

**Balkan Idols:  
Religion and Nationalism  
in Yugoslav States**

*Vjekoslav Perica*

**OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS**

# BALKAN IDOLS

RELIGION AND GLOBAL POLITICS

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## PREFACE

Yugoslavia, that ethnically diverse country . . . began the 1990s with the brightest future in Eastern Europe. It boasted a literate, well-trained population that traveled frequently abroad, and had an unusually large number of companies that had evaded the inefficiencies of the communist economy and could compete on the international market . . . food shortages and lines at stores commonplace in the rest of the Eastern bloc were virtually unknown in a land blessed with fertile soil and a breathtaking coastline that attracted billions of dollars in foreign tourism.

*New York Times*, 13 April 1992

If you take all guns out of Yugoslavia, they would kill themselves with knives. Then they would use their teeth. . . . The historic controversies that Europe thought it had put behind it—nationalism, religious hatred—have blossomed and now drive the fighting. . . . Some Europeans fear that the war in Yugoslavia may represent the beginning of a new division of Europe—this time along religious lines.

*Boston Globe*, 28 October 1991

Religion is one of the major forces of conflict in our world today. Six months after Islamic radicals' deadly terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C.; as Hindus and Muslims clash anew in India; Jews and Muslims fight a bloody civil war in Palestine; and religion fuels conflicts and wars elsewhere in Asia and Eurasia, in Africa, in the Balkans and Northern Ireland; as religious organizations thwart democratic

transitions in many former communist countries; while religious fundamentalism accompanied with bigotry and xenophobia grows in the “Christian West,” religion causes concern more often than hope. Putting the Marxist “opium” metaphor in even stronger terms, the iconoclastic author Salman Rushdie has recently referred to religion as a “poison” for the people. Yet only a decade ago, the dominant global public discourse on religion portrayed it a force of peace, catalyst of the remarkable triumph of democracy over totalitarianism, and hallmark of a new ideal world order.

In the late 1980s, the end of the communist reign in Eastern Europe was approaching. The great change was accompanied by signs of what seemed a religious renaissance. In the multinational Yugoslav federation founded by the communists during World War II, the most visible opposition, the country’s religious institutions, celebrated what they perceived as a religious revival. Church attendance visibly increased. Large crowds turned out at massive liturgical events held in shrines, in the streets, in stadiums, and at historic sites. Like Eastern European clergy, the Western media cheered a “return of God” after the fall of the Marxist utopia. Churches were viewed as locomotives of democratization and as proven anticommunists, natural allies of the West (as they had been during the Cold War). Writing my column “Religion and Politics” in the Croatian weekly newspaper *Nedjeljna Dalmacija* from 1988 to 1991, I also repeatedly expressed the belief that religious institutions would contribute to the consolidation of liberal democracy in former communist countries. At that time, in addition to writing my “religious” column, I was also a public activist trying to contribute to democratization of church–state relations by serving on the state commission for relations with religious communities in Croatia. I believed that changes should have occurred swiftly and often could not grasp the sources of difficulties. I also hoped that multiethnic Yugoslavia would remain united and, thanks to her relative prosperity, rich resources, human capital, softer communism, and independence from the USSR, enter a full-fledged democratic transition before any other East European country. I was taught the lesson of history according to which the peoples of the Yugoslav federation could attain prosperity, liberty, and international reputation only through unity and multiethnic equality and cooperation. One does not need Marxist philosophy to understand and espouse such a lesson in Balkan history. Both common sense and a fair use of genuinely religious perspectives would reveal the same truth.

Optimism, like pessimism, is contagious. Communist regimes were collapsing throughout Eastern Europe, and the obnoxious Soviet Union ceased to be a global superpower. The American scholar Francis Fukuyama published his optimistic essay “The End of History?” celebrating contemporary Western states and societies as ideal-types of government. Another influential social scientist, Samuel P. Huntington, argued that at this moment, religion, notably Christianity (both Catholic and Protestant and possibly even Eastern Orthodox), had become increasingly and actively supportive of lib-

eral democracy worldwide.<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, religious scholars and apologists of faith published books about the mythic “final revolution” unfolding through the 1980s and 1990s, in which virtuous forces, notably churches, were ultimately triumphing over forces of evil.<sup>2</sup> Such theses even seemed to receive some kind of divine support. At Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina, visionaries and pilgrims allegedly received a message from the Virgin Mary that the current Balkan Marian apparitions would be the last such apparitions on Earth because Mary had completed her historic struggle for peace and justice on Earth!<sup>3</sup> In the spring of 1992, a group of jubilant Catholics, mostly from western Europe and the United States, even went to Russia and marched in Red Square carrying the Virgin Mary’s statue, celebrating what they perceived as a great, final, godly triumph in history.

At least for a moment, many (including me) believed in the advent of a “golden era” of peace and prosperity for all. The moment of truth, however, came soon. Starting in 1991 and at this writing, 2001, still continuing, the Balkan wars brought the quickly forgotten human practices of warfare, mass murder, torture, concentration camps, and genocide. Triggered by the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the Balkan wars dominated international news and world politics for most of the last decade of the twentieth century. What initially seemed to be a “distant local war,” a reminder of the Balkans wars of 1912–13 became the century’s marker.<sup>4</sup> The Yugoslav wars exceeded the dimensions of local or regional conflicts and evolved (like the Spanish Civil War or the conflict in the Middle East) into a “world war” of sorts. The technology of the communication revolution brought Balkan horrors into every home in the west. Western audiences and political establishments were shocked by the quick spread of hatred and the galloping war that so quickly tore apart the multiethnic and multiconfessional Yugoslav society. The Balkan malady, from which a nation was dying before Western cameras, especially worried leaders and citizens in every similarly structured and vulnerable multiethnic society. The fact that Yugoslavia was communist was cold comfort. After all, Yugoslav communism since the 1960s had been open to the world and softer than any similar regime. Notwithstanding, neither the crude communist multiethnic USSR nor the rigid communist regime in multiethnic Czechoslovakia disintegrated via genocide and massive human suffering as did the Balkans.

First casualties and artillery barrages in the Balkans were accompanied by Western political analysts’ efforts to explain the “roots” and “causes” of the conflict. Religion, the usual suspect in the long history of human conflict and suffering, became one of the primary suspects. In September 1992, the *New York Times* reported from Bosnia as follows: “[N]ew specters of ancient religious fervor are driving the ferocity of the fighting. They are accompanied by equally menacing memories and myths, which are fomenting the hatred among Muslims, Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs. These feelings have transformed the fighting in Bosnia into a religious conflict marked by zealotry and brutal extremism.”<sup>5</sup> At first glance, the religious war perspective



sounded appealing to the Western audience. Yugoslavia's multiethnic and multireligious structure could foster group rivalry that the communist system had failed to manage.

During the 1990s, books on Yugoslavia flooded bookstores and libraries. Most of this literature made no mention of religious institutions as a crucial factor in the conflict.<sup>6</sup> Among authors of several studies<sup>7</sup> that took religion seriously, the agile journalist and author Robert Kaplan, who specialized in reporting from conflict zones worldwide, became very influential.<sup>8</sup> In consequence, between the 1999 Kosovo War and the fall 2000 renewal of violence in Palestine, the Balkans and the Middle East, despite considerable differences, began to look like twin cases in world affairs.<sup>9</sup> During the media focus on the Balkan crisis, the West faced the risk of being both confused and afraid while also getting tired of "all those faraway places of which we know little," to rephrase the notorious dictum of Neville Chamberlain's in 1938. Another paradox was that two American scholars, presumably the most knowledgeable about religion in the Balkans, namely Sabrina Petra Ramet of the University of Washington and the Methodist scholar Paul Mojzes from Pennsylvania, although both published invaluable books,<sup>10</sup> still exerted only a minor influence that was confined to academic circles and experts like them who had no power to influence a broad audience or decision-making in Washington, D.C. What has been missing in the recent scholarship on Yugoslavia is a study explaining the uniqueness of the Yugoslav case and the concrete, active history-making forces, such as religious institutions. A documented history of religion and its interaction with ideologies, nations, and states has not been published. Consequently, the grand debate on the Yugoslav case in the West induced by the media focus on the Balkan wars in the 1990s ended up with the same preexisting popular misconception that religion per se, that is, the different beliefs and styles of worship, suffice to cause (out of the blue) serious conflicts. This misconception is especially harmful for countries like the United States, because in this multiethnic country, no less vulnerable than similar societies, some people have been seriously frightened by the Yugoslav disaster, while others have downplayed it, attributing to the United States some kind of immunity to what had befallen the allegedly "uncivilized" Yugoslavia.

The religious connotations of the Yugoslav wars also reignited the never-ending global scholarly debates about religion in a modern and changing world and about secularization, revival, and "new" religious fundamentalism. Some analysts argued that Yugoslavia is simply another case to sustain the hypothesis that the world is experiencing a surge in extraordinary religious activism (desecularization and revival). According to this argument, the ideological strife of the Cold War era was replaced by a conflict of cultures and religions or, as Samuel P. Huntington referred to it, a "clash of civilizations."<sup>11</sup> Opponents of the "desecularization" argument saw nothing sacred in Yugoslavia-like conflicts.<sup>12</sup> At any rate, recent comparative and general studies dealing with the new politics of religion worldwide, the

“new” fundamentalism, and “religious nationalism” have lacked a case study on religion in Yugoslavia.<sup>13</sup>

This study is not only on outgrowth of the Balkan crisis and debate of the 1990s but also the result of a several-decades-long scholarly inquiry about religion in Yugoslav states. Studies published between the 1960s and 1980s, predominantly works of sociology and political science, examined popular belief, secularization, and church-state relations.<sup>14</sup> Historians were especially interested in the interaction between religion and the crucial question of nationalism. As the communist era was nearing its end, religion became an increasingly interesting topic for historians of nationalism, at this time viewed as particularly important by the Serbian school of historiography.<sup>15</sup> In the 1980s, two landmark historical studies of nationalism in Yugoslav lands, written by Ivo Banac and Milorad Ekmečić, discussed the involvement of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Croatian Catholicism in nationalist politics and in ethnic strife.<sup>16</sup> Ivo Banac argued that religious relations among Yugoslav peoples “never occasioned religious wars on the scale of those fought in Western Europe after the Reformation.”<sup>17</sup> Banac, followed by other Croat historians, designated the ideology of Great Serbian nationalism, to which the Serbian Orthodox Church paid lip service, as the principal cause of the failure of the interwar Yugoslav kingdom, ill famed for its continuous ethnic strife.<sup>18</sup> A member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Milorad Ekmečić argued that religions and clergy divided several similar Slavic peoples, turned them against one another, and prevented them from forming a viable and influential European nation-state.<sup>19</sup> Ekmečić criticized all clergy as backward, sectarian, and conflict prone but singled out the Catholic Church as a “state within a state” that undermines every state, as it allegedly did in the South Slavic country with an Orthodox majority.<sup>20</sup> With the advent of war and rise of new patriotic historiographies in the successor states of the former Yugoslavia, the unfinished Banac-Ekmečić debate was expanded into a Serbo-Croatian-Muslim dispute over religion and church in history of the Yugoslav peoples.<sup>21</sup>

This study aims at becoming the first political history of religion in modern Yugoslav states. It combines a narrative and analysis. The narrative presents chronologically the process of the making, decay, and collapse of several regimes and nation-states, highlighting the role of religion in the process under consideration while also presenting a history of several religious institutions. The analysis, to put it most succinctly, deals with the role of religious institutions, symbols, and practices in state-formation and state-destruction. The largest portion of this study examines the largest Yugoslav religious organizations, namely the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Islamic religious organization (Islamic Community). In this study I write what religious scholars ordinarily avoid: a political history of religion. Finally, there are in later chapters several topics neglected by previously published works on religion and nationalism in Yugoslav lands, such as interfaith relations (ob-

served at an institutional level), church-state relations (analyzed on the basis of documentation from state archives and government agencies of the communist era previously inaccessible for research), the phenomenon of civil religion, the role of the mainstream religious organizations in landmark ethnic nationalist movements, exile politics and churches abroad, the international dimension of religious organizations' activity, and a number of other themes that have been either altogether omitted or insufficiently studied earlier.<sup>22</sup>

Religion is a highly complex phenomenon. I have been conscious of its nature but as a historian of nationalism, I had to narrow my analysis to religion's social and political dimensions in relation to that topic. For readers with a stronger interest in spiritual and cultural than political aspects of Balkan religions, I refer to works by religious scholars such as Paul Mojzes, Miroslav Volf, Mirko Djordjević, and Michael A. Sells.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, I looked at religion above all as the important source of political legitimacy and agency of nation-formation, especially relevant in an environment such as the Balkans. I was particularly interested in the impact of religion on the formation of multiethnic and multiconfessional nations—"nations of many nations" and nations of many faiths. Furthermore, I have espoused two important general assumptions about the role of faith in the formation of nation-states that came from a religious scholar and a sociologist of religion. The first is Reinhold Niebuhr's statement that "nations are held together largely by force and by emotion," where the emotional precondition for nationhood is provided by religion, and the second is Robert Bellah's argument that "a nation cannot be forged or changed by rational politics alone, without the appeal to the nation's soul."<sup>24</sup> Consequently, I also examined the phenomenon that I have termed "the Yugoslav civil religion of brotherhood and unity." This "invisible religion" (to borrow Peter Berger's phrase applied to a different discourse) has been ignored by earlier analyses of Yugoslavia, which viewed it as a communist trickery or at best mere rhetoric although millions of people sincerely embraced it and accomplished important things inspired by it. Brotherhood and unity was the faith of Yugoslavia's golden age. Faiths that preceeded and succeeded it are faiths of this country's dark ages.

Finally, a note about the scope of this study may be in order. In the process of research and writing, an initially modest scope has become quite broad and ambitious. This has occurred, so to speak, "out of necessity" rather than my own design. Although this book is mostly about what used to be the multiethnic nation of South Slavs, it is more than a case study, country study, or regional history. The first reason for this is the nature and complexity of religion. Second, hardly any book dealing seriously with the Balkans can remain within regional limits because of the crucial mutual impact between the region under consideration and the world, that is, because of the interaction between local and global history and politics. Small wonder one of the most valuable volumes emerging from the vast literature

produced in the wake of the global focus on the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s—Misha Glenny's *The Balkans, 1804–1999: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*—underscores that the understanding of Yugoslavia requires a broad perspective as much as European, and international histories of the modern era cannot afford to overlook Yugoslavia.<sup>25</sup> It must be acknowledged that Glenny is one of the few western Balkan analysts who realized two critically important things about the region under consideration. The first is that one of the major causes of the Balkan peoples' "eternal" troubles is their inability to cooperate with each other and attain some degree of unity for the sake of common good and liberty. For that matter, the lesson of Yugoslavia should be both about a remarkable failure and promise of success (i.e., potential through cooperation). The second is that the Balkan peoples shed their blood in order to master their own destiny only to realize after every cycle of massacres and wars that outsiders—the great powers—would decide their fate. Consequently this book cannot remain a case study even if it were designed as such because it examines a country of an extraordinary cultural heterogeneity that happened to be located in a region which, analogous, for example, to the Middle East, is the world in a microcosm. No less important, this is the region where Rome and Byzantium and later Ottoman Turkey and Habsburg Austria challenged each other and vied for souls and loyalties of the local peoples; where the notorious "Eastern Question" originated; where the 1914 Sarajevo assassination led toward World War I; where the first large heresy within the communist block was born; where the first large-scale post–Cold War conflict took place; and so forth. Consequently, a book like this one indispensably had to exceed boundaries of a country and even regional studies and, in addition to contributing to the Yugoslav scholarship, draw several broader generalizations concerning nationalism, religion, secularization, communism, and the world after Yugoslavia's collapse.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is a historical research monograph, so a few notes on sources seem indispensable. The documentation on which this study is based includes some Yugoslav communist-era documents, mostly obtained through municipal and regional commissions for relations with religious communities (called earlier “commissions for religious affairs”), as well as documents from government and party (the League of Communists) organs and agencies in the republics and the federation, obtained through the local commissions. Commissions for relations with religious communities were the only specialized agencies for church-state relations that harbored some data about religious institutions and occasionally produced good analyses and information—usually for a restricted audience (that is, confidential or semiconfidential material for state and party officials). One of a few valuable sources not produced by these commissions but still available to me during the research and writing of this book, was the bimonthly bulletin *Religija, politika, društvo* (*Religion, Politics, Society*—cited later in this English translation) published by the analytical department of the Yugoslav government’s news agency TANJUG. Thanks to my experience in the archives, a great deal of previously unpublished information is to be revealed in this book. The bulk of the research and fieldwork was carried out between 1985 and 1991, and most cited and examined documents originated between the 1960s and the late 1980s. Initially I intended to write a typical journalistic book on religion, communism, and the Balkan conflict. In 1993 I had completed such a book in Croatian. That unpublished manuscript became the key source of information for my doctoral dissertation, as well as this book.

During my doctoral and postdoctoral work in the United States (1995–2000) I consulted secondary as well as some primary sources. I was also able to acquire a new perspective and familiarize myself with the new art of conflict management developing in the United States. After completing the dissertation at the University of Minnesota, the research and writing of

this book was accomplished in Washington, D.C., above all thanks to the splendid resources of the Library of Congress. The period in Washington included my appointments as a Peace Scholar in residence at the United States Institute of Peace, Research Scholar at East European Studies division of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and a research analyst affiliated with the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress. When I began to teach history in the winter of 2000, I realized that I had had a privilege available to only a few lucky scholars, that is, to complete a major book-length work free from the teaching burden.

As noted in the preface, one reason why a coherent historical study in church-state relations and the religious dimension of nationalism in the Yugoslav states has been hitherto unwritten, was the restriction of access to both state and church archives during the communist era, as well as the near impossibility of document-based scholarly research under the postcommunist regimes. Nevertheless, scholars and journalists with good connections in the government, as well as some government officials, were able to publish a number of more or less well-documented analyses, doctoral dissertations, master's theses, and monographs based on documentation from government agencies, police archives, commissions for religious affairs, embassies, and other state organs. I had the privilege to work both as a Croatian government official and as a journalist with good contacts in religious institutions.

The documentation utilized here is relatively limited in scope and number. Most interesting documents I had a chance to read were communist-era confidential analyses of church-state relations and correspondence between government and church officials. Unfortunately I had no chance to reexamine archival material and expand my research after the fall of communism. According to the current situation, future researchers will be facing numerous difficulties, especially in the two largest successor states of the former Yugoslavia. In Croatia, for example, the Tudjman regime politically exploited communist-era archives and secret police files. The regime favored the Catholic Church to an extent that, according to unconfirmed information I received from private sources, an unknown amount of communist-era police files and documents from commissions for relations with religious communities had been transferred to private clerical possession and to the Vatican archives. It is noteworthy, however, that some documents about the Catholic Church in Croatia during World War II and under communism are kept in the Museum of the Victims of Genocide in Belgrade. In addition, the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., has recently acquired some material about the Croatian wartime state and the Catholic Church that came largely from U.S. sources and Serbian sources (always eager to discredit Croatia and the Catholic Church), with some coming from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In November 2001 the Croatian government turned over to the state archives 38,000 communist-era secret police files plus some six hundred new files from the Tudjman era (1990–2000) and

allowed affected citizens to familiarize themselves with these files' content. On this occasion commentators and editorials again noted that many files had earlier been destroyed or stolen, and some affected citizens rejected the right to read their files because they did not wish to take part what seemed to be another compromise between powerholders rather than a service to democratic transition. (See *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 6 November 2001, and *Feral Tribune*, no. 843, 10 November 2001.)

A vast amount of material on the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia and other religious institutions is still kept in former government agencies, government archives, and other institutions in of Belgrade. The Belgrade bi-weekly *Republika* wrote in May 2000 about Yugoslav president Milošević's use of secret police files and archival documents against political opponents. Unfortunately for researchers on communist Yugoslavia, the Serbian government also controlled the former Yugoslavia's government archives. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, much documentation was lost in the 1992–95 war. Still, some encouraging news came from researchers affiliated with Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C., who visited Sarajevo in 1999 looking for archival sources for the Cold War International History Project. They reported that a massive communist-era archive was saved and will be open to Western researchers. Similar news may soon come from the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia.

My autumn 1999 visit to Europe, the first after eight years in America, was filled with good sentiments only during my week-long stay in Berlin. As I traveled southward, I thought about a motto I found in a Bosnian "alternative" newspaper: *Što južnije, to tužnije* (the more you're moving to the South, the more it looks sad). After two weeks I gave up my efforts to conduct a "ten years after" set of interviews, because no one seems as open and ready to talk as during the prewar crisis (when none of us really expected such a war). Eventually I realized that my most effective tool is my experience and my research and fieldwork, carried on from 1985 to 1991 and updated with the hindsight of 1991–2000 and my Washington research.

In the bibliographical section of this book I list a number of documents in my personal archive from offices of commissions for relations with religious communities. None of those documents has been cited in similar studies on Yugoslavia published either in English or local languages. These documents are cited in the notes using their original titles, with a free translation by me in parentheses. Quotations from these documents and other sources in Serbo-Croatian also appear in my translation unless otherwise noted. Documents are classified and cited according to the institution of their origin rather than the location where they were kept (this includes almost all of the documents I have obtained through the municipal or regional commissions for relations with religious communities in Split, Croatia, between 1985 and 1991).

Finally, I would like to acknowledge support without which this book would have not been possible. I am indebted to several institutions and in-



dividuals for support, guidance, and encouragement that I received during the making of this book. First of all I remember with appreciation all those who were my friends, coworkers, and interviewees during the prewar crisis in former Yugoslavia and Croatia, when I worked for the weekly *Nedjeljna Dalmacija* and for the regional commission for church-state relations in Split, Croatia. My personal experience of the late 1980s and early 1990s eventually became what is usually called “fieldwork” and “area studies” that generated both my dissertation and this book. From this period I remember with special gratitude Marin Kuzmić, Vito Unković, Radovan Samardžić, Kruno Kljaković, Srdjan Vrcan, Tomislav Šagi-Bunić, and Ševko Omerbašić.

To Roko Andričević, Efi Foufulla-Gheorgiu, and my wife Sanja’s NASA fellowship in hydrological research I owe my coming to America. I also feel obliged to thank the United States for receiving me and many other members of my generation after the disintegration of our homeland. Furthermore, let me thank the University of Minnesota for admitting a Balkan latecomer to its Graduate School. Special thanks to my dissertation adviser, Professor Theofanis G. Stavrou, and all the teachers I met during my studies in Minneapolis. Furthermore, I acknowledge with gratitude dissertation fellowship awards that I received from the Jennings Randolph Program for International Peace of United States Institute of Peace and the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. I am especially grateful to Joseph Klaitis of the United States Institute of Peace for his support and encouragement beyond the dissertation. Many thanks also to the United States Institute of Peace Grant Program. And the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars–East European Studies has been supportive and invaluable to me during my doctoral as well as postdoctoral research. I would also like to thank the academic journals *East European Societies* and *Religion, State and Society* for permission to reprint in this book my earlier published articles or sections in published articles. I am also more than grateful for the precious advice as well as benevolent criticism I got from Sabrina Petra Ramet. Many thanks also to Zoran Mandić, Diana Roglić, Dražen Gudić, Pero Jurišin, Boris Orcev, and Momčilo Markuš for illustrations, various materials, and information they sent me from the Balkans during the late 1990s. I also very much appreciate the invaluable contribution to this book of the anonymous readers for Oxford University Press, Oxford’s editors Cynthia Read, Bob Milks, and Theo Calderara, copyeditor Martha Ramsey, and the series editor John Esposito. Finally, my gratitude to my family goes beyond words. I wish to acknowledge the concrete and invaluable service with editing, maps, and bibliography I got from my wife, Sanja, and our son, Karlo, as well as immeasurable support and encouragement I have received from Sanja, her mother, Nada, and our daughter, Maria.

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## NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE TERMS

Most foreign language terms and personal, institutional, and place names in this book come from the Serbo-Croatian, Serbian, and Croatian languages. The written languages are phonetical, which means that each letter of the alphabet represents a separate sound. Basic rules for pronunciation are as follows. The letter *c* is pronounced as “ts” or “tz” and is never pronounced as “k” (for example, *Stepinac* should be “Stepinats,” not “Stepinak” or “Stepăinek”; *Jasenovac* is “Jasenovats,” not “Jasenovak,” and *Srebrenica* is “Srebrenitsa”). The letter *j* is always pronounced as a *y* (*Jugoslavija* is “Yugoslavia” or “Yugoslaviya”). The most common diacritical marks are:

ć is pronounced “ch” (*Kuharić* is “Kuharich”);

č is pronounced “tch” (*Gračanica* is “Gratchanitsa”)

š is pronounced “sch” (*Milošević* is “Miloschevich”).

ž is pronounced “zh” (*Žanić* is “Zhanich”).

Toponyms appear in anglicized form only, as in “Belgrade” and “Yugoslavia” (the native language forms are “Beograd” and “Jugoslavija”), but only if the anglicized form is in general use in international news and literature. Otherwise the native language form is maintained (e.g., “Peć” instead of the historic “Ipek,” and “Marija Bistrica,” not “Maria Bistrica”). Most names appear in their native-language form, such as “Pavle,” not “Paul”; “Franjo,” not “Francis”; and “Alojzije,” not “Aloysius.”

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## CHRONOLOGY

1935–1939

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Holy See sign a concordat regulating the status of the Catholic Church in the multinational country. The largest nation's religious organization, Serbian Orthodox Church, opposes the treaty. On 19 July 1937 the "Bloody Liturgy" incident takes place in Belgrade, when the Serbian Orthodox Church stages demonstrations against the concordat and prevents its ratification by the National Assembly. The "Concordat Crisis" fuels hostility between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church of Croatia, aggravating crisis in the national turn.

1939

The Serbian Orthodox Church celebrates the 550th anniversary of the battle of Kosovo and improves relations with the royal government. Ratification of the concordat is canceled. The Croatian episcopate mobilizes Croatian Catholics for a nine-year celebration of the jubilee "Thirteen Centuries of Christianity in the Croat People."

1941–1945

Civil war along ethnic lines is fought in a Yugoslavia dismembered by Axis Powers. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia, led by Croat Tito, organizes the "People's Anti-fascist Liberation Struggle"—a successful multiethnic resistance to both for-

	eign invaders and domestic ethnic factions. Tito is backed by the Allies.
1941–1945	The Independent States of Croatia (NDH), allied with the Axis, brutally persecutes the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serb population in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Serb nationalist militia, the Četniks, massacre Croats in south-eastern Croatia and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Catholic Church hierarchy supports the NDH.
1946	The victorious communist government condemns religious leaders for collaboration with ethnic wartime regimes and foreign invaders. Many clerics and religious leaders are executed, jailed, or exiled. The Archbishop of Zagreb, Alojzije Stepinac, is sentenced to 16 years in prison. The Serbian bishop Nikolaj Velimirović goes into exile, and the theologian Justin Popović is sent into long-term confinement. Numerous anti-Yugoslav ethnic nationalistic organizations are founded in the West. Some religious leaders and diaspora churches support these émigré groups and organizations.
1948	Yugoslavia breaks from the Soviet Union but preserves independence. The Serbian Orthodox Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, exiled in the United States, urges Serbs in America to petition the United Nations for recognition of Croat massacres of Serbs during World War II as genocide he compares to the Inquisition and the Holocaust. The Tito regime sentences to long prison terms a group of Bosnian Muslims who fight for an independent Muslim state.
1952–1953	Yugoslavia and Italy are involved in a heated border dispute. The Italian anti-communist pope, Pius XII, makes the jailed Archbishop Stepinac a cardinal and excommunicates the Croat communist Tito from the Catholic Church.
1960	Cardinal Stepinac dies in confinement. Germanus Djorić becomes head of the Serbian Orthodox Church with the con-

	sent of the regime and initially refrains from championing ethnic nationalism through the Church.
1962	Branches of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North America secede from the Serbian patriarchate in Belgrade, and the Macedonian Orthodox clergy announce a similar intentions. The Serbian Orthodox church is weakened while Yugoslav Catholicism and Islam recover and expand.
25 January 1966	In the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, the first historic Catholic-Orthodox interfaith prayer service is held in the city cathedral in Split, Croatia; a Croatian bishop and Serb-Orthodox prelate worship together. Interfaith cooperation spreads throughout country, including Protestants and Muslims as well as Catholics and Orthodox. The regime cautiously supports this new ecumenism, which helps to stabilize the country's ethnic relations.
1966	A protocol on talks between the Holy See and government of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is signed in Rome, leading to the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two states.
1967	The orthodox clergy in the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, with local communists' backing, secedes from the Serbian patriarchate in Belgrade. The Serbian Orthodox Church does not recognize the new national Orthodox church and blames the regime for inciting the schism.
1968	The Serbian Orthodox Church, defying the authorities' ban, organizes a commemoration of Serb medieval ruler Dušan in downtown Belgrade. Patriarch Germanus returns the Church to a nationalist course.
1968–1969	Bosnian Slavs of Muslim faith are recognized by the regime as a nationality under the religious label. The Islamic Religious Community changes its name to



	<p>"Islamic Community" but rejects ethnic nationalism and supports Tito's federation.</p>
1969	<p>Patriarch Germanus writes to Tito seeking government protection against Albanian attacks on church property, clergy, and faithful in the province of Kosovo. In September, the Serbian Orthodox Church celebrates the 750th anniversary of ecclesiastical independence. The 1969 jubilee is the first such massive religious event publicly celebrated in the communist country since 1945.</p>
1970	<p>In Sarajevo, the Bosnian Muslim nationalist Alija Izetbegović publishes a document entitled "The Islamic Declaration—A Program for the Islamization of Muslims and the Muslim Peoples." Izetbegović uses Islam to mobilize Bosnian Muslims in a struggle for nationhood and statehood. A few Muslim clerics join him at this point.</p>
1975–1984	<p>The Croatian Catholic episcopate organizes the "Great Novena," a nine-year jubilee entitled "Thirteen Centuries of Christianity in the Croat People." After the Polish "Great Novena of the Millennium," in the 1950s, the Croat Novena is the most grandiose religious event freely celebrated in the communist countries of Eastern Europe.</p>
1979	<p>The Catholic Church in Croatia begins annual commemorations of Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac, persecuted by the communists. The regime protests but does not ban the commemoration.</p>
1980	<p>Tito dies in Belgrade. The two largest churches send condolences to the government. The Islamic Community and the Macedonian Orthodox Church hold commemorations in churches and mosques.</p>
1981	<p>Unknown arsonists, suspected to be Kosovo Albanian separatists, set ablaze the residential section of the Serbian medieval patriarchate at Peć, near the Albanian border. Serbian bishops seek govern-</p>

- ment protection of Serbs in Kosovo.  
Belgrade media focus on Kosovo.
- 1981 At the Croatian village of Medjugorje in western Herzegovina, a group of children announces through Franciscan priests that they see daily a Croatian-speaking Virgin Mary. The Medjugorje apparitions draw crowds of pilgrims from whole world to take part in what will become the longest and one of most massive series of Marian apparitions in history of Catholicism. The Serbian Orthodox Church perceives Medjugorje apparitions as the work of Croat nationalists and as a desecration of the mass graves of Serbs killed in the vicinity of Medjugorje by the Independent State of Croatia in World War II.
- 1983 In Sarajevo, Alija Izetbegović and a group of Muslim nationalists are tried in state criminal court for “hostile propaganda” and “spreading religious and ethnic hatred” and sentenced to long prison terms.
- September 1984 The Croatian Great Novena concludes with a “National Eucharistic Congress.” At the same time, the Serbian Orthodox Church organizes a pilgrimage and liturgy at the Jasenovac concentration camp. The event commemorates Serbs killed by the regime of the Independent State of Croatia during World War II.
- May 1985 A groundbreaking ceremony and worship service is held at the Vračar hill in Belgrade after Serbia’s government allows the construction of the Saint Sava’s memorial temple, commenced in 1935.
- 1987 Slobodan Milošević rises to power in Serbia. The Serbian Orthodox Church publishes a volume containing maps and pictures of medieval monasteries and churches in Kosovo to repel Albanian separatists and prove Serbia’s claims. Church’s newspaper, *Pravoslavlje*, publishes an editorial that urges the partition of Yugoslavia into Catholic and Orthodox parts.

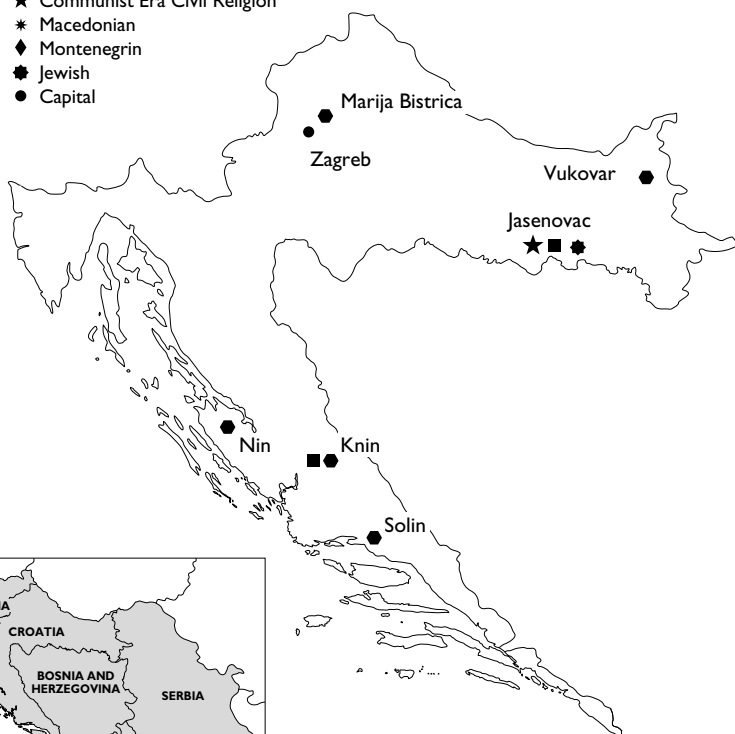
1989	Celebrations of the 600th anniversary of the Kosovo Battle are held throughout Yugoslavia. Slobodan Milošević speaks at the historic battlefield but does not attend the holy liturgy.
1989–1991	Serbian and Croatian bishops argue through the media and top-level correspondence over various issues in church history, most vehemently over the role of the Catholic Church in the Independent State of Croatia during World War II. By 1991 all forms of interfaith cooperation cease.
1990	Ethnic nationalist parties come to power in Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Religious institutions back them.
1990	A Belgrade newspaper publishes an interview with the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Germanus, in which this church leader says that the partition of Yugoslavia is inevitable and Serbs should establish a homogenous state of their own. He believes that peaceful partition is possible through Serbo-Croat negotiations that would also involve leaders of the Serbian Orthodox and Catholic churches. Several other Serb bishops echo the idea in interviews with secular and church media.
1990–1991	The Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina calls local Serbs to arm themselves and rise to prevent genocide in order to avoid new massacres of Serbs as occurred in the Independent State of Croatia during World War II. Serb uprisings spread through Croatia and later occur in Bosnia-Herzegovina.
1991	Serb and Croat bishops meet to call for a peaceful resolution of the crisis, but no church supports Yugoslavia's unity. On these meetings Serb bishops propose the partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina and changes of borders of Croatia. Talks collapse.
1991–1992	The Yugoslav federation, established by the communists in World War II, col-

	lapses. The Milošević regime in Serbia appropriates the Yugoslav name, under which it pursues Serbian nationalist politics.
1991–1995	Large-scale bloody wars are fought in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ethnic militia conduct genocidal “ethnic cleansing” practices. Thousands of churches and mosques are destroyed. Religious institutions support ethnic nationalist factions, blaming each other for the war.
1998–1999	War in Kosovo. In retaliation for the Milošević regime’s persecution and the Serbian Church’s role as the ally of Serb nationalism, Albanians attack Serb churches and expel the Serb population. The Orthodox Church remains in the province, with a few Serbs as guardian of Serb sacred sites.
1992–2000	International religious organizations and foreign religious leaders provide humanitarian aid and labor to reconcile hostile religious institutions in the successor states of the former Yugoslavia.
2000	The Milošević regime is ousted in Serbia, and the Orthodox Church improves relations with the state. The Tudjman regime is voted out of power in Croatia, but the Catholic Church continues to support the radical ethnic nationalist opposition. Ethnic nationalist parties, backed by religious organizations, remain strong in Bosnia and Herzegovina, now a multiethnic country with a highly uncertain future.
2001	Slobodan Milošević is put under arrest and brought before the International War Crimes Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia at the Hague, Netherlands. A war between Slavic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians breaks out in the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia.
February 2002	The Milošević trial at the Hague begins. The former Serb leader is charged with genocide and crimes against humanity.

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- Croat Catholic
- Serb Orthodox
- ☾ Bosnian Muslim
- ★ Communist Era Civil Religion
- \* Macedonian
- ◆ Montenegrin
- ✱ Jewish
- Capital

## CROATIA



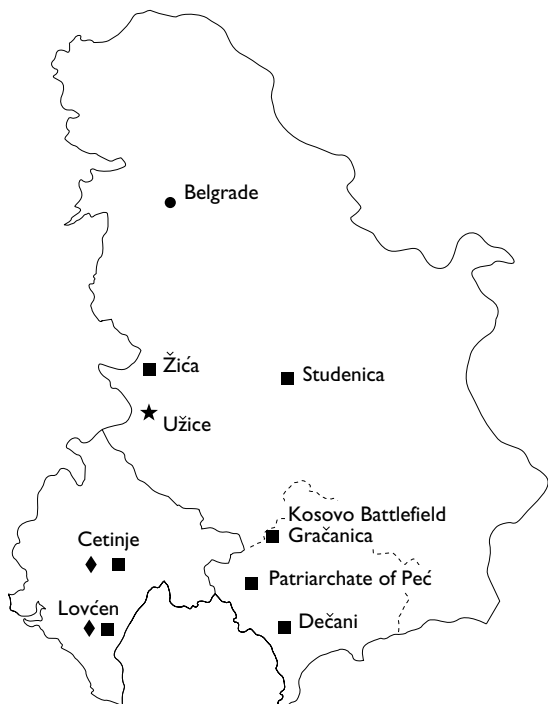
## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA



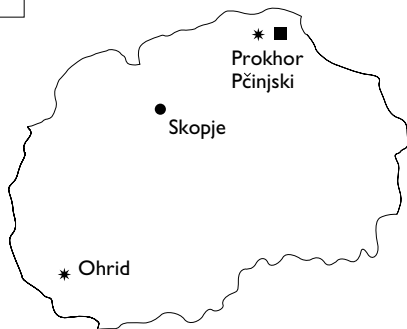
Sites of memory, martyrdom, and contesting myths

- Croat Catholic
- Serb Orthodox
- ☾ Bosnian Muslim
- ★ Communist Era Civil Religion
- \* Macedonian
- ◆ Montenegrin
- ✳ Jewish
- Capital

## SERBIA, MONTENEGRO, AND KOSOVO



## MACEDONIA



# BALKAN IDOLS



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## RELIGION, ETHNICITY, AND NATIONHOOD

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### Symbols

On 8 June 2000, as the war between the NATO alliance and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was concluding, the cover page of the Belgrade weekly *NIN* featured a blue-helmeted UN soldier (apparently from an African country) on guard duty in front of the fourteenth-century Byzantine church of Gračanica near the Kosovo battlefield of 1989. As the defeated Serb army left the Kosovo province, Albanian militants (mostly Muslims by religion) attacked dozens of Serb medieval churches and monasteries with arson and explosives. Young educated English-speaking Serb monks rushed to publicize these attacks via the internet, and Church authorities, by September, published a monograph about the destruction.<sup>1</sup> The Serbian Church deliberately forgot a massive destruction of Albanian villages and cultural centers and expulsions and killings of Albanian civilians committed by Serbs during the 1998–2000 Serbo-Albanian War.<sup>2</sup> Even more important, the Serbian Church did not take advantage of modern communication and publishing to tell the world about the destruction of thousands of Croat Catholic Churches and Bosnian Muslim mosques carried out by Serb militants during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1991–95. The Catholic Church published monographs about these “religious wars.”<sup>3</sup> The Bosnian Islamic Community informed the international community about the destruction of mosques.<sup>4</sup> Speaking of the religious dimension of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Serbian patriarchate cried out about what they called a “spiritual genocide against the Serb people,” listing hundreds of ancient and modern sacred places destroyed by Croats and Muslims.<sup>5</sup> It must be also noted that during the brief Croat-Muslim war in 1993–94, the two parties attacked each other’s sacred heritage and cultural landmarks. The decade of wars in the Balkans during the 1990s thus highlighted the crucial, centuries-old problem in the area: a mixed population of diverse ethnic and

religious descent and vague cultural boundaries that makes the creation of culturally homogenous nation-states via partition of land and peaceful drawing of state borders virtually impossible, or “possible” only at the expense of destructive perpetual wars. Sacred landmarks, as border guards and visible material cultural markers, were built for millennia by various empires, native regimes, and foreign invaders. Other monuments, as symbols of changes in history and guardians of memory, stood by sacred places in a region pregnant with one of heaviest burdens of history in the world.<sup>6</sup>

Reporting from the heartland of Yugoslavia in the 1970s, the *Washington Post* correspondent Dusko Doder described Yugoslavia as a “vague country” with a problematic identity and for an American visitor an especially confusing “landscape of Gothic spires, Islamic mosques and Byzantine domes.”<sup>7</sup> The local groups, however, know well who is who. “The ethnic group is defined by exclusion,” John Armstrong points out, and he emphasizes that “one ethnic group often constituted an antithetical duality with the opposed ethnic group. . . . [I]n the process of drawing inter-ethnic boundaries, the symbolic border guards such as peculiar architecture are critically important.”<sup>8</sup> The age of modern nations expanded the function of preserved ancient sacred symbols as material evidence of a the nation’s long tradition and continuity. “Sacred sites,” wrote Peter van der Veer, “are . . . the physical evidence of the perennial existence of the religious community and, by nationalist expansion, of the nation. . . . The history of shrines, as told in religious tales, and established by archeological evidence, is the history of the nation.”<sup>9</sup>

## Myth

In the modern era, forms of spiritual life have changed. Patriotic sentiments and national identities seem to have been by far more powerful as social forces, as well as individual emotions, than the beliefs in a heavenly God, angels, theologies, and religious myths that modern societies organized as nation-states inherited from antiquity. George L. Mosse referred to nationalism as a “secular religion” and implied that this kind of religion overpowered ancient forms of spirituality.<sup>10</sup> Enlightened thinkers such as Rousseau and Tocqueville, as well as contemporaries such as Robert Bellah and others, have spoken about the fusion and interaction between religious symbols, rituals, myths, and other similar practices and the new secular, profane forms of national identity and state worship, calling this phenomenon “civil religion.”<sup>11</sup> In regimes generally hostile toward traditional religion, such as communism and Nazism, various forms of secular worship of the state and political leaders and peculiar “secular religions” were engineered by power holders.<sup>12</sup> Yet traditional religious institutions found it hard to legitimize such regimes, so the term “civil religion” actually refers to more benign systems tolerant of all faiths as well as of nonbelief.

Regarding the phenomenon of the nation-state: it consists of territories with borders, peoples, armies, and bureaucracies, but that is not enough: the nation-state cannot exist without an adequate system of public patriotic worship, symbol, myth, and ritual. Nation-states require of their citizens not only that they be governed and they govern but also that they love their “country” and be prepared to kill, die, and lie for it. As in the case of religion, an individual or group’s disrespect of this requirement calls for some kind of excommunication, punishment, and sometimes even death.

Nation-states also cannot exist without history and myth, which also require a worshipful acceptance. Myth is a narrative about the origin, that is, “birth,” of the community. This narrative, often historically inaccurate, becomes *sacred*; that is to say, historical narrative becomes *religion* rather than history based on evidence.<sup>13</sup> According to functionalist explanations of myth, myth explains and justifies the existence and distribution of political power under current circumstances.<sup>14</sup> Myths make nations, and nations make myths. The crucial difference among the three Slavic Serbo-Croatian-speaking Yugoslav ethnic nations and the Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Muslims who constitute two-thirds of the population in the two common Yugoslav states is not religion (Serb Orthodoxy, Croatian Catholicism, or Bosnian Islam) but the *myth of national origin*, which is consecrated by native religious institutions. Hypothetically, in spite of the three religions involved, a different mythmaking, in which religious institutions could have collaborated, could have made the three a single nation, provided they agreed to espoused common faith, not in a single heavenly God but in a *common myth of national origin as a single nation*.

“No serious historian of nations and nationalism can be a committed political nationalist,” wrote Eric Hobsbawm, because “nationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not so.”<sup>15</sup> Nationalist historiographies are usual suspect—for being “mythical” and therefore, strictly speaking, false, created not by history but by scholars in service of power-holders and ideologies. Ernest Renan considered “deliberate forgetting” of certain events in history, such as crimes, moments of shame and defeat, bad things about heroes and leaders, and so forth, as important as the preservation of the historical memory of noble struggle, glory, and martyrdom that is the essence of national identity.<sup>16</sup> “Men calculate and compute with memory and forgetting,” wrote Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>17</sup>

## Institutions

For the Yugoslav peoples, Michael B. Petrovich pointed out, “religion was not so much a matter of *private* conscience as of one’s *public* identity. In some cases, the identification between religion and nationality was so great that a religious conversion automatically entailed a change of nationality, in the eyes of others if not in those of the convert himself.”<sup>18</sup> In the second

Yugoslav state, Tito's Yugoslavia (so called, after the country's communist leader, Josip Broz Tito, 1892–1980), the census of 1953 registered both religious affiliation and nationality and confirmed that ethnic, national, and religious identities commingled, creating the three “ethnic nations.”<sup>19</sup> The census data and ensuing empirical research confirmed that

there exists a rather strong correlation between religious affiliation, commitment to religion and involvement in the church on one side and nationality on the other. It is obvious that the Slovenes and Croats would be predominantly or exclusively Roman Catholic and Serbs and Montenegrins Orthodox and, consequently, that there would be a strong correlation between the national identity of the Slovenes and Croats and their religious affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>20</sup>

The major religious institutions worked together with modern secular nationalistic intellectuals on the task of creating the nations and nationalities of Yugoslavia by means of mythmaking, linguistic efforts, commemorations, and holidays and through the creation of “national saints” and calculations involving history and memory.

### *The Serbian Orthodox Church*

In his memoirs a Serbian archpriest recollects the following verses he was taught in his family as a child: “Srpsko je nebo plave boje; na njemu stoluje Srbin bog; a oko njega Srbi anđeli stoje; i dvore Srbina boga svog” (“The Serbian heaven is blue; the Serb God reigns in heaven; angel Serbs stand around him; and serve their Serb God”).<sup>21</sup> “More so than in the rest of Catholic or Protestant Western Europe,” wrote Michael Radu, “the Orthodox churches of Eastern Europe have long been openly and actively involved in national politics and are intimately and historically connected with the region’s dominant postcommunist ideology—nationalism.”<sup>22</sup> The Orthodox church in Eastern Europe was perceived as “the historic repository of nationhood, national values, and quite often, as the savior of a nation’s very existence.”<sup>23</sup> The historian of modern Serbia Michael B. Petrovich pointed out that “the Serbian Orthodox church was a cultural and quasi-political institution, which embodied and expressed the ethos of the Serbian people to such a degree that nationality and religion fused into a distinct ‘Serbian faith.’ This role of the Serbian church had little to do with religion either as theology or as a set of personal beliefs and convictions.”<sup>24</sup>

Serb rulers and bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church built shrines, monuments, and cemeteries as places of worship and markers along state borders and communal boundaries. Ancient landmarks show how the medieval Serbian kingdom was established and how it expanded, was destroyed, and was renewed in modern times. The oldest sacred landmarks are Žiça