

Balkans and Islam

Balkans and Islam:
Encounter, Transformation,
Discontinuity, Continuity

Edited by

Ayşe Zişan Furat and Hamit Er

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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*To my everything and nothing
in the heart of the Balkans*

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The symposium provided an academic platform for many established scholars that gathered together from all over the world. We owe, first and foremost, many thanks to them for their active participation and support for this event. The contributors of this volume have to be commended for showing the utmost level of understanding and cooperation even when the schedule was tight and they were fully booked with their own works. We thank all of them for their efforts.

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INTRODUCTION

AYSE ZISAN FURAT AND HAMIT ER

Following the first military expedition to the region in the year 1354, the Ottoman presence in the Balkans lasted for over five hundred years. Although the Ottoman political rule ended in the beginning of the twentieth century, the cultural and the religious impact of the Ottomans has lasted to the present day. The encounter with Ottoman culture brought about significant changes in the socio-cultural and political structure of the region, thereby collaterally laying the foundations that transformed Southeast Europe into the “Balkans.” Various ethnic and cultural groups of the Balkans were reconstituted from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Although by that time the Empire started its gradual retreat from the region, the cultural heritage of the Ottomans has kept its significance even until today, especially in terms of the formation of religious identities. The intermittent wars between the Ottomans and the Russians, and the Balkan Wars in the beginning of the twentieth century, played a substantial role in re-shaping the region.

These changes had a lasting effect upon all the communities living in the Balkans. It is a matter of debate among scholars as to whether this transformation caused a “discontinuity” in the Ottoman/Islamic tradition of the region, or ensured its “continuity” through re-definition, or reconstruction of “national and religious identities.” Whatever the answers might be, this volume argues that the Ottoman tradition on the one hand, and Islamic entities and relations (realities) on the other, were, and are still, used as a source of reference, especially in defining the re-emerging Islamic phenomenon in the Balkans.

Aimed at elaborating on this argument in detail throughout Balkan history as well as opening new discussion topics, this volume aspires to find answers for some fundamental questions which are situated in the centre of many academic works that address similar topics. However, it takes the issue one step further by bringing together different voices of the Balkan region. Due to the geographical dispersion of the authors, as well as the contextual diversity of the contributions, the different perspectives of the phenomena of encounter, (mutual) transformation, change, and

continuity with regard to Islam in the Balkans are extensively elaborated upon. Moreover, showing the transition patterns of the Islamic presence in the Balkans by connecting the past and the present, this volume encourages further thoughts and poses new questions about the fate of Balkan Islam in the future while providing a critical and integrative contribution to the academic studies in this field.

The papers presented in the Balkans and Islam (Encounter-Transformation-Discontinuity-Continuity) Symposium held between November 3–5, 2011 and organized by Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Faculty of Theology, in collaboration with the Turkish international Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA), constitute the main framework of this volume. In order to provide coherence and accuracy, the papers that have been selected are directly related to the main themes of the symposium. Thus, the selected papers focus mainly on the topics of re/construction of identity and its sustainability, cultural diversity and congruity, alongside history making and constructing culture in the Balkans. This brings the most challenging aspects of the matter into the discussions on discontinuity and continuity of Islam in the Balkans as a result of encounters and transformations that took place over centuries.

The corpus of the book is organized into two main parts—Historical Sketches and Contemporary Implications. The former addresses one of the most debated issues, the conversion/Islamization of the Balkans by the Ottomans.

In the first chapter, **Galip Çağ** explores the details of various myths in the Balkans from a historical perspective. While challenging nationalist history writing traditions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries he analyses events that took place after the arrival of the Ottomans to the Balkans by using three mythological characters: Sari Saltik, Saint Nedelya and Ayvaz Dede.

Halide Aslan elaborates upon a later period, between 1880 and 1910, by taking Kosovo as a sample for tracing the conversion phenomenon in the Balkans. She emphasizes the impact of local ritual practices over the Muslim society based on archive resources. **Selcen Özyurt** focuses on another case: North Eastern Bulgaria in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. After providing an overview of the conversion of Turks settled in the region to Christianity, she discusses how the relations between Turcoman and the Turks constituted a Heterodox (Public Islam), which is a synthesis of Islamic characters and earlier beliefs in the area. In this general framework, she highlights the historical roles and social structures of the ethno-religious heterodox communities in the Balkans such as Bektasihis, Bedreddinis and Kizilbashis.

The second theme in the first part is the imagination of the Turks and Islam in the region, and the consequential policies developed towards the Muslims in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among the chapters related to this theme, **Irina Vainovski Mihai** provides an overview on the image of the Ottomans in Romanian Travelogues in the nineteenth century, a period signifying the nation building process and foundation of the modern Romanian state. She focuses on two travelogues by the canonical writers Dimitrie Bolintineau (1819–1871) and Vasile Alecsandri (1818–1890). Looking into the image of the “Oriental Other” as a means of national self-identification and self-assertion, she illustrates the adaptation of cultural models of Europe and discursive strategies of “othering” in the “Oriental” and shows how proximate Turkish and Muslim alterity has been exoticized and alienated.

Ayşe Zişan Furat focuses on Bosnia between 1878 and 1918 by pointing out the religious and educational policy applied by the Austro-Hungarian Administration. Elaborating on Benjamin Kallay’s policy towards the Muslims in Bosnia she provides a detailed analysis of the factors behind the efforts of the Austro-Hungarian civilizing mission aimed at transforming the socio-cultural life of Bosnian Muslims. On the other hand, **Heiko Brendel** discusses the Austro-Hungarian policies towards the Muslims in Montenegro after its occupation in 1916. He evaluates the efforts of the new administration in order to stabilize the region. At the same time, Brendel claims that the Austro-Hungarian military administration’s policy towards the Muslims in Montenegro was only a partial success at best, especially due to the uncertainty in Vienna and Budapest on the future of Montenegro.

In the second chapter, the volume turns to the contemporary issues. In the opening paper, **Fikret Karčić** identifies the main challenges facing the Balkan Muslims at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Relying on historical experiences and comparisons with the other Muslim communities, Karčić starts by defining the constitutive elements of “Muslim identity” in the Balkans and focuses on the challenges facing the Balkan Muslims at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Religious and intellectual leadership, maintaining the vitality of the indigenous traditions of Islam, responding to the necessities of post-modernity and integrating into the body of Muslims in the European Union are among the issues the author elaborates on. Casting light on the same issue, **Rahman Ademi** notes that living as a Muslim in the Balkans has some difficulties. Providing an inside view, he associates the Islamic identity with being a Turk and analyses the Balkan Muslim identity in terms of continuity of collective heritage having its roots in the Ottoman times. **Ayşim**

Parlaklyldız concentrates on debated terms such as multiculturalism, integration, and assimilation in the context of the Balkans. While seeking to explore more about the contemporary situation of Muslims living there, she discusses the role of Turkey in the process of re-defining religious and cultural identities in the process of globalization.

After working on the theoretical framework, our narrative gives details of cases in different Balkan countries. **Enes Karić** presents us with a fresh view on folk religion in the region by taking Bosnia as an example. He argues that in the folk religion of Bosnian Muslims, the remnants of the former tradition, whether Slavic polytheistic or Christian tradition, can clearly be seen. By giving examples from Bosnian Ulama, he provides significant insights on the Islamic modernist driven critique of Bosnian folk beliefs.

Frances Trix focuses on the different strategies Turkish speaking Muslims used after the Second World War in order to maintain their cultural identity in a multicultural society. She outlines four different strategies used by the Turkish people in Macedonia, namely opening a cultural association, publishing a newspaper, running a theatre as a cultural centre and establishing multi-lingual schools.

Applying a social movement theory approach to the findings of the conducted field studies, **Velko Atanassoff** offers a somewhat new methodological framework in the research of the phenomenon of Islamic activism in Bulgaria and tries to debunk some of the often repeated myths and stereotypes put forward in the media and academic research. He concludes that the politicization of religious issues in a midst of democratic transition is a process that threatens to discontinue the traditional Islamic culture in the country by redefining and reconstructing the existing ethnic and religious identities.

The closing chapters approach the topic from a different angle: maintaining Muslim identity in the Balkans through conservation of architectural heritage. **Ermal Nurja** explores the details of different examples of Ottoman architectural heritage in Albania by rediscovering the documents related to the religious buildings, especially to the mosques, in the Ottoman archives of that country. Unfolding the relation between politics, cultural transformation and tangible heritage he discovers the extent of destruction of the Ottoman architecture in this country. On the other hand, **Amir Pašić** examines the role of architecture in maintaining Muslim identity based on contemporary statistics. Introducing concrete resolutions for the contemporary situation in the Balkans, he shares his long term experiences from his time as the head of the architectural

department in the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA) in Istanbul from 1993.

The contributions and their authors in this volume present a large spectrum of historical and geographical examples from a region which has been a land of many different cultures, religions and groups for centuries. The variety of the subjects also affirms that there has never been a uniform approach to the presence of Islam in the Balkans, as there has never been and will never be a simple answer for any particular question related to the topic. However, there will always be a desire to explore the encounter, the transformation and continuity in the Balkans with regard to Islam.

PART I

HISTORICAL SKETCHES

CHAPTER ONE

FROM MYTH TO REALITY:
SOME FINDINGS ON THE ROLE OF ISLAM
IN THE OTTOMAN CONQUEST
OF THE BALKANS

GALİP ÇAĞ*

The new Balkan states, founded as a result of dissociation and nationalist riots in Europe after the French Revolution, had tried to maintain legitimacy through a historical pattern which actually did not exist and was established from scratch. The most important part of that rewritten imaginary pattern is without a doubt the events that occurred after the Ottoman authority became a presence in the region.

In those new writings, which can be considered as fictional history, it has been claimed that with the arrival of Turks/Muslims in the region a kind of mistreatment broke out and people were islamized “by force of sword,” and thus the Ottoman Empire was presented as barbaric and the Balkan states under its domination as oppressed and as an element whose culture was destroyed.

This study introduces some findings related to the fact that the Ottoman Empire pursued a tolerance-driven attitude of conquest based on its policy of tolerance and appeasement (called *istimalet* in Turkish), contrary to the claims mentioned above. Although some of these findings have turned into a myth in the course of time, they still feature in local sources especially, making them more reliable and true.

We hope the present study will contribute to the considerations and evaluations which regard Islam as a religion that encourages a moderate attitude even towards non-Muslims and which considers the Ottomans as a community with a plan and mission, rather than a simple group of conquerors.

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In this chapter, we will attempt as a method to examine some of the Balkan communities and to present descriptions and stories covered in local and Ottoman sources regarding such communities. The conclusion of the present study will be established with the assistance of such myths and stories concerning the conquest of these regions by the Ottoman-Islam identity, and on evaluations to be made in this regard.

It is a known fact that the Turks arrived in the Balkans long before the Ottomans. The next stage of Balkan-Turk settlement, which started with the migration of tribes and then became apparent with the settlement of the Patzinaks and Cumans, is undoubtedly the arrival of Muslim Turks in that region. Our focus is on when the Muslim-Turk community first arrived in the region and how the conversion of the native population was achieved after the first emergence of Ottoman Turks, and how Islam influenced this process.

Due to the reasons given in the introduction of this chapter, a considerable amount of the viewpoints in the literature of Balkan history consider that the attitude of Ottoman authority in the region was to achieve conversion to Islam by means of occupation and enforcement. While such considerations can be commonly perceived under the problem of *objectivity*¹ in historical literature, it can also be regarded as a defective and non-scientific consequence of the *historical nationalist*² approach, as stated by Karpat. On the other hand, thanks to the increasing number of studies on this issue in recent years and the researchers who have eliminated the subjectivity problem, it is now possible to examine the issue with different data and a multi-perspective approach. Indeed, this is one of the most important starting points in making healthy deductions.

A Leader in the Balkans: Sari Saltik

Although the exact date when Muslim Turks started to settle in the Balkans has been debated, the main consensus of experts on this issue is that the most important and primary representative of the settlement is Sari Saltik. The life of Sari Saltik and his contribution to the Islamization and

¹ For an evaluation related to the problem of objectivity in the literature of Balkan history, see; Galip Çağ, “Osmanlı Balkan Tarihi Yazımında Objektiflik Problemi [Problem of Objectivity to the Writing of History of the Balkans],” Gazi University, Institute of Social Sciences, 2nd Young Scientists Symposium, May 17–20, 2010, (Ankara: Gazi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2010), 235–250.

² Kemal H. Karpat, *Balkanlar’da Osmanlı Mirası ve Ulusçuluk* [Ottoman Heritage and Nationalism in the Balkans] (Ankara: 2004), 7.

Turkization of the Balkans can be regarded as beyond the scope of this chapter. However, in regard to the principle of historical continuity, it is essential to mention the issue since it is the starting point and precursor of our topic.

In consideration of our topic, we will not focus on who Sari Saltik was, and where and when he lived.³ What we are actually interested in is Sari Saltik's contribution to the Islamization of the Balkans and the influence of Islamic identity resulting from it.

Many anecdotes featured in *Saltik-name*⁴ place Sari Saltik's legendary personality at the forefront. Saltik, who strived to perform *jihad* and fought to that end in many regions of the world, had different methods of spreading Islam, and it is reported that such methods were highly effective in the conversion of Christian clerics in the Rumelia.

It is said that Saltik occasionally disguised himself as a priest and went into monasteries and churches, impressing the audience by reading verses from the Bible and Torah. He then disclosed his real identity, convincing people to convert to Islam.⁵

The most important point symbolizing such conversions is the persuasion method, the most effective way to convert people to Islam used by Islamic leaders. The all-embracing attitude of the Islamic faith, the holy status of two important prophets, Jesus and Moses, in this religion and degeneration in Judaism and Christianity in the medieval age were important reasons for such clerics to convert to Islam. However, the conveyance of such attraction through service was made by dervishes and saints, such as Sari Saltik, and this is the point emphasized in Saltik's anecdotes. The figure represented by Saltik as emphasized in such myths is exactly the attitude adapted by Muslim Turks against non-Muslims. Therefore, this and the values represented by the myths below should be evaluated as a source of data assisting the judgment made in historical researches.

In a citation by Ahmet Yaşar Ocak from *Vilayetname-i Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli*, it is said that Sari Saltik, with Ulu and Küçük Abdal, were assigned by Haji Bektash to convert the Rumelian people to Islam. Arriving in a castle named Kaligra in a Rum state after a long journey, the three-member team encountered a dragon. After a long effort and with the help

³ For detailed information about Sari Saltik, see Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Sarı Saltuk: Popüler İslam'ın Balkanlar'daki Destani Öncüsü (XIII. Yüzyıl)* [Sarı Saltuk: Epic Vanguard of Popular Islam in the Balkans], (Ankara: TTK, 2002).

⁴ For detailed information about Saltikname, see *Saltuk Gazi Destanı = Saltuk-name*, Necati Demir, Mehmet Dursun Erdem, (Ankara: Destan Yayınları, 2007).

⁵ Ocak, *Sarı Saltuk*, 44.

of Haji Bektash, Sari Saltik killed the dragon. The people living in the castle were impressed with the self-sacrificing effort of Saltik and converted to Islam as a result.⁶

Undoubtedly, the “dragon” element highlighted therein reminds us of the influence of rulers on the local people before the arrival of Ottoman Turks. Heavy tax rates, religious restrictions and non-progressive living conditions are reflected in the fire of the dragon, and the way it tyrannizes people. In this anecdote, Sari Saltik is a Muslim Turk and a saviour.

The emphasis placed in the epic *Saltik-name* on Sari Saltik’s way of converting people to Islam by means of attitude and advice, besides his soldierly personality, gives us some idea about the conveyance and communication methods of the Turks. Likewise, Halil İnalçık highlights the conquest policy during the Foundation Period of the Ottoman Empire in the same way. The Ottoman authority emerged as the protector of Orthodox Christians, bestowed rights on local people in exchange for obedience and *jizya* (a poll tax payed by non-muslims until 1856 for liberation from military duty in the ottoman empire) and always offered opportunities for people to surrender voluntarily before conquering any region.⁷

Sari Saltik and his dervishes certainly left important impressions on the Balkans. Local people who were oppressed by the strict feudal system and who lost their freedom of belief due to oppressive doctrines of Catholicism experienced the all-embracing approach of the Islamic faith and its practices, offering a universal right to life. Indeed, this approach and attitude were a highly effective means for Ottoman Turks to advance throughout the region and increase their strength.

After Sari Saltik, the Ottoman Empire conquered the Balkans starting from the Çimpe Castle, which the Ottomans were granted in exchange for assistance. Even during the assignment of this castle, the Empire revealed that its method of conquering in the forthcoming years would be not only by force of the sword. In this respect, Neşri, an Ottoman historian, describes the attitude of Ottoman Turks towards those living in the castle: “they offered objects and bestowed them many gifts without hurting non-Muslims.”⁸

When thoroughly evaluating the Ottoman laws and the responsibilities conferred by the Empire on the people, and comparing them with the responsibilities assigned by the administrative system before the Ottoman

⁶ Ocak, *Sarı Saltık*, 48.

⁷ Halil İnalçık, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Klasik Çağ (1300–1600)* [Ottoman Classical Age (1300–1600)] (İstanbul: YKY, 2003), 3.

⁸ Mehmed Neşri, *Kitâb-ı Cihan-nümâ*, 175.

Period, the motives for fast-growing obedience to the Ottoman Empire and rapid Islamization in the Balkans are very clear. In comparing the Dušan's Code with Ottoman Laws and stating that the Ottoman Empire prohibited Catholicism within the borders of the empire in order to protect Balkan Orthodoxy, İnalçık surely attempts to point out this situation.⁹ In this regard, it is useful to examine the policy of conquering and living in the Balkans based on practices applied in different areas of the region.

The Conquest of Manastir and Saint Nedelya Myth

In those times, it was very apparent that the Ottomans were different from former conquerors, because beside their qualities and practices mentioned above, their differences were easily observable through such attitudes as leading people to convert to Islam. According to Paul Coles, with the influence of Sunni Islam Ulama, the mentality of firm borders against the Ottomans was changed and the practice of Islamization by force was abandoned with that nation.¹⁰ The conquest of Manastir is one of the most important evidences indicating the winning of local people's hearts rather than using enforcement, slaughter and acting in a way that is purely obsessed with conquest. Today, Manastir is one of the most important cities of Macedonia and known as Bitola. Although there is limited information about the conquest of Manastir, a myth/story told about it is significant proof evidencing the foregoing situation and the influence of Islamic identity on the Ottoman Empire's policy of conquest.

According to Dimosvki Colev¹¹ and Ramadani,¹² the Ottoman units arrived in Manastir from Pirlpepe. Stoyanovski states that when Ottoman units arrived in the city, local people were very frightened due to the stories told about Pirlpepe being taken after fierce battles.¹³ Contrary to Stoyanovski's statement, made without any reference, Feridun Emecen

⁹ İnalçık, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, 19.

¹⁰ Paul Coles, *Avrupa'da Osmanlı Tesirleri* [Ottoman Impact on Europe], (İstanbul: Ötüken, 1975), 27. According to Köprülü, the advancement to the west had become easier for the Ottoman Empire due to hostility towards the Latins in addition to the Catholics [especially after the 4th Crusaders]. Fuat Köprülü, *Osmanlı Devleti'nin Kuruluşu* [Establishment of Ottoman State] (Ankara: TTK, 1999), 78.

¹¹ Gorgi Dimovski Colev, *Bitola vo XIV-XV vek, Zavladuvanye na Bitola od Türçite* (Bitola: 2000), 29.

¹² Naser Ramadani, *Depértimi Osman Né Maqedoni Dhe Zhvillimi i Arsimit İslam gjatë shekujve 9–10 h. /XV-XVI*, (Shkup: 1998), 34.

¹³ Aleksandar Stoyanovski, *İstoria na Makedonskiot Narod*, (Skopje: 1969), 196.

points out that the city was taken after the local people surrendered voluntarily without resistance.¹⁴ However, this evaluation is not accepted in that region since it does not serve the nationalist approach.

Other evaluations concerning the conquest of Manastir also refute the foregoing claim that the city was taken by force. Researchers such as Dimovski,¹⁵ Aruçi and Matkovski¹⁶ claim that the Ottoman Empire took the city by way of a mutual agreement, despite initial combat, and refer to the following story which supports their argument. When people living in Manastir realized that they could not take a stand against the Ottoman army, they started to adopt a moderate approach and attempted to reach an agreement. At this point, about thirty-eight women brought food to the tents pitched by janissaries around the Saint Nedelya Church and asked how Timurtash Pasha was. After sharing the food, janissaries paid bountifully for the food and gave gifts to each of the women. In addition, they emptied some tents and greeted those women as guests, assigning a guard to each tent to maintain security. After the girls returned to Manastir in the morning, they told the ruler how they were hosted by the janissaries. Nikola, the priest of Saint Nedelya Church, was assigned to announce the city's dependence to the Ottoman authority. In short, the city was conquered by way of mutual agreement.¹⁷

Although the findings related to the method adapted in conquering Manastir are limited, it is understood that the Ottoman Empire took over the city by way of mutual understanding. In this case, it is worth questioning the soundness of a thesis which claims that the Ottomans captured the Balkans by force.

In addition, the fact that different versions of the story mentioned above are featured in the narrations of regional historians indicates both the objectivity of history and the impact of myths on making historical judgments.

¹⁴ Feridun Emecen, "Pirlepe'nin İlk Osmanlı Tahrirleri [First Tahrir's of Pirlepe]," *Güneydoğu Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 12 (1998): 67.

¹⁵ Colev, *Bitola vo XIV–XV vek*, 29.

¹⁶ Aleksandır Matkovski and Kemal Aruçi, *Makedoniya vo Türkskata Hronnka Tacüt Tevarih od Hoca Sadettin Efendi (1361–1520)*, (Skopje: Institut za Naçnonadna Istorija Glasnik, 1979), 208.

¹⁷ Almost the same story is featured in the Manastir Vilayetinin Tarihçesi, a book by Manastırlı Mehmet Tevfik (Bilge). See Mehmed Tevfik, *Manastir Vilayetinin Tarihçesi*, (Manastir: Beynelmîlel Ticaret Matbaası, 1327/1909), 29–30.

Islamization of Bosnia, Bogomilism and Ayyavz Dede

It is surely beyond doubt that Bogomilism played an important role in the conquest of Bosnia by the Ottoman Empire.¹⁸ It is known that these people suffered at the hand of the Catholics due to their beliefs throughout the medieval ages, and consequently escaped to live on mountains away from civilization. They took refuge in the Ottomans upon the arrival of their authority in the region.¹⁹

By unmercifully exercising the unlimited power and authority resulting from their position, subsequent Popes aimed to convert the Bogomils to Catholicism by way of violence to expand the influence of the Papacy.²⁰ The Bogomils, who were subject to a total purity policy by Catholics since the First Crusade, were doomed to solitude in the middle of the Balkans after facing a similar treatment under the domination of the Byzantine Empire, which they initially regarded as shelter.²¹

Violent acts of the Catholic and Orthodox churches against the Bogomils, the monotheistic approach of Bogomilism, its attitude against church hierarchy and the similarity of many rules in Bogomilism with those in the Islamic faith were the main reasons prompting many Bosnian people to convert to Islam.

It is a fact that before the arrival of the Ottoman Turks in the Balkans, many dervishes who were the members of various sects settled in various regions. The Bogomilism movement is heavily influenced by mysticism. Therefore, the local people gathered around the dervishes, especially in Bosnia, with their sufistic Islam attitude and established hermitages in isolated areas.²² It should not be overlooked that this situation led the Bogomils to recognize the authority of Ottoman Empire and to become Muslims. After conquering the region, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire

¹⁸ For the characteristics of Bogomilism making the conversion of Bosnia to Islam, see Altan Çetin, Galip Çağ, "Bosna'nın Osmanlı İdaresine Geçişinde Bogomillğin Etkisi [Bogomilism impact on Bosnia's Transition under Ottoman Administration]," *International Symposium on the Bosnia and Herzegovina from Ottoman Rule to Present*, (Tuzla: 2010), 179–188.

¹⁹ L. S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, (Illinois: 1956), 40–41.

²⁰ Hüdai Şentürk, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Bulgar Meselesi (1850–1875)* [Bulgarian Question in Ottoman Empire], (Ankara: TTK, 1992), 3.

²¹ Ahmed S. Aliçiç, "Hersek'te İslam'ın Yayılması [The Spread of Islam in the Herzegovina]," *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil, Tarih Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* 46 (2) (2006): 252.

²² Metin İzeti, *Balkanlarda Tasavvuf* [Sufism in the Balkans], (İstanbul: Gelenek Yayınları, 2004), 20.

Mehmed II paid special attention to the people of this region and granted them a special statute by way of a decree he issued in 1478.²³

Some European historians assert that vast opportunities granted by the Ottomans to Muslims were highly effective during mass conversion activities in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Considering that the Ottoman Empire provided the same opportunities for Muslims living in other European regions they conquered, and the fact that people residing in Bosnia-Herzegovina converted to Islam so quickly, can only be explained by the Ottoman Empire's attitude of winning their hearts.²⁴

At that time, the Bishop of Zagreb, Simun Erdedi, addressed Franyo Bacan, the leader of Croatia, as follows: "Those who recognize the rule of new Ottoman emperor will live in joy and peace, and I can safely confirm that after the conquest of Brod, more than 40,000 people abandoned Christianity and converted to Islam." Ten days later, on December 3, 1536, he wrote to King Ferdinand of Austria and Hungary the following: "Unfortunately, these poor people are accepting Muhammadan faith, denouncing the faith of Christ the Saviour. This happens so frequently that even my own vassals in the land of Sopja Fortress are leaving me, accepting the authority of the Turks."²⁵

When Bogomilism, which is highly influenced by mysticism, and the activities of Khorasan leaders in the region came together, it was inevitable that mythic events would occur. Indeed, the local inhabitants, who had lived with the grim face of Christianity up to that point, inevitably transformed their ideas and opinions about these people who

²³ The original edict is kept in the Franciscan Catholic Monastery in Fojnica. It reads as follows: "I, the Sultan Khan the Conqueror, hereby declare to the whole world that, the Bosnian Franciscans granted with this sultanate ferman are under my protection. And I command that: No one shall disturb or give harm to these people and their churches! They shall live in peace in my state. These people, who have become emigrants, shall have security and liberty. They may return to their monasteries which are located in the borders of my state. No one from my empire; my viziers, clerks or my maids will break their honor or give any harm to them! No one shall insult, endanger or attack these lives, properties, and churches of these people! Also, the ones these people have brought from their own countries with them have the same rights... By declaring this ferman, I swear on my sword by the holy name of Allah who has created the ground and sky, Allah's prophet Mohammed, and seven prophets that no one from my citizens will react or behave the opposite of this ferman!"

²⁴ Kemal Nurkić, *Bosna Hersek'in İslamlaşması* [Islamization of Bosnia and Herzegovina], (M.A. Thesis, University of Ondokuz Mayıs, 2007), 41.

²⁵ Adem Handžić, *Studije o Bosni*, (İstanbul: IRCICA, 1994), 43–44.

were closer to them in all respects despite being a different nationality, into mythic stories over a great deal of time.

The majority of the dervishes mentioned were brought over from Macedonia by Isa-Beg Isaković. Since they had Slavic origins, their language was similar to Bosnian and they easily conversed with the local people. According to a folktale, Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror brought forty sheikhs with him when he arrived in Bosnia. Ayvaz Dede, known by local people, was among them. Today, his tomb is one of the most important sanctuaries for Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina.²⁶

Ajvatovica is a mountain located near Bugojno and Kladanj (Donji Vakuf town) in the middle of Bosnia. According to legend, Ayvaz Dede was a fighter dervish from Akhisar, Anatolia. He settled on this mountain where the Bogomils lived, and engaged in milling, winning the hearts of the Bosnians in a short time. Whenever a person had a problem, he or she would knock the door of Ayvaz Dede. People consulted him during the long-lasting period of drought and when experiencing sterility with their animals. A large rock located near the village acted as a natural seawall, blocking the flow of water into the living space, and the Bosnians asked Ayvaz Dede for a solution to this problem. Ayvaz Dede lived in seclusion for forty days and forty nights and prayed to Allah. On the fortieth day, the massive rock was split into two and the Bosnians regained their water. Afterwards, all Bosnians converted to Islam upon such a divine manifestation.²⁷

As seen in this example, there are myths in the Bosnian culture which consider that the Ottoman Empire conquered those regions through the influence of its Islamic identity rather than by force. The fact that this myth and that Ayvaz Dede is still memorialized every year in a traditional manner are important anecdotes showing his continuing value. People celebrate this day for hours, walk for miles and pray near the rock which is assumed to be that referred to in the myth. These all indicate that a myth can be the main source of social motivation as an important touchstone for the past. Examining the real aspects and influences of myths solely based on such reality will fill important gaps in the field of history.

²⁶ Mehmedalija Bojić, *Historija Bosne i Bošnjaka*, (Sarajevo: TKD Šahinpašić, 2001), 48.

²⁷ Hüseyin Yorulmaz, *Osmanlı'nın Batı Yakası Bosna* [West Coast Of The Ottoman: Bosnia], (İstanbul: 2007), 220.

Conclusion

The settlement of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans for six centuries has been a central concern for many researchers in various aspects. This settlement, which has been explained from the viewpoint of both by “force of the sword” and “policy of tolerance and appeasement,” has been evaluated many times in terms of the chronological sequence. However, when these studies are examined altogether, it is clear that an especially significant source indicating the policy of tolerance and appeasement has been ignored: legends and myths.

It is a fact that in various regions and states of the Balkans there are many permanent pieces of work dating back to the Ottomans, and they are sufficient in themselves to demonstrate the Ottoman reality in the region. However, they are not sufficient to prevent the distortion of how these facts are perceived by others. In fact, as stated in the introduction to this chapter, despite the existence of such pieces of work and the heritage of civilization in the region, there is a considerable amount of study which claims or records that the Ottoman Empire and thus the Turks/Muslims had influence on the region by way of force. There are different versions of many mythoi which are taken as the basis when introducing such arguments. These versions claim exactly the opposite of what they actually support, but they are ignored as mentioned above.

The present chapter aims to put forward the fact that such mythoi are non-ignorable arguments despite not being a conclusive proof, and to identify some of them. Sari Saltik, the conquest of Manastir, the Ayvaz Dede myth, Dobruja being a kind of first station in Rumelia, Manastir being one of the most important stations of the Ottoman Empire’s campaigns to the west, and the policy adopted by the Ottoman Turks in taking Bosnia are examples demonstrating such details.

Undoubtedly, it is an important requirement to compile this kind of data and to present the case of Ottoman-Balkan civilization with a more objective viewpoint, as it has been victimized by nationalist historiography from the nineteenth century onwards.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE RELIGIOUS CONVERSION (TO ISLAM) IN KOSOVO (1800–1900)

HALIDE ASLAN*

The Balkans, the doors leading to Europe for the Ottomans, have always been regarded as a special region. The most important feature of the Balkan Peninsula is its typical “passage-like” position. From ancient times, the political, social, religious and economic destiny of the region has been determined by its geopolitical location. The region, being a sort of passageway, enabled many tribes to move more easily and also offered shelter to many nations. Thus, many states made up from various tribes with different languages and religions have existed there. Peoples entering the Balkans from various routes carried ethnic and cultural traces from South and Central Europe, Asia and the Near East with them. In the formation of ethnic groups, however, it was the variations in languages and religions that marked them, rather than racial differences.¹ The Balkans is a region constituted by three divine religions, nineteen ethnic (racial) groups, sixteen languages, and ten independent states.² From the day the Ottomans came in 1354, they dominated the region for almost five centuries.³ The success underlying the Ottoman presence and spread in the

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¹ İbrahim Çulha, *Kosova’da Türk Topluluğunun Tarihsel Gelişimi ve Sorunlar*, (M.A. Thesis, Marmara University, 2008).

² Halil Şimşek, *Türk-Bulgar İlişkileri ve Göç*, (Ankara: Harp Akademileri Komutanlığı, 1999), 219.

³ For further information about the Balkan Peninsula, see Halil İnalçık, “Türkler ve Balkanlar,” *Balkanlar*, (İstanbul: OBIV, 1993), 11–14; John Thirkell, “Islamisation in Macedonia as a Social Process,” in *Islam in the Balkans*, ed. Jennifer Scarce (Edinburgh: 1979), 43–47; Aziz Nazmi and Şakir Taş, “Edirne Civarının Osmanlılaşma Süreci,” *Essays in Honour of Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu*, vol. I, (İstanbul: IRCICA, 2006), 115–121; Nedim İpek, “Kosova Vilayeti Dahilinde