



The Battle of Kosovo 1389: An Albanian Epic

By Anna Di Lellio

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The Battle of Kosovo of 1389 holds enormous significance in the formation of modern Balkan nation states, especially among South Slav and Serbian nationalist circles. What has given this single battle such resonance, even more than six centuries later, and what does it reveal about the complex tangle of identity in the contemporary Balkans?

Robert Elsie's beautiful new translation brings a little-known Albanian epic account of the battle between the Ottoman Sultan Murat I and a coalition of Balkan forces brilliantly to life. The fantastic tale of Murat's campaign in Kosovo and his assassination by the Albanian knight Millosh Kopiliq is more often presented from the Serb perspective, which extols particularly the valour of the Serbian knight Milos Obilic. By proposing an alternative narrative, *The Battle of Kosovo* offers a more nuanced understanding of this powerful myth of nationalism and belonging. Anna Di Lellio's sensitive commentary explores the significance of this epic poem and of the battle more generally in post-war Kosovo in reinforcing a collective identity that emphasises resistance against foreign oppression and identifies strongly with a European, predominantly Christian culture. *The Battle of Kosovo* is an important addition to our understanding of the past, present and future of this complex Balkan nation as well as the broader issues of national memory and identity.

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Editorial Review

Review

'The construction of national identities in the Balkans has been a fascinating process of creativity and destruction, of enrichment and impoverishment, for the history of the ethno-linguistic groups who once shared a common past. The Battle of Kosovo 1389 vividly illustrates this tragic duplicity, which continues even today in the region among Albanians and Serbs, as well as other ethnic groups, and can often descend into a history of insults and injuries. In contrast Anna Di Lellio suggests how, through the confrontation of different narratives of the same past, it is possible to build a postnationalistic narrative.' - Fatos Lubonja, author of *Second Sentence: Inside the Albanian Gulag*; 'Anna Di Lellio has afforded us a rare insight into an alternative - Albanian - tradition of the Battle of Kosovo. This valuable collection, meticulously translated, edited and commented, represents a labor of love that is simultaneously of great importance for all students of the Balkan past.' - Ivo Banac, Bradford Durfee Professor of History, Yale University; 'A superb volume with a fluent, close and eloquent translation. The Battle of Kosovo 1389 is a remarkable feat of synthesis - of interest to folklorists, linguists, anthropologists, Ottomanists and those who are interested in movements in contemporary history.' - Harry Norris, Professor Emeritus, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London

About the Author

Anna Di Lellio is Lecturer at the Graduate Program in International Relations at the New School University in New York and at the Kosovo Institute of Journalism and Communication in Prishtina. She is the editor of *The Case for Kosova: A Passage to Independence*. A sociologist, journalist and policy analyst who has worked in and on Kosovo for the past ten years, she holds a PhD in Sociology from Columbia University and a Masters in Public Policy from the Wagner School of Public Service at New York University.

Robert Elsie is a writer, translator, interpreter and specialist in Albanian studies. He has worked on Albanian culture and history for thirty years. Among his numerous publications, the translation of the Albanian classic, Gjergj Fishta's *The Highland Lute* (I.B.Tauris), represents perhaps the most remarkable achievement.

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