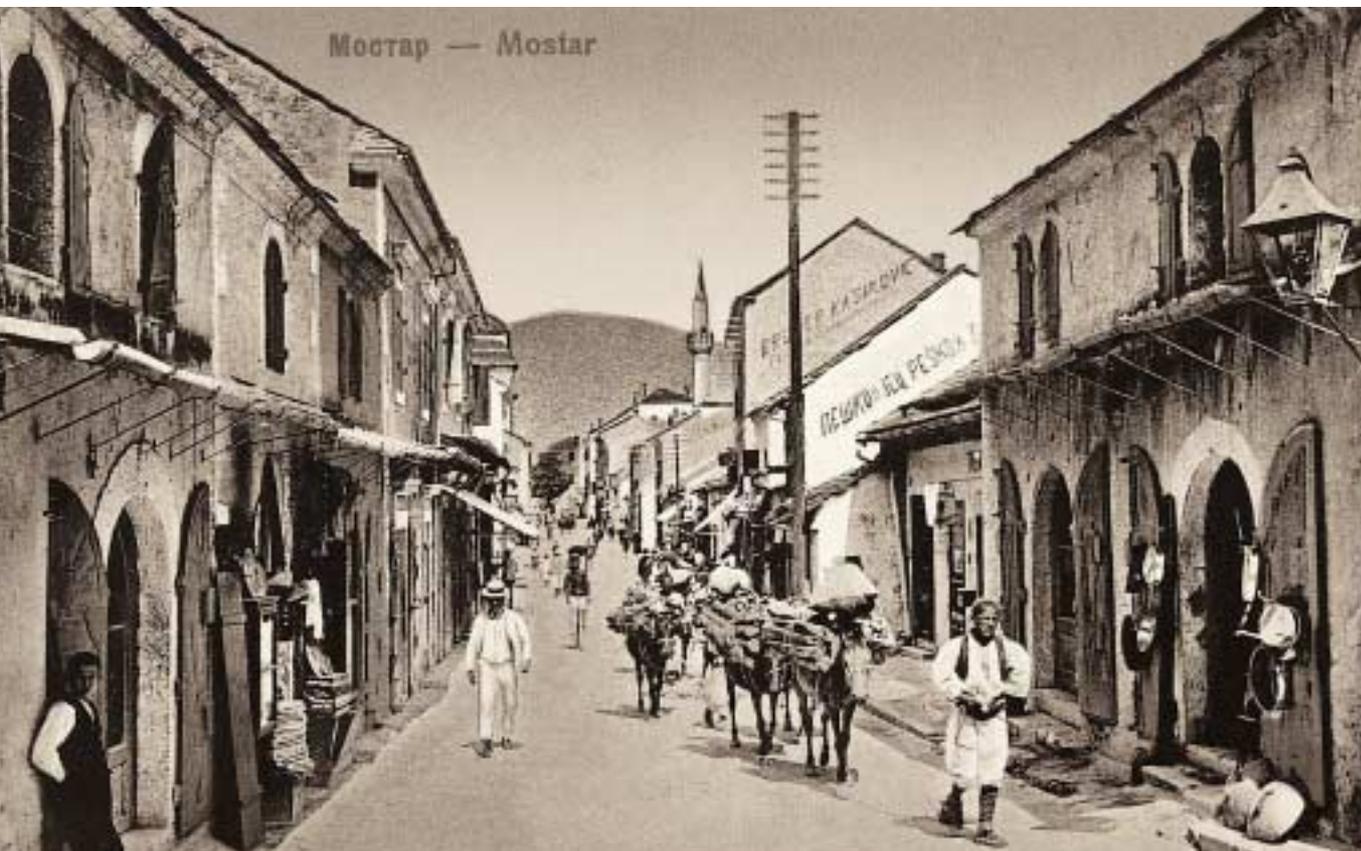
The first document that names the city was written in 1474, only eleven years after the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans. The bridge is at the heart of the town's identity: Mostar means in fact "bridgekeeper". Bosnia was added to the Ottoman Empire as a province and ruled by a *pasha*: an administrator of elevated rank. Following this occupation, Mostar was transformed, in a matter of decades, from a minor river crossing to a thriving colonial crossroads. As Ottoman administrators strove to integrate local inhabitants into their empire and extend their influence, architecture expressed important social and economic changes in Mostar. During the Ottoman period, the *Stari Most* was built to replace a precarious wooden suspension bridge that had spanned the river. Facilitating travel, trade and the movement of military troops, the *Stari Most* became a symbol of the benevolence and power of the Ottoman Empire; it insured Mostar's primacy as the capital of the county of Herzegovina.

The Ottomans used monumental architecture to affirm, extend and consolidate their colonial holdings. Administrators and bureaucrats –

A view of Velika Tepsa Street (today's Maršal Tito Street), looking north, at the beginning of the twentieth century. The street was the main commercial spine of the city, lined with one- and two-storey shop-front buildings. Its east side was completely demolished after World War II. Only a few shop-front structures survive today on the west side of the street.

many of them indigenous Bosnians who converted to Islam – founded mosque complexes that generally included Koranic schools, soup kitchens or markets. These foundations, or *vakufs*, were a traditional mode of philanthropy which allowed for routine distribution of wealth within the empire. The grandest mosques were characterised by a large single dome, like the Koski Mehmet Pasha Mosque in Mostar on the east bank of the Neretva or the Karadjozbeg Mosque, bearing many hallmarks of the famous Ottoman architect Sinan. The dome had come to represent the imperial presence of the Ottomans throughout the territories they controlled; it seems to have signified both Ottoman dominion over a colony and benevolence towards the colonised.

Mosques defined and strengthened communities. A good example is the Sevri Hadži Hasan Mosque, a hip-roofed structure that forms the nucleus and principal public open space of its neighborhood, or *mahalla*. Such *mahallas* developed quickly on both banks of the Neretva during the Ottoman period. One- and two-storey houses were anonymous at the street level but rich and expressive within. Each was



carefully sited to catch a view of a cypress or minaret from second-storey windows and each was legally obliged not to block the views of a neighbour. A street-level entry would access the courtyard, creating a transition that allowed for intimacy and privacy within; rooms dedicated to family life were separated from those intended to receive outsiders. Mostar's Bišćevića house is a case in point: an austere entrance belies rooms of built-in cabinets, elaborately carved wooden ceilings and a windowed room that cantilevers over the Neretva River. In thriving commercial areas, houses like the Alajbegovića house addressed the commercial thoroughfare with a shop, with residential spaces above and behind.

Though Mostar was officially part of the Ottoman Empire until the third quarter of the nineteenth century, all of the territories that would later become Bosnia and Herzegovina enjoyed an unusual measure of independence in the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth centuries. Ottoman legislation assuring religious tolerance between Christians, Muslims and Jews had become an integral part of indigenous social and political values, and the city functioned as a bonded, multicultural social entity. In Mostar, historicist architectural styles reflected cosmopolitan interest and exposure to foreign aesthetic trends and were artfully merged with indigenous styles. Examples include the Italianate Franciscan church, the Ottoman Muslibegovića house, the Dalmatian Ćorovića House and an Orthodox church built with a gift from the Sultan.

THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN PERIOD

Bosnia was made a crown land of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1878, a move calculated to avoid a Serbian takeover. Though Mostar's city council aspired to autonomy, it cooperated with the Austro-Hungarians to implement sweeping reforms in city planning: broad avenues and an urban grid were imposed on the western bank of the Neretva, and significant investments were made in infrastructure, communications and housing. City administrators like Mustafa Mujaga Komadina were central players in these transformations, which facilitated growth and linked the eastern and western banks of the city.

New monuments and architectural styles reflected the aspirations of Mostarians and the Austro-Hungarian administration. Monolithic neo-Renaissance buildings towered over their diminutive Ottoman predecessors and introduced sober, imposing street walls to the city.



Above: the front porch of the Karadžozbeg Mosque built in 1577.

Below: view of the entry court of the Bišćevića house, an eighteenth-century example of domestic architecture built during the Ottoman period.



Above: a view of today's Maršal Tito Street at the beginning of the twentieth century when it turned into a broad avenue lined with tall neo-classical buildings inspired by Austro-Hungarian examples.

One example is the Municipality building. Designed by the architect Josip Vancaš from Sarajevo, it asserted a new prosperity, stability and tradition, linking Mostar symbolically with other European centres. Residential districts around the Rondo invited grand single-family homes and reaffirmed an occidental influence that complemented the city's traditional buildings. By the early twentieth century, elements of Art Nouveau and Secessionist styles began to appear in Mostar's historicist buildings, such as Josip Vancaš' Landbank constructed in 1910.

The inevitable hybrid that emerged from this period of intense building was a new monumental style that combined the massing of European prototypes with Orientalist details. This contamination is illustrated well by Franc Blazek's Gymnasium of 1902. Though its design was derived from Islamic styles of Spain and North Africa and bears no genuine relation with Mostar's Ottoman past, it reflects the tendency of Austro-Hungarian administrators to harmonise rather than suppress cultural difference within the empire.



WORLD WAR I TO SOCIALISM

The First World War was triggered in Sarajevo when Serbian “Black Hand” radicals confirmed their distaste for the incumbent empire by assassinating its heir, Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Fearing annexation by the Serbians, most Bosnians were loyal to the Austro-Hungarian Empire during World War I. Pragmatism and international pressure in light of a re-aligned Europe at the close of the war forged the “Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes” (later Kingdom of Yugoslavia), a constitutional monarchy that included Bosnia and Herzegovina under the leadership of Serbia’s Prince Regent Alexander. His attempts to “erase the old regional identities” antagonised all parties, culminating in a suspension of the constitution.

These internal conflicts were soon overshadowed by the advance of Hitler and the German alliance with an “Independent State of Croatia” (the NDH). A Partisan resistance in the region grew under the direction of Josip Broz Tito, and attracted large numbers of Bosnians. At the close of World War II, Tito was at the heart of a new socialist Yugoslavia. Between 1948 and 1974, Yugoslavia evolved from a repressive socialist regime to a federative socialist nation made up of discrete republics, of which one was Bosnia-Herzegovina. During this period in Mostar, the industrial base was expanded with construction of a metal-working factory, cotton textile mills, and an aluminium plant. Skilled workers, both men and women, entered the work force and the social and demographic profile of the city was broadened dramatically; between 1945 and 1980, Mostar’s population grew from 18,000 to 100,000.

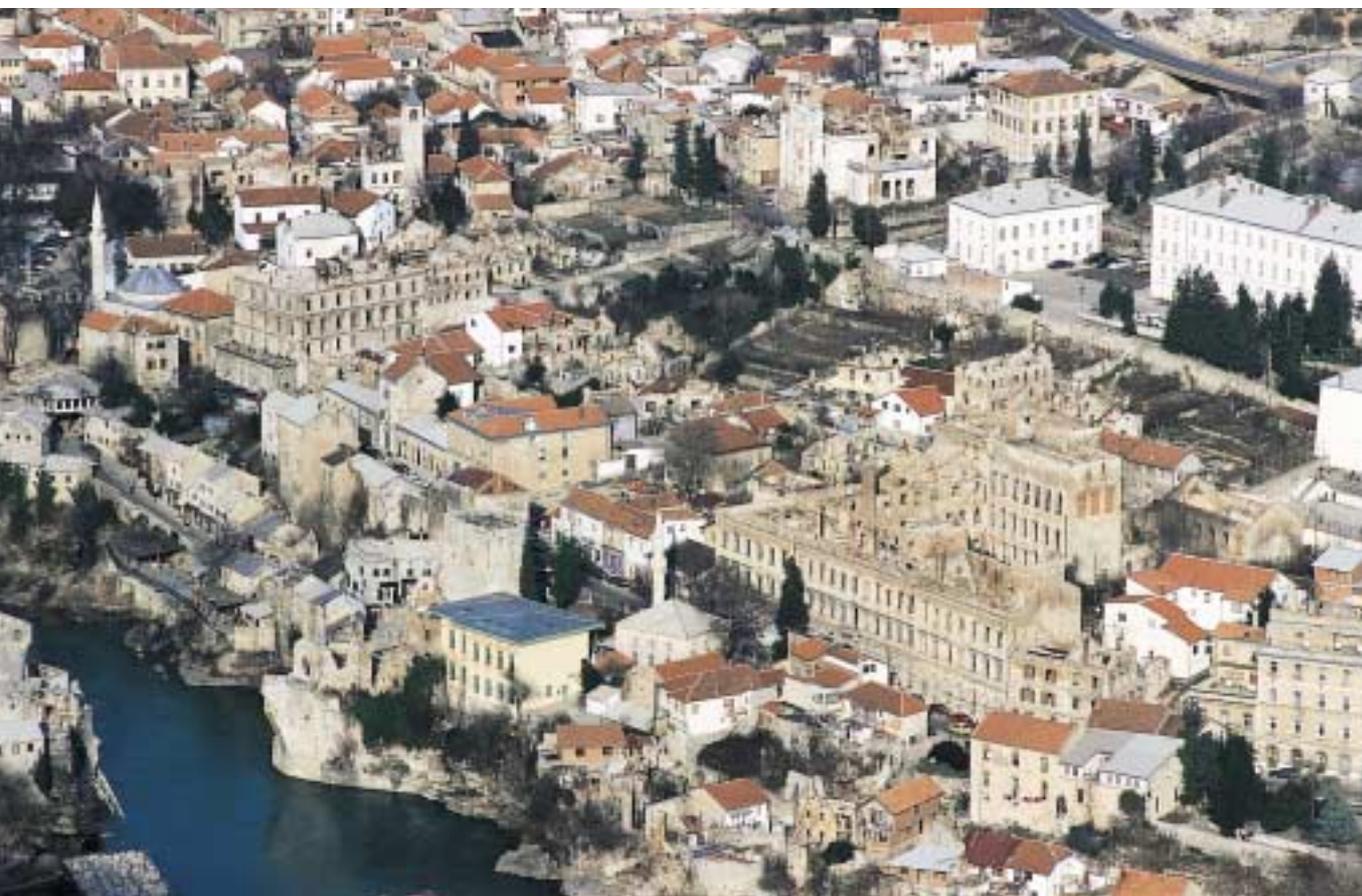
Because Mostar’s eastern bank was burdened by inadequate infrastructure, the city expanded on the western bank with the construction of large residential blocks. Local architects favored an austere modernist aesthetic, prefabrication and repetitive modules. Commercial buildings in the functionalist style appeared on the historic eastern side of the city as well, replacing more intimate timber constructions that had survived since Ottoman times. In the 1970s and 1980s, a healthy local economy fueled by foreign investment spurred recognition and conservation of the city’s cultural heritage. An economically sustainable plan to preserve the old town of Mostar was implemented by the municipality, which drew thousands of tourists from the Adriatic coast and invigorated the economy of the city. The results of this ten-year project earned Mostar an Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1986.



Above: Mostar’s main theatre (to the right) was built along Maršal Tito Street after World War II, following the demolition of several old buildings. The functionalist architecture of the period resulted in the radical transformation of the traditional townscape.

Below: the 1970s and 1980s were marked by the construction of large residential blocks, associated with the functionalist aesthetic and social programmes of the socialist regime.

Opposite left: Mostar’s most prominent Orientalist building was Franc Blazek’s Gymnasium built in 1902 with classical proportions and Islamic details.



The destroyed Stari Most (to the left) and the ruins of Girls' High School (to the right) along Maršal Tito Street in a view taken after the 1992-1995 war. Monuments and prominent historic buildings were especially targeted by tank shells. The Girls' High School remains in ruins to this day (see pages 59-61).

THE COLLAPSE OF YUGOSLAVIA

During the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, ultra-nationalist leaders in the republics enjoyed political ascendancy which would have been unthinkable under Tito. Alija Izetbegović formed a new government in Bosnia, which included the representation of Muslim, Bosnian-Croat and Bosnian-Serb parties. In 1992, 64% of the Bosnian electorate voted for a state “of equal citizens and nations of Muslims, Serbs, Croats and others”. Days later, Sarajevo was under a siege that would last more than three years. During this same period, Bosnian Serb military and paramilitary forces pursued a campaign of terror and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. Mostar was overwhelmed by Serbian military units, and shelled from the surrounding hills during May and June of 1992. Nearly 100,000 people were forced from their homes and over 1,600 died. Many historic buildings in the old city, including most of the city’s important mosques, were heavily damaged. Even the Old Bridge was hit by a shell.

A Croat-Muslim Federation was able to expel Serbian forces by June 1992. Shortly thereafter, local Muslims and Croats became adversaries due to competing territorial ambitions and ongoing political instability. The Bosnian-Croatian Militia (the HVO) took possession of the West Bank of the Neretva, expelling many Muslim families from their homes, and initiating a new round of hostilities in what was termed the “second battle of Mostar”. More than 3,000 people were killed, and another 10,000 were sent to concentration camps. Throughout the HVO’s assaults, the Old Bridge was a favoured target for hostile artillery. On November 9, 1993, the bridge’s springline was hit at point-blank range by a Croatian tank shell and Mostar’s 400-year-old symbol fell into the cold Neretva River, provoking deep sadness for citizens throughout the city for whom the Bridge had represented everything permanent and inviolable.

MOSTAR SINCE 1995

President Izetbegović of Bosnia-Herzegovina and President Tudjman of Croatia signed a Federation Agreement on 18 March 1994, which provided for an interim administration by the European Community in Mostar, a city still coveted by both Bosnians and Bosnian Croats. Following this partial peace agreement, Mostar remained a violently divided city; the east side remained without electricity, running water, 70% of its pre-war housing units and nearly all economic activity. In the years following, European Community administrators were able to engineer political equilibrium, implement humanitarian assistance, restore essential infrastructure and build new schools.

NATO’s intervention in the region began with the signing of a “General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina” in Dayton, Ohio. Delineating a Muslim-Croat Federation covering 51% of Bosnia’s territory and a Republika Srpska covering 49%, this agreement led to increased stability. By June of 1996 local residents of all backgrounds and absent refugees were able to participate in elections for a unified city government in Mostar. Today, there is a growing local economy and a joint administration, in which Muslim and Croat officials alternate in the post of Mayor and Deputy Mayor. Moderate and centrist politicians have put forward a conciliatory political agenda with increasing success and public support. As wartime tensions slowly fade, energies are being poured into new commercial and civic projects – including the reconstruction of damaged historic architecture – which have fostered a growing sense of hope in the city and its future prospects.



Above: the Musala area as seen from the west side of the Neretva River following the war. Both Tito’s Villa (to the left) and the Neretva Hotel (to the right) were severely damaged.

Below: map of the Balkan region with the location of Mostar after the Dayton agreement of 1995.

