TRADITIONAL ARTS AND CRAFTS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Cristina Gregorin
Norbert Heyl

Published in November 2005, Editore DITRE srl, Italy

© 2005 Photography and book layout: Norbert Heyl
Text: Cristina Gregorin
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the proper permission in writing of the authors.

ISBN 88-902157-0-4

The designations employed and the presentation of the material throughout this publication do not imply the expressing of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the UNESCO Secretariat concerning the legal status of any country or territory, its economic or social development, or any aspect of its culture.

The authors are responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts contained in this book and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the organisation.

Cover: Linen kaleidoscope artwork, walnut lace and glass beads by Branka Mikanović (Bihac, Bosnia and Herzegovina) embroidered by Vida Vukićević (Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Page 1: Silver filigree vases by Mahir Hadibegić, Sarajevo.

Page 2: Engraved, silver-plated and treated jug and incense-boat on a small copper table engraved by Sahib Bashaćević.
INTRODUCTION

TRADITIONAL ARTS AND CRAFTS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Norbert Heyl
Cristina Gregorin

UNESCO
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FABRICS</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEATHER</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METAL</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOOD</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POTTERY</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STONE CARVING</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELIGIOUS ART</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A year after the First Ministerial Conference on Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe (Mostar, 19 July 2004), the cooperation process initiated on that occasion is starting to bear fruit. At Mostar, in the atmosphere of joy marking the celebration of the opening of the reconstructed Old Bridge, the Ministers of Culture of the participating countries of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe agreed to strengthen cultural cooperation in the region, specifically aimed at enhancing the shared cultural heritage as a key factor in human, social and economic development. That commitment, officially voiced by the Ministers in the Mostar Declaration and the Action Plan appended to it, was heartily welcomed by UNESCO, which took immediate steps to put it into practice. Accordingly, with the generous support of the Italian Government, appropriate action was taken by UNESCO, specifically through its Office in Venice, with the aim of preserving and enhancing the South-Eastern European cultural heritage. This book, which is being presented here today at the second Ministerial Conference on Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe (Venice, Italy, 25 and 26 November 2005) is one of the first concrete manifestations of this initiative. The aim of the work is to provide a view of traditional arts and crafts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a particularly rich and distinctive sector of the country's living cultural heritage. It should help to raise awareness of its value and specific interest and of the dangers facing its transmission to future generations. It conducts the reader along a visual path of vital aesthetic and historical interest, bearing witness as it does to the incomparable richness of traditional Bosnian craftsmanship resulting from a unique mix of cultural influences. I am confident that this work, while contributing to the preservation of precious traditional skills, will also help to emphasize the importance of sustaining cultural diversity as a source of creativity, that "forms the common heritage of humanity and should be cherished and preserved for the benefit of all" (Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, Preamble, art. 2).

Mounir Bouchenaki
UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture

This Work has been published with the financial support of the UNESCO Office in Venice.
The Balkan peninsula comprises three geographically distinct regions. It is surrounded on three sides by the Mediterranean Sea and has a mountainous central continental region that slopes downwards in the north towards the Sava plains. While the north is subject to the influence of central Europe and the South reflects the impact of the Mediterranean, therefore, the continental region, which historically has always been the most difficult to conquer and consequently impervious to outside influences, is considered the most authentically Balkan. The natural borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is a mainly mountainous country dominated by the massifs of the Dinaric Alps, are the rivers Sava and Una to the north, the Drina to the east, the Dinaric Alps to the west and the Karst Plateau of Montenegro to the south. The country also has numerous rivers, first and foremost the Neretva, famous for its emerald green colour, that flows into the Adriatic Sea.

In antiquity the peninsula was inhabited by the Illyrian people, of Indo-European origin. After the fall of the Roman Empire, which had conquered most of the Balkan region beginning in 9 AD, but whose cultural influence had never really penetrated into the interior of the peninsula, successive waves of invasions took place. The invaders included the Avars, the Goths and lastly the Slavs, who settled here during the 6th and 7th centuries AD, and who could be considered the ethnic group that characterizes the region. Croat tribes established themselves to the north of the Serbs, Herzegovina:

Stone, Herzegovina
Funeral monument of the type known as a stećak.
Stephen II Kotromanić introduced rulers were Ban Kulin and expanded further over the Kingdom of Serbia. In 1180 Bosnia was linked closely with Croatia, while in the Early Middle Ages, Bosnia was situated between these two large groups, and its population can be defined as ethnically and linguistically Slav, but the many conversions and mixed marriages that have taken place over time have given rise to an ethnically consistent but culturally and religiously diverse population.

In the Early Middle Ages, Bosnia was linked closely with Croatia, while Herzegovina was defined as an independent kingdom under Ban Kulun and expanded further over the next two centuries. Its two most powerful rulers were Ban Stephen Kotromanić (1322-53) and King Stephen Tvrko (1353-91), under whose rule Bosnia became the most powerful state in the Western Balkans. During this era Bosnia enjoyed relative prosperity thanks to its rich mines, above all its silver mines. It was in this period that miners from Saxony arrived, as well as merchants from Dubrovnik and other towns on the Dalmatian coast, and a number of market towns, such as Tuzla, Jace, Visoko and Mostar, were developed. Culture flourished, particularly in the areas of manuscript illumination and metalwork, as well as Bosnia's most legendary symbol of its wealth, the monumental decorated tombstones called stećci.

One aspect of Bosnian medieval history still much-debated concerns the nature of the indigenous Bosnian church and how much it was influenced by the Bulgarian Bogomil sect with its dualist or Manichaean beliefs. It is well-known that for centuries the Vatican accused Bosnia of heresy. Nowadays historians tend to diminish the role of Bogomilism believing rather that the isolation of the Bosnian church at that time - even the Bishop's seat had been moved north to Slavonia in the middle of the 13th century - had probably led to the development of unorthodox liturgy and religious practices that existed alongside some forms of heresy. The Bosnian church was undeniably persecuted, first by the Franciscans called in by King Stephen II Kotromanić when he was converted to the Catholic Church in the mid-14th century and subsequently by the last Bosnian king, Stephen Tvrko, who repressed the movement once and for all a few years before the Turkish conquest. Some historians believe that Islam was viewed as a reliable religious and social system for which the population had felt a need at the time and it was this factor that encouraged many Christians to convert. Nevertheless, Muslims remained a minority in Bosnia for long after the Ottoman conquest; there was no immediate mass conversion and indeed conversion was not particularly encouraged by the Turkish authorities, who levied higher taxes on non-Muslims. It was, indeed, during Ottoman rule that Bosnia and Herzegovina's rich cultural mix developed further with the arrival in the Balkans of Jews who had been originally expelled from Spain in 1492. Most of Bosnia was conquered by the Turkish sultan Mehmet II in 1463, with Herzegovina succumbing in 1481. Jajce, in the north-west of Bosnia, finally fell in 1527, from which time the country remained part of the Ottoman Empire until 1878, and was known as 'European Turkey'.

Turkish rule continued for 400 years. Bosnia was the Ottoman's border with Western Europe and by the seventeenth century Sarajevo was the second-largest city in the Turkish Empire. Towns and cities developed a tolerant mix of Muslim Bosniak, Catholic Croat, Orthodox Serb, and Sephardic Jewish cultures. Many architectural masterpieces were constructed - mosques, bridges, schools, inns, caravanserais, clock towers, and baths. Today Ottoman culture is an integral part of Bosnian cultural heritage in its architecture, art and literature. Ottoman influence, however, was visible above all in the towns that flourished during this period, while it was felt far less in hill villages and in the mountains, far from the centres of power. Even today, the arts and crafts that developed in towns for the benefit of patrons seeking luxury goods, differ from the popular art of the villages as a result of this oriental component. Migration was a feature of the Balkan peninsula for many reasons: wretched economic conditions, abuse by bands of plunderers, military invasions and, especially in the 19th century, the repeated shifting of the border between Austria and Turkey. The western border of the Turkish Empire corresponded more or less to that of present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, and was never left undefended or unpopulated. More than once, when famine and plague decimated the population, the Turks encouraged the Walachs, or Vlachs, a semi-nomad shepherd people originally from Albania and southern Serbia, of Serbian Orthodox religion and whose physical strength was an advantage for defending the border, to move here. But Christians living near the border, both Catholics and Orthodox often fled to Austrian territories, partly for religious reasons and partly to avoid the 'devshirme', a system requiring them to place their male offspring at the disposal of the Ottoman Empire. At regular intervals the sturdiest and most gifted boys would be taken from Christian families and removed to Istanbul, where they were converted to Islam and given an education. It is estimated that between 1463 and 1650 around 200,000 boys were moved forcibly from the Balkans to Turkey. Many of them made administrative careers, some of them becoming viziers, the elite corps of the Turkish army. The practice brought practical benefits for the Balkan population, as it led to closer relations between the capital and the European regions of the empire, so much so that the Slavonic language became in Istanbul the third language after Turkish and Arabic.

The years of the decline of the Ottoman Empire, from the second half of the 17th century onwards, were marked by harsh exploitation of the peasants and an extremely conservative administrative system. This usually did not allow Muslims to trade with Christians, and certainly did not absorb the new industrial and technological developments occurring in the West. Following the Berlin Congress of 1878, when the country was placed under Austro-Hungarian administration...
In a period of fierce nationalism, Austrian domination ignited social tensions that finally culminated in the assassination by Bosnian Serb nationalists on 28th June 1914 of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, and his wife Sophia, triggering off World War One.

In 1918 Bosnia-Herzegovina became part of the newly-created Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, renamed in 1929 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. During the Second World War Yugoslavia was occupied by the Germans and the Italians. During this short period Bosnia's Jewish community was almost completely eliminated. In these years the country was also the theatre of a civil war between the Serbian Chetniks and the Communist Partisans, as well as of the persecution of the Serb population in particular, along with Muslims, Roma and Jews. Approximately one million Yugoslavs died during the course of World War Two.

During the period of Turkish domination there was relatively little persecution of non-Muslim communities, although the Christian and in particular the Catholic churches were frequently oppressed, but all in all, Ottoman policies did not cause bitterness in relations between different groups. Impressions brought back by journalists and travellers in the early 20th century were consistent in reporting general mutual tolerance and respect among the different communities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Outbursts of violence during the Second World War were more the fruit of 19th century nationalist feelings rather than of ancient attrition.

In 1945 Bosnia and Herzegovina became one of the republics of the new Communist federal state of Yugoslavia under Josip Broz ‘Tito’, with Sarajevo as its capital. In the post-war years national and religious differences were suppressed in the name of a new social system, only to flare up in 1991 when, driven by a growing Serb nationalism, Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence and the Yugoslav government responded by sending tanks into both countries.

In 1992 Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence and a long and painful war ensued, which left the population with an emotional wound that has shattered the social fabric. Nevertheless, the essential cultural proportions of the country’s pre-war population remain unchanged and Bosnia-Herzegovina remains the home of Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Serbs, Croats, Jews and Roma. Following the 1995 Dayton Agreement, which ended the war Bosnia and Herzegovina was divided into two entities, Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina with Sarajevo as the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Tensions have not died down, but the desire to reconstruct and live in peace is strong. In Sarajevo, one of Europe’s most cosmopolitan cities, muezzins chant their prayers while church bells toll, and the beautiful Catholic and Orthodox cathedrals, along with the mosques, are open to all. In summary, one could say that the feature that most typifies the culture and history of Bosnia and Herzegovina is precisely the peaceful co-existence of different communities, of the intertwining of different styles and traditions. In spite of the horrors of the 20th century, it is this heritage, both ethical and cultural, that Bosnia and Herzegovina must now show to the world.
The richness and variety of local costumes have always played an essential part in the social life of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Until a century or so ago, a person’s attire, the decorations, colour combinations and many other details of which varied from one village to the next, expressed not only his or her membership of a community but also their social status and their wealth. Generally speaking, in the villages, making these clothes was a woman’s task, starting from the production of the fabric, in an economic system in which families had to be self-sufficient and cater to their own needs. Only a small part of the work was carried out by a number of specialised craftsmen. Things were different in towns, however, where the Turkish and Middle Eastern style influenced clothing and fabrics, which were of better quality for the wealthier classes and embellished by embroidering them with gold and silver threads.

While Muslim costumes obeyed religious and cultural precepts and were more or less the same throughout Bosnia, the costumes of the other communities mirrored a more Mediterranean taste.

It was specifically more Italian in the south, due to contacts with Dalmatia. However, in the North, bordering on Austro-Hungarian territory, the taste was more Central European. In the mountain areas of the Dinaric Alps in western Bosnia, clothes were made of heavy fabrics due to the harsh cold climate and were decorated with rich multi-coloured embroidery. The typical sleeveless leather cloak lined with sheepskin, of Asian origin, was apparently already used by the ancient Illyrians and by the Slavs. In spite of the influence of other peoples who later settled in the Balkans it has remained unchanged. It also seems that the typical short Turkish waistcoat worn by both men and women was so popular precisely because it was considered a natural variant of the sleeveless coat.

In the central eastern part of Bosnia the decorations on local costumes are usually simpler than those of the inhabitants of the Dinaric Alps. In Posavina, the northern region near the border with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in addition to a preference for rich floral patterns, raised embroidery as well as showy shirt collars for both men.
In Jevđici Brijeg, in Herzegovina, the Hercegovac cultural group keeps the tradition of songs and dances of the local Catholic community alive. In addition, the members make all the costumes for the group, according to past techniques. In the photograph, Mrs. Božica, dressed in her traditional costume, is using two metal brushes to card. Bottom: Stole with raised embroidery, typical of the Catholic tradition in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
and women were an important feature. Although the tradition of local costumes started to die out early in the last century, first in towns and then, some time after the war, also in the countryside, many of the techniques once used to work and decorate fabrics still remain. The recent war led to the migration of thousands of people from the smaller towns and villages towards places where their communities represented the majority of the population. It was first of all the women who had to bear the brunt of exile, leaving their homes and villages when many of the men were away at war. As a result, humanitarian associations were established in several towns in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to help these women overcome the trauma of exile and war. Alongside medical, psychological and financial help, it was also necessary to think of ways of actively employing them. Gašina Marjanović, founder and chairman of the Duga (Rainbow) association in Banja Luka, told us how various handcraft activities were organised. Those women who had chosen very traditional work, such as weaving,
embroidery and knitting were able to recall serene moments of their childhood or family lives. They regained part of their tranquillity earlier than those women who had chosen less familiar activities, such as dress-making using paper patterns. These centres took in women from all over the area without making any religious distinctions and on finding themselves all thrown together they were able to share their knowledge. Their curiosity towards the various items that were being created within the group and the fact of working together helped them to renew their traditions, creating clothes that could be worn on any occasion but at the same time featuring the elegance and refinement that only the talent of an expert craftswoman could provide.

Furthermore, the attention paid once again to the techniques that women had applied for centuries, induced them to try their hand at imitating the splendid hand-made garments of the past. With the help of experts in ethnography and various museums, the women belonging to Duga and those of Žene za Žene (Women for Women) in Sarajevo have been able to produce perfect copies of the original costumes. The ability to master their traditions confidently made it possible for them to bring them back to life. One of the problems that was encountered in creating replicas of the models of the past was the difference in the quality of the colours. Until the beginning of the 20th century and in some instances even later, women used to make dyes from plants, which gave rise to dull shades, particularly loved in towns, that could be coordinated harmoniously with one another. Nowadays there is a tendency to buy industrial yarn dyed with aniline colours that no longer have the delicate shades typical of vegetable dyes, and for this reason Duga now arranges to hand-dye some of the yarns. Among the various difficulties this return to tradition has brought up there were practical ones such as making the looms. Galina Marjanović succeeded in finding an old carpenter, who had to recall his earlier knowledge, since it appeared that looms of the kind needed had not been made in Banja Luka for the last fifty years.

When Duga managed to organise the first exhibition in town, visitors marvelled at finding objects that reminded them of olden times they had believed lost forever. The main goal of the Žene za Žene association is to make women aware that they can be financially independent. They therefore organise various one-year courses for teaching specialised skills and improving the quality of the products. Jasmine is a costume designer and has been working in this field for many years. She teaches how to match colours, develop designs and patterns and improve the quality of the stitching. Carpets, typical of the whole Balkan peninsula and present in every household in the past, are a particularly interesting product. Those made in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially, are considered the most beautiful and the most famous.

The patterns of these carpets have not been influenced by Ottoman tastes and are still based on the typical geometrical lozenges, spiral or zigzag designs found as decorations on ancient medieval tombs and even on archaeological finds from earlier times. These carpets, known as
Kilims, feature flat-woven fabrics and are made either on horizontal or vertical looms. The weft threads are passed under and over the warp threads, and the pattern is obtained by running weft threads of various colours backwards and forwards over the warp to create the chosen design. The choice of colours and their combinations vary from one place to another. Generally speaking, townpeople used to prefer softer colours while villagers liked them to be livelier, although this was not a set rule.

Woollen articles are also very characteristic. Living as they do in a mountainous country with a continental climate, Bosnians have always worn woollen garments. In mountain villages, where the main activity was sheep-rearing, life in the open air made wearing heavy garments a must. These were closely-knit garments so that the cold air could not penetrate.

At Muslim weddings it was often customary for the bride to wrap a stole she had embroidered around the shoulders of her closest relatives.

Top left: Typical Bosnian carpet woven on a vertical loom by the women of the žene za žene association of Sarajevo. In making these carpets, following the patterns and matching the colours according to tradition is considered particularly important.

Top right: Stole embroidered with extremely fine silk thread to create a flower pattern, made by the žene za žene association.

Opposite page: Carpet woven on a vertical loom by the žene za žene association. These delicate colours are typical of the Austrian period, while the geometrical pattern dates back to a far older indigenous tradition.
Brightly coloured gloves and hats knitted by the Žene za Žene association.

The rigid continental climate of central Bosnia has always made woollen garments a must. In Bjelašnica, a mountain area not far from Sarajevo, famous as the venue of the 1984 Winter Olympics, a trend combining several colours creating a very pleasant chromatic effect developed in the early 20th century.

Right: A Žene za Žene association weaver working on a carpet on a vertical loom.
Socks are usually knitted using five needles, while gloves and hats are knitted with a single needle. Until early in the 19th century the colour combinations were based on black and white, but then more lively colours began to be used, particularly in the mountain area of Bjelašnica, near Sarajevo. Bjelašnica became famous particularly at the time of the 1984 Winter Olympic Games. The villages on the southeast-facing slopes, in particular, produced a vast variety of woollen socks that could not be found anywhere else in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The patterns were either geometrical or floral, and each type of sock had its own name. The beauty of these hand-made articles is the constant changing of patterns and colours. Today they tend to repeat traditional patterns as well as to invent new ones.

In the past, young women not only had to prepare their trousseaus but the quality of their work was considered indicative of whether they were capable of taking care of their families and homes properly. In some places there was a custom of giving one’s future in-laws presents as proof of their skills. In the towns, embroidery, usually floral patterns sewn with very fine threads on extremely light fabrics, was particularly important. For Muslim marriages, it was the custom for the bride to cover her closest relatives’ shoulders with shawls embroidered by her. Another Muslim tradition was to hang white cotton or linen towels in the houses. These were delicately embroidered with coloured or gold or silver thread.

In the last two decades of the 20th century embroidery was practised mostly for personal use, and only recently its aesthetic value and economic functions have been rediscovered. This work is still carried on at home rather than in specialised workshops. However in the old town centre of Mostar Mustafa Šoše works in a tiny shop. Šoše, is a former aeronautical engineer, who with the patience of Job embroiders so perfectly that it is indeed impossible to distinguish between the right and wrong side of the fabric. He is aware of this and his first gesture is to show a splendid flower embroidery and then to turn the cloth over to show the reverse. Modesty, however, forces him to add that embroidery is for elderly, quiet and patient people like himself. Asked when he discovered that he had this talent, he replied that it was God’s will. He recalled how during the last war he was stuck at home and had found some spools of gold thread that his wife used for her embroidery. He began to embroider in order to fill the long days, learning from magazines and books. When the war ended he was unable to go back to his previous job and after a couple of years he thought of turning his pastime into a business. Šoše loves the creativity inherent in this work and prefers motifs copied from nature, above all flowers and trees, the beauty of which he believes contains the mark of the power of God. As a man of faith, he is ready to teach others this art, completely free. Šoše says that in life one has to give others a little of one’s material and also of one’s spiritual possessions.

In addition to reviving the dances and songs of the Catholic community of Herzegovina, the Hercegovac folk group of Široki Brijeg, near Mostar, also pays a great deal of attention to making traditional costumes: from the production of the fabric to the last stage.
Opposite page: two works by Mustafa šoše, Mostar. The copper and painted wooden frames symbolizing the windows of a mosque contain two pieces of embroidery against a background of black silk. The piece on the left shows the Prophet Mohammed carried into heaven by Buraq, his mythical mount, part horse and part-woman, with a peacock’s tail. The peacock, shown in the corner on the right, is the highest symbol of beauty created on earth by God; nevertheless its claws are too large, showing that only God is perfect. In the embroidery on the right, a religious text in the form of a stork, copied from the original by the 17th century calligrapher Izmail Yuhdi Top. Mustafa šoše with a piece of embroidery showing the old bridge of Mostar.
Opposite page: White cotton shirt with raised embroidery in gold and silver thread, made by the Hercegovac group. It is possible to recognise a cone and a spindle (tools used to spin wool) on the shirt.

Radoslav Cenić, a wool carder from Banja Luka. His customers are mainly country folk who bring small quantities of sheep’s wool to be carded, as industrial processing would be far too expensive. After being washed and cleaned, the wool is stranded, as can be seen in the photograph. It is then placed on the conveyor belt of an old machine, that was his father’s, and which carries it to the cylinders to be softened and picked.

of sewing and embroidering them. They get their linen and cotton from craftsman while the wool is bought raw by them and then carded, pressed and spun by hand. The group, founded in 1996, was joined enthusiastically by the students of the local secondary school, partly because its choreographer was their language and literature teacher. He and many elderly people have gladly taught them the customs, traditions and techniques of the past, for making the costumes as well as helping to bring popular dances and songs back to life.

While reviving the techniques for making wool is a matter of culture for the Hercegovac group, there are still some isolated areas of the country where people, far away from industries or in conditions of hardship, use this craft to meet their own day-to-day needs. In Banja Luka there is a small firm owned by Radoslav Cenić, whose family began to card and recycle wool in the nineteen-forties. His machines, second-hand even then, can wash and card small quantities of wool.

The competitive edge of modern industry is taking its toll, however, making it impossible to live only from this work and he has thus taken up other activities as well. Although the tradition of rich local costumes has died out and the production of fabrics with those symbolic and social values is now part of their history, the heritage left by this long tradition remains. In particular with reference to the techniques and to some decorative motifs, this heritage has found a modern application, keeping at the same time, the memory of the past alive.

Bottom: Radoslav Cenić, a wool carder from Banja Luka. His customers are mainly country folk who bring small quantities
Lightweight and strong, leather has always been put to many uses: from saddles and riding tack for horses to saddlebags, bags for men and women, footwear and containers for liquids. In every society the production of leather articles met the daily needs of the population, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where stock-raising meant that there was a large number of sheep and goats, and cattle as well, it became very widespread.

The leather used to be processed mainly by tanners from Sarajevo and Visoko, and trade via Dalmatia as far back as the 16th century, has been documented. Visoko, in particular, in a strategic position as far back as the 14th century, on the trade routes between Dalmatia and the interior of the Balkans, became a truly international centre for the production of leather and shoes. It has been calculated that in the 19th century the skins of 20,000 cattle and 60,000 sheep were used every year, and that the production of footwear may even have reached a million pairs a year.

Visoko is still an important centre for the production of leather, although the tanners have now disappeared.
Although leather is no longer produced by craftsmen, there are still some workshops, particularly in Sarajevo, where many items are made using ancient techniques. The various shoe shops offer very original models, rich with Ottoman influences but adapted to a modern lifestyle.

The Kalajdžisalihović cousins, who separately have continued their long family tradition (the first family shop was opened in 1822), are all very well known. Each of them has specialised in a different type of footwear: Adnan makes orthopaedic shoes, while Mehmed makes tough traditional shoes. Ahmed, instead, is the one who has proved most daring and has transformed the traditional cloth slippers, known as Ali Baba because of their oriental look, into shoes to be worn on any occasion. According to Ahmed Kalajdžisalihović, he got the idea in the nineteen-seventies from watching European and American tourists wearing these slippers out-of-doors. This made him think of designing a more comfortable and stronger version, gradually turning them into proper shoes. His resourcefulness has earned him notoriety and he now also works with some international designers. The path followed by Ismet Šarančić was completely different. He started by chance when he saw an old shoemaker who managed to work even though his hands were trembling. Impressed by this, he wondered whether he too, with his firm hands but no experience at all, would be able to make shoes, seeing that
Leather shoes by Ahmed Kalajdžisalihović, known informally as aladinkas. Right: Wooden last and aladinka by Ismet Šarancić, Sarajevo. Šarancić, too, started out in the local tradition but now making the traditional slippers tougher and embellishing them with a curl on the tip.

Opposite page: Leather sandals designed by Mensud Velagić, Sarajevo. These two models, the soles of which were cut asymmetrically, can be worn by both men and women.

he was never pleased with those he wore. He therefore started to experiment, tearing the soles off old shoes in order to understand their qualities and defects, but without attending any specialised courses or shoemakers’ workshops, since he had a factory job.

At that time Šarancić was a young man, interested mainly in the line and design of shoes, but with time he developed an increasing awareness for the quality of the workmanship. Finally he found the courage to leave his job and set up his own workshop. Šarancić has now made a name for himself and has a number of regular customers, and is even at times recommended by other shoemakers when they receive particularly complex enquiries. Recently he has worked for two Sarajevo designers, who won first prize with Šarancić’s shoes in a fashion competition.

His production is therefore opening up to an increasingly modern market, but retaining all the quality of crafted work. The shoes made by Mensud Velagić are also worth mentioning. Loved by a young clientele, they blend western and eastern elements in a very inventive manner, giving preference to very lively colours. His peculiarity is that he carries out each single stage of the process personally. He starts with the design and then goes on to make the wooden lasts. Then he cuts and sews the leather and, lastly he assembles the various parts. Velagić makes the lasts on the basis of the shoe he has in mind, since it is he who invents and works out the various models, different ones for every season, so that they are always exclusive. As we have seen, Visoko was famous in the past for its tanning activities and leather working. It is here that the last shoemaker capable of making opankas, a sort of moccasin that for centuries was the traditional footwear throughout central Bosnia, can be found. It seems that western shoes were first brought to Bosnia and Herzegovina with the arrival of the Austrians. Originally, opankas differed slightly from place to place, but rules governing dress were introduced during the Ottoman rule to enable the various different communities to be distinguished, and opankas began to differ according to this principle. The Orthodox community wore them with
Brightly coloured Aladinkas by Ismet Šaranić. The shoe has a long shape, like Western models. Ismet Šaranić at work on a shoe. Although he started almost out of curiosity, he has proved that he knows how to overcome all the technical difficulties that the cobbler’s craft entails.

Opposite page: Leather shoes by Mensud Velagić. The lively colours and the elaborate details have made Mensud Velagić’s shoes very popular with the young people of Sarajevo. Each model is different in the details of the decoration and in its shape, which means that different wooden lasts have to be made all the time.
upward pointing tips, Muslims wore flat ones and for Catholics they were black. In those days shoes were not made according to the shape of the foot and right and left shoes were identical, leading to the habit, particularly among the peasants, to change their shoes over from one foot to the other when the most exposed parts became worn. Efendira Ešref-Rešo started to work in his father’s workshop as a child, making modern shoes that by then were also worn in Yugoslavia. Opankas were not very fashionable in the nineteen-sixties as they were viewed as too traditional and out-dated. After the last war, however, many folk groups were formed and the demand for Opankas began to grow. Alongside the colourful traditional version, there is another that has been modernised in time. The predominant colour is the classical black and the upper has been raised. A few years ago Efendira Ešref-Rešo had the idea of leaving the natural colour of the leather, a successful decision, as it re-launched Opankas among young people, and now they have become very popular.
Leather bag and belt by Samir Avgić, Sarajevo. His leatherware is outstanding because of the elaborate patterns that he creates with his over 400 tools. Samir Avgić draws inspiration from tradition, both for the models of his bags and when decorating them.

As far as the production of bags is concerned, the name of Samir Avgić stands out. He follows tradition throughout the stages of processing and staining of the leather. The cutting and assembly are all done by hand and in developing the shapes. Apart from the quality of the work, the beauty of his creations lies also in the rich and varied tooled decorations and patterns he makes with the help of his collection of about 450 special tools. Many of these tools were bought in the United States, but in recent years a number of the American firms that used to make them have discontinued their production. According to Avgić, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find new ones. He therefore handles these tools with great care and never leaves them in the shop, preferring to put them away in a safe place.

One of the craftsmen whose leather work has become part of the history of Sarajevo is undoubtedly Mehmed Užičanin. He has been in the same shop for over 50 years and he remembers the times when the most sought after articles were horse saddles. Užičanin’s skill was such that...
Leather bags by Samir Avgić.

Left: Leather sandals by Mensud Velagić. The uppers consist of two intricately braided bands. This design was inspired by a Bosnian tradition.

Leather is thus the material in which it has been most possible to renew tradition, precisely because accessories such as shoes and bags adapt to new needs and follow fashions. These craftsmen have therefore contrived ways of allowing them to continue with the processes and techniques they have always used, but combining ornamental and design elements with present-day aesthetic tastes and needs, so that this art has stayed fashionable with good prospects for the future.
Thanks to the richness of the local mines, the craftsmen of Bosnia and Herzegovina have always distinguished themselves in the production and working of metal objects. According to Marian Wenzel, who was one of the most important scholars on the art and artefacts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the stylized images on the famous medieval tombs known as *stećci* portraying hunting scenes, horsemen and dancers or symbols from the world of nature, originated from the patterns carved or engraved on the containers made of silver and other precious or semi-precious metals that were once part of funerary accoutrements.
It is well known that Saxon miners came to Bosnia as early as the 14th century, attracted by the opportunities for work. Also in the following century blacksmiths and silversmiths who worked along the Dalmatian coasts moved inland, to the then independent kingdom of Bosnia, where they were appreciated above all at the courts of the aristocracy for whom they manufactured luxury items.

The Turkish rule led to the adoption of new techniques, new ornamental motifs and also new shapes. The use of copper for kitchenware was introduced, and containers made of this metal were lined with tin, which is very resistant to organic acids, so that they could be used to hold food.

Copper objects were part of the normal endowment of Muslim households and, starting in the early 19th century, also of Christian households, so that in addition to their utilitarian qualities they also acquired aesthetic functions. The Ottoman art of copperworking reached the peak of refinement between the 17th and the 19th century, when the main schools were those based in Istanbul, in the Caucasus and in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
There are countless combinations of geometrical and floral patterns, carried out according to tradition, even if this does leave scope for free expression.

First of all it is necessary to form an idea of the size, shape and rhythm of the main motif, that is repeated according to a certain order. The motif may be a flower, a bird or a geometrical element. Once this has been decided, the background, that is to say the spaces between one flower and the next, is worked, usually by dotting the surface. As an alternative, to give the object a lighter appearance, it is possible to pierce it with a very fine and sharp burin, removing part of the metal.

Sahib Bašcˇaušević comes from a family that has been practising this craft for well over a century. He worked with his father until a short while ago, and with his grandfather also. Therefore he has lived through the social changes that have led to a different way of using copper objects. From utensils that no household could do without, they have become decorative objects, often losing their original utilitarian function. Nevertheless, all the knowledge and the techniques he has assimilated remain, and many of the objects he fabricates are still in daily use.

The latter differed from the first two because of the clearer, more even and deeper engravings and the broader scope of the decorations. As techniques were refined, the pieces made became increasingly sophisticated and consequently a mark of social prestige, since their cost was dependent on the workmanship rather than on the material.

In the oldest part of Sarajevo, the Bašˇcaršija (market), the street names indicate the crafts that used to be practised here until not very long ago. One of them is the Kazandžiluk, that is to say the coppersmiths’ street, where the old shops still exist. This is probably due to the fact that their products are still purchased locally. Indeed, the typical coffee sets that you see in shop windows, can still be found in almost every household. These sets are tin-plated internally to ensure their practical use. The large jugs and plates, on the other hand, have now acquired an almost exclusively decorative function and are used only on special occasions. Although the chiselling work now tends to be simpler so that the objects can be sold at a lower price, it is still possible to find very meticulously worked pieces. After the container is shaped and before it can be decorated it has to be filled with molten lead to prevent the risk of deforming it while working with the hammer and chisel. Once the chiselling work has been completed, the object is put back on the heat and since lead melts at 250°C while copper requires a higher temperature (about 800°), the molten lead can be poured off and it is possible to go on to the finishing stage. At this point it is necessary to decide whether to treat the surface or to leave it in its natural state, or perhaps to silver or gold-plate it.

Since copper and silver tarnish in time, if a protective patina is not desired, preferring to let the object shine naturally, it will have to be polished regularly. Gold-plating is now applied by electrolysis in specialised workshops, taking care to cover any parts meant to remain natural with a protective varnish. Conversely they may later be coated with silver using a fine brush and a very steady hand. Each craftsman has his own particular style and in Kazandžiluk everyone recognises who it was that made a given article.

As techniques were refined, the pieces made became increasingly sophisticated and consequently a mark of social prestige, since their cost was dependent on the workmanship rather than on the material.

In the oldest part of Sarajevo, the Bašˇcaršija (market), the street names indicate the crafts that used to be practised here until not very long ago. One of them is the Kazandžiluk, that is to say the coppersmiths’ street, where the old shops still exist. This is probably due to the fact that their products are still purchased locally. Indeed, the typical coffee sets that you see in shop windows, can still be found in almost every household. These sets are tin-plated internally to ensure their practical use. The large jugs and plates, on the other hand, have now acquired an almost exclusively decorative function and are used only on special occasions. Although the chiselling work now tends to be simpler so that the objects can be sold at a lower price, it is still possible to find very meticulously worked pieces. After the container is shaped and before it can be decorated it has to be filled with molten lead to prevent the risk of deforming it while working with the hammer and chisel. Once the chiselling work has been completed, the object is put back on the heat and since lead melts at 250°C while copper requires a higher temperature (about 800°), the molten lead can be poured off and it is possible to go on to the finishing stage. At this point it is necessary to decide whether to treat the surface or to leave it in its natural state, or perhaps to silver or gold-plate it.

Since copper and silver tarnish in time, if a protective patina is not desired, preferring to let the object shine naturally, it will have to be polished regularly. Gold-plating is now applied by electrolysis in specialised workshops, taking care to cover any parts meant to remain natural with a protective varnish. Conversely they may later be coated with silver using a fine brush and a very steady hand. Each craftsman has his own particular style and in Kazandžiluk everyone recognises who it was that made a given article.

There are countless combinations of geometrical and floral patterns, carried out according to tradition, even if this does leave scope for free expression.

First of all it is necessary to form an idea of the size, shape and rhythm of the main motif, that is repeated according to a certain order. The motif may be a flower, a bird or a geometrical element. Once this has been decided, the background, that is to say the spaces between one flower and the next, is worked, usually by dotting the surface. As an alternative, to give the object a lighter appearance, it is possible to pierce it with a very fine and sharp burin, removing part of the metal.

Sahib Bašˇcˇaušević comes from a family that has been practising this craft for well over a century. He worked with his father until a short while ago, and with his grandfather also. Therefore he has lived through the social changes that have led to a different way of using copper objects. From utensils that no household could do without, they have become decorative objects, often losing their original utilitarian function. In spite of this, all the knowledge and the techniques he has assimilated remain, and many of the objects he fabricates are still in daily use.

The latter differed from the first two because of the clearer, more even and deeper engravings and the broader scope of the decorations. As techniques were refined, the pieces made became increasingly sophisticated and consequently a mark of social prestige, since their cost was dependent on the workmanship rather than on the material.

In the oldest part of Sarajevo, the Bašˇcaršija (market), the street names indicate the crafts that used to be practised here until not very long ago. One of them is the Kazandžiluk, that is to say the coppersmiths’ street, where the old shops still exist. This is probably due to the fact that their products are still purchased locally. Indeed, the typical coffee sets that you see in shop windows, can still be found in almost every household. These sets are tin-plated internally to ensure their practical use. The large jugs and plates, on the other hand, have now acquired an almost exclusively decorative function and are used only on special occasions. Although the chiselling work now tends to be simpler so that the objects can be sold at a lower price, it is still possible to find very meticulously worked pieces. After the container is shaped and before it can be decorated it has to be filled with molten lead to prevent the risk of deforming it while working with the hammer and chisel. Once the chiselling work has been completed, the object is put back on the heat and since lead melts at 250°C while copper requires a higher temperature (about 800°), the molten lead can be poured off and it is possible to go on to the finishing stage. At this point it is necessary to decide whether to treat the surface or to leave it in its natural state, or perhaps to silver or gold-plate it.

Since copper and silver tarnish in time, if a protective patina is not desired, preferring to let the object shine naturally, it will have to be polished regularly. Gold-plating is now applied by electrolysis in specialised workshops, taking care to cover any parts meant to remain natural with a protective varnish. Conversely they may later be coated with silver using a fine brush and a very steady hand. Each craftsman has his own particular style and in Kazandžiluk everyone recognises who it was that made a given article.

There are countless combinations of geometrical and floral patterns, carried out according to tradition, even if this does leave scope for free expression.

First of all it is necessary to form an idea of the size, shape and rhythm of the main motif, that is repeated according to a certain order. The motif may be a flower, a bird or a geometrical element. Once this has been decided, the background, that is to say the spaces between one flower and the next, is worked, usually by dotting the surface. As an alternative, to give the object a lighter appearance, it is possible to pierce it with a very fine and sharp burin, removing part of the metal.

Sahib Bašˇcˇaušević comes from a family that has been practising this craft for well over a century. He worked with his father until a short while ago, and with his grandfather also. Therefore he has lived through the social changes that have led to a different way of using copper objects. From utensils that no household could do without, they have become decorative objects, often losing their original utilitarian function. In spite of this, all the knowledge and the techniques he has assimilated remain, and many of the objects he fabricates are still in daily use.

The latter differed from the first two because of the clearer, more even and deeper engravings and the broader scope of the decorations. As techniques were refined, the pieces made became increasingly sophisticated and consequently a mark of social prestige, since their cost was dependent on the workmanship rather than on the material.

In the oldest part of Sarajevo, the Bašˇcaršija (market), the street names indicate the crafts that used to be practised here until not very long ago. One of them is the Kazandžiluk, that is to say the coppersmiths’ street, where the old shops still exist. This is probably due to the fact that their products are still purchased locally. Indeed, the typical coffee sets that you see in shop windows, can still be found in almost every household. These sets are tin-plated internally to ensure their practical use. The large jugs and plates, on the other hand, have now acquired an almost exclusively decorative function and are used only on special occasions. Although the chiselling work now tends to be simpler so that the objects can be sold at a lower price, it is still possible to find very meticulously worked pieces. After the container is shaped and before it can be decorated it has to be filled with molten lead to prevent the risk of deforming it while working with the hammer and chisel. Once the chiselling work has been completed, the object is put back on the heat and since lead melts at 250°C while copper requires a higher temperature (about 800°), the molten lead can be poured off and it is possible to go on to the finishing stage. At this point it is necessary to decide whether to treat the surface or to leave it in its natural state, or perhaps to silver or gold-plate it.

Since copper and silver tarnish in time, if a protective patina is not desired, preferring to let the object shine naturally, it will have to be polished regularly. Gold-plating is now applied by electrolysis in specialised workshops, taking care to cover any parts meant to remain natural with a protective varnish. Conversely they may later be coated with silver using a fine brush and a very steady hand. Each craftsman has his own particular style and in Kazandžiluk everyone recognises who it was that made a given article.
Engraved gold and silver-plated jug, sugar-bowl and cake-stand by Sahib Bašcˇaušević. While the shaping and chiselling stages are still carried out using older techniques, nowadays the gold-plating is applied by means of an electrolytic process. On the plate there is also a compass, an essential work tool that is fundamental in achieving a symmetrical arrangement for the decorative elements.

Top left: Sahib Bašˇcaušević while he works with his chisel, finishing a sugar-bowl.

Top right: Plate and soup-tureen by Mirsad Brkanić, decorated with engraved patterns. The tureen is first silver-plated and then engraved with a burin, a tool to make the natural copper colour of the pattern stand out.
objects on display could find a place on any table.

Mirsad Brkanić, too, carries on a family tradition that he is now passing on to his children. He never talks while he is teaching them. More than words, he says, what counts is to watch and understand, to learn the correct positions of the hands, the pressure to be applied to the hammer and the attention to be paid to the mark one is about to make.

Mirsad Brkanić also pays special attention to the tin-plating stage: if the plating is applied by hand it will last for 30 or 40 years, while if it is electrolytic it will have to be repeated more often.

The tradition of copper containers that continues to live on in Sarajevo, albeit to a lesser extent than before, has almost died out in Mostar. Many of the objects on sale in historic Mostar are actually bought from gypsies, renowned since the Middle Ages for their skills as coppersmiths and blacksmiths.

The copper items produced locally are, basically, decorative items. Specifically, many chiselled plates can be found, often depicting the Old Bridge that is the symbol of Mostar. The works of Ismet Kurt stand out among all these standardized pieces. His embossed and chiselled figures have a monumental quality about them and an expressive immediacy. His patterns are mostly figurative and recall the stećci and local folklore, but there are also elements associated with his painful war experiences, that inevitably affect the way he feels and works. In addition to going through a mourning process expressed in patterns such as graveyards or door symbols – taken to mean ways of escape from the difficulties of life - he also decorates and transforms the grenades that were thrown in their thousands on Mostar. This art form of recycling the tools of war, such as weapons, bombs and bullets, but even human bones, and transforming them into objects for peaceful uses, so that they lose even visually their original meaning of aggression and death, is known as ‘trench art’. This term was coined originally to indicate the works created by soldiers and civilians during and after the Great War, not only in the trenches, but nowadays it is used with a broader meaning that includes objects from any war.
Specifically, the decoration of bombs and grenades is known as ‘shell art’ and has many collectors and admirers.

Ramiz Pandur was in his workshop when the Old Bridge was blown up, and this terrible sight led him to put even more effort into his art, which is that of chiselling copper and then painting it. The idea had come to him originally in an endeavour to embellish his production, and over the years he has developed and perfected this technique.

Painting on copper was started in Italy in the 16th century and then spread throughout Europe. Since copper does not absorb colour and, unlike canvas or wood, it is not altered by temperature or moisture, the colours remain bright for a long time. There are several different ways of treating the surface, preparing the colours and mixing them with various oils, but of course these methods are part of Pandur’s trade secrets. At the same time, however, he is sorry that no-one else seems to want to continue practising this art. On the other hand, he says himself that “it is hard and dirty work”, and he has calculated that he has to go back to a given object 14 times before it is finished.

Ismet Kurt, a former engineer and war veteran, now decorates large copper plates with traditional and folk patterns of Herzegovina.
Opposite page. A woman’s face embossed and engraved on copper by İsmet Kurt. Inspired by the previous plate (page 57), Kurt decided to engrave a portrait of the best-looking of the women. The roundish face, almost as if alluding to the moon, is framed by a square shape. The two figures, male and female, at the sides, refer to the feeling of love inspired by the woman.

Left: Copper plate engraved, painted and treated by Ramiz Pandur, for whom the female figure surrounded by flowers and birds is a symbol of love and happiness.
It is work that requires plenty of patience before achieving the satisfaction of seeing it completed. His themes are mostly combinations of imaginary elements, nature and symbols from local folklore, such as joyful figures, dancers, birds, flowers or idealised Herzegovina landscapes, through which Pandur tries to express his love for life and his innate optimism.

Copper working, whether traditional, artistic or innovative, is still one of the major arts forms in Bosnia and Herzegovina. But iron, too, in spite of its mainly utilitarian applications in locks or knockers, or in the weapons industry, was once also used for artistic purposes. There are very few blacksmiths left now capable of expressing the full ornamental potential of this metal. One of these few is Malik Džulić, who definitely honours the blacksmith tradition. In his many years of activity he has done work for numerous mosques and churches as well as for some museums, including the one dedicated to Ivo Andrić in Travnik, and for many other public bodies. His love of nature and its beauty leads him to ennoble this hard material and to transform gates, standard lamps, mirrors and other decorative items into flowers, sprays and birds, all extremely elegant and graceful. Iron is now almost all imported, and only a few people are left who buy only the material and work it on site.

In the museum of the local Franciscan church of Our Lady of the Assumption in Kreševo, once a famous mining town, near Sarajevo, friar Mato indicates the many church ornaments and objects used in everyday life that used to be manufactured in the past and that were the pride of the town. One of the last few remaining firms still in business is that of the Tomdar family, who used to produce spare railway parts. Nowadays they make mostly agricultural tools using trying out new solutions and different colours and paints.
Kreševo, in central Bosnia, was renowned in the past for its wrought-iron work. Only a few firms are left now. Top: The Tomdor family make agricultural and other tools using a semi-industrial method. In the photos the blade of an axe is taken out of the furnace to be beaten on the anvil.

Right page: Malik Djulić’s workshop in Sarajevo: the anvil and tools for beating iron, the sturdiness of which clashes with the lightness of the flowers created.
a semi-industrial system or other items, some entirely hand-forged, although only to order. But in a village in the middle of a vast wooded area near Vareš, where many charcoal burners are still active, there is a small pre-industrial workshop run by the blacksmith Ivo Jozeljić. This area has always been renowned for its ironworking activities, as the great ruins of the industrial facilities set up here by the Austrians in the 19th century bear witness. Not even Jozeljić himself was able to say for how many generations his workshop had been there. Of the many workshops that used to exist in the town until World War Two, only two still remain. That is to say his own and the one belonging to another family that returned recently from Germany and set up in business again.

Jozeljić recycles scrap iron, including old railway tracks, and with the help of a hammer mill and his hammer and anvil he forges a whole range of essentials, such as agricultural tools including hoes, hammers, sickles, axes of various sizes, horseshoes that are also used for cattle and kitchen utensils that are subsequently sold in markets or along main roads, or to anyone asking for them. It is still possible to make a living out of this work, although he too has been feeling the effect of the crisis in recent years.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was also rich in silver, with which innumerable jewels were created, as well as belts, buttons and buckles for adorning traditional costumes. Gold was rarer and the privilege only of the wealthier classes, so that many people acquired the habit of gold-plating silver so as to look more important. The filigree technique, in particular, was used to create extremely refined works, and there are still master craftsmen today in Sarajevo capable of faithfully reproducing the masterpieces of the past.

Filigree is an extremely ancient technique dating back to 4000 years ago. It consists of braiding together two very fine gold or silver threads and using the new slightly grainy thread obtained in this way to create very delicate objects or jewels. It seems that the Arabs excelled in this art, purportedly because their warm climate led them to prefer these lighter ornaments. Thanks to the Crusades, the technique was also imported into Western Europe, although it was actually already Wrought iron rose by Malik Djulić. Djulić sees nature as the highest form of beauty and this is his interpretation of wrought iron. It is his way to feel closer to nature. Opposite page: Mirror with wings consisting of wrought iron roses. Malik Djulić is welding the parts of a wrought iron rose.
The area around Vareš, in central Bosnia, features many small waterfalls. Watermills were very widespread here, and were used to power several workshops, such as that of blacksmith Ivo Jozeljić of Ocˇevlja.

Far left: Anvil and horseshoes. On the left, we see how the water, carried in metal pipes, feeds a small mill. This turns the shaft which then, as shown in the bottom right photograph, drives the hammer, causing it to strike the iron.
known in Moorish Spain, and apparently the technique was first brought to Bosnia by some Sephardic Jews who arrived here following the diaspora from Spain in the 15th century. Even today this work is still basically a craft, since industrial means can do no more than use moulds to imitate the lace-like appearance of filigree, but sacrificing the beauty of it that consists precisely in using the braided threads. Thus, the value of an item depends both on the artisan’s technical knowledge — in particular it takes considerable skill to weld the threads together with silver dust heated on a gas flame — and on his aesthetic taste and creativity in developing the shapes and patterns. The basic elements are geometrical, spiralled or flower motives and arabesques, and they can be combined in ever new ways. The threads can be various thicknesses. A very fine thread will give rise to extremely light and suggestive but very fragile shapes, and for a jewel meant to be worn it is better to use a slightly thicker thread with a diameter of at least 0.5 or 0.6 millimetres, to make it stronger. To make the threads progressively finer, the master filigree-maker uses an iron device called a drawplate which has a number of holes in it, the openings of which are narrower on the side on which the thread comes out. Starting from a thicker thread, it will have to be pushed through each of the holes, one by one, until the required diameter is reached. Filigree is a highly labour intensive technique entailing high costs, so that this
Their talents they have serious doubts as to whether it will be possible to continue practising their craft. Filigree jewels are certainly rather delicate and the silver tarnishes and so it has to be polished. At the same time, filigree jewellery is not bulky and showy but elegant and discreet, and this special feature demands understanding.

Fahrudin Sofić’s jewels, on the other hand, are timeless. He is a well-known Sarajevo goldsmith who comes from a family that has a very long tradition, and whose mother was the first female goldsmith in the town. Sofić knows all about the history of Bosnian jewellery and makes jewels specifically inspired by the traditions of the early twentieth century when, thanks to the goldsmith’s schools opened by the Hapsburg government, the Bosnian style became more international. The goldsmiths were able to observe the objects sent there from Vienna, compare their work with new styles and travel abroad. Thus Bosnian jewellery, ethnic and elegant at the same time, came to be highly appreciated also in the Austro-Hungarian capital. Sofić stresses the importance of the various different cultures that, one by one, brought about changes in jewellery, starting from Jewish culture which, as seen with reference to filigree, reached Bosnia in the late 15th century. The Ottoman influence was also important, since for centuries, in Bosnia,
the elite consisted mainly of Turks, who set the style for luxury objects. Traditional jewels have several different motifs: flowers, above all small roses and birds, or the çınak, the shuttle used on a loom to pass the weft threads over those of the warp, and that is now a very popular motif for brooches and rings as a symbol of female culture. In particular, Bosnian jewellery sets great store on precious stones such as amethysts, sapphires, diamonds and brilliants, but at the same time it should not be too showy. Preciousness should be mediated by unadorned and elegant lines.

The craftsmen of Bosnia and Herzegovina give brilliant proof of their ability, continuing the very long tradition of transforming metal in its various applications into refined luxury items.
Diamond ring in the shape of a šunjak, the shuttle used on a loom to pass the weft threads over the warp threads. This model is widely used by women in Sarajevo and is frequently purchased together with a brooch as a set.

Bottom: Brooch with a net-like pattern and two small diamond rosettes, made by Fahrudin Sofić for his wife's birthday. Next to it is a sapphire and brilliant brooch.

Opposite page: Copper plate, embossed and chiselled by Ismet Kurt, Mostar. The motif refers to the ancient sport of young warriers on horses.
The abundance of woods and forests in Bosnia and Herzegovina has always facilitated the widespread use of wood, not only for many objects for day-to-day use, from cooking utensils to agricultural tools, but also for furnishing both country and town houses. Popular art therefore came to be expressed naturally through the many applications in which this material was used: musical instruments, shuttles, pipes and furniture were decorated and enhanced, reaching forms of extremely fine craftsmanship. The decorations varied from carvings of simple geometrical patterns progressing to the refined arabesques that still characterise the famous furniture made in Konjic, a town on the River Neretva, mid-way between Sarajevo and Mostar. On the other hand, for musical instruments, forms of anthropomorphic carving have been preferred, especially for the gusle, an instrument similar to a violin but with a single string or, more rarely, two, played with a bow. The gusle can be found more or less all through the Balkans. The strings used to be made of horsehair, although this tends nowadays to be replaced by nylon, which is tougher, while the soundbox is usually covered with goatskin. The neck and tip can be transformed into the animal shapes of the local fauna such as adders, horses or donkeys, or sometimes fantastic or monstrous animals. The bow is also sometimes carved into the shape of a snake.

In the past gusle players were highly respected members of the community. The songs they sang were usually stories of heroic deeds of the past or present and epic songs for entertaining the public by telling them stories. In Ivo Andrić’s novels the gusle player is often portrayed...
The instrument and the bow are richly carved, frequently with images from local fauna, such as snakes or horses, or those more symbolic such as eagles.

**Gusle** made by Mato Anić, Široki Brijeg.

The gusle is similar to a violin with a single string. It is found throughout the Balkans and is played with a flexible wooden bow. Both the neck of the instrument and the bow are richly carved, frequently with images from local fauna, such as snakes or horses, or those more symbolic such as eagles.
as someone apparently unassuming and insignificant, but as soon as he starts to sing silence falls and everyone listens, spellbound. As the stories are handed down by word of mouth, the themes tend to change and nowadays the songs tell of episodes from the recent civil war or more topical issues. Mate Anić comes from a family of gusle players of Široki Brijeg in Herzegovina. In addition to singing, he knows how to make typical instruments for folk music. He believes that compared with the nineteen-seventies, when he was young there is renewed interest in these forms of music. Anić learnt about wood and making instruments when he was young, as this tradition was handed down from one generation to the next. Anić’s son, too, learned, and his grandchild, only a few years old, is now inquisitive and tries to imitate his father and grandfather as they work. The choice of the wood is important: the best are sycamore for its strength and cherry for the ease with
which it can be worked. The wood has to be collected in winter, when it contains less sap, and it needs to be worked at once, while it is still fresh. It is then left to season for a few months before it is decorated and stained.

Another instrument made by the Anić family is the *diple* or bagpipes, the origins of which are probably even older than those of the *gusle*. An important part of making the *diple* is the preparation of the sheepskin used to make the bag containing the air. First it is soaked for a few days in water and salt to dehydrate it, then it must be softened by soaking it in milk for a couple of days followed by washing at least ten times a day for another few days. After this, the inside is rinsed and disinfected with brandy while the outside is treated with a normal emollient cream. When the *diple* is not being used it is put away in a plastic bag so that it will retain its softness, while in the past it used to be wrapped tightly in coarse paper to prevent exposure to the air.

Milan Bilbija of Prijedor, north of Banja Luka, also makes musical instruments according to the local
tradition, especially the tambur, a sort of guitar with three strings, as well as flutes, guitars and violins. Like Mate Anić, Milan Bilbija, who used to run a group of folk musicians who played the tambura and has won an award as an ethnomusicologist, feels that in order to make a good quality instrument one must also be able to play it. Knowing about wood is in any case essential.

For example, the piece covering the soundbox must have at least ten grains per centimetre, corresponding to the minimum age of the wood required to ensure good acoustics. The larger the number of grains the better the quality of the sound. As a craftsman Bilbija is best known for his wooden flasks, another typical product of folk tradition in Bosnia and Herzegovina and which, he says, were probably brought here by the Slavs in the 7th century. While the manufacturing stages are similar throughout the Balkans, each workshop has its own secrets. To prove his statement Bilbija shows off a beautiful Romanian flask made in the nineteen-thirties using special processes and very different from his own flasks.

In his workshop he has at least a hundred or so woodcarving instruments that he has made himself. Furthermore, Bilbija is a highly versatile person, and in addition to having prepared study programmes for craft schools for years, he has always taken a great interest in musical folklore and local history. His research also led him to discover an old abandoned mine, making him a very well known character in the area.

Music has always played an important part also in central Bosnia, and while in towns sentimental sevdalinkas were...
sung, mostly accompanied by the tambura or by the saz, a string instrument of Turkish origin, villagers preferred the diplo and the flute. Those made in Goduša are particularly interesting. This small town near Visoko has specialised for many years in flutes making. Also the čibuk, the typical local pipe of Turkish origin. Until the nineteen-seventies the wood of the pipes and flutes used to be left in its natural state, varnished and then carved using a red-hot tool. Later they began to be painted with colours of vegetable origin and in more recent years with alcohol-based aniline colours. Their size and decoration vary a great deal. While small čibuks are still used today, the larger ones, initiated in the nineteen-seventies, are mainly ornamental although in actual fact they work just as well as the smaller ones and some people do use them on special occasions. Vehab Halilović, a well-known craftsman of Goduša, has built himself a few machines to simplify some stages of the work. For example, instead of heating his gouges on a flame before carving the wood, he has designed an electrical device on which he mounts them so that they
will heat up more quickly. To model the inside of the flute he uses a bow fitted with a plastic string that makes the flute turn on the tool that shapes it. He then paints the flute with aniline colours already mixed with the varnish so that the colour is applied in a single stage, and then goes onto the final carving, so that the carved parts are left natural.

No-one knows how far back in time this activity started in Goduša. According to the people who live here it has always been practised, and Halilović says that nowadays about 80% of the 1500 inhabitants are involved, with different roles and working different hours, in making these objects, that are then sold to shops all over Bosnia and Herzegovina. There are no workshops, however, as the work is still carried on at home. Halilović says he will always be grateful to whoever it was who started this activity in the past, as making these objects has provided a livelihood for many generations.

One rather more refined application for wood is undoubtedly the production of carved furniture. The heart of this activity is in Konjic, in Herzegovina, which was already well known towards the end of the 19th century for its precious wooden furniture decorated with the geometrical patterns of the local tradition, arabesques of the Islam tradition or according to the taste and talent of the craftsman. There are currently two families who have stood out for several generations, the Mulićs and the Niksićs. Besim Niksić says that there used to be seventeen workshops before World War Two, but that first the war and then the socialist system had caused these crafts activities to

Mulić workshop:
Wooden boxes carved with geometrical patterns inspired by the Bosnian tradition. These boxes could be used to contain any object but their main purpose was as a jewel case. Chess is a very popular game in Bosnia. The chessmen in the photograph are made of fig and maple wood and are the work of Vehab Halilović.
Opposite page: A gauged and planed wooden box by Nikšić, Konjic.
Right: Cherrywood chest decorated with flower motifs made in his youth by Besim Nikšić. He now owns a workshop in Konjic originally established by his father in 1927. Before proper bedroom furniture sets came into use, these chests stored mattresses during the daytime, and the openings in the top were for air circulation. This one is now part of the Nikšić family’s drawing room.

Following pages: A drawing room used as a museum hall by the Mulić workshop in Konjic. At the centre there is a small wooden table whose legs were inspired by a bridge over the River Neretva.

The three-legged stools, tronožacs, are made of maplewood treated with walnut-coloured varnish.

The mahogany secˇija - cupboard furniture together with beroches - is embellished with oil-paintings of Bosnian landscapes.
collapse. Until the mid nineteen-seventies only making small souvenirs or repairs was allowed. Before World War Two Mulić’s maternal grandfather had a firm that employed 300 people. He later worked as a foreman in the factory after it was taken over by the state. When private ownership was re-introduced he resigned from his job in order to set up the firm again. The Mulić’s had a family museum that was destroyed during the last war apart from a few rooms that he keeps going at his own expense. The Niksić’s, too, are organising something between a showroom and a museum. They were stimulated to do this after they had the opportunity to buy back a set of drawing-room furniture made in the nineteen-thirties by the founder of the original firm for a customer in Belgrade. Both families are aware of the value and beauty of their work. The stages according to which they make their furniture are almost the same for both, only the stylistic details and the subtleties change. Both Niksić and Mulić are involved mainly in creating and designing furniture and the two families are now in healthy competition with each other. They do feel the impact of competition from those who imitate their work, but the quality is poorer in terms of both the type of wood used and the machining, and the products are sold at far lower prices. Mulić, in particular, complains that his name is often used by others, since there is no trademark protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It must therefore be hoped that awareness of this highly refined activity, through which an old aesthetic tradition is expressed, will grow.
Ceramic art has a very old tradition in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In some areas around Sarajevo very solid thick-walled terracotta containers engraved with simple geometrical patterns are still manufactured using hand-operated potters’ wheels. These containers can be found in many other Eastern European countries, and archaeological digs have corroborated the belief that this tradition dates back as far as the 7th century AD, when the Slav people first came to the Balkans. Glazed pottery, perhaps originated from the orient, came to Bosnia and Herzegovina from Serbia and Bulgaria in the 19th century. This art still survives in Gracanica and Doboj and in some villages of the Srpska Republic.

The tradition of painted pottery is still found in Visnaja near Lješkovo, but now becoming rare.

For many generations the Ohran family of Lješkovo, a village not far from Sarajevo, has been producing earthenware pots that are still widely used for cooking. The quality of the clay, which is found in a wooded area, is extremely good, so that it is not necessary to add any other chemical compounds and it needs no further treatment. All it requires is softening, with the help of a machine consisting of rollers and, of course, by hand, until the ‘right’ consistency, that only a potter’s long experience can
Recognize, is reached. The kiln, built by the two brothers, burns beechwood and reaches a temperature of 900 to 1000 degrees. The colour of the vases depends both on the type of firing and on the cooling process. If the natural colour of the clay is to be retained, the container is fired only once and then it is ready. If not, then during the cooling process the container is removed from the kiln and dipped into a mixture of water, oil and flour that darkens the colour.

Apart from the special orders they receive, the Ohran brothers make between 20 and 30 different standard models on their hand-operated wheel. One of these items, found in every household, is the typical earthenware cooking pot used to prepare the traditional local dish, the 'Bosnian stew', in which vegetables and meat are cooked together and remain warm even for the whole day. Emesdin Ohran pointed out that the quality of the clay was essential for cooking healthy food, which was the reason why these pots are still widely used. Their strength is now legendary, and tales are told of when, in times of incursions, it was customary to bury money and jewels in these pots, as they were capable of remaining intact underground even for hundreds of years, protecting their hidden treasures.

The Ohrans used to take their wares to markets and fairs, but now that they are among the last potters left making these traditional pots and are so well known, it is the customers who come to them. A few years ago, on his return home after spending some time in France, Oliver Arapović, who was fascinated by local ceramic art, decided that he would seek out the master ceramists of bosnian tradition, and thus met the Ohrans.

They joined forces and Arapović has...
Top: Sonja Bukić is shaping a vase, here on a hand-operated wheel.

Right: Emsedin Ohran shown while he models the lid of a pot on a hand-operated wheel.

Opposite page: The shapes of Emsedin Ohran’s jugs and vases as well as their simple geometrical decorations are all very ancient origin.

The streaky effect is obtained by dipping the artefact into a mixture of organic origin as soon as it is taken out of the kiln.
Top: Large flowerpot by Oliver Arapović, made according to traditional techniques, although its design has been modernized.

Opposite page: ‘Swinging Vases’ made of terracotta painted by Sonja Bikić. Although she uses traditional subjects and motifs, Sonja Bikić lets her inspiration guide her work producing items on the borderline between art and craftwork.
now learnt the traditional pottery-making
techniques but creates very different
objects, such as large imitations of antique
amphorae or large flower pots.
Sonja Bikić of Banja Luka, who
studied applied arts in Belgrade and
Budapest, also combines traditional
elements with an artistic and personal
vision of ceramic art. She herself wonders
where the border between craft and art
lies in her production. Indeed, she takes
care personally of all the stages of clay
preparation, starting from collecting it.
On reaching the modelling stage, on the
other hand, her artist’s intuition takes
over and the object she had imagined
that she wanted to make in a certain way
is transformed by the creativity of the
moment. Sonja stresses the fact that it
is precisely at the time of creation that
her ideas are developed. She sees the
technology underlying her craft as the
foundation of her work, while her
inspiration gives her free rein, in the
sense that it does not limit her work
to traditional objects.
While the Ohran brothers hand down
through their pottery a historical and
cultural heritage that continues to live on
among the population, Oliver and Sonja
starting out from that same heritage have
found ways of renewing the tradition,
enriching it with new and even
international suggestions.
In Bosnia and Herzegovina stone carving boasts ancient origins, where the stećci, medieval funeral monuments, are still admired today for their imposing size, the sobriety of the images, and the fascination inspired by the patterns. The meanings of these patterns often remain mysterious. Most of the 60,000 existing stećci are in the southern part of the country, and about 10,000 of them have bas-relief patterns. There are only a few actual statues, however, since these are not permitted, neither by the Muslim religion which does not allow the portrayal of human...
being, nor by the Christian Orthodox religion. Since in the early years of Christianity a tradition of this kind was never developed as it wished to stress its difference from the pagan cults that often used statues as objects of veneration.

There are, of course, many buildings, mosques and Christian churches, featuring both eastern and western characteristics, and are the mark of a unique architecture. One of the architectural masterpieces of the Ottoman period was the Stari Most, the Old Bridge, in Mostar. It is said that the architect, Hajruddin, built it over a period of nine years, paying great attention to ensuring its strength. Its design was very simple and functional, consisting of a single arch 29 metres long, made of blocks of Tenelija limestone from the local quarry in Mokosha. The blocks were held together by a layer of mortar and a system based on clams and dowels. The bridge has now been rebuilt using traditional techniques and materials. The new blocks were obtained from the same quarry used 430 years ago, and the only difference is that the pins today are made of corten steel.

After a long period of inactivity, the Mokosha quarry has been reopened. The firm Kamen Dent was granted a concession in 1995 and, alongside a production using very modern machinery, it also makes entirely hand-sculpted items such as fireplaces, panels, columns and architraves. These are the works of ten or so specialised stone carvers. One of these is young Mario, whose talent is such that he is already...
considered a master stone carver.
He says that he prefers flower patterns, since they bring joy and are a symbol of happiness. After studying at the stone carver’s school in Brač, Croatia, he also attended courses organised in Mostar by the French Embassy. These courses were extremely important for many of Herzegovina’s present stone carvers. For example for Miro Pistalo, a young stone carver from Mostar, who was commissioned by the Iguman Danilo Pavlović of the Žitomislići monastery, 20 km to the south of the town, to make copies of the original capitals, after the church, dating back to the second half of the 16th century, was deliberately dynamited in 1993. It had been possible to salvage a few icons and some of the interior decoration, however the actual building was completely destroyed. The rebuilding work, which started in 2002, is proceeding well. The stone carvers come from Trebinje, and so as not to prejudice the historical nature of the building they work applying the original techniques. Whenever possible they re-use the old stones, often joining several...
The Živomiljević monastery complex is being rebuilt exactly as it was. In the foreground are the remains of the old guest house while the new church is visible in the background. In the small photograph, two stonemasons employed by the eparchial workshop measure the blocks of stone.
fragments together by tessellation, and when new stone is used it is cut by hand.

The Vujinović family workshop is also in Trebinje. They were forced to abandon their land and workshop in their place of origin near the border with Croatia, and moved here a few years ago. The whole family had to start up the activity again from nothing. In addition to the father and son, the mother is also active in the workshop, creating mosaic tesserae cut from stone. As well as mosaic work, some examples of which can be seen in the monasteries of Saints Peter and Paul and in that of Tvrdoš, near Trebinje, the Vujinovićs also build funeral monuments and specifically traditional washing facilities. These architectural elements are often to be found in Orthodox monastery complexes, for the faithful to wash before entering the church.
The art of stone carving is anything but lost. Indeed it continues to produce significant art works thanks to the availability of an abundance of soft, easily worked limestone, and thanks also to a tradition that has maintained its specific characteristics. The many restoration works required after the war could provide an opportunity to re-establish a genuine stone carving school in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but in actual fact, all too often the contractors taking on the work hire personnel from outside, and this is holding back recovery in this field. The interest and the passion shown by the many young carvers, however, combined with the country's need for building work, could hold great prospects for the future.
Traditional wash facility build by the Vujinović family for the Saints Peter and Paul monastery near Trebinje. This small building is often provided in Orthodox monasteries. In the background, the ancient ruins of the church dating back to the time of Constantine.

Opposite page: The church of Crkvina in Trebinje was built recently on the model of the church of Gracanica in Kosovo. When building an Orthodox church, the height has to match the floor plan so that the proportions are harmonious.
In Herzegovina, a land in which the Orthodox faith was deeply rooted well before the Ottoman conquest, it is still possible to find splendid monasteries and churches. The decorative richness of these religious buildings springs from the idea of Orthodox spirituality, according to which everything, both worldly riches and spiritual life, must contribute towards the glory of God. Beauty is seen as a fundamental experience of human life.

Orthodox churches have therefore been distinguished by many precious objects, such as their icons, iconostases, chairs and pulpits, and also the use of marble and of interior decorations made of gold, silver and other metals.

In Dobrićevo, Sister Tekla, who was born in Crete, dedicates herself to painting icons. While she was a medical student in Athens, her spiritual experience grew profoundly, and she realised that painting was a means of her drawing closer to God. Her teacher was a fellow university student who later made a name for himself as one of the best known icon artists in Greece. After working for some time as a hospital doctor, Sister Tekla decided to become a nun, initially in the eparchial workshop in Trebinje.
Greece, later asking to be transferred to Herzegovina, a land in which she had always been very interested. She now lives in Dobrićevo, although most of the monastery still has to be built, and she paints icons for other churches in the area. An example of these is the church in Crkvina, built recently taking the church of Gracanica near Pristina in Kosovo as a model. This church is the last resting place of the poet Jovan Ducić (1871-1943), much loved by the Orthodox community. The iconostasis, that is to say the partition separating the area in the church for the liturgical function from that of the congregation, contains four of Sister Tekla’s icons.

For the Orthodox religion, the art of painting holy images requires absolute fidelity to the original prototype, thus re-asserting the authenticity of the tradition. The portrayal of the saints and their stories, the motifs and the techniques therefore follow a set of very precise rules, but which do leave room for the artist’s feelings. For example in the expressions of the figures portrayed and in the way she matches the colours. Sister Tekla prefers to keep to a limited chromatic range, mainly blues, reds and yellows for her characters’ clothes, ochre for their skin and black and white as the basic colours of other pictorial elements. Generally speaking, her figures stand out due to the contrast between warm and cool shades, although she mixes the
colour to be applied with a touch of the other contrasting colour in order to tone down the transition from one to the other. To make the darker shades some black is added to the basic pigment, while white is used for the lighter shades. Sister Tekla’s painting usually ranges from three lighter shades to three darker ones, so that she uses a total of seven shades per colour, including the basic one. Sister Tekla stresses the fact that colour is the expression of the innermost being of the artist, and that another person might therefore use other tints, either subtler or more intense than her own. Nevertheless what is essential is the radiance of both the faces and the garments. In their lifetimes, she says, “saints were special people, because they already lived bathed in divine light”. Expressing this light, in which Christ was transfigured on Mount Tabor, is the deepest meaning of an icon. It acts as a vehicle between the earthly world and the heavenly world. Through the light that the icon has to radiate, the religious believer gains an intuition of the other-worldly dimension that is still inaccessible to him but present in human life.

Of course it is not only painted icons that have this function of mediation between the two worlds, but any image, including those embroidered at the monastery in Tvrdoš by Sister Catherine and Sister Teodosia. To embroider the figure of a saint, it is necessary to know about him. Portraying a holy image is an activity that one can only undertake if one is totally immersed in one’s faith. The embroidery, which is applied to vestments and ecclesiastical paraphernalia, must also follow the same rules underlying icon painting, and the models to be reproduced are the same.
Sister Catherine from Indianapolis staying at Saints Peter and Paul monastery, is embroidering a special ecclesiastical cloth used in the orthodox ceremony of the Great Entrance. Canonicals always have to be hand embroidered, according to a malice shot, although it disappeared almost completely in the period of Turkish domination, was re-discovered in the 20th century.

Right: Madonna with three hands, carved with a welding machine by Goran Kosanić, Mostar.
As far as wood-working is concerned, carpenters and wood-carvers enjoy a greater degree of freedom in their renderings of the motifs, which are usually symbolic rather than figurative. Not far away from Trebinje is a carpenter’s workshop that works almost exclusively for the eparchial administration. They work according to the Orthodox tradition and they define themselves as being of Byzantine culture, meaning that their technical and spiritual roots lie deep in the Byzantine tradition. Even within the boundaries of their cultural tradition, there is also some scope for innovation.

Their work includes the actual wood work, that is to say preparing and assembling the panels and furniture, and the carving, which is always very precise. Thanks to the quality of their work, they receive commissions not only locally but also from abroad, supported by the religious authorities who, through their widespread contacts, find clients for the firm they have placed their trust in. The administration and workshop also work closely with the Academy in Trebinje, holding courses for students and offering the most talented the opportunity to work on specific jobs as
well as helping them to find employment. Father Stephen, a former student who subsequently became a monk and now teaches icon painting, is also trying to organise courses in mosaic art.

As we have seen, the spiritual dimension that accompanies the construction and decoration of an Orthodox church is also expressed in cutting the stone blocks and in the creation of architectural elements. What is more, it would seem that it is the very manual character of the work that inspires religious sentiment. Goran Kosanić of Mostar, for example, had never been particularly pious, coming as he did from a Communist family. After an accident at work that cost him the use of his right hand – fortunately restored after an operation – he began to create icons in wood with a welder. Through this rehabilitation therapy he gradually regained use of his hand, and at the same time found great inner peace. Although he had never studied the iconography of the saints, he visited numerous churches and examined the icons carefully. Now, having felt the beneficial effect of this activity, he has also taken an interest in the stories behind each saint, thus drawing closer to religious tradition. In the Islamic world, on the other hand, where the representation of human images was forbidden for fear of becoming guilty of idolatry, calligraphy was to become a genuine art form. It started a few decades after Mohammed’s death. It was decided to collect his talks, his sayings and his sermons into a proper parchment written text. Until then, they had been scribbled on various materials such as leather, material or even pebbles. Since those of his followers entrusted...
with drafting the final texts came up with several versions, the religious authorities feared that this might have resulted in different interpretations and decided to keep only what was common to all the writings. They destroyed all the rest. It was then necessary to reform the grammar and writing which, as is the case of other Semitic languages, is read from right to left, so that all Arabs would be able to read the text. For Muslims, the calligraphy used to write the Koran has, therefore, a sacred value, since it is the form in which the word of Allah is revealed. The text is divided into 114 chapters called the Suras, which are arranged in descending order of length with the exception of the first, al-Fatihah, that forms the beginning of every prayer. Alongside this orderly construction in the presentation of the text, a style of handwriting featuring clearcut, angular contours and attractive proportions developed that was called Kufic, from the name of the city of Kufa in Iraq. Thus a style of calligraphy for religious purposes was created, distinct from that used for commercial and legal needs. Calligraphers were widely respected and deeply
religious people, as the beauty of their hand-writing originated also from an inner enlightenment.

The spreading of Islam to non-Arab lands, where Persian or Turkish were spoken, led to the creation of regional calligraphic schools and to different hand-writing styles, such as Ta’liq in Persia and Deewani in Turkey. A reform was necessary in order to ensure that the language of the Koran was accessible throughout the Islamic world. During the following centuries new calligraphies developed but they maintained some common features such as a quest for harmony between the vertical lines and the horizontal base formed by the links between the letters. The concept underlying this harmony is that of proportion, for which the principles of geometry are essential. When the calligrapher looks at the page on which he is about to write, he must already visualize the balanced and harmonious distribution of the lines and letters. The calligrapher must, therefore, not only know Arabic and be familiar with the ornamental styles and the various hand-writing styles, but must also have an artistic predisposition and a strong aesthetic sense.

There are currently very few calligraphers in Bosnia and Herzegovina. One is Hazim Numanagić, who has studied Arabic and Persian, but who is also familiar with the Latin, the Hebrew and the Cyrillic alphabets. Although he did not attend a calligraphy faculty, he grew up in a very religious family belonging to a fraternity of Dervishes (the followers of some currents of Sufism, a religious movement of a mystical and ascetic nature).
Above: Even preparing
the paper is an important
part of a calligraphic
work, since the colours of
the background must be
in harmony with those of
the inscriptions. In this
case Hazim Numanagić
has prepared a mixture
based on henna powder
and Indian tea, blended
together by using egg
white. The colours for the
written part are gouache
colours, based on ground
pigments and gum
arabic, resulting in
particularly soft shades.

Opposite page: The
cupola of the Ghazi
Husrev-beg mosque.
For the calligraphic
decoration the pouncing
technique was applied.
The inscriptions or
drawings are made full-
size on a large sheet of
paper and pierced along
the inside and outside
contours. The sheet of
paper is then placed
against the wall and
dabbed with coal dust
so that when the paper
is removed a tracing
remains as a guide.

who knew both this art form very well
and also the Arabic language. It was
therefore the context in which he
lived that gave him a natural bent
for calligraphy, which he has been
practising for twenty years as a personal
interest and for several years now as
a professional activity. Numanagić’s
favourite calligraphy is Ta’lig, of Persian
origin, that due to its softness and
melodic line is particularly well suited for
poetry. He also frequently uses Kufic which,
as has been seen, is a very geometrical and
rigorous style of handwriting, and is often
employed for writing verses on buildings,
mosques and other public buildings, since
it contains references to the geometry
of the architecture. But Numanagić
especially uses the Suls style, which he
describes as the most elegant, the most
complex and the highest order, in which
the Koran Suras are usually written. Of the
various decorative styles, on the other
hand, he prefers Rumi, a floral style in
which the flowers are very stylized and distributed uniformly, with no predominant element at the centre. Because of his knowledge of many different alphabets, Numanagić is also contacted by people of other faiths, and when the Pope visited Sarajevo in 1997 the Catholic community of the town commissioned him to write a parchment as a gift for the Holy Father.

There is no doubt that the most important assignment he has ever had was the restoration work on the Ghazi Husrev-beg mosque, which dates from 1530, and which was badly damaged in the last war. It was intended to re-create the original wordings of the decorations, which had already disappeared during the restoration work carried out in the Hapsburg period, following a fire. It was necessary to reconstruct them philologically, partly by comparing other mosques in Bosnia and Herzegovina from the same period and partly by obtaining information from old drawings and photographs from the times before it was destroyed in the 19th century. So it was a long, complicated and expensive job, recounts Numanagić, who added that assignments of this size were difficult to come by.

The beauty of this art form, says Numanagić, is that one must respect its limits, that is to say the boundary between what you can and what you cannot do. This means that the creativity of the calligrapher can develop only within a system of rules and a universal order that is understandable to everyone.

As far as the decoration and embellishments of the interiors of Catholic churches is concerned, most of the art works come from Croatia. There are currently no well-known craftsmen in Bosnia dedicated solely to specialised production with a Catholic background. Nonetheless, the new vitality of all the religious communities in the country gives hope for the future.

Sacred art, regardless of the religious faith that expresses it, is a means through which the various different communities of Bosnia can assert their individuality. The beauty inherent in these art works becomes a means for overcoming anachronistic rivalries and expressing, instead, the best of the rich and varied culture of this country, of its historical heritage and of the religious affiliations that, ultimately, all come together to form a single national identity.
We hope that this volume offers a representative survey on the varieties of artefacts and their different traditions, which are still found in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nevertheless, we are aware that in a single publication it has not been possible to present all the artisans who deserved to be mentioned. Our intention has been to encourage people who visit the Country, to spend time discovering and experiencing these creative and diligent places where the rich, cultural and folkloristic traditions of Bosnia and Herzegovina are kept alive.

The Authors

CREDITS

A special thanks to all artisans who participated in this project with enthusiasm and generosity.

A very big thank you goes to the following people for their invaluable support.