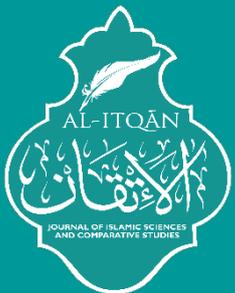


AL-ITOQĀN

المجلة الإسلامية
والدراسات
المقارنة

JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC SCIENCES
AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES

VOL. 9, NO. 1, AUGUST 31, 2024





AL-ITQĀN



JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC SCIENCES AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES

VOLUME: 9 NUMBER 1 AUGUST 2024

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Fatmir Shehu (IIUM, Malaysia)

EDITOR

Megawati Moris (IIUM, Malaysia)

EDITORIAL BOARD

Syed Arabi Aidid (IIUM, Malaysia)
Kamaruzaman Yusuff (UM, Malaysia)
Mumtaz Ali (IIUM, Malaysia)
Noor Amali Mohd Daud (IIUM, Malaysia)
Adibah Abdul Rahim (IIUM, Malaysia)

Haslina Ibrahim (IIUM, Malaysia)
Siti Akmar (UiTM MARA, Malaysia)
Thameem Ushama (IIUM, Malaysia)
Che Zarrina Saari (UM, Malaysia)

INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD

Afifi al-Akiti (Oxford University, UK)
Abdullah M. al-Syarqawi (Cairo University,
Egypt)
Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu (Kwara State
University, Nigeria)
Anis Ahmad (Riphah International
University, Islamabad)

ASM Shihabuddin (Uttara University,
Dhakka, Bangladesh)
Ibrahim M. Zein (Hamad Khalifa University,
Qatar)
Haji Norarfan bin Haji Zainal (Universiti
Islam Sultan Sharif Ali - UNISSA, Brunei
Darul Salam)

©IIUM Press, International Islamic University Malaysia. All rights reserved.

eISSN: 26008432

Al-Itqān: Journal of Islamic Sciences and Comparative Studies is an academic, peer-reviewed, and international bilingual (Arabic and English) online and free-accessed journal, published bi-annually (February and August) by the Department of Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University of Malaysia. It publishes articles, research reports, case studies, and book reviews on diverse topics related to issues, problems, and developments in Islamic Thought, Comparative Religion, Philosophy, Social Sciences, the Arts and Humanities.

Website: <https://journals.iium.edu.my/al-itqan/index.php/al-itqan/index>

Email: al-itqan@iium.edu.my

Published by:

IIUM Press, International Islamic University Malaysia, P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia /
Phone (+603) 6196-5014 / Fax: (+603) 6196-6298 / Website: <http://iiumpress.iium.edu.my/bookshop>

Contents

المقالة العربية

1-14 إسهامات ابن نجيم الحنفي في فقه الأموال: دراسة تحليلية
محمد رحمت علي (Md. Rahmat Ali) ومحمد أمان الله (Muhammad Amanullah)

15-24 الجهاد بين الصلاح والإصلاح وحروب المطامع والمصالح: نحو بناء سلام عالمي في ضوء
السياسة الشرعية

عبد الحميد محمد علي زرؤم (Abdulhamid Mohamed Ali Zaroum)، بلال بركات سلهب (Belal
(Arafath Careem Mohammed Jiffry) وعرفات كريم محمد جفري (Barakat Sulaiman Salhab)

English Articles

- Distortion of Truth about Islam and Its Reality: Some Reflections** 25-40
Muhammad Mumtaz Ali
- Why did the Bosniaks embrace Islam, Unlike the Serbs and Croats?** 41-71
Spahic Omer
- Mapping the Islamic Discourse on Knowledge: The Relevance of the New
Islamic Discourse** 72-96
Mohamed Oudihat and Che Amnah Binti Bahari



AL-ITQĀN: *Journal of Islamic Sciences and Comparative Studies*
Vol. 9, Issue No. 1, (August 2024) 41-71
Copyright © IIUM Press
eISSN 2600-8432

WHY DID THE BOSNIAKS EMBRACE ISLAM, UNLIKE THE SERBS AND CROATS?

*Spahic Omer**

Abstract: This article discusses the reasons, why, unlike their Serb and Croat neighbors, the Bosniaks embraced Islam. Though somewhat gradual, the process was both collective and earnest, amounting to a phenomenon rarely witnessed in the latter periods of Islamic civilization in general, and the expansion of the Ottoman Caliphate in particular. Different scholars have provided different perspectives on the enduring mystery. However, as religion has been politicized and nationalized in the Balkan region, and politics and nationalism have become intertwined with religion, the task of reconciling conflicting perspectives and establishing the truth has become increasingly complex. This article posits that, besides, several secondary socio-political and economic factors, religion was the primary driver behind the conversion of the Bosniaks. The unique faith and rituals of the Patarens in Bosnia, along with their Bosnian Church, had a notable impact on a large number of Bosniaks, including those in positions of power and authority. The Bosniaks were distinguished by their inclination towards openness, inquisitiveness, and pursuit of truth, unlike the Serbs and Croats who often let ethno-nationalism and faith-based chauvinism shape their religious and socio-cultural choices. A research methodology that integrates descriptive, interpretative, and analytical historical methods is employed in the entire work.

Keywords: Bosniaks, Islam, Patarens, Bogomilism, Serbs, Croats.

* Associate Professor at the Department of History, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: ospahic@iium.edu.my

Received Date: MAY 13, 2024

Accepted Date: JULY 12, 2024

Published Date: AUGUST 31, 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31436/alitqan.v9i1.283>

Introduction

Despite having early encounters with Islam and Muslims as early as the 9th century through warfare engagements and trade relationships with regions like Crete, Sicily, southern Italy, and Spain, which were governed by Muslims, the Bosniaks (the people of Bosnia) were not systematically introduced to Islam until the late 14th century, as the Ottoman forces intensified their efforts to infiltrate and expand into Bosnian regions.¹ However, upon the official conquest and integration of the kingdom of Bosnia into the Ottoman State in 1463, the spontaneous and peaceful, but systematic and gradual, Islamization of Bosnia and its populace was initiated.

It was anticipated and necessary to undertake such a process in order to counter and restrain the aggressive campaigns of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches against the Bosnian Church, which was seen as heretical by both branches of Christianity and thus required correction and re-alignment with Christian orthodoxy. When the Ottomans and Islam, their official religion, came, the Bosniaks promptly started accepting it, unlike their neighbors, the Serbs and Croats, causing the existing conflict dynamics to escalate to a different level and dimension. Everything was either aligned with ethno-nationalism and flag-waving, or imbued with belief-based bias, or was a combination of both. Such were the developments that they never subsided, smoothly transitioning from one stage to the next without interruption. The turmoil in the Balkans at the close of the 20th century, along with its enduring effects today, represented merely the most recent installment in a continuous socio-religious, ethnic, and even civilizational conflict that originated centuries ago.

This article will explore why the Bosniaks embraced Islam while the Serbs and Croats did not, and what were the underlying reasons for this difference. Among various social, political, and economic factors, the distinctive religious beliefs and practices of the Patavens in Bosnia and their Bosnian Church played a significant role in influencing many Bosniaks, including the nobility and political leaders. Additionally, the Bosniaks' inclination towards openness, inquisitiveness, and pursuit of truth set them apart. In contrast, the Serbs and Croats were more influenced by ethno-nationalism and faith-based chauvinism in shaping their religious and socio-cultural choices. The article has six sections, namely, Islam in Bosnia between religious freedom and the pressure of ethnocentrism; the secret motives behind playing the labeling game; the Bosniaks as “good Christians”, “good Bosniaks” and “good people”; choosing to reject the distorted image of Christianity and embrace the truth

¹ See, Malcolm, Noel, *Bosnia A Short History*, (New York: New York University Press, 1994), pp. 51-69; and Haveric, Dzavid *Islamisation of Bosnia*, (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Muller, 2008), pp. 18-40.

of Islam; the Bosniaks were closer to Islam than any branch of Christianity; and, the Bosniaks' freedom versus the indoctrination and inhibition of the Serbs and Croats.

Islam in Bosnia between Religious Freedom and the Pressure of Ethnocentrism

An enduring mystery in the history of the Balkans is the choice of the Bosniaks to convert to Islam, a choice that diverged from that of their neighboring communities, the Serbs and Croats, who opted not to follow suit. People wondered what happened, why things turned out that way and what were the factors that contributed to the outcome. Numerous historians and social anthropologists explored the topic, creating a variety of opinions that either diverged substantially or conflicted with each other.

The earliest methodical studies on the subject, directly or indirectly, were "Povijest Bosne (History of Bosnia)" by a Bosnian historian of the 19th century, Salih Sidki Muvekkit-Hadžihuseinović (d. 1888);² "Islamizacija Bosne i Hercegovine (Islamization of Bosnia and Hercegovina)" by Mehmed Handžić (d. 1944), who was an outstanding Bosnian religious scholar and politician;³ "The Bogomils of Bulgaria and Bosnia" by Linus Pierpont Brockett (d. 1893), an American historian;⁴ "Bogomili i Patareni (Bogomils and Patarens)" by Franjo Rački (d. 1894) who was one of the most authoritative Croatian historians, politicians and Catholic priests in the 19th century;⁵ "Bogomili Crkva Bosanska i Krstjani (Bogomils the Bosnian Church and Krstjans)" by Božidar Petranović (d. 1874), a leading Serbian scholar and historian also in the 19th century.⁶

The theme in question was a captivating idea and an appealing opportunity. It was approached from different perspectives by protagonists who harbored different, yet conflicting, interests, leading to correspondingly different and conflicting results. While being a piece of a larger puzzle, the pursuit of truth in relation to the subject matter was not necessarily the main focus. It is no surprise, therefore, that the debates on the Bosnian religious identity before the Ottomans and the spread of Islam in Bosnia proved too complex to be fully resolved. Allowing the issue to remain unresolved definitely worked in favor of

² Muvekkit-Hadžihuseinović, Salih Sidki, *Povijest Bosne (History of Bosnia)*, translation into Bosnian by a group of translators, (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 1998), pp. 11-13.

³ Handžić, Mehmed, *Islamizacija Bosne i Hercegovine (Islamization of Bosnia and Hercegovina)*, (Sarajevo: Islamska Dionička Štamparija, 1940), pp. 4-8.

⁴ Brockett, Linus Pierpont, *The Bogomils of Bulgaria and Bosnia*, (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1879), pp. 60-90.

⁵ Rački, Franjo, *Bogomili i Patareni (Bogomils and Patarens)*, (Zagreb: Jugoslovenska Akademija Znanosti i Umjetnosti, 1869), pp. 125-150.

⁶ Petranović, Božidar, *Bogomili Crkva Bosanska i Krstjani (Bogomils the Bosnian Church and Krstjans)*, (Zadar: n.p., 1867), pp. 107-170.

those seeking to manipulate the truth and sow discord. Here are some of the more recent studies that may not completely solve the conundrum, but can guide the readers through its complexities: Noel Malcolm, “Bosnia A Short History” (1994); Mustafa Imamovic, “Historija Bošnjaka (History of Bosniaks)” (1997); John Fine, “The Bosnian Church, A New Interpretation, A Study of the Bosnian Church and Its Place in State and Society from the 13th to the 15th Centuries” (1975); Gorčin Dizdar, “The Standing Stones of Medieval Bosnia: Heresy, Dualism, and Symbols in Pre-Ottoman Balkans” (2016).

The fact remains that, by and large, the arrival of the Ottoman Turks and Islam in the region was welcomed by the Bosniaks but was loathed by the others. Even though the conversion process was slow but sure, the Bosniaks were able to see in Islam and in the prospect of becoming Muslims what their flanking neighbors neither could nor wanted. Atypical as it may seem, Islam was what the Bosniaks needed – and perhaps even coveted to some extent – while the others dreaded it.

The crux of the matter was religious freedom and freedom of choice. The Bosniaks acted in accordance with what they believed was best for their personal and national interests. Every community was at it, one way or another. At first, the Balkan lands were a rich tapestry of different mythologies and pagan practices, manifested in myriads of beliefs, myths, and rites. This was true for both the indigenous communities, mainly the Illyrians, and the incoming South Slavs. If mythology and paganism were seen as a preferred choice for the South Slavs, so was the acceptance of Christianity with its Catholic and Orthodox strands at the hands of the Croats and Serbs respectively, and so was, furthermore, the acceptance of a form of Christianity first and of Islam second by the Bosniaks.

In truth, there are no indigenous or homegrown religions in Europe. For ages, the continent was a spiritual wasteland, incessantly trying to this day to revert to its original self. Hence, following the migrations and interactions with others, the continent’s inhabitants and entire communities were entitled – yet invited, as it were - to choose whatever they wished and were inclined to, consistent with the precepts of inquisitiveness and freedom.

Accordingly, the moment the Bosniaks chose to become Muslims, they did nothing but exercise their rights neither more nor less than when they adopted Christianity. They were as free and true to themselves when they abandoned first paganism and then Christianity in favor of Islam, as their Serbian and Croat counterparts when they abandoned paganism and became Christians. Even as one group opted for Catholicism and the other for Orthodoxy, that too implied that they all continued to hold on to their prerogatives and to exercise their rights of freedom and choice. All three: the Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats,

capitalized on the environment and opportunities presented to them, resolving to be masters of their decisions and, by extension, destinies.

If the Bosniaks resolved to change their religious path from paganism to Christianity and eventually to Islam, then, why is their progression deemed to have less accord and moral virtue than the trajectories of the Serbs and Croats from paganism to Christianity? In some sense, all three groups were dissenters, having turned their backs on the religious principles and cultural norms of their ancestors. This raises the question: Why the ultimate decisions of certain people are not seen as equivalent to those of others? The Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats may be viewed as either forsaking their pagan beliefs and traditions or embracing freedom in their quest for truth, and their choices deserve respect. However, given that the former was never even remotely considered, the only possibility is for the latter to be the case.

Since the Balkans never ceased to function as the confluence of the East and West, of different civilizational undercurrents, and of sets of different, albeit habitually disagreeing, national as well as ideological interests, the arrival of the Ottomans and Islam as their ideological, state and civilizational *élan vital* additionally spurred the overall sentiment, quickly transforming the Balkans into the hotbed of unprecedented geopolitical crescendos. The somewhat projectable and governable curve of the religious, socio-political, and cultural evolution of the Balkan communities was suddenly turned on its head. The general feeling is inclined towards a vibe of uncertainty and instability. So uncontrollably pulsating were the proceedings that in the end even the devastating World War I was instigated there, right in the streets of Sarajevo.

Thus, Islam's presence and the Bosniaks' acceptance of it was not viewed through the prism of the truth-seeking and truth-finding transactions, but rather through the prism of bigoted nationalistic tendencies. The prevalent milieus were structured in a manner that restricted people from thinking or behaving differently. The themes of religion and its potential spiritual uplifting were harnessed solely for national affirmations across the Balkan territories, due to which a part of national agendas was not the notion of truly enlightening and spiritualizing societies and people by means of religions, but instead nationalizing religions, manipulating its powers and brainwashing people. National identities and pride were the ultimate objectives, with religion serving as the means to achieve them.

It seemed as though people were aware, drawing from countless historical examples, that Islam was invincible. Its strength lay in being a transcendent idea, a revealed system of beliefs and values, and a sustained way of life. No religion or ideology could stand up to it. Therefore, it was most effective to shift the focus of Islam and Muslims from the domain of

spirituality and morality to the vagaries of nationalism and its ever-expanding universe of dogmatism and narrow-mindedness.

For example, it was by no means a coincidence that when in 1217 the medieval Kingdom of Serbia was established, and only two years later, in 1219, there came to pass the formation of an autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church. Instead of the latter legitimizing and empowering the former, it was the reverse. The Church was not meant to Christianize Serbia, but the new Kingdom was to Serbianize the Church.

Along the same lines, while the first Archbishop of the autocephalous Serbian Church, Saint Sava (Rastko Nemanjić), was very active in the socio-political life of the nascent Serbian Kingdom, the founding fathers of the Kingdom, such as Stefan Nemanja and Stefan Nemanjić as the founder and the first king (the first-crowned one) respectively, in the end committed themselves to religious service and embraced monastic life. After Stefan Nemanja embraced monasticism in his later years, he adopted the name Simeon, while Stefan Nemanjić took on the name Simon when he too became a monk.⁷ Unsurprisingly, all three were from the Nemanjić dynasty and were closely related as family members. Stefan Nemanja was the father while Stefan Nemanjić and Saint Sava (Rastko Nemanjić) were his sons. In this manner, ethnocentrism and religious extremism intertwined, causing a compounded issue where each supported the other. Ethnic bias and nationalistic fervor based on faith became like two halves of a whole.

According to Mark Mazower, “throughout history, the Balkans have been a crossroads, a zone of endless military, cultural and economic mixing and clashing between Europe and Asia, Christianity and Islam, Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Subject to violent shifts of borders, rulers, and belief systems at the hands of the world's great empires - from the Byzantine to the Habsburg and Ottoman - the Balkans are often called Europe's tinderbox and a seething cauldron of ethnic and religious resentments.”⁸

The Secret Motives Behind Playing the Labeling Game

Shortly after they had made their home in the Balkans in the 6th century, the South Slavs, who were pagans, became the target of the Christian proselytization efforts. The evangelization works were gradual and were carried out in waves till approximately the 12th

⁷ Yanich, Voyeslav, and Hankey, C., *Patrick Lives of the Serbian Saints*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), pp. 6-45.

⁸ Mazower, Mark, *The Balkans: A Short History*, (New York: Modern Library, 2000), see the back cover of the book.

century.⁹ The process could be roughly broken down into two phases: one prior to the East-West Schism of 1054 and the other subsequent to it. Admittedly, the latter was more eventful, more dramatic, and more divisive, effectively splitting the Balkans into two camps: the supporters and followers of Eastern Orthodoxy in Constantinople and Roman Catholicism in Rome (Greek East and Latin West). This later facilitated the spread of the Latin and Cyrillic scripts, with the majority of Orthodox Slavs adopting Cyrillic and the majority of Catholic Slavs adopting the Latin.¹⁰

As a result, the Serbs became Orthodox and the Croats Catholic Christians. The Bosniaks, on the other hand, stood out as a unique case. Adopting - or helping in the advancement of - a peculiar style of Christianity, they remained neither here nor there. They were in a state of limbo. Though they insisted that they were true Christians - describing themselves as “krstjani” (christened ones), “good Bosniaks”, or simply “good people”¹¹ - the Bosniaks were continuously labeled as heretics both by the masters of the Greek East and Latin West axis and their Croat and Serb proxies in the Balkan region.

As heretics in the eyes of the Christian two-pronged “orthodoxy”, the Bosniaks were given several pejorative names, namely “Bogomili” (or “Bogumili”, Bogomils, which means, sarcastically, those dear to God), “Babuni” (perhaps superstitious ones, or followers of an ungodly idea), “Patareni” (deviants or fools),¹² and the members of the Bosnian (heretical) Church. The last one, perhaps, was the mildest one, in that, as Christians, the Bosniaks were indeed united as a community, a body, or an organization of believers. Such was not a slur, just stating the obvious.

At any rate, it appears as though the “Bogomili” tag was the intended affront and that the names of “Babuni” and “Patareni” were its synonyms. The three were used interchangeably, which may also suggest that the Bosnian heresy fluctuated in practice and intensity, taking on varying interpretations and being construed differently across different historical periods and locations. That is why the Bosniaks are sometimes called “Bogomili” and sometimes “Babuni” and “Patareni”, and at other times the whole system is dubbed simply the heresy of the Bosnian Church. Thus, inferring for instance that the Bosniaks were neither Bogomili, nor Babuni, nor Patareni purely because the three classifications were not used widely and consistently, is not appropriate. As said before, those

⁹ Spinka, Matthew, *A History of Christianity in the Balkans*, (Claremont: Archon Books, 1968), pp. 1-36.

¹⁰ Adamska, Anna, “Intersections: Mediaeval East Central Europe from the Perspective of Literacy and Communication”, in *Medieval East Central Europe in a Comparative Perspective*, edited by Gerhard Jaritz and Katalin Szende, (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 223-238.

¹¹ Imamovic, Mustafa, *Historija Bošnjaka (History of Bosniaks)*, (Sarajevo: “Preporod”, 1997), p. 13.

¹² Lavrin, Janko, “The Bogomils and Bogomilism,” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 8, No. 23 (December 1929), pp. 269-283.

were synonyms that complemented each other and were used interchangeably, especially by the antagonists of Bosnia.

For that reason, the term “Babuni” in “The Code of Stephan Dušan: Tsar and Autocrat of the Serbs and Greeks” means the Bogomilism of Bosnia as a form of heresy. The expression “the word of Babuni” has been translated as “heretical utterance.” Hence, Article 85 of the said Code of Stephan Dušan, titled “Of Heretical (Babuni) Utterance,” reads: “whoso utters heretical words, if he be noble let him pay one hundred perpers; and if he be not noble, let him pay twelve perpers and be flogged with sticks,” there is a comment by the translator, Malcolm Burr, that the meaning of “babunska reč” (the word or utterance of Babuni) was for many years a puzzle. However, “it is now known that Babuni is another name for Bogomiles; it occurs in the so-called Krmčija of the time of Saint Sava, where we find the heading ‘On Masaljani, who are now called Bogomili-Babuni.’ In an old manuscript of Sveta Trojica near Plevlje, dating from between 1285 and 1291, there is an anathema against *zli eretici prokleti babunie*, ‘evil heretics accursed Babuni.’ Micklosich suggests that the name of the “Babuna Pass came from some settlement of Bogomiles in that wild district.”¹³

Moreover, in Article 10 of the same Code, titled “Of Heretics”, it is said: “And if any heretic be found living among Christians, let him be branded on the face and driven forth; and whoso shall harbor him, he too shall be branded.” Regarding this, the translator, Malcolm Burr, made an interesting comment. He said that “this clause must have applied principally to the Bogomiles, the most numerous heretical sect in the Balkans. They were Manichaeans of Paulician descent, and were particularly numerous in Bosnia, where they were an organized community.”¹⁴

The above comment offers further insight into the range of names and meanings linked to the Bosnian heresy. Bogomilism was likewise occasionally associated with Manichaeism and Paulicianism, which was for obvious reasons. The former was a dualistic cosmology of the 3rd century portraying the intrinsic clashes between a virtuous realm of light and a malevolent realm of darkness, a fundamental belief at the heart of Bogomilism. The latter was a medieval (7th century) Christian sect whose members referred to themselves as good Christians, which is similar to the codes of “good Bosniaks” and “good people”, which the Bosniaks took great pride in identifying themselves with. It follows that, by

¹³ “The Code of Stephan Dušan: Tsar and Autocrat of the Serbs and Greeks,” translated from the old Serbian with notes by Malcolm Burr, in *the Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 28, No. 70 (November 1949), pp. 198-217.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

extension, the Bosniaks considered themselves to be good Christians as well. Towards this end, certainly, is a book in German by Eugen Roll titled “Ketzer Zwischen Orient und Okzident: Patarener, Paulikianer, Bogomilen” (Heretics between Orient and Occident: Patarens, Paulicians, Bogomils).

When they spoke about Stefan Nemanja, the founder of the Nemanja dynasty which ruled Serbia from 1169 till 1372, Voyeslav Yanich and C. Patrick Hankey highlighted that a sign of his devotion to the holy Orthodox Church was his unparalleled zeal to “destroy utterly all heresies which arose among the people through the work of false teachers.” The authors were prompt in noting that the most significant heresy was Bogomilism in Bosnia. They were “very dangerous to the state in those days. When the Turks took Bosnia in 1463 they became Musulmans.”¹⁵ Stefan Nemanja's fight against the “formidable heresy” of Bogomilism contributed to his canonization as a saint. Needless to say that the authors also insinuated that with the incorporation of members of the Bogomilism sect into Islam, the mother of all religious heresies and existential evils, and all perils for the entirety of Christendom, was created.

The above names for the Bosnian “heresy” and for the Bosniaks as its adherents were so widespread that even classical Bosnian authors did not hesitate to use them. Some examples are Salih Sidki Muvekkit-Hadžihuseinović, a pioneering figure in Bosnian historiography during the 19th century, and Mehmed Handžić, a prominent Bosnian theologian and politician in the first half of the 20th century. Both of them accepted that prior to the arrival of the Ottomans, after which the Bosniaks began converting to Islam in large numbers, the Bosniaks were Bogomili (Bogomils), which to the two authors was synonymous with the Patareni label. Salih Sidki Muvekkit-Hadžihuseinović discussed the matter in his seminal history of Bosnia, wherein he dwelled on the emergence of Bogomilism and the identity as well as teachings of the Bogomili.¹⁶ Mehmed Handžić, on the other hand, did a similar thing in his treatise titled “Islamizacija Bosne i Hercegovine” (Islamization of Bosnia and Hercegovina) in which he explored the origins of the Bosnian Muslims.¹⁷

The Bosniaks as “good Christians”, “good Bosniaks”, and “good people”

It stands to reason that the derogatory tags for the Bosniaks before the Ottomans and the process of Islamization likely continued although that unique period of Bosnia and its

¹⁵ Yanich, and Hankey, *Lives of the Serbian Saints*, p. 8.

¹⁶ Muvekkit-Hadžihuseinović, *Povijest Bosne (History of Bosnia)*, pp. 11-13.

¹⁷ Handžić, *Islamizacija Bosne i Hercegovine (Islamization of Bosnia and Hercegovina)*, pp. 4-8.

people, with its distinct characteristics, ceased to exist. Whereas the Bosniaks were preoccupied with their new socio-religious identity and eagerly awaited forging an exciting future. Focusing excessively on the past rooted in misguidance was of secondary importance. Other priorities took precedence and needed to be addressed.

It was the opponents of the Bosniaks that were infuriated by the latter's both old and new distinctiveness, and it was them and their actions that kept distorting historical narratives to weaken the Bosniaks' case and exaggerate their own. The goal was to portray the Bosniaks as traitors and foreigners in their own country to the greatest extent possible. Without doubt, the fact that the Ottomans were poor historiographers exacerbated the situation, as confirmed by Mehmed Handžić (d. 1944)¹⁸ and Safvet-beg Bašagić (d. 1934), the father of the Bosnian Renaissance at the beginning of the 20th century.¹⁹ Investigating and documenting the early history of Bosnia proved challenging due to the lack of preserved information or the prevalence of misinformation.

The truth is that the Bosniaks were originally, or were supposed to be, Christians. According to some, they were closer to Roman Catholicism, as espoused by the Croats, and to others, Eastern Orthodoxy, as espoused by the Serbs. It is because of these potential affiliations and their far-reaching nationalist ramifications that the early religious background of the Bosniaks was obscured and kept hidden. The Bosnian version of Christianity was unique. It contained important elements of both the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox models and of several heretical schools of thought, such as Bogomilism, Manichaeism, Paulicianism, and others. The presence of components of diverse forms of paganism should not be excluded either. According to Gorčin Dizdar, the Bosnian Church was "related to other medieval dualist movements such as the Paulicians of eastern Anatolia, the Bogomils of Bulgaria and the Patarens/Cathars of Western Europe."²⁰

This eccentric blend of Bosnia's "Christian" beliefs and practices was regarded as heretical both by Rome and Constantinople. It was unacceptable, which led to Bosnia and its people becoming the subject of religiously motivated and politically influenced attempts at conversion, and in some cases, persecution. Due to the fact that the Bosniaks were considered heretics and actively practiced their heretical beliefs, it was necessary to give

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁹ Bašagić, Safvet-beg, *Kratka Uputa u Prošlost Bosne i Hercegovine (A Brief Introduction to the History of Bosnia and Herzegovina)*, (Sarajevo: Vlastita Naklada, 1900), p. 3.

²⁰ Dizdar, Gorčin, *The Standing Stones of Medieval Bosnia: Heresy, Dualism and Symbols in Pre-Ottoman Balkans*, PhD Dissertation, York University, Toronto, Ontario, 2016, pp. 63-120. Obolensky, Dmitri, *The Bogomils, A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism*, (Twickenham: Anthony C. Hall, 1972), pp. 277-285.

them an appropriate designation. Finding a single term that could encompass all aspects of the heresies proved to be an impossible task. Consequently, a range of terms were created and circulated, although most were only partially accurate, and none were fully inclusive by themselves. This in turn caused a proliferation of labels, and therefore, the Bosniaks used liberally, depending on their spiritual and socio-political inclinations. In the eyes of many, though, the entire convolution denoted just a heretical Church of Bosnia.

Yet, the Bosniaks saw themselves as true Christians. They were “good Christians”, which rendered them “good Bosniaks” and generally “good people.” It seems that the followers of the Bosnian Church were bent on transcending mundane and physical considerations as well as symbols. Thiers was a monastic or ascetic way of life in which renouncing worldly pursuits for the sake of full devotion to spiritual work, was the utmost priority. Substance took precedence over display, much like how the world of spirit overshadowed the world of matter. For that reason, was the Bosnian Church occasionally called a monastic Church or a monastic religious organization. However, the ascetic and puritanical nature of the Bosnian Church was more liberal and open-minded than is normally expected from similar religious groups. Though the Bosniaks should have been to a considerable degree opposed to the wealth and secular power of the established Churches, and, at face value, should have forsaken earthly material goods, “the Bosnian Church in its heyday enjoyed considerable power, and its dignitaries were used to sign charters and carry out diplomatic missions.”²¹

Within this framework, one can try to understand why certain beliefs and practices of the Bosnian Church were misunderstood, blown out of proportion, and deemed heretical. Whereas they might simply have been acts of neglect and inefficiency, and the results of dissimilar world outlooks and so, interpretations. Treating those either as part of an elaborate dualistic cosmology or as outright deviations is not only morally unacceptable but also spiritually unjustifiable. Equally unsuitable would be to perceive the Bosnian Church as a monolithic, or homogenous, and overly simplified concept as well as a concrete phenomenon.

Arising from such an approach were the misunderstood, exaggerated and even incorrect views that posited that the Bosnian Church subscribed exclusively to “a Manichaean ‘dualist’ theology, according to which Satan had a power almost equal to that of God; the visible world was Satan’s creation, and men could free themselves from the taint of the material world only by following an ascetic way of life, renouncing meat, wine and

²¹ Malcolm, *Bosnia A Short History*, pp. 35, 39.

sexual intercourse.” This “identification of matter with Satan’s realm had some far-reaching theological implications: Christ’s incarnation had to be regarded as a kind of illusion, and his physical death on the Cross could not have happened; various ceremonies involving material substances, such as baptism with water, had to be rejected, and the Cross itself became a hated symbol of false belief. Also rejected were the use of church buildings, and indeed the entire organizational structure of the traditional Church, especially its wealthy monasteries.”²²

Once it was established that the Bosniaks strayed from conventional-cum-orthodox Christian practices, the notion of Bosnia being heretical started to take hold. It was yet turning into an international affair. So much so that in 1203, the Pope in Rome, Innocent III, expressed concern over the deviations in Bosnia, and prompted by a series of complaints, many of which were politically driven, he sought to investigate the matter. He aimed to check the accuracy of the complaints and evaluate the degree to which the Bosniaks followed Catholicism instead of heresy, as claimed by Ban Kulin (d. 1204), one of the most notable medieval Bosnian rulers, who used to profess himself to be a good and faithful Catholic.

The result was the meeting of Bosnian ecclesiastics at Bilino Polje in April 1203, at which they signed a declaration promising to reform their behavior. The meeting was attended by a legate of the Pope. The Bosniaks “undertook to acknowledge the full supremacy of Rome, accept Catholic priests in their monasteries, restore altars and crosses to places of worship, adopt the confessional and penance, follow the Roman calendar of feasts and fasts, receive communion at least seven times a year, keep the sexes apart in monasteries, and give no shelter to heretics. They also promised not to arrogate to themselves alone the name of ‘christianus’, but to refer to themselves as *fraters*, ‘brothers’, instead.”²³

Historians are virtually unanimous in their agreement on the authenticity of the account mentioned above. The account demonstrates that the Bosnian Christians were different, associating themselves with neither of the branches or sects of Christianity, but with Christianity itself. They were Christians (“christianus” or “krstjani”), first and foremost, the followers of a religion rather than any of its derivatives.

That the Bosniaks were able to establish common ground with the legate or ambassador of the Pope, and that the outcomes of the meeting in no way implied a disavowal of heresies, shows that the Bosnian Church was different yet accommodating and compatible and that the Bosnian clergy were ready to listen and even yield to the pressure, albeit without

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

renouncing the unique Bosnian character of their Church in favor of absolute Catholicism and the national-identity-related nuances that such a prospect entailed. What was discussed and recorded during the meeting pertained to rituals, ceremonies and customs, not to pure theological issues. It dealt with practical application, not with articles of faith or worldview (*weltanschauung*). The Pope's envoy to the meeting with the Bosniaks, John Casamaris, stated afterwards in a letter to the Pope that he was discussing merely "the actions of some Patavens in Bosnia."²⁴

Admittedly, the meeting at Bilino Polje (today's Zenica city) was as much a religious as political gathering.²⁵ Its agendas cut across the tinges of the two domains. The fact that no spectacular outcomes the said conference has produced indicates that it was convened partly as a result of the growing differences inside the fold of the Bosnian Church, which had a bearing on the trajectory of the evolution of the Bosnian national consciousness, and partly as a result of the equivalently growing accusations against Bosnia and its overall religio-national development programs. Towards this end are the first two and the last items in the Bilino Polje abjuration document: "We (Bosnian Christians) will not follow heretical depravity. We renounce the schism, for which we are accused, and promise to remain faithful to the orders and instructions of the Holy Church. When our Magister dies, from now on forever, the priors with a council of Brothers, fearing God, will chose an elder who will be confirmed by a Roman pontiff. And if the Roman church will want to add or modify anything, we will faithfully accept and adhere."²⁶

Ultimately, the meeting ended up benefiting all parties involved. The Catholic Church was satisfied that the Bosnian Church was not as heretical as claimed and that it promised to remain "under control". The Bosnian Church, on the other hand, was exonerated in many ways, enabling it to remain true to itself and to function in accordance with its core values. Its mixture of monasticism, good work and operational (administrative-qua-spiritual) autonomy from Rome, remained the distinctive nature of the Bosnian Church. Thus, to Noel Malcolm, one of the meanings of the word "krstjani" was "monks". The word might have been affiliated mostly with the monks of the Bosnian Church. The same author believes that the Bosnian Church was probably isolated from Catholic jurisdiction from as early as the

²⁴ Dizdar, *The Standing Stones of Medieval Bosnia: Heresy, Dualism and Symbols in Pre-Ottoman Balkans*, p. 113.

²⁵ Fine, John, *The Bosnian Church, A New Interpretation, A Study of the Bosnian Church and Its Place in State and Society from the 13th to the 15th Centuries*, (Boulder: East European Quarterly, 1975), pp. 126-134.

²⁶ Dizdar, *The Standing Stones of Medieval Bosnia: Heresy, Dualism and Symbols in Pre-Ottoman Balkans*, pp. 112-113.

1230s; “and as it gradually asserted its autonomy, it must sooner or later have reached a point where it was in de facto schism with Rome.”²⁷ During that period and later, the split with Rome likely took on various political and doctrinal dimensions, which may not have been as fundamental as some would like to suggest. They might have shared similarities with the subjects that were addressed in the prior Bilino Polje conference.

It is also noteworthy that the Bilino Polje conference was not, and could not be, fully representational of the religious state of Bosnia. It is not possible to definitively assert that there were not extra heretical or otherwise elements in the country. But the meeting made it abundantly clear that Bosnia was anything but conventional, predictable, and easily controllable. John Fine surely had this verity in mind when he said that “there is no evidence that the leaders of any heretical movement were present at Bilino Polje. This all suggests that Casamaris’ personal investigation had turned up no hard-core heretics. This, of course, only means that the legate did not find them. It does not mean that such heretics were not to be found somewhere in Bosnia. After all, Bosnia was a large region with rugged mountains and poor communications. To cross the country was then a trip of at least ten days. However, had Casamaris heard about the existence of heresy anywhere in Bosnia, it is inconceivable that he would not have at least suggested prolonging his mission or sending further missions. But he did not.”²⁸

Parenthetically, in addition to the Bosnian Church, Catholicism was also notably present in Bosnia. Some Catholic orders even came - and settled - intending to battle and eradicate the supposed “heresies of the Bosnian Church.” The Catholic Church's footprint in Bosnia was in line with the prevalence and impact of the Bosnian heresies. The success and zeal of the latter directly impacted the existence and operation of the former, leaving less room for it.²⁹ However, in much of Bosnia, excluding Hercegovina, there was very little Orthodox presence before the Ottoman arrival. “Indeed, an Orthodox population was introduced to large parts of Bosnia as a direct result of Ottoman policy.”³⁰

Choosing to Reject the Distorted Image of Christianity and Embrace the Truth of Islam

At any rate, the Bosnian Pre-Ottoman religious individuality was affirmative. It called for resourcefulness and critical thinking. Christianity was an invented religion. It was deemed

²⁷ Malcolm, *Bosnia A Short History*, pp. 34-37.

²⁸ Fine, *The Bosnian Church, A New Interpretation, A Study of the Bosnian Church and Its Place in State and Society from the 13th to the 15th Centuries*, p. 129.

²⁹ Brockett, *The Bogomils of Bulgaria and Bosnia*, pp. 65-68.

³⁰ Malcolm, *Bosnia A Short History*, p. 55.

the only answer to restoring the spiritual and moral order and fulfilling the covenants the Jews had both neglected and were incapable of achieving. Christianity was intent on replacing Judaism by making its own particular message universal. Christians were the new Israel, both in flesh and in spirit, and the strictly unitarian God of justice in the Old Testament had been replaced by the trinitarian God of love in the New Testament.

At first, Christianity was at odds with Judaism, then with itself, and finally with the world. The efforts to untangle the complications arising from the inflexibility of Judaism and the closed-off attitudes of the Jews resulted in a multitude of theological and legal challenges that persistently troubled Christianity and the Christian mindset. Accordingly, Christianity started off as an asset, but over time it shifted towards being a liability and drawback; and originally a redeemer, it soon took on the role of a manipulative captor.

No wonder that from the beginning, Christianity has been surrounded by controversies. It struggled to establish its core beliefs and enforce them on most of its followers. Its diffusion had to be limited and defined within the boundaries of conformity. Freedom and curiosity were substituted with restriction and control, while openness and choice were replaced by indoctrination and pressure. Christianity, it follows, never experienced the state of being, because it was always becoming. It was – and never stopped – evolving. It was excessively concerned about the past (historical revisionism: what things have or might have been) and the future (causal determinism: what things are expected, or fantasized, to be), rather than the present (consequential accountability: what things are right here and now and how they are to be experienced, or lived, morally).

However, despite the concerted efforts to implement the ideas and systems attached to the evolving Christianity, there were always hurdles to overcome in achieving success. Creating a sense of uniform orthodoxy was a daunting task, as that was the most elusive goal. For that reason, the notion of identifying and combatting heresies played a crucial role in the history of Christianity and the shaping of its canons. To counter the hazards posed by the proponents of differing viewpoints and doctrines, anything divergent within the delineated sphere of Christian orthodoxy was not only dismissed but also actively opposed.

The stage was set for a turbulent future when it was declared in the Second Epistle of Peter (the authorship of the Epistle, traditionally ascribed to Simon Peter, “a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ”, is a subject of debate among scholars who argue it was likely penned by one or more of Peter’s disciples in Ancient Rome, with Peter’s name used as a pseudonym): “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master

who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them, the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed, they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” (2 Peter 2:1-3).

The rise in detecting and confronting growing heresies became more pronounced as Christian orthodoxy evolved, a process that could only occur after the Roman Empire officially adopted Christianity as its state religion. In making this decision, the Roman authorities aimed to Romanize the religion just as much as to Christianize the Empire. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the pioneering work of early Church fathers like Ignatius (d. 108/140),³¹ Polycarp (d. 155),³² Irenaeus (d. 202),³³ Tertullian (d. 220)³⁴ and Eusebius (d. 339)³⁵ might not have been acknowledged or achieved success without the conversion of Emperor Constantine I to Christianity in 312. The action resulted in the issuance of the Edict of Thessalonica in 380 by three Roman emperors, and set in motion a series of ecumenical councils, starting with the first one in Nicaea in 325.

The criteria for identifying heresies and the standard procedure for addressing them were outlined in the Edict of Thessalonica. As per the Edict, the principles and teachings of standardized Christianity were not the ones revealed or supplied by Jesus himself, but “delivered to the Romans by the divine Apostle Peter, as it has been preserved by faithful tradition, and which is now professed by the Pontiff Damasus and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness.” Besides, the Roman establishment was recognized as the ultimate source of religious legitimacy and the leading enforcer and guardian of religious orthodoxy. That inevitably signaled a war against nonconformists and religious “others.”

The Edict’s words attest to the dangerous jurisdiction and privilege of the Roman Empire, along with their possible ramifications: “We authorize the followers of this law to assume the title of Catholic Christians; but as for the others, since, in our judgment they are foolish madmen, we decree that they shall be branded with the ignominious name of heretics, and shall not presume to give to their conventicles the name of churches. They will suffer in

³¹ *The Epistles of St. Ignatius Bishop of Antioch*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1910).

³² *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians*, (n.p.: Kindle Edition, 2022).

³³ His seminal book is “Against Heresies”, published by New Advent. The book is also known as “On the Detection and Overthrow of the So-Called Gnosis.”

³⁴ *Tertullian’s Prescription against Hereticks*, (Oxford: The Theatre, 1722).

³⁵ *The Church History of Eusebius*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998).

the first place the chastisement of the divine condemnation and in the second the punishment of our authority which in accordance with the will of Heaven we shall decide to inflict.”³⁶

William K. Boyd captured the growing feeling in the Empire by stating that the new religion was meant to benefit community development and protect the state's interests, rather than adding to its challenges. The government was grappling with an array of issues and was desperate for advantages and solutions. Christianity-related problems were the last thing on its list. “Since Constantine, I desired that the church should contribute to the social and moral strength of the empire, religious dissension was a menace to the public welfare, and if necessary, secular authority might be exercised for its suppression.”³⁷

The dynamic shifted dramatically with the East-West or Great Schism in 1054, leading to severed connections and broken bonds between the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. The occurrence was the outcome of a string of protracted religious disagreements and theological disputes. As part of the process, a wide range of orthodox beliefs - and consequently, the world of heresies - came under scrutiny. The standards and systems for handling not just heresies, but as well orthodoxy itself, were politicized to a greater extent and managed in a more irresponsible and manipulated manner. An atmosphere of institutionalized inquisition or religious-qua-political tribunal, separation, lack of trust, accelerated conflicts, and uncompromising rivalry for followers between the Catholic West and the Eastern Orthodox East, were the most damaging corollaries of the Schism.

It was in these conditions that the peoples of the Balkan region were proselytized and introduced to Christianity. Because they were Catholics and Orthodox, the Croats and Serbs were inherently pitted against each other, and by virtue of being neither – or at most temporarily and superficially Catholic, but fundamentally "heretical" – the Bosniaks were targeted by both the Croats and Serbs, as well as external forces outside the Balkans. Their religio-political survival depended on their ability to tread a fine line.³⁸

One may wonder why the Bosniaks continued to maintain their unconventional religious beliefs and practices despite the ongoing regional and international efforts to convert them, investigate them, and politically dominate them. Taking everything into account, it is quite possible that the Bosniaks belonged to those "heretical" sects or schools of thought that saw themselves adhering closely to the original teachings of Jesus, rather

³⁶ Serry, Gic, *The Edict of Thessalonica*, <https://faithandheritage.com/2017/07/the-edict-of-thessalonica/>, accessed on May 3, 2024.

³⁷ Boyd, William K., *The Ecclesiastical Edicts of the Theodosian Code*, (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1905), p. 34.

³⁸ Malcolm, *Bosnia A Short History*, pp. 15-42.

than teachings that were invented or developed over time. Reversing the established pattern, it was the Bosniaks who were orthodox, in the sense of striving to step outside the domains of the conventionally imposed beliefs and to return to the spirituality of the early Christians, while it was the professed imperialized orthodoxy that was gradually proving otherwise.³⁹

The issue was about seeking the truth and meeting the precepts of history and moral consciousness, not about political correctness or practical opportunism. As if the Bosniaks wanted to adhere to the true spiritualized Christianity, rather than its politicized and also Romanized counterpart. For that reason, it is often stated that the essence of Bogomilism – after all a significant force in defining the Bosnian Church - was rooted in the pursuit of returning to the spirituality of early Christians and challenging established systems of government and church. Accumulating wealth and power were also condemned.

Furthermore, asserting that only the New Testament expressed true Christianity – with the Old Testament being of no value at all, and even harmful to use, in that it was written (distorted and interpolated) at the instigation of Satan - the followers of Bogomilism “denounced the entire institution of the church. They did not recognize the decisions of ecumenical and local councils, spurned the writings of eminent theologians, and sharply criticized representatives of the church, arguing that they were servants of the force of darkness. Their attacks against the higher clergy, especially bishops, were particularly sharp. According to the Bogomils, they had completely forgotten their duty to be the shepherds of their flocks, but lived in luxury and idleness and led vain, useless lives.”⁴⁰

In this manner, the Bosniaks maintained their spiritual freedom and independent thinking. They possessed a strong inclination towards questioning erroneously established norms and institutions. Over time, they developed objectivity and open-mindedness as key traits, which greatly contributed to their cultural identity, demonstrating its value the instant they were able to learn about Islam and interact with Muslims. Were it not for this factor, it would be hard to fathom why the Bosniaks converted to Islam in such large numbers, despite the fact that the Ottomans neither forced anybody to enter the fold of Islam – as it is universally maintained by both Muslims and non-Muslims - nor did they possess, especially

³⁹ Bišćević, Vedad, *Bosanski Namjesnici Osmanskog Doba, 1463-1878 (Bosnian Governors of the Ottoman Era, 1463-1878)*, (Sarajevo: Connectum, 2006), p. 40.

⁴⁰ Angelov, Dimiter, *The Bogomil Movement*, (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1987), pp. 16-20.

at the outset of their Bosnian adventure, any comprehensive systems and strategies for the peaceful promotion of Islam and for inviting people to it.⁴¹

Unconventional as it may seem – barring the provisos of perfection and idealism - the Ottomans signified a pure Islamic polity. They were primarily focused on spreading, explaining and protecting the message of Islam across the globe. Their main goal was to win over people's minds and hearts, rather than just acquiring territories. Building an empire came second and was influenced by their Islamic mission. The Ottomans saw themselves as the carriers of Islamic civilization, entrusted with the task of enlightening others. Gaining lands was a bonus, not their main priority.⁴²

The Bosniaks' inner freedom resonated with the freedom found in Islam's monotheistic beliefs. Their thirst for an objective and authentic truth was satiated by Islam's championing of critical thinking, incessant pursuit of the truth and perfection, fairness, equality, transparency and straightforwardness. When it came to their religious beliefs centered around Jesus in particular and the truth in general, the Bosniaks were somewhat connected to Christianity, but fundamentally, they were in search of something else. Seeking to fill the gap left by the shortcomings of Christian theology and morality, they desired more. The solution lay in Islam.

The Bosniaks were Closer to Islam than any Branch of Christianity

That was the chief reason why the Bosniaks were quick to accept Islam in droves, according to Safvet-beg Bašagić and his book “Kratka Uputa u Prošlost Bosne i Hercegovine (A Brief Introduction to the History of Bosnia and Herzegovina).”⁴³ In their Bogomilism-inspired beliefs, prior to the Ottomans, the Bosniaks were “closer to Islam than Catholicism,” as a result of which their conversion to Islam should not be regarded as a surprise. The teachings of Islam pertaining to aristocracy, which eliminate any sort of favoritism and excessiveness, were more suitable to the pride and dignity of the elites of the Bosnian Bogomils than to the Catholics, who attributed to the church and ecclesiastics all worldly and spiritual authority both over individuals and entire populations – was the appraisal of Safvet-beg Bašagić.⁴⁴

⁴¹ See, Adem, Handžić, *Studije o Bosni, Historijski Prilozi iz Osmansko-Turskog Perioda (Studies on Bosnia, Historical Expositions from the Ottoman-Turkish Period)*, (Istanbul: Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 1994), p. 33-38.

⁴² See, Maksudoglu, Mehmet, *Osmanli History, 1289-1922, Based on Osmanli Sources*, (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 1999), pp. xxv-xl.

⁴³ Bašagić, *Kratka Uputa u Prošlost Bosne i Hercegovine (A Brief Introduction to the History of Bosnia and Herzegovina)*, p. 18.

⁴⁴ See, *Ibid.*

The same author asserted that in no way did the Bosniaks lose their freedom and independence in the 15th century, following the arrival of the Ottomans. Rather, the Bosniaks were thus liberated and helped in their national affirmation. It was only halfway through the 19th century, when the Ottoman polity deteriorated and the Ottomans stopped being what they used to be, that the Bosniaks started losing their sovereignty and rights.⁴⁵ Since there can be no genuine national identity-building without religious awareness and growth, Safvet-beg Bašagić definitely implied that the freedom and independence linked to the arrival of the Ottomans also meant spiritual emancipation together with moral upbringing.

An illustration of this restless and inquisitive Bosnian spirit is entailed in the following. Dimiter Angelov stated that the Patarens of Bosnia – who belonged to the Bosnian Church and were related to the Bogomils – placed great emphasis on the sacredness of human life and life in general. It was a big sin to kill not only people but also animals. Hence, wars and bloodshed were perceived as undesired anomalies. It was not seldom, therefore, that the Bogomils – including the Bosnian Patarens - levelled sharp attacks not just against killing and bloodshed, but as well “against the fanaticism of the church and the secular authorities in persecuting and destroying their opponents.”⁴⁶

A 15th century debate between a Pataren from Bosnia (a heretic) and a Roman (a “rightly-guided” Catholic) on the matter has been documented. According to the record, a Bosnian Pataren and a Roman debated a number of issues. One of them concerned the persecution and killing of those who harbored different opinions. The Bosnian “heretic” accused the Catholic church and the bodies of worldly power of transgressing the commandment to love one's neighbor, and of persecuting and putting to the sword all those who opposed the church dogmas and held dissimilar views. The Bosnian “heretic” said that “it was permissible to expose and persecute one's opponents with words, but not to kill them physically, as this was in contradiction with the holy doctrines of Christ.”⁴⁷

This was indeed an instance of the Bosniaks’ commitment to honesty and virtue. Because neither the church nor its oppressive secular partners truly reflected the original teachings of Jesus, they could be openly criticized and even rejected. One could also attempt to circumnavigate them in search of Jesus' true personality and heavenly message.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁶ Angelov, *The Bogomil Movement*, p. 23.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

The report above also serves as an illustration of how the Bosniaks were closer to Islam than Christianity.⁴⁸ Historically, both the Jews (Children of Israel) and Christians were known as advocates of violence and bloodshed for the sake of realizing some nationalistic and quasi-religious goals. This was so, although it has been ordained for the Jews - and, by extension, Christians because the Christians viewed themselves as the inheritors and fulfillers of the unrealized mission of the former – that the sanctity, or inviolability, of any human life, is supreme and cannot be compromised regardless of circumstances and reasons.

Of course, this ordinance has been interpolated and greatly tampered with, but the Holy Qur'an, in its role as the validator of the previous holy scriptures and the ultimate source of history, brings it to light and reminds the perpetrators of their crimes. The Qur'an says for example: "Because of that, We decreed upon the Children of Israel (the Jews) that whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption (done) in the land – it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one – it is as if he had saved mankind entirely. And our messengers had certainly come to them with clear proofs. Then indeed many of them, (even) after that, throughout the land, were transgressors" (al-Ma'idah, 32).

It goes without saying that the church and its allies, often despotic governments, could only partake in unjust wars and bloodshed because the true teachings of Jesus - which were in harmony with the teachings of earlier prophets, and were topped by the idea of the sanctity of human life - were twisted, lost and exploited. Therefore, it is understandable why individuals seeking the genuine truth, and the authentic message of Jesus would be willing to reject the church and its dubious religious universe and instead explore what Islam had to offer. That is exactly what the Bosniaks were bent on doing ever since the Ottomans introduced them to Islam.

Mehmed Handžić went a step further and said that Bogomilism – which had a considerable impact on the development of the religion of the Bosnian Patarians – was influenced by other major religions, notably Judaism and Islam. He added that some people may be surprised to hear that Islam is mentioned as a factor that contributed to the establishment and growth of Bogomilism in Bulgaria as its country of origin, "but that is a historical fact." Mehmed Handžić mentioned a Croatian source according to which around the 10th century, when Bogomilism was founded in Bulgaria, Bulgaria was "full of Muslims." Such a phenomenon occurred due to the preaching efforts of many Arabs in the country. The propagation of Islam was so intense and widespread that, at one-point, Islamic

⁴⁸ Arnold, Thomas Walker, *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*, (Westminster: A. Constable and co., 1896), pp. 169-172.

books were burned as a result. Mehmed Handžić concluded that, undoubtedly, there were Muslims in medieval Bulgaria who might have influenced the creation of Bogomilism as a Christian sect.⁴⁹

It is likewise noteworthy, Mehmed Handžić continues, that the dualistic cosmology or the cosmological system of twin, opposing deities of Manichaeism and Paulicianism, which preceded and inspired Bogomilism, may have been misinterpreted and exaggerated. In passing, Islam also promotes a form of dualism, where all goodness is associated with the Almighty God and all evil with Satan. It was solely God who gave Satan the power to embody evil and tempt people. It stands to reason that, originally, it was this dualism that was adopted and preached by the ideological precursors of Bogomilism, and later by Bogomilism and the Patarens of the Bosnian Church themselves.

Owing to this, the religious movement of Paulicianism – as the key source of inspiration for Bogomilism - whose members portrayed themselves as “good Christians”, gained recognition in the thought of some prominent Muslim scholars in the field of comparative religion, such as Ibn Hazm and al-Shahrastani. They viewed Paulicianism as a monotheistic belief system rooted in authentic teachings about God and Jesus.⁵⁰ As a result, Bogomilism and later the Bosnian Church were seen to embody some elements of the true Islamic faith. This means that when the Bosnian Patarens converted to Islam, a religious journey that began centuries earlier partly due to Islam was completed. It came full circle.

Even when Sir Thomas Walker Arnold, a British orientalist, and historian, spoke about the case of the conversion of the Bosniaks to Islam in his book “The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith”, he underlined that the main reason the Bogomils (Patarens) of Bosnia readily adopted Islam was due to the numerous similarities “between their peculiar beliefs and the tenets of Islam.” The Bogomils accepted Islam and “allowed themselves to be merged in the general mass of the Muslim believers” freely and rather enthusiastically. The author listed the similarities between the Bogomils' teachings and Islam, highlighting that the serious differences were few. However, the significant number and depth of the similarities made it possible to navigate around or reconcile those differences effortlessly.⁵¹

Prior to the Ottomans, Sir Thomas Walker Arnold wrote, “in the fifteenth century, the sufferings of the Bogomils became so intolerable that they appealed to the Turks to

⁴⁹ Handžić, *Islamizacija Bosne i Hercegovine (Islamization of Bosnia and Hercegovina)*, pp. 13-14.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16.

⁵¹ See, Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*, pp. 169-172.

deliver them from their unhappy condition, for the King of Bosnia and the priests were pushing the persecution of the Bogomils to an extreme which perhaps it had never reached before; as many as forty thousand of them fled from Bosnia and took refuge in neighboring countries; others who did not succeed in making their escape, were sent in chains to Rome. But even these violent measures did little to diminish the strength of the Bogomils in Bosnia, as in 1462 we are told that heresy was as powerful as ever in this country.”⁵²

From the time the Ottoman Caliphate conquered Bosnia, there was very little mention of the Bosnian Bogomils. “They seem to have willingly embraced Islam in large numbers immediately after the Turkish conquest, and the rest seem to have gradually followed later, while the Bosnian Roman Catholics emigrated into the neighboring territories of Hungary and Austria.” In addition, Sir Thomas Walker Arnold dismissed the allegation that the conversion of the Bosniaks was insincere and inadvertent. According to some claims, “a large proportion of the Bogomils, at least in the earlier period of the conquest, embraced Islam with the intention of returning to their faith when a favorable opportunity presented itself; as, being constantly persecuted, they may have learnt to deny their faith for the time being; but that, when this favorable opportunity never arrived, this intention must have gradually been lost sight of and at length have been entirely forgotten by their descendants.” However, Sir Thomas Walker Arnold emphasized that such an idea is “a pure conjecture and has no direct evidence to support it.”⁵³

The Bosniaks’ Freedom Versus the Indoctrination and Inhibition of the Serbs and Croats

Be that as it may, the situation for the Serbs and Croats was different. They did not have the privilege of genuine and unbiased truth-seeking, religious freedom, and critical thinking. Right from the start, they were caught up in disputes among themselves, and every so often, together, against Islam and Muslims in Bosnia. These conflicts quickly took on nationalistic undertones, eventually overshadowing everything else. Therefore, instead of ennobling and spiritualizing nationalism, essentially bringing it under control, the opposite was the case; that is to say, religion was warped, manipulated, and exploited to cultivate a nationalistic spirit. The end goal was not religion, but the exploitation of religion for nefarious purposes.⁵⁴

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 170-171.

⁵⁴ Okić, Tajib, “Bosanski Kristijani (Bogumili) Prema Nekim Neobjavljenim Osmanskim Izvorima (Bosnian Krstijani (Bogomils) According to Some Unpublished Ottoman Sources),” in *Anali Gazi Husrev-Begove Biblioteke*, 12 (21-22), 2003, pp. 143–166.

However, as this course of action was unusual, even for the religious and nationalist zealots like the Serbs and Croats, systematic processes of religious brainwashing and nationalist indoctrination were common.⁵⁵ Which was perfectly understandable, in that it is hard for someone aware and enlightened to accept and live by principles of dishonesty, bias, unfairness, and manipulation. People needed to be kept ignorant and blinded, ensuring they remained in such conditions. It follows that nothing, but deceit, falsehood, and mind control was needed, and was delivered based on the laws of the supply and demand relationship.

Being part of the persistently religiously challenged and politically contested Christendom, on the one hand, and partaking in the territories where the East intersected with the West and where the cultures of Islam and Christianity overlapped and frequently struggled for dominance, on the other, the Serb and Croat geopolitical milieus were shaped by not just local, but also international, players. The interests of the Serbs and Croats were often manipulated to serve larger agendas. They were merely seen as pawns in a bigger scheme of things.

Accordingly, since the early signs of Islamophobia were increasing locally and globally, the Serbs and Croats, in their role as guardians of Christendom and a bulwark against the expansion of the Islamic (Ottoman) threat within Europe, saw their importance magnified. They were not immune to the manipulative campaigns that inspired and sustained the Crusades, and could not stay indifferent towards the ideas of the leading Islamophobes of that formative age, such as John of Damascus (d. 749), Doctor of the Church and Teacher of the Faith, whose apologetics featured the earliest systematic condemnations of and attacks against Islam, considering it the source of all religious deviations; Robert of Ketton (d. 1157), who was the first to translate the Qur'an into Latin, but whose translation was significantly incorrect and unreliable and was intended not to introduce the actual Islam and its Qur'an to the Western audiences, but to try to substantiate the longstanding Western misconceptions about Islam and Muslims; Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (d. 1320), who gained fame for his anti-Islamic writings, which were inspired by his pilgrimage to Palestine and his subsequent missionary journey to Baghdad.⁵⁶

As much a product as an epitome of these bigoted religious sentiments and their accompanying socio-political developments was Saint Sava (d. 1236), who was the first Archbishop of the autocephalous Serbian Church and whose original name was Rastko

⁵⁵ See, Petrović, Miodrag, *Zakonopravilo Svetoga Save o Muhamedovom Učenju (Zakonopravilo of Saint Sava on the Teachings of Muhammad)*, (Beograd: National Library of Serbia, 1997), pp. 7-60.

⁵⁶ See, Omer, Spahic, *Islamophobia and Islamic Moderation*, (Kuala Lumpur: Dar Al Wahi, 2022), pp. 26-70.

Nemanjić. He is customarily acknowledged as the Enlightener of the Serbian mind and one of the prime movers behind Serbism. However - if truth be told – Saint Sava was the most responsible person for demonizing Islam and Muslims in the Balkans, and for erecting insurmountable barriers between the orbs of Islam and Christianity, especially the Serbian Orthodox Church. His greatest fault was depriving his fellow citizens of the rights to unbiased truth-seeking, religious freedom and critical thinking.

Many regard Saint Sava as the founder of Serbian medieval literature, too. One of his prominent works was *Zakonopravilo* or “Nomocanon of Saint Sava.” *Zakonopravilo* was a collection of (Byzantine) ecclesiastical or church canons and civil laws. It was meant to organize and sustain the functioning of the newly established Serbian Kingdom (in 1217) and the newly attained independence of the Serbian Church (in 1219). Such was the relationship between the two that they called for each other.

To create the lasting foundations both of an independent state and an independent church it was necessary to produce a legal system. That was the reason why Saint Sava created his *Zakonopravilo*, which, expectedly, featured decrees that organized the life of the church and also myriads of norms that aimed at regulating civil life. No wonder that the growth of the Serbian state and the growth, coupled with strength, of the Serbian Church have always been bracketed together in the historical narratives of the Serbian traditional scholarship.

Zakonopravilo was used for legitimizing the state and validating the church. To Saint Sava, the Serbian Church’s independence was the only thing that had lacked in the state for its regularization and proper functioning. It furthermore should be recalled that while Saint Sava faced no obstacles whatsoever in being consecrated to become archbishop of the Serbian land by the holy patriarch of Constantinople, German, in the presence of the Byzantine Emperor and all his nobles, to become the first apostle, teacher, and enlightener of his fatherland, getting an approval for an independent (autocephalous) Serbian Church was not as smooth. It has been reported that when Saint Sava so requested, the subject was not very pleasing to the emperor and the holy patriarch. However, only owing to the great love they had for Saint Sava, they gave their consent. It follows that *Zakonopravilo* as the highest code of the Serbian Church was completed in 1219, which is the same year when the church’s independence was obtained, in order for the Saint Sava to justify the trust the Byzantine Emperor and the holy patriarch of Constantinople had placed on him and Serbia as a whole.

Therefore, *Zakonopravilo* is hailed as one of the most consequential statutory undertakings in the history of Serbia. Even though it had been taken from a variety of Byzantine sources, *Zakonopravilo* was fine-tuned in order to befit the prevalent conditions

of Serbia. Saint Sava's by and large minor interpretations and commentaries abound, which augmented the code's value. Historically, the impact of *Zakonopravilo* extended beyond the borders of Serbia. The influence was as much political as religious. For instance, the Bulgarian and Russian Orthodox Churches were of those that accepted the code.

Zakonopravilo consists of numerous sections. However, there are two sections in which Saint Sava speaks about Islam and Muslims. The first section is a part of the author's presentation of Christian heresies, wherein he delved into the case of Islam as one of those heresies. The second section is what Saint Sava called "The Rite Performed on Those Who Convert from Saracenes (Muslims) into this Pure, Genuinely Christian Faith of Ours."⁵⁷

Reading through what Saint Sava wrote about Islam and Muslims leads one to several conclusions, namely that there is nothing honest or scientific in the texts; that most of the things written are modes of bigotry and ignorance copied from other Byzantine inept and biased sources; and that introducing Islam and Muslims as compelling ideas and realities was never intended by way of inserting those discourses into the pages of *Zakonopravilo*. What was actually intended was to pre-empt the approaching risk of the Serbian people's acquaintance with the actual picture of the traditions of Islam.

The presence of Islam was undeniable. Wherever Islam arrived, it did so to stay. As it was constantly making inroads into the Byzantine territories, ideologically and militarily, nobody could tell for sure what was going to happen in the future. To many people, Islam's triumphant arrival to the rest of the Byzantine world – including the Balkans - was not the question of "if" but "when". Therefore, the people needed to be prepared. They needed to be indoctrinated and brainwashed, developing thereby an "immunity system" that would protect them from the perils of Islam and its followers.

So, whenever the people were forced to make contact with the realities of Islam and Muslims, the "immunity system" would be activated. By hook or by crook, the masses had to resist. Other than this, it stands to reason, that Saint Sava had no other reason to talk about Islam, Muslims, and the probability of conversion from Islam to Christianity, and vice versa, within the framework of a Serbian enlightenment through Serbian law and the precepts of its Orthodox Church.

Nonetheless, since the messages of Saint Sava were rooted in preconceptions and narrow-mindedness, they were able but to impair. Nothing constructive could they generate, neither on their own nor in the midst of environments where Islam was present. All potential

⁵⁷ Petrović, *Zakonopravilo Svetoga Save o Muhamedovom Učenju (Zakonopravilo of Saint Sava on the Teachings of Muhammad)*, pp. 7-60.

dealings with Muslims were thus affected yet ruled out. The people were intended to be made blind, thoughtless, and even xenophobic. Instead of letting the people think for themselves, somebody had already performed that duty for them; and instead of letting them judge matters from their points of view, the judgments had already been precast and supplied for them.

It was feared that unless this approach was adopted, when afforded an opportunity many Serbs would have flocked to the fold of Islam on account of the latter's attractive propositions, such as polygamy, "easy" divorce, the boundless rewards of a martyr (*shahid*), and the infinite pleasures of Paradise (*Jannah*). Hence, Islam and its beauties, together with alleged leniencies, had to be depicted and served as mere profanities, vulgarities, contradictions, and manifestations of fanaticism.

This was the main reason why most Serbs were never disposed to consider the issue of Islam seriously, much less to embrace it as the final Testament to the world. The people were not trained to pursue the objective truth and to live accordingly as the core of their *raison d'être*, but rather to live preordained lives mandated by an array of ethnocentric and ideological propensities, as well as historical and socio-cultural constructs.⁵⁸

In the introduction of his book "Zakonopravilo Svetoga Save o Muhamedovom Učenju (Zakonopravilo of Saint Sava on the Teachings of Muhammad)", Miodrag Petrović had exactly this in mind when he said that the number of Serbs who throughout history accepted Islam would most likely have been even more alarming had Saint Sava not had the foresight and had he not produced *Zakonopravilo* long before the appearance of Muslims on the Balkans with the intention of "educating" and preparing his people. The man was a Serbian savior par excellence. He "saved" them from Islam.⁵⁹

It comes as no surprise that Saint Sava's main source of inspiration and guidance was John of Damascus, the renowned father of Islamophobia who is universally accepted as a Doctor of the Church and Teacher of the Faith within the whole of Christianity. Saint Sava borrowed heavily from his mentor's writings when allegedly criticizing and speaking ill of Islam in his own works. In consequence, the anti-Islam and anti-Muslim views of Saint Sava were able to strike a chord with the world of Catholicism as well. That was particularly the case with the Croats whose nascent anti-Bosnia and anti-Bosniaks sentiments were already in play long before the Ottomans. The point of departure was when the Franciscans - members of a mendicant order of the Roman Catholic Church, founded in the early 13th

⁵⁸ Omer, Spahic, *Serbian Islamophobia*, (Kuala Lumpur: Dar Al Wahi, 2023), pp. 3-20.

⁵⁹ Petrović, *Zakonopravilo Svetoga Save o Muhamedovom Učenju (Zakonopravilo of Saint Sava on the Teachings of Muhammad)*, p. 7-60.

century - embarked on a drive to regain the Bosnian heretical souls for Rome. The mendicants got to work in Bosnia in the mid-14th century and may have had more success with the Bosnian nobility and political leaders than with ordinary citizens.⁶⁰

The Franciscans had sixteen monasteries in Bosnia on the eve of the arrival of the Ottomans. “Each monastery was allowed a maximum of only twelve friars, and the average number per monastery may in fact have been as low as four.”⁶¹ Later after the Bosniaks had become Muslims and Bosnia had been integrated into the Ottoman Empire, the said unfavorable sentiments gradually morphed into those of anti-Islam and anti-Muslims.

According to Pawel Cholewicki. “The Franciscan vicary, the only successful Catholic structure in Bosnia, was a natural beacon for increasing Catholic influence. The Franciscan action in Bosnia was prompted and bolstered by the papacy and the Bosnian monarchy. The papacy included the Franciscans of the Bosnian vicary in two of its major fifteenth-century projects: the reunification policy and the organization of the anti-Ottoman Crusade.” Even though the Franciscan activities in Bosnia were diversified at the time, a common theme was evident in all their efforts - missionary work. The aim was to advance Catholicism and supplant the Bosnian Church, while converting as many heretical Bosnians as possible.⁶²

Conclusion

The multitiered domain of faith was the main factor that allowed the Bosniaks to adopt Islam, setting them apart from the Serbs and Croats. Surely, some other mainly socio-political and economic factors contributed to the intensity and scope of the conversion and the spread of Islam in general - such as the somewhat privileged legal status of Muslims, the slavery institution, urbanization, the growth of Muslim towns, and migration (in the words of Noel Malcolm: “the influx of already Islamicized Slavs from outside Bosnia’s borders”⁶³) – but these were common elements present in most newly-conquered regions, causing a foreseeable influence and resulting in minimal outcomes. There is no historical record of any of those secondary factors causing a seismic demographic or religious shift in Bosnia or other Ottoman territories. In the Bosniaks’ pursuit of righteousness and authenticity,

⁶⁰ See, Cholewicki, Pawel, “The Role of the Franciscans in the Kingdom of Bosnia during the Reign of King Stjepan Tomaš (1443–1461)”, in *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, edited by Ildikó Csepregi, (Budapest: Central European University, 2019), Vol. 25 pp. 107-120.

⁶¹ Malcolm, *Bosnia A Short History*, p. 18.

⁶² Cholewicki, “The Role of the Franciscans in the Kingdom of Bosnia during the Reign of King Stjepan Tomaš (1443–1461)”, in *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, Vol. 25, pp. 107-120.

⁶³ Malcolm, *Bosnia A Short History*, p. 68.

religion's influence far outweighed that of socio-political-economic reasons. Certainly, were it not for the unique character of the Patarens in Bosnia and their Bosnian Church (which was influenced by the Bogomilism sect to some extent and could even be traced back to it) the acceptance of Islam by the Bosniaks would not have been as earnest. So much so that Islam was generally desired and eagerly sought out. It was met with open acceptance and embraced naturally, as opposed to being forced through manipulation and pressure.

Drawing from original, unpublished, and seldom-used Ottoman sources, Tajib Okić revealed that the Bosniaks' religious identity was frequently manipulated by both Serbs and Croats, who sought to portray them as either Catholics or Orthodox Christians. Tajib Okić emphasized that the unpublished Ottoman sources indicate that the Bosniaks did not belong to either of these groups, leading to their persecution and continuous pressure to conform to the “mainstream” Christianity. The Bosniaks' adherence to Bogomilism (that is, being Patarens, *krstjani* or christened ones, good Bosniaks, or simply good people) as well as the subsequent persecutions on account of the former, played a significant role in their conversion to Islam. Betraying no religious authority or legitimacy whatsoever, the process of the Bosniaks' acceptance of Islam was rather natural. It symbolized reverting to its original state, as evidenced by those rare and unpublished Ottoman sources, with the earliest dating back to 1468-9.⁶⁴

Both Catholic and Orthodox versions of Christianity - yet Christianity as a whole - were socio-political and religious constructs. They labeled such as were different as nonconformists and heretics, even if they followed the genuine or nearly genuine teachings of Jesus. The Bosniaks aligned more with the latter than with the Christianity models (constructs) that emerged later.

There is a historical account according to which in 1463, when the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II al-Fatih (d. 1481) conquered the city of Jajce, the Bosnian royal city, Bosnia officially came under Ottoman rule. This very event marked the beginning of the rapid and widespread Islamization of the predominantly Bogomil population in Bosnia. At that time, as many as 36,000 Bogomil families thronged to Jajce to convert to Islam and swear allegiance to the mighty Sultan. Following their conversion, around 30,000 militarily capable Bosniaks offered to enlist as soldiers (*janissaries*) and serve under the Sultan's command.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Okić, Tajib, “Bosanski Krstjani (Bogumili) Prema Nekim Neobjavljenim Osmanskim Izvorima (Bosnian Krstjani (Bogomils) According to Some Unpublished Ottoman Sources),” in *Anali Gazi Husrev-Begove Biblioteke*, Vol. 12, (21-22), 2003, pp. 143–166.

⁶⁵ Mustafa Imamovic, *Historija Bošnjaka (History of Bosniaks)*, p. 138.

Despite being accepted as true by several early historians, modern scholarship has discredited and rejected this account. However, the account is not entirely baseless or worthless. Admittedly, some exaggerated and outright unfounded points have been inserted into the authentic sequence of historical events, but at the very least, the entire story: a blend of truth, exaggerations, and fabrications, suggests that matters of faith, along with their various supplementary aspects, played the most significant role in the pervasive, albeit gradual, Islamization of Bosnia.

All things considered, the Bosniaks embraced Islam for three main reasons: the turbulent socio-political conditions in Bosnia before the Ottomans arrived, economic benefits engrained in the Shari'ah law that were granted to new Muslim converts, and the discontent and opposition of the Bosnian Church followers towards the imposed Christian orthodoxy, which they adhered to only superficially, concealing their actual beliefs and motives until the advent of the Ottoman rule. However, this was related to joining Islam only, which could mean simply converting and adopting a new name, whereas the full transformation into devout followers of Islam, adhering to all its teachings, was a gradual process. Undoubtedly, Islam was coming home in Bosnia. It was reconnecting with some of its ancient roots that can be traced back to the original teachings of Prophet Jesus ('Isa).

Bibliography

- Adamska, Anna. (2016). Intersections: Mediaeval East Central Europe from the Perspective of Literacy and Communication. In: *Medieval East Central Europe in a Comparative Perspective*, edited by Gerhard Jaritz and Katalin Szende. London: Routledge. pp. 223-238.
- Petranović, Božidar. (1867). *Bogomili Crkva Bosanska i Krstjani* (Bogomils the Bosnian Church and Krstjans). Zadar: n.p.
- Obolensky, Dmitri. (1972). *The Bogomils, A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism*. Twickenham: Anthony C. Hall.
- Haveric, Dzavid. (2008). *Islamisation of Bosnia*. Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Muller.
- Franjo Rački, *Bogomili i Patareni (Bogomils and Patarens)*, (Zagreb: Jugoslovenska Akademija Znanosti i Umjetnosti, 1869).
- Gic Serry, *The Edict of Thessalonica*, <https://faithandheritage.com/2017/07/the-edict-of-thessalonica/>, accessed on May 3, 2024.
- Gorčin Dizdar, *The Standing Stones of Medieval Bosnia: Heresy, Dualism and Symbols in Pre-Ottoman Balkans*, PhD Dissertation, York University, Toronto, Ontario, 2016.
- Handžić Adem, *Studije o Bosni, Historijski Prilozi iz Osmansko-Turskog Perioda (Studies on Bosnia, Historical Expositions from the Ottoman-Turkish Period)*, (Istanbul: Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 1994).
- Janko Lavrin, *The Bogomils and Bogomilism*, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 8, No. 23 (Dec., 1929), pp. 269-283.
- John Fine, *The Bosnian Church, A New Interpretation, A Study of the Bosnian Church and Its Place in State and Society from the 13th to the 15th Centuries*, (Boulder: East European Quarterly, 1975).

- Linus Pierpont Brockett, *The Bogomils of Bulgaria and Bosnia*, (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1879).
- Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: A Short History*, (New York: the Modern Library, 2000).
- Matthew Spinka, *A History of Christianity in the Balkans*, (Claremont: Archon Books, 1968).
- Mehmed Handžić, *Islamizacija Bosne i Hercegovine (Islamization of Bosnia and Hercegovina)*, (Sarajevo: Islamska Dionička Štamparija, 1940).
- Mehmet Maksudoglu, *Osmanli History, 1289-1922, Based on Osmanli Sources*, (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 1999).
- Miodrag Petrović, *Zakonopravilo Svetoga Save o Muhamedovom Učenju (Zakonopravilo of Saint Sava on the Teachings of Muhammad)*, (Beograd: National Library of Serbia, 1997).
- Mustafa Imamovic, *Historija Bošnjaka (History of Bosniaks)*, (Sarajevo: "Preporod", 1997).
- Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia A Short History*, (New York: New York University Press, 1994).
- Pawel Cholewicki, "The Role of the Franciscans in the Kingdom of Bosnia during the Reign of King Stjepan Tomaš (1443–1461)", inside: *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, edited by Ildikó Csepregi, (Budapest: Central European University, 2019), vol. 25 pp. 107-120.
- Safvet-beg Bašagić, *Kratka Uputa u Prošlost Bosne i Hercegovine (A Brief Introduction to the History of Bosnia and Herzegovina)*, (Sarajevo: Vlastita Naklada, 1900).
- Salih Sidki Muvekkit-Hadžihuseinović, *Povijest Bosne (History of Bosnia)*, translation into Bosnian by a group of translators, (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 1998).
- Spahic Omer, *Islamophobia and Islamic Moderation*, (Kuala Lumpur: Dar Al Wahi, 2022).
- Tajib Okić, "Bosanski Kristjani (Bogumili) Prema Nekim Neobjavljenim Osmanskim Izvorima (Bosnian Krstjani (Bogomils) According to Some Unpublished Ottoman Sources)," inside: *Anali Gazi Husrev-Begove Biblioteke*, 12 (21-22), 2003, pp. 143–166.
- Tertullian's Prescription against Hereticks*, (Oxford: The Theatre, 1722).
- The Church History of Eusebius*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998).
- The Code of Stephan Dušan: Tsar and Autocrat of the Serbs and Greeks*, translated from the old Serbian with notes by Malcolm Burr, inside: *the Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 28, No. 70 (Nov., 1949), pp. 198-217, published by: the Modern Humanities Research Association and University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies.
- The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians*, (n.p.: Kindle Edition, 2022).
- The Epistles of St. Ignatius Bishop of Antioch*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1910).
- Thomas Walker Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*, (Westminster: A. Constable and co., 1896).
- Vedad Bišćević, *Bosanski Namjesnici Osmanskog Doba, 1463-1878 (Bosnian Governors of the Ottoman Era, 1463-1878)*, (Sarajevo: Connectum, 2006).
- Voyeslav Yanich and C. Patrick Hankey, *Lives of the Serbian Saints*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921).
- William K. Boyd, *The Ecclesiastical Edicts of the Theodosian Code*, (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1905).