

THE CHURCHES AND EARLY OTTOMAN GOVERNANCE IN BOSNIA: THE REALITY AND HISTORIOGRAPHIC GENERALISATIONS IN 20th CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

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Biased approaches to Bosnian historiography in general, strong nationalist sentiments and excessive interpretations of certain phenomena have produced a number of disagreements between scholars. This refers especially to the Bosnian religious history. The purpose of my paper is twofold. It examines modern historiography of the early Ottoman Bosnia, and attempts to open some new venues to the study of the encounters between different religious communities and their representatives. In the first two centuries of Ottoman rule, the attitude of Ottoman center towards confessional structure of Bosnian society, is a result of political, economic and social circumstances on one hand, and the result of the Ottoman strategy of accepting some local institutions and including some non-Muslim elements into the military class on the other. My paper consists of an overview of the confessional structure in Bosnia, and an analysis of the relationship between the two churches (Catholic and Orthodox) in the Balkans, focusing on the encounter between Ottoman State, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians.

Key Words: Bosnia, ottoman period, religious communities

* I will not say anything new if I say that the history of the entire Balkans demands a critical reinterpretation, a deliverance of the pseudo-mythical and pseudo-historical webs in which it is entangled. The modern times ask for the rational reconstructions, complex and asymmetrical images of the past, and they

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ask for the historical events to be described in the entirety. Numerous researchers of the Balkans approach this subject from the narrow national standpoints, ignoring the history and the achievements of other ethnic groups and multinational societies and states to which they once belonged. The trend of modern globalization, however, can be also recognized through “prettifying” the past; through demands for the revision, but without “difficult recollections”. The history of the Ottoman State is the history of all nations that lived in it. For the long time, it has been interpreted with prejudices, with the superficial conclusions, which, in the historiography of the European, and particularly Balkan states, remained immune to the counterarguments emerging from the opposite experiences and findings. The science has turned the Ottoman state into an internal place of disposal of the European stereotypes and the misguided passions, treating the Balkan countries as an exotic zone between the European civilization and the mystical Orient.

The conference on the expansion of Islam and on the Islamic culture took place in 1991, and it brought upon it the great attention of the scholar circles, with the results of the researches.¹ Unfortunately, those new findings in science, and the numerous scientific works that appeared in the years that followed, do not change anything in the attitude toward history if the social circumstances are such that an “irrational” awareness, a simplified and symmetrical image of the past, is still desirable. Richard Holbruk said that, in the USA, the most famous book in English language about Yugoslavia was Rebecca West’s book “Black Lamb and Grey Falcon”, from 1930’s; and its standpoints that “the Turks ruined the Balkans” and that Muslims were racially inferior influenced the two generation of the readers.² Philippe Gelez recently wrote the guide for the research of the islamization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and he failed to mention the above-mentioned conference in 1991.³ Those collective-psychological stereotypes do not come any more as the consequence of the lack

¹ Širenje islama i islamska kultura u Bosanskom ejaletu, Orijentalni institut u Sarajevu, 7-9. mart 1991. / *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju*, 41/1991, Sarajevo 1991.

² Richard Holbruk, Put u Dejton, Beograd 1998, p. 20.

³ Philippe Gelez, Petit guide pour servir à l'étude de l'islamisation en Bosnie et en Herzegovine avec le recueil des sources connues, ainsi qu'un commentaire sur l'utilisation qui a été faite de celles-ci, Les éditions ISIS, *Les cahiers du Bosphore*, XXXVII, Istanbul, 2005.

of knowledge, but it seems that we are facing the historiographic organized oblivion.

Here, I would like to express some of my observations regarding the confessional structure in Bosnia, the relationship between two biggest Churches in Balkans, the relationship of Porta toward them, and regarding some historiographical generalizations in the 20th century.

The establishment of the Ottoman government in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the subsequent stabilization of the Ottoman social-political organization were not the mere acts of the political changes, but they were the events that had the far-reaching cultural and civilizational consequences in this area. The subjective approaches to the entire historiography of Bosnia and Herzegovina, strong predisposition to the nationalism, as well as the excessual approaches to the certain phenomena, were creating, and they still are, countless discordances between the scholars, particularly when it comes to the subject of the Ottoman period of our history. The attitude of Porta, during the first two centuries of the Ottoman government, toward the religious structure of the inhabitants of Bosnia was the result of the political, social and economic situation it encountered. Just as well, it was the result of the tactics the Ottoman Turks were carrying out, accepting the encountered institutions and including the non-Muslim elements in the military class. At first, people were religiously divided into Catholics, Bogumils and Cryptomils, Orthodox and Muslims, but essentially unified, since all those mentioned groups recognized themselves as Bosniacs. The land registries from the Ottoman period name all the inhabitants of Bosnia as Bosniacs, regardless of whether it was Marko, Jovan or Ahmed.⁴

Through the centuries, the existence of the different confessions of the single ethnos, the lack of existence of one sufficiently strong church, the pressure applied on Bogumils from two sides and the possibility of conversion to the conquerors' religion, all that created the suitable environment for the process of expansion of the Islam. The basic Islamic principles: "your faith to you, ours to us" and "there is no forcing in faith" were part of the theocratic

⁴ Adem Handžić, „Konfesionalni sastav stanovništva u Bosni i Hercegovini u prvim stoljećima osmanske vladavine“, *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju*, 42-43/1992-93, Sarajevo, 1995, p. 119-151

concept of the Ottoman state. In the long line of the historiographic units that deal with and prove the fact that Islam was gradually progressing, people often emphasize what Vladislav Skarić wrote in the 1940's: "It is wrong to think that Islam expanded rapidly in the Balkan peninsula, and that it was officially spread by force. There is much evidence that it was not the fact. I will just emphasize the fact that 19th century would not have encountered a single Christian, or a single church or monastery, if Islam had been spread forcefully by the state. Islam was being spread by situation and by human circumstances".⁵

As for the procedure of accepting the Islam, there is no doubt that, at first, the acceptance of Islam had a declarative character: a person would take a new name, and it is notably an often occurrence with men, rarely with women. The entire procedure took place in front of the imam of the fortress, and the sources usually accompany it with the determinant: "new Muslim". There are cases when name was not changed, but the same determinant is included with it – "muslim-i new" (Grubiša, Muslim, in the village of Kitova in district of Sarajevo, Ivan, Pavle's son, Muslim in the casbah of Visoko, Božidar, son of Mihovil, Muslim, etc.)⁶

By following the direction where historiography begins with the sources, with the contemporary results of the researches regarding their examination and criticism, a scholar inevitably reaches the conclusion that the conquest of Bosnia and the expansion of Islam, by its tempo and wideness, had a different development than it had in the other parts of the world. In the situation where heretics were persecuted by the Bosnian kings, following the papal initiative, and where babuns were persecuted by the Serbian rulers in front of the Ottoman advancement, the entire area of Bosnia did not have a Church that could have played a decisive role in the state.

In the mid-15th century, all the Bosnian rulers declared themselves as Catholics: Hrvoje's descendents Đurađ and Petar Vojsalić, vojvoda Ivaniš

⁵ „Širenje islama u Bosni i Hercegovini“, Kalendar Gajret za 1940., str. 29, citirano prema: Mehmed Handžić, Islamizacija Bosne i Hercegovine i porijeklo bosansko-hercegovačkih muslimana, Sarajevo, 1940., p. 28

⁶ Adem Handžić, O ulozi derviša u formiranju gradskih naselja u Bosni u XV stoljeću, *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju*, XXI, p. 137

Pavlović, Sladoje Semković, vojvoda Petar Klešić, vojvoda Stjepan Vukčić...⁷ Vojvoda Sandalj Hranić was Orthodox and Pataren, and herceg Stjepan was, in the religious point of view, “a genuine image of those Bosnian feudalists who, according to the political situation, had two or three confessions. He was Orthodox inside, Bogumil on the outside, and he was sending messages to Pope that he would take the catholic confession”.⁸ As sultan’s vassal, Kosača attacked Dubrovnik, which accused him of being “a perfidious Pataren”.⁹

The issue of Bogumils, the issue of “Bosnian Church”, is inseparable from the expansion of Islam in the 15th century. Based on the sources of the Ottoman provenance (janissary law), Bašagić wrote that, during the conquest of Bosnia in 1463, the large groups of Bogumils from all parts bowed to sultan Mehmed II near Jajce, and they all received Islam on that occasion. They asked the sultan: “May our children be also gathered in the *acemi oğlans*”, which they were granted; and that “guaranteed the economy not only on their own lands, but in the entire state as well.”¹⁰

Much earlier, Zinkeisen spoke about the same event, just as did Johan von Asboth, whom Bašagić quotes, in his own translation: “Bogumils, led by the old aristocracy that had been in connection with Turks before, and which had brought the Turkish noblemen to the country, converted to Islam in masses, and they were wholeheartedly accepted by the new masters. Particularly lower and higher aristocracy, having accepted the Islam, did not limit themselves just on their properties and power, but they were enlarging their privileges, which made them adapt more easily to the organization of the Turkish government, and which made them stand out as a useful tool for subjugation of the great Hungary.”¹¹

⁷ Franjo Rački, *Bogumili i patareni*, Rad JAZU, knj. VIII, Zagreb, 1869, p. 151; Dinić J.M., *Državni sabor srednjovjekovne Bosne*, Beograd, 1955, p. 68; Sima Ćirković, *Istorija Bosne*, p. 287

⁸ Nićifor Dučić, „Istorija srpske pravoslavne crkve od prvijeh desetina VII v. do naših dana“, *Književni radovi Nićifora Dučića arhimandrita*, knj. 9, Biograd, 1894., p. 60

⁹ *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, I, p. 643

¹⁰ Safvet-beg Bašagić, *Bošnjaci i Hercegovci u islamskoj književnosti*, Izabrana djela, knj. III, 15; - *Kratka uputa u prošlost Bosne i Hercegovine*, p. 16

¹¹ Bašagić, *Bošnjaci i Hercegovci...*

Hadžijahić considers it very possible that Bogumils there, near Jajce, complained to sultan about their problems regarding persecution, confiscations of the properties and the forceful conversion to Catholicism under king Tomaš, in 1459; it is not excluded that they received the ahdname, like the Franciscans in the village of Milodraž near Kiseljak did, in 1463, since sultan Mehmed used the same way to regulate the status of the Orthodox church, after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, and the Armenian church in 1461.¹²

As for the Bogumils, it is a fact that they were widely spread in Bosnia, from the second half of the 12th century until the middle of the 15th. Supporters of the statement that that "Bosnian Church" was nothing else but the pure Orthodoxy (Vaso Glušac, Božidar Petranović, prota Davidović) were the loudest in the period between the second and the sixth decade of the last century. Regardless of the certain disputes about the character of Bogumilism, the sources prove, and the modern science stands on the point that it was neither Catholic nor Orthodox, but it was characteristically Bosnian philosophy. With the desire not to go any further into this matter, we feel the necessity to emphasize the crucial discrepancy between Bogumilism and Orthodoxy, emerging as the result of temporal divergence: at the time when Bogumilism was starting to disappear, Orthodoxy was only beginning to spread out in Bosnia, due to the migrations of the Vlachs in the late 15th century. Apart from the fact that Ottoman administration was making Vlachs from Herzegovina and Montenegro settle in the northern and north-eastern parts of Bosnia, the Ottomans, out of strategic reasons, were directing them to go even farther north, over Majevisa toward river Sava and the borders with Hungary.

On the broader plan, the Catholic Church is in a much harder position. Only two men were allowed to ride side by side with the sultan: šejhu 'l-islam and patriarch, while Pope was usually the one who initiated the attacks on the Ottomans. Therefore, we can notice that the prohibition of building new churches on the places where there had not been any church before was applied only on the Catholics, in comparison to the Orthodox monasteries, which were being built on the places where certainly there had not been any monastery before. If a catholic church was expanded without permission, it was torn

¹² Muhamed Hadžijahić, *Porijeklo bosanskih muslimana*, Sarajevo, 1990., p. 44

down.¹³ There were also situations that the Orthodox metropolitans were collecting some taxes from the Catholics (for marriage, church...). The Catholics would complain, and the fermans would be issued, forbidding that. From the repeated complaints, it is obvious that those fermans were not obeyed. The position of the Orthodox Church was particularly strengthened with the renewal of the Patriarchy of Peć, in 1557; it even happened that one Franciscan province was recorded in the books as being one of the eparchies of the Orthodox patriarch.¹⁴ Their relationship with the Orthodox Church "consisted of paying the regular church levies", while the autonomy of the internal structure was completely preserved.¹⁵ The levies taken from the believers by the metropolitans were called *vlatičina* in the Catholic sources. It comprised the marriage taxes (*resm-i nikah*), the tax for the monastery (*resm-i kenisa*), charity (*tasadduk*), oath (*nazr*), the estate of the deceased monks (*metruk*), tax for christening (*kirst akcasi*)... The Orthodox people had their stronghold, among other things, in the fact that dukes (*knez*) were numerous among the spahis; and it is a well-known fact that Vlachs, with a minimum of the conversion to Islam, had the position of *filurici*, whose *filurija* replaced all other taxes, and it was smaller than the tax that peasants had to pay.

As Islam expanded, the catholic churches were disappearing. A clear example is given by the situation in Zvornik, where sources say that the local Franciscans lost their supporters, so they sold the mill, in 1533, to the dizdar Evlija-aga and they moved out. The Ottomans turned their abandoned church into a mosque, naming it *kilise mescici*, "*mescid* out of church", and it was mentioned under that name throughout the entire 16th century. The fact that it was called *mescid* shows that it was a smaller building.

On the other hand, numerous Orthodox cattle-keepers come to that area, and the appearance of monasteries is notable, first of which was Paprača, in 1547, followed by Lomnica, Ozren, Vozuća, Tamna and Gostović. Precisely because of that unequal position, where Catholics were more endangered, the

¹³ Fojnica kroz vjekove, Fojnica – Sarajevo, 1987., p. 75-76

¹⁴ Boris Nilević, Srpska pravoslavna crkva u BiH do obnove Pečke patrijaršije, „Kulturno nasljeđe“, Sarajevo, 1990., 198-218; R. Tričković, Srpska crkva sredinom XVII veka, Glas SANU CCCXX, Odeljenje istorijskih nauka, knj. 2, Beograd, 1980, p. 149

¹⁵ R. Tričković, p. 136



acceptance of Islam was more noticeable. The data from the earliest land registries, about the Christians, their houses, properties, names of the Christian villages, forests, etc. give testimony about the "Bosnian Church" in the phase of its extinction. Naturally, there were some authors who emphasized the significance of the Bogumilist component in the genesis of the inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some of the important ones were Ćiro Truhelka, Vladislav Skarić, Aleksandar Solovjev, Muhamed Hadžijahić...

We can ask ourselves then what was the fundamental attitude of Porta toward the two biggest Churches. On the one hand, Porta issues berats to the Orthodox metropolitans, allowing them to collect the church taxes from the Franciscans and Catholics; on the other hand, the fermans are issued, following the complaints from the Franciscans and Catholics, forbidding the metropolitans to demand any kind of levy from them. Here is an example: in 1498, sultan Bajazit II, after an appeal from the citizens of Novo Brdo and Srebrenica, sent a ferman to cadis, forbidding the patriarchs and metropolitans to collect money from the catholic priests.¹⁶ The Franciscans often call upon the privileges given to them by the Fatih's adh-nama, although the text of the adh-nama does not mention the relationship with the Orthodox Church. The document of the cadi of Mostar, from 1575, says that the metropolitan Savatije took 15, 20 or more groschs from every village, and he forcefully took five to ten groschs from many people.¹⁷

As for the titles of the members of one or the other Church, they present the relationships between the Orthodox Churches. Prior to the renewal of the Patriarchy of Peć, the documents mention the orthodox clergy under the titles of patriarch, metropolitan and the episcopo of Greeks. Most likely, those are the representatives of the archiepiskopy of Ohrid, because it had its eparchies in Bosnia, Dalmatia and Serbia at that time.¹⁸ After the renewal of the Patriarchy of Peć, we encounter the titles with *Sirf* (*keferesi*, *mitrepoliti*, *piskoblari*). The

¹⁶ Hazim Šabanović, *Turski dokumenti u Bosni iz druge polovine 15. stoljeća*, Istorijsko-pravni zbornik 2 (1949), Sarajevo, 197-198, no. 9

¹⁷ Samostan u Zaostrugu, *Acta Turcica*, br. 62

¹⁸ I. Snegarov, *Istorii na Ohridskata arhiepiskopi-patrijarši (1394-1767)*, Sofija, 1932, p. 160-161

catholic representatives are mentioned as *Frenk ruhbanları*, *Frenk keferesi*, *Latin ruh ve sair keferesi*, *Şokça ve Latin taifesi*, *Macar ve Şokça*, etc.

This is just a small introduction to the problem of the presence of the religions on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Ottoman period.

Marc Bloch says that documents are not the pure past, but instead, they are witnesses whose answers depend on the questions asked. After several years of work on researching the documents and materials of the Ottoman provenance, I think that the access to and the usage of the archival materials have become problematic in several aspects. The limited communication among the historians, archival institutions, the flow of literature, as well as the situation in the wider region, where people write much about B&H – all this make just one part of a bigger mosaic of problems. The science must avoid the routine and ghettoization, surpass the antiquary approach to the historical materials, the sterile and superficial description of events. It is necessary to go beyond the autistic existence in the local coordinates, to move out of the boundaries of the research conceptions and the mental transfer of the historians. A multiperspective approach to the events of the 15th century demands an objective presentation of the positions of all its protagonists. Nevertheless, “the children never observe the history with the eyes of their fathers”, so each generation has to reevaluate the history in a new and different way. However, there are many things that are not researched, and the value of the historiography is also measured through what it did not research.

ÖZET

BOSNA'DA KİLİSELER VE ERKEN OSMANLI YÖNETİMİ: 20. YÜZYILDA REALİTE VE TARİHSEL GENELLEŞMELER

Genelde Bosna tarihçiliğine ön yargılı yaklaşımlar, güçlü milli hissiyat ve muayyen bir vaka üzerine müfrit yorumlar ilim adamları arasında pek çok ihtilaf yaratmaktadır. Bu özellikle Bosna'nın din tarihi konusuna atfedilmektedir. Bu çalışmamda iki hedef gözetilmektedir. Burada erken Osmanlı Bosnasının modern tarihçiliği incelenmekte ve farklı dinî topluluklar ile onların temsilcileri

arasındaki mücadeleler üzerinde yapılan arařtırmalara yeni mekanlar açılmaya çalışılmaktadır. Osmanlı idaresinin ilk iki yüzyulunda Osmanlı merkezinin Bosna toplumunun dinî yapısına karşı tutumu, bir yanda siyasî, iktisadî ve sosyal şartların sonucu, diđer yanda Osmanlı'nın bazı yerel müesseseleri benimseme ve askerî sınıf içine gayrimüslim unsurları dahil etme stratejisinin sonucudur. Çalışma Bosna'da itikadî yapıya genel bir bakışı ve Balkanlarda iki kilise (Katolik ve Ortodoks) arasındaki ilişkilerin analizini içermekte, ayrıca Osmanlı Devleti, Katolik ve Ortodoks kiliseleri arasındaki mücadeleler üzerinde yoğunlaşmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bosna, Osmanlı yönetimi, dini toplulukları, tarihçilik, genelleşmeler