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BOOK REVIEW

Kenneth Morrison and Elizabeth Roberts, *The Sandzak: A History*, London: Hurst & Company, 2013.

Hamdi Fırat Büyük*

“The Sandzak: A History” by Kenneth Morrison and Elizabeth Roberts (2013) sets out to analyse the history of the region of Sandzak (*Sandzak*) starting with the first Slavic settlements located there up through Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian rule and ending with today. More importantly, almost half of the book is devoted to exploring the experience of Sandzak during the Yugoslavian era, thus giving important insights on the region in a timeframe accompanied by the Balkan Wars, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, two world wars and the reign of Tito. Additionally, with this important piece, the authors offer the readers an opportunity to trace the history of the Sandzak region not only through the dissolution of Yugoslavia but also up until the year of 2013. Even though there is a lack of academic literature within the fields of history, political science and international relations on the region of Sandzak, no one denies the important and unique situation of the Sandzak region in Balkan history. Hence, the book is of vital significance for those students, researchers

* PhD Student in International Relations at Ankara University and Researcher on Balkans at the International Strategic Research Organization (USAK), h.firatbuyuk@hotmail.com.

and academics of not only the Sandzak but of the Balkans at large.

In the book, the detailed and well-defined chronology of the Sandzak's history covers a wide breadth of topics such as urbanisation, trade, geography and politics, among others. Seeing that many aspects of the Sandzak's history had been hidden from view up until now, this book has undoubtedly illuminated such blind spots in our knowledge on the region. The book starts with a discussion on the establishment of the Novi Pazar, which is both the largest province and the capital city of the Sandzak region. The meaning of the Novi Pazar is "new bazaar/market"; Ottoman Turks established the city as a new trade and military hub to assist them in expanding their reach throughout the rest of the Balkans and to Europe. In this way, Novi Pazar had occupied a central position in the Ottoman Balkans for almost a century, long before the city of Sarajevo came to prominence. Yet, Novi Pazar began to lose its importance as Ottomans moved the central garrisons and trade networks to Sarajevo and other cities in the newly invaded lands of the Balkans in preparation for further territorial conquest.

The history of the Sandzak during the period of wars between Austria and the Ottomans, and also between Russia and the Ottomans, was well covered in the book. According to the authors, during the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans the Sandzak came to occupy a unique position in the region. Here, when Austria annexed the "*Eyalet of Bosna*" the Sandzak acquired its own provincial administration as "*the Sandzak of Novi Pazar*" - the name of the region originates from this title as Sandzak denotes a specific governmental province in Ottoman Turkish - and therewith the Sandzak identity was truly created. The history of the Sandzak from then until now is well-explored by the authors, including the region's experience during the two world wars, under the kingdom of Yugoslavia and within the Tito era. However, the lack of an in-depth discussion on Islamization of the Sandzak, and Balkans at large for that matter, leaves something to be desired. In spite of the fact that Islam is the most important pillar of the identity formulations of the people of the Sandzak and the driving force behind the Sandzak of Novi Pazar's initial establishment, the authors afforded very few pages to

addressing the period. The religious cleavages between the ethnic groups of the Sandzak, including Serbs, Croats, Muslim Bosniaks, Turks, Albanians, Montenegrins, etc., could have also been allotted more space within the book in order to foster a better understanding of the Sandzak and its roots for its readers.

Despite the lacuna of an analysis on the region's process of Islamization in the book, other time periods were delved into in great depth, particularly the era of Yugoslavia and its dissolution. Here, the Sandzak Muslims' position and their interactions with Bosnia during the Bosnian War was described in painstaking detail. For instance, first-hand information and extensive field research was employed in the discussion on the Sandzak's referendum for autonomy as well as the internationalisation of "the Sandzak Question". Additionally, the authors draw a realistic picture of immigration from the Sandzak to Sarajevo and other Bosnian cities, explaining the societal dimensions of Sarajevo after this wave of immigration and the Sandzak Muslim's involvement in the Bosnian War. The authors state with examples that there is obvious societal cleavage between Sandzak Bosniaks (*Sandzaklije*) and Sarajeven Bosniaks (*Sarajlije*) in today's Bosnia.

In spite of the fact that the book outlines the history of the Sandzak region, it is also a valuable resource on Balkan history overall, as the Sandzak Question is of great importance for almost all countries in the region. For instance, by exploring the time period of the Balkans Wars that saw the removal of Ottoman rule over the Sandzak, the authors illuminate the complex network of relations that exists between the multiple countries of the Balkans. Another example of this type of insight is seen in the authors' focus on the Sandzak's position after the fall of Milosevic in Serbia and with regard to Montenegro's independence. Here, the book offers the unique domestic perspectives of Montenegro, Serbia and Bosnia regarding Montenegro's independence and the position of the Sandzak throughout the process.

Coupled with its deep historical analysis, what really makes this book stand out from the crowd is its concerted focus on the Sandzak in recent times. Here, for instance, authors claim that with Montenegro's independence, for the first time, a state border came to divide the Sandzak. Before and after the Montenegrin independence referendum, the people of the Sandzak had

difficulty in positioning themselves because, according to authors, those in the area of the Sandzak that fell within the borders of Montenegro have full trust in the Montenegrin capital of Podgorica while those within the borders of Serbia are still sceptical of Belgrade after the Bosnian and Kosovar Wars. While both the Montenegrin and Serbian Party of Democratic Action (*Stranka Demokratske Akcije* – [SDA]) which is the largest party of ethnic Muslim Bosniaks in the region, decided to vote against the independence of Montenegro, most of the Montenegrin Sandzakians actually voted for the independence, according to official data on the referendum. In this way, the authors came to describe the Sandzak after this point as the *lost Sandzak*, because despite its autonomy and despite the calls of all Sandzakians for a united Sandzak that have been heard since the Balkan Wars to the collapse of Yugoslavia, Sandzak was officially divided between two independent countries.

The book also underlines recent challenges to the Sandzak region. For instance, the authors defined Salafi and Wahhabi movements as a threat to the peace and stability in the region as they believe these movements and the actions of their adherents could increase and promote radicalism and separatism throughout the area. Also, the book explains regional issues revolving around the “*Reis-ul-ulema*” - or the chief Muslim cleric. Both the Montenegrin and the Serbian Sandzak Muslim communities have some issues with their respective governments when it comes to deciding on their religious heads. While it seems that the problem is almost solved for Sandzak Muslim communities in Montenegro, in Serbia there are still two heads for Serbia’s Muslim community as one is elected by Muslims and the other is appointed by the government. Moreover, this issue is gaining an increasingly regional dimension as other countries such as Bosnia and Turkey strive to have their voices heard in the debate.

Overall, *The Sandzak: A History* did well at addressing nearly all aspects and periods of Sandzakian history with the exception of the process of Islamization and the spread of Islam throughout the region. Additionally, the late and modern history of the Sandzak was explained in great detail with first-hand information and extensive field research; it is seen here that one of the

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authors' positions as a former diplomat in the field has actively contributed to the deep analysis put forward throughout the piece, especially when it comes to more contemporary issues faced by the region. Furthermore, the book offers a detailed history of not only the Sandzak but also of the Balkans in general, as the history of the Sandzak cannot be observed independently of other countries in the region. Also, the book's notes and references span nearly one hundred pages, thus bringing to view the authors' efforts and adding to the book's academic reliability. Finally, the book is an obvious contribution to the literature on Balkan and especially Sandzakian history, a field in which few sources exist. With this in mind, it is certain that *The Sandzak: A History* by Kenneth Morrison and Elizabeth Roberts will become a go-to reference for those who study the Balkans if not the Sandzak itself.