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ACCEPTING ISLAM BY THE BOSNIAKS DURING THE OTTOMAN PERIOD

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Abstract

For years in Europe has been built a model of division and fear from the Muslims. This ideology has tragic consequences today. It is based on two myths: the myth of forced Islamisation and myth of Christian Europe. This ensures two effects. One that Islam is non-European, the other effect is imposing a sense of weakness and guilt of Muslims and their inferiority against the Christians. Therefore research that objectively shows the historical truth about the spread and acceptance of Islam is imperative and crucial task of history. Ottoman state based on Islamic principles for its many centuries ruling in the Balkans has left behind, or saved all nations, religions, cultures and languages in a small space like nowhere else in Europe. That clearly demonstrated that the reasons for the acceptance or rejection of Islam were varied, but in no one case were violent. Bosniaks are one of the native Europeans nations who are mostly Muslims. In this research we will be analyzing the process of accepting the Islam by the Bosniaks in the Ottoman period. Dismantling the myth of enforced Islamization, but also and the term Islamization is the first step towards the acceptance of reality, understanding and prosperity of the peoples and countries of Europe, especially the Balkans.

Keywords: Bosnia, Bogomilism, Islamization, Ottoman Period

Bosniaks and Their Beliefs Before the Ottomans Came

The Balkan has always been a place of constant migrations and blending of population, given the geostrategic position and natural sources and conditions for life and development of the people. As a result of those kinds of opportunities today's citizens of Bosnia, Herzegovina and Sanjak (Sandžak) as well as the other Bosniaks in the Balkan and beyond, because of linguistic and cultural reasons, and because of thousands of years of mutual history, can freely say that they have Illyrian - Slavic ethnic origin. With symbiosis of the native population (biggest part of which Illyrian) and immigrated Slavic tribes in ethnic Bosnia were formed the Bosniak people. In this way the influence of the socio-cultural circumstances in the pre-Slavic period is in no way denied, but is very much recognizable, especially from anthropological aspects. However, regarding the reality today we believe that this kind of thesis is most acceptable, and the medieval and Ottoman period to be most significant in the development and establishment of the Bosniak people and nation.

The Bosniaks are native people in the middle part of the Balkan with several centuries of historical, cultural and political continuity. The constant migrations caused by

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the turbulent historical and social occurrences and processes had an effect on geographical distribution of the Bosniaks in the Balkan as well as in the world. In this regard, Bosnia, Herzegovina and Sanjak are centrally important, and countries of origin of Bosniaks are parts of Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo and Croatia. Other parts of the former Yugoslavian state union, Macedonia and Slovenia, in different ways are countries in which Bosniaks had spread, yet, because of their long presence and participation in the establishment and building of these new states, Bosniaks are an inseparable part of them.

The first written sources about Bosnia being a separate country are found in the handbook of king Porphyrogenitus in 958, where Bosnia is mentioned along with the cities Katara and Desnik.¹ However, it is quite certain that Bosnia as a separate organized community and had existed before that. Realistically, along with it there had been other individual areas that later would become component parts of Bosnia, and that are seen in different charters of Bosnian kings. Thousands of other documents, mostly in Latin, testify to the existence of Bosniak people, the state of Bosnia, and Bosnian separate religion between XI and XV century,² with the biggest rise from XII until the end of XIV century. In medieval Bosnia the central authority with all its state attributes provided the necessary requirements for ethnic consolidation of the community. These are: several centuries of territorial stability, its defense against foreign pressure, social structure and religion, laws, trade exchange, binding the center of state and the government, by specially creating a sense of belonging, loyalty to the Bosniak feudal class. This resulted in emergence and strengthening of ethnical self-knowledge implemented in the ethnonym Bosniak. The formation of the medieval Bosniak people had started early, with the beginnings of the Bosnian state, so that at the time of the establishment of Ottoman Empire, the term was in use.

With the increased national movements during the XIX century in the neighboring Serbia and Croatia, in the researches about the medieval period, the Bosniaks in literature and media are often referred with religious designations such as Bogomils, or patarens, cathars, babuni etc. First of all, the religious designation was supposed to impose the attitude that the Bosniak people does not exist. Moreover, because it involved another religion, against which were the Christians in the medieval period, this religion was to be shown as a twisted Catholic or Orthodox Christianity. In this way an attempt on denationalization of Bosniak people was made.

With Serbian authors a highly acceptable theory Petranovikj theory, who says that the Bosnian religious community was one of the Orthodox, and with which they insisted on to justify their pretensions towards Bosnia as their historical right. On the other hand, for the same reasons, the favorite theory of the Croatian authors is that the Bosnian religious community is a branch of the Catholic Church.³ The fact is that monotheism is based on the messenger of God Jesus, but it had some differences from the teachings of the official Orthodox, or Catholic Church, because of that it was declared heresy and

1 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, превод на англиски R.J.H. Jenkins, Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington, 1967, 161.

2 Драгољуб Петровић, Бошњаци и словенске етничке групе исламске традиције у Македонији и на Балкану, Бошњаци на Балканот: Зборник на трудови од Меѓународниот научен симпозиум, Друштво за уметност и наука, Скопје, 2003, 25.

3 Noel Malcolm, *Povijest Bosne - kratki pregled*, Erasmus Gilda, Novi Liber, Zagreb, Dani-Sarajevo, 1995, 39.

as such was banned. The Bosniaks did not want to give up on their beliefs no matter the horrors they had suffered because of it.⁴ There are a lot of sources that tell us about the distinctiveness of Bosniaks and their religion in the medieval period on one hand, and the attempts to impose the catholic (Croatian) and orthodox (Serbian) identity on the population of Bosnia, on the other.

In the time of Crusades from 1235 to 1239, the Bosniaks were “burned on the stake”.⁵ Pope Innocent IV, head of of the Bosnian religious community “Djed” appointed him as “heretiarh“ whom they call Pope.⁶ The Pope Urban II said that Bosnia belongs to Tvrtko and the patarens.⁷ In 1186 the Serbian ruler Stefan Nemanja held a state church gathering at which “bogomilism” was declared a heresy and it was decided for it to be destroyed. After that a part of the survived went through Drina to Bosnia, where the ruler of Bosnia, Ban Kulin accepted them as good believers,⁸ which shows the uniqueness of these people and their approach to religion. The first time that a orthodox Bosnian Metropolitan is mentioned is in 1532,⁹ and the first certain proof of an existing Orthodox church in Sarajevo originates all the way from 1616.¹⁰ Many other sources confirm that it really was a special teaching and religion, which was developing out of the Orthodoxy and Catholicism as a part of the people and the Bosnian authority, which strongly influenced the development and identity of Bosniaks.

In XII, in Bosnia was formed an institutional autocephalous community to which belonged the Bosnian kings. Regardless of the pressures, monotheism in Bosnia was receiving a growing number of supporters. Also, the so called “Heretics” from northern Italy were coming to Bosnia at that time, to refine and fully learn the religious teaching of the people who live there. We will agree with the statement of many authors that the Bosnian monotheists are the most significant and valuable occurrence in the history of the medieval Bosnian state, which with its manifestation had a key role in the profiling of the spiritual, religious, political, cultural and social life of medieval Bosnia.¹¹

Regardless of the usage and imposition of various theories and names, the essence is that Bosniaks believed in one God, in the divine announcement and God’s messengers. Although they were the majority population in ethnic Bosnia, they did not impose their religion on anyone, but they kept their beliefs even though they were under constant pressure from The East and from The West. Like all the believers, they were convinced

4 Enver Imamović, *Porijeklo i pripadnost stanovništva Bosne i Hercegovine*, ART 7, Sarajevo 1998., 24.

5 Dominik Mandić, *Bogomilska crkva bosanskih krstjana*, Volume 2 of *Bosna i Hercegovina; povjesno-kritička istraživanja*, Croatian Historical Institute, Chicago, 1962, 217.

6 Bonicije Rupčić, *Značenje “Dubia“ fra Bartola iz Alverne iz god. 1372/73. za povijest Bosne*, Zbornik Zavoda za povijesne znanosti Istraživačkog centra JAZU. Vol. 15, JAZU, Zagreb, 1988, 70.

7 Nada Klaić, *Srednjovjekovna Bosna: politički položaj bosanskih vladara do Tvrtkove krunidbe, 1377. g* Grafički zavod Hrvatske, Zagreb, 1989, 238.

8 Željko Fajfrić, *Sveta loza Stefana Nemanje*, Grafosrem, Srbska pravoslavna zajednica, Šid, 1998, 42–43

9 Srećko M. Džaja, *Konfessionalität und Nationalität Bosniens und der Herzegowina*, Oldenbourg, München, 1984, 126.

10 Vladislav Skarić, *Srpski pravoslavni narod i crkva u Sarajevu u 17. i 18. vijeku: (sa 10 slika)*, Državna štamparija, Sarajevo, 1928, 10, 155.

11 Зекир Рамчиловиќ, *Бошњаците во Македонија во текот на XX век со посебен акцент на културата и просветата, Бошњачка културна заедница во Република Македонија, Скопје, 2014., 37.*

that their faith is the real faith in God, far from them being heretics, as they were called. Therefore I believe it is most proper to use terms that respect their religion, distinctiveness and uniqueness. More precisely as Bosniaks with monotheistic belief which identified them as a nation and as a religion, and made them special compared to other nations and Christians in the Middle Ages. This religion was widespread in Bosnia and contemporary in Sanjak, and had a great number of followers.

Another thing worth mentioning is that Bosnia as a country dated on the Mediterranean, met with Islam very early by means through of trade. Also, a few centuries before the arrival of the Ottomans, many missionaries who preached Islam were traveling through Bosnia. The examination of this early medieval era shows that the earliest Islamic impact occurred in the VIII century, before the formation of the Bosnian state (X to XII century), then through to reaching its medieval territorial magnitude as a kingdom and finally up to the early Ottoman period.¹² As will further be explained that the spreading of Islam in the Ottoman period was not a violent process, such studies suggest that Islam not only in the Iberian Peninsula in southwest Europe or its eastern parts, but was present much earlier in Europe. In some parts of Europe Islam was spread, in other for the first time Christianity was spreading. That is, both religions that were actually not European, in time became. This is of crucial meaning in order to detach the prejudices that Christianity is a European religion and Islam is not. Thereby Europeans would get rid of the unnecessary burden they carried and the relation between the members of the two religions would ease.

ACCEPTING ISLAM BY THE BOSNIAKS DURING THE OTTOMAN PERIOD

The last years of the medieval Bosnian country had gone by with insecurity and waiting, mostly for an attack from the western Catholics, but also from fear of enlarging of the Ottoman Empire.¹³ Under constant a threat for the throne, the people were being at risk of further persecutions and killing by the Catholics from the west, the Bosnian Duke Hrvoje Vukčević, being a “patrenes” himself in 1415., asked the Ottomans for help.¹⁴ With their help he defended Bosnia from the catholic army led by the Hungarian king Sigismund. In that way the Ottoman influence in Bosnia even before the official conquest was strengthening. The missionary work was intensified, and the Islamic way of living was becoming well-known.

In the middle of the XV century, in order to be crowned as the King of Bosnia and to get support from the catholic western countries, Stjepan Tomasević accepted Catholicism and was crowned by a pope’s delegate in 1461. However, he was not followed by his people. In favor to receive help and support from the catholic states, he gathered

12 Dzavid Haveric, Islamisation of Bosnia: Early Islamic Influence on Bosnian Society, Deakin University, Viktoria, 2004., 11 – 53.

13 The Ottoman Empire is a name mostly used in the Balkan and the world history and which will be used further for that reason, even though we believe it is partially true. The official name is: دَوْلَتِ عَلِيّهٔ عُثمَانِیّه - Devlet-i ‘Aliyye-i ‘Osmâniyye, i.e. the exalted Ottoman Sublime State (Commonwealth), or in the newer history it is mostly seen as “Osmanlı Devleti”, i.e. the Ottoman State, which has been the universal state of different people, nations and religions, like Turks, Arabs, Bosniaks, Albanian, Jews, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Greek etc.

14 Mustafa Imamović, Historija Bošnjaka, Preporod, Sarajevo, 1997, 74.; Ferdo Šišić, Vojvoda Hrvoje Vukčić Horvatić i njegovo doba (1350–1416.), A. G. Matoš i Naklada Hrvoje, Zagreb, 2004, 230.

the clergy with an offer of choice: to convert to Catholicism or to leave Bosnia. On that way the Bosnian King himself broke the backbone of the Bosnian religious community and the compactness of the population.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the members of the monotheistic religion were still dominating in the Kingdom of Bosnia until the country became a part of the Ottoman Empire.

In that kind of conditions, without the expected outside help, with divided, and after the persecution, disloyal population, the Ottoman army took over Bosnia. Even though the Kingdom of Bosnia was a powerful country, surprisingly there was no resistance. The reasons were different and were closely related to the political situation, the Ottoman's influence in the country and persecution of the members of the monotheistic religion in Bosnia. Because of the confrontations and suffering, a number of the citizens escaped from the country. The ones that had stayed in the country had to choose between catholic religion or death. The people were angry with their King who had put himself on site of his persecutors' – the inquisition and crusades and they fell into apathy.¹⁶ The Dominican Nikola Barbuchi, in 1459., sent a report from Jajce to Rome, in which he said that the Bosnian King cannot fight against the Ottomans because the Bosniaks, members of the monotheistic religion, love the Ottomans more than the Orthodox and Catholic Christians, and that the larger part of the population are bogomils.¹⁷ Many Bosniaks ran away to the Ottomans and found their rescue there. Representatives of the native nobles and religious leaders with many Bosniaks, self initiatively went in front of the Sultan of city Jajce and accepted him as their lord. It's supposed that the son of the Bosnian King Stjepan Tomasevikj, Sigismund together with 30.000 other Bosnian sons accepted Islam for their religion.¹⁸ Later on, Sigismund as Ishak Bey Kraloglu made an impressive carrier in the Ottoman Empire.

The Bosniaks being absolutely distressed after the violent christianization and confiscation of their property, were delighted by Sultan Mehmed Fatih's decision for everyone to get their property back if they just return to being good Bosniaks. For this occasion no less than (36.000 families have stated that they willingly take Islam as their religion.¹⁹ The older historians and other authors take this assertion to be credible. In doing this they refer to the so called Janissary law, that is one of its transcripts, which in 1724 was written by Mustafa Celebi in Istanbul.²⁰ Given all the circumstances we believe that the assertion could be correct, being reserved for the number of persons that accepted Islam. In that way a large part of the members of the monotheistic religion in Bosnia started accepting Islam, the reason being the similarities in the beliefs and the continuity in God's Announcement.

15 Зеќир Рамчиловиќ, Бошњаците во Македонија во текот на XX век ..., 38.

16 Ibidem, 39.

17 Lajos Thalloczy, Studien zur Geschichte Bosniens und Serbiens im Mittelalter, Übers.(превод) von Franz Eckhart, Duncker & Humblot, München, 1914, 415.

18 Ejup Mušović, Crnogorski Muslimani, Identitet Bošnjaka-Muslimana, Zbornik radova sa naučnog simpozija u Plavu, Centar za kulturu, Beograd, 1995, 68.

19 Mehmed H. Handžić, Islamizacija Bosne i Hercegovine; i porijeklo bosansko-hercegovačkih muslimana, Islamska dionička štamparija, Sarajevo 1940, 20.; Harun Crnovršanin, Kako se kalio Sandžak (Ilustrovana historija Bosne, Sandžaka i Kosova), Sandžačka riječ, Frankfurt, 2005, 57.

20 Mustafa Imamović, Historija Bošnjaka..., 138.

In the regions where Bosniaks lived we have weightier acceptance of Islam. This explains the different predispositions regarding religion, namely number of similarities in the beliefs and principles in the monotheism of Bosniaks and Islam. Bosnian believers had taken Islam, which gradually takes the place of bosnian religion,²¹ making a continuousness of God's Announcement.

What is never mentioned is that one of the motives is the last God's announcement exactly. Which itself, for those that chose it, is the last perfect word of God. The discovery of the truth and reasons for existence. That also meant changing of the ways of living according to certain principles and rules, which were not easier. This was one of the motives why others did not chose Islam, as well. If people would think logically, there would be no reason for any discussions, and the individual choice would be a source choice of its own search for truth. However, from humans aspect's incomprehensible reasons, but from some aspect a way for manipulation and ruling with the people and resources, Islam is always presented in a negative connotation.

In order to dismiss a lot of prejudices in the perception of Islam, and because of great importance for the position of Bosniaks, we will explain the motives on accepting Islam in the Ottoman time. Generally, in the Balkan's historiographies it is assumed that the main factor for spreading Islam is improving the socioeconomic status and easier and safer life. However, the theory of economic motivation, avoiding paying taxes for the non-Muslims and the theory for safer life has a lot of discrepancy and contradiction.

For example, the Kharrach was an annual tax for grown men who could earn money, and in the XVI century it was four gold coins for the wealthy, two for the middle class and a one ducat for the poor man.²² In that time one Venetian ducat could be bought for about 20 kilograms wheat, and the Austrian gold coin for little more. Considering the a small value of Kharach tax evasion can not be the reason or motive for changing the religion. We should not forget the fact that Muslims, unlike Christians, were paying zakat too, which is an annual religious tax and one of the five basic obligations in Islam. The records show that there were a lot of rich merchants: Greeks, Vlachs, Armenians, Jews that had never renounced their Christian religion.²³ Among the Spahis in the Macedonian villages there were Christians as well as Muslims, which was the case in the other Balkan parts too. This is the proof that the "Turks", after the conquest did not force people to change their religion in order to keep their estates.²⁴ According to Skaric, it is not true that a person has to be a Muslim so that they can to become rich in the Ottoman Empire. The religion did not prevent anyone from taking a good place in the clerk hierarchy, army or society, except for the highest positions.²⁵

21 Fikret Adanir and others, *The Ottomans and the Balkans: a discussion of historiography*, Brill Leiden, 2002, 51.

22 Владислав Скарић, *Изабрана Дјела, Књига 1, Сарајево и његова околина од најстаријих времена до аустроугарске окупације*, Веселин Маслеша, Сарајево, 1985, 92.

23 Noel Malcolm, *Povijest Bosne...*, 60.; Mustafa Imamović, *Historija Bošnjaka...*, 147.

24 Јован Ф. Трифуноски, *Турско становништво у СР Македонији, Новопазарски зборник*, 10, Музеј Рас, Нови Пазар, 1986, 132.

25 Владислав Скарић, *Изабрана Дјела ...*, 79.

The people who accepted Islam, accepted the obligation to defend the God's last announcement and the country with their lives, as well. More precisely, with the acceptance of Islam, the Bosniaks became military pledges. For the most part of the existence of the Ottoman Empire, the military duty lasted over ten years. The empire was in constant wars with different part of it, the reason for which was the expansion and defending of the big country. The wars always bring victims, and with the long military service, most of the young men never returned to their homes. Unlike them, those that kept their religion, did not have the duty to fight for the country that guaranteed their safety. What was better, to accept Islam or not? In this context, it is important to understand the Bosniak's accepting of Islam having in common with their previous beliefs, which were different from those of the catholic and orthodox Christianity and the condition of Bosnia before the coming of the Ottomans.

In the history of the Balkan people, very often and based on myths as the hardest part of the Ottoman authority was considered the Law for recruitment of non-Muslim boys, known as *devshirme*,²⁶ and at the request of Bosniaks, recruitment of children of Muslims from Bosnia.²⁷ The reason being the advantages of the system in the period after finished the education in school in Istanbul and preparing for the higher offices.²⁸

26 *Devshirme* (Ottoman: *دوش-یرمه*, Turkish: *Devşirme*), a verb meaning collecting of different kind, like agricultural products, harvest, army, in this situation known as collecting of kids from their families for education and training for Janissaries or other state services.

27 İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti Teşkilatından Kapukulu Ocakları, I-II*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1943, 9.

28 Safvet Beg R. Bašagić, *Kratka uputa u prošlost Bosne i Hercegovine, od g. 1463–1850*, Vlastita Naklada, 1900, 19; Mehmed H. Handžić, *Islamizacija Bosne i Hercegovine ...*, 20. The choosing of children, according to most authors was done every fourth, (Радован Самарџић, *Београд и Србија у списима француских савременика, XVI-XVII век*, Историјски архив Београда, Београд, 1961, 708.; İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti ...*, 14.), or fifth year (Владимир Ђоровић, *Историја Југославије, Народно дело*, Београд, 1933, 292.). The only children of the families were not recruited, (Јован Н. Томић, *Данак у крви, прилог проучавању историје српског народа у XVI веку*, Ђорђе Станојевић, Београд, 1898., 7.; İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti ...*, 17.) as well as the boys that were studying craft (Јусуф Мулић, *О неким посебностима vezanim за поступак прихватања ислама у Босни и нетаčnostима које му се приписују*, ANALI Gazi husrev-begove библиотеке у Сарајеву, Књига XXIII-XXIV, Сарајево, 2005, 201.). Married boys were not recruited, that is why the parent that did not want their son to be taken would have them married or studying craft. They were choosing one boy out of 40 houses. Regarding age we come across different data that are between 7 and 18 years old but most of the authors consider the age to be between 14 and 18. In the ferman to all the cadis in Rumelia and Bosnia how to select and conduct the children in Istanbul from 1622. it is ordered for them to be select children of 15 to 20 years old. (Sidžil 2, page 43 b i 44 a, No. doc.1, *Daju se uputstva svim kadijama u Rumeliji i Bosni kako da se sakupljaju i sprovode deca u Istanbul, decembar 1622 godine.*). In this ferman we can see several segments of the enforcement of *devshirme*. A special person is appointed in charge for the conduct of *devshirme* and in doing so the local lords, cadis etc. were obligated to inform the population about it and to gather all children with their fathers in front of the authorized person for him to see them. From those that have several children the one to be taken is the one that matches the age from 15 to 20, but not to take from those that have only one child. To write the name of every child, the name of his father, and to make a description of the personal characteristics and appearance of the child. When choosing a child from the local people keep an eye special attention for fraud and not to take even a one beans from anyone. The local lords not to mingle and interfere in the choosing of children for Janissaries, and the child to be chose personally and individually the authorized person. (Aleksandar Matkovski, *Prilog pitanju devşirme, Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju, XIV-XV, 1964-65.*, Orijentalni institut u Sarajevu, Sarajevo, 1969, 296–298.). This law, according to most authors was abolished in 1637/1638. (Joseph von Hammer, *Historija Turskog*

The system of devshirme is exposed a lot, and it is given special attention in the school materials for history. In that way it became a part of the collective consciousness of the Balkan people and it is imposed as the truth which is not to be discussed. It is simply the truth. The reason being satanising a certain community or country without a scientific articles. Today's mythologization is based on the Jovan Tomikj's study from 1898. According to him, the Ottoman Empire had gone up so high thanks to the Christian kids, mostly Serbian kids, who with their "juice of life" were giving strength to the country, and when that juice dried up did the downfall of the country started.²⁹ In the beginning children of all Christians were included, and later they confined themselves only to certain people: Bosniaks, Albanians, Greeks, Bulgarians and Armenians, which opposes Tomikj's statements. According to Aleksandar Matkovski, Tomikj's work is one-sided and starts from religious and anti-Turkish positions, so it can be criticized in the conception as well as in the conclusions.³⁰ The reasons for the rise and destruction of the country cannot be searched for in the above mentioned, nevertheless the article has achieved its goal, and we are still enthralled by those myths.

Like in every other implementation of a some action on the field, it is possible that sometimes the rules of the Sublime Porte were not followed. Here of course the crucial factor was the man. The way to inform about the action depended on the local leaders, some of them may have even taken on violent actions and methods. In some works, like the work of Tomikj, a huge number of violations are mentioned, some are illogical, most are unconfirmed, with suspicious descriptions of the process of devshirme. The chance of certain leaders to profit from this, there probably were some isolated cases of fraud and violence on the population.

This system, on the other hand, had enabled education of great quality in Istanbul, development and progress, while their origin and family relations were not forbidden or negated.³¹ This is partially true, because until their education or training they were not able to visit their homeland, but considering their age they could remember their family and home very well.

The Muslims too were not satisfied with them taking only the Christian children. The travel writer Gerlah, wrote about a particular Mustafa – pasha, who was telling him that the Turks do not have any benefit from taking the Christian kids on the contrary the Christian kids come to Saray and grow to be big people and later they are commanding with the Turkish kids who are lagging behind.³² On one side, there are the Christian parents that sometimes would bribe their Muslim neighbors to exchange their children because the Muslim child is circumcised, on the other side there are parents of both religions that were trying to bribe the officials to take their children.³³ This is particularly

Osmanskog carstva, V, Ognjen Prica, Zagreb, 1979, 244.).

29 Jovan H. Tomiћ, Данак у крви, приложак проучавању историје српског народа у XVI веку, Ђорђе Станојевић, Београд, 1898, 1-3.

30 Aleksandar Matkovski, Prilog pitanju devširme..., 273.

31 Mustafa Imamović, Historija Bošnjaka..., 165.

32 Petar Matković, Putovanja po Balkanskom Poluotoku XVI veka: Opis putovanja dvaju carskih poslanstva u Carigrad: K. Ryma godine 1571 i D. Ungnada godine 1572., Tiskom Dioničke tiskare, Zagreb, 1892, 28.

33 Зеќир Рамчиловиќ, Бошњаците во Македонија во текот на XX век..., 43.

common later, because the parents understood that in this way their kids have a better future and that they can achieve the highest positions in the country. The benefits of this system were more that clear for the Bosniak that in 1515. arranged a deal with which 1.000 of their children a year will be studying in the schools in Sultan's yard.³⁴

Devshirme was a well planned action, with precisely set criteria, so that the education support was given to a specific number of children for every administrative unit in the country, who were ofcourse with the highest quality of psycho – physical capabilities. In 1488. Bosniaks were already getting back to Bosnia to rule with it, in the period from 1488. to 1858. even 65 governors were originally from Bosnia and through the XVI and XVII century there were nine Grand Viziers from Bosnian origin.³⁵ The impact of this kind of system was great in every sphere in evry aspect of the lives of the population. It is assumed that the Bosniaks is were highly respected. One Austro-Slovenian author in 1530. wrote that the Sultan liked to hire Bosniaks the most, because he believed that they are the best, the biggest believers and most devoted of all, differentiating from the other Turks in that they are bigger, more attractive and more skilled.³⁶

The Islam in Bosnia within the Islamic caliphate experienced a complete development. The Islam was mostly an individual act, apart from for a few grouped incomes to Islam in the beginning. Massive, but a gradual process that was going on for several generations. This practice shows that the Islamic rule that in religion there is no forcing, was followed.³⁷ This also is confirmed by the defters that testify about the indifferent attitude of the authorities toward the Christians' beliefs, and it was totally normal for the people who accepted the Islam to continue living with their family.³⁸ According to Ottomans defters in the beginning of XVI century in Bosnia, Herzegovina and Zvornik, 211.595 persons were not muslim, while 133.295 were.³⁹ In the general census in Bosnia, without Herzegovina from 1604., out of 64.721 house, Muslim households were 45.941, and non-Muslim 18.891, or 71% with 29%.⁴⁰ The process of

34 Noel Malcolm, *Povijest Bosne ...*, 46.

35 René Pelletier, *Sarajevo et sa région: chez les Yougoslaves, de la Save à l'Adriatique*, Belles-Lettres, Paris, 1934, 74–75.

36 Benedikt Curipeschitz, *Ein Disputation oder Gespräch zwayer Staluben Übersetzung und Faksimile der Ausgabe von 1532*, Wieser Verlag, Klagenfurt, 1998, 44.

37 Kur'an Časni, Sura 2 (El – Bakare): 256, translate Muhammed H. Pandža, Džemaluddin Čaušević, Naklada C, Zagreb, 2000.

38 Srećko S., Džaja, *Die "bosnische Kirche" und das Islamisierungsproblem Bosniens und der Herzegowina in den Forschungen nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg*, Rudolf Trofenik, München, 1978, 84. In the first defters, there are a lot of examples like this: Ferhat, son of Ivan's; Hasan, son of Mihailo's. (Noel Malcolm, *Povijest Bosne ...*, 70.). There were also cases where one of two brothers would accept Islam whereas the other did not. (Владислав Скарин, *Изабрана Дјела...*, 80.). In the census in Sarajevo from 1489 it says: Hizir, Radic'son, Grubisa, muslim Jusuf... In the kasaba Visoko a noticed is the case where a person accepts Islam but does not change the name: Ivan, son of Palve, muslim; or Bozidar, son od Mihovil, muslim and Alija his brother muslim. In the village Dubrava, the documents mark one family heade by Dzafer, son of Abdulah. Dzafer's brother is Petar, his uncle is Vukas, and his grandchildren are Gjuro, Radovan, Radman, Pavko and Vukman, and his sons are Ali and Bali. In the village Trbusnica there is a some Hasan, who is a son of a priest. (Adem Handžić, *Studije o Bosni: historijski prilozii iz osmansko-turskog perioda*, Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, Istanbul 1994, 49–50.).

39 Muhamed Hadžijahic, *Porijeklo bosanskih Muslimana*, Bosna, Sarajevo, 1990, 165.

40 Adem Handžić, *Konfesionalni sastav stanovništva u Bosni i Hercegovini u prvim stoljećima osmanske*

accepting Islam was gradually happening in Herzegovina too. A saved record from the Orthodox monarch from Herzegovina from 1509., said that a lot of Orthodox willingly accepted Islam.⁴¹ In the report to the Austrian archduke, submitted by Jeronim Zlataric, is stated that Muslims are a majority in Bosnia. Petar Mazareki, who was staying in Bosnia in 1624., in his statement to the Pope, write that Muslims take three fourths of the population, and only one fourth are Catholics and Orthodox. With minor differences in the numbers of the structure of the population testify Atanasije Grgicevic, Tomko Mrnavic too, as well as Fra Marjan Maravic with their reports. This can also be seen with the fact that the Bosnian eyalet is established at the end of XVI century, when the territory of the old Kingdom of Bosnia had absolute majority of Muslim population.

The Bosnian eyalet was not covered with massive migrations of some muslim ethnic groups. The claims of “planned migrations from different Muslim groups from Anatolia to the Balkans are unsustainable, since the spacious Anatolia was rarely populated, and in the first centuries of the kingdom it was an area of immigration.”⁴² The migrations to the Balkans occurred as a result of losing territory and expulsion of Muslims and of the Jews too and their distribution to other parts of the country, as well as on the Balkans, cannot be generalized as a peaceful and planned colonization of the region. But ofcourse their arrangement distribution according to numerous factors, possibilities and needs of the country was planned.

The acceptance of Islam by the Bosniaks and other peoples: Serbians and Croatians, was wanted to be judged with building a perception of betrayal of tradition and ideals because Christianity, as an ancestral religion was abandoned. This of course is not true, especially for the Bosniaks, because the majority of them were not Christians to begin with, but pure monotheists with their own religious community. There are always theories about the process of accepting Islam being played in terms of physical and psychological compulsion on one side, or those people were slaves, convicts, homeless people and other recreant and excluded elements on the other. When it comes to Bosniaks, as we saw at the beginning, Islam was accepted by members of monotheistic religion and later it was an individual act. Imposing the terms betrayal or enforcement, was just a way to succeed in the assimilation or physical extermination of the Bosniaks and taking over Bosnia. The medieval Bosnia from the aspect of religion does not belong neither to Rome nor Constantinople (Istanbul). The violent spreading of Islam was proved unjustified by Ciro Truhelka, Vladislav Skaric, Milenko Filipovic, Vladimir Corovic, Vasa Pekagic etc., and a part of their attitudes are that there are no proofs for violent dispersal of Islam of any kind. In their researches it is clearly seen that their opinion is that if the spreading of Islam was violent in XIX century there would be no Christians on the Balkans and that the Ottoman Empire was much more tolerant toward other religions than many other Christian countries ever were. S. Stojanovski believes that “the religion was making a demarcation among the communities and individuals, and it even divided them, still unlike the other parts of Europe it offered a greater degree of tolerance, with an unconditional freedom

vladavine, Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju, 42–43, Orijentalni Institut u Sarajevu, Sarajevo 1995, 134.

41 Muhamed Hadžijahic, *Porijeklo bosanskih Muslimana...*, 78.

42 Mustafa Imamović, *Historija Bošnjaka...*, 147.

of the conscience".⁴³ The Islam on the Balkans did not know of pyres, inquisitions, or St. Bartholomew's Day massacres. "In the times when at the public squares in Western Europe thousands of "disbelievers" were burning on pyres, in the Balkans there were representatives of many Islamic cults and forefronts that propagated and disseminated the Islam,"⁴⁴ indicated A. Matkovski. Later on he concludes that "Islam was a much more tolerable religion than Christianity", but also adds that this does not mean that there absolutely were not different excesses from individuals who were discriminating the Christian population.⁴⁵

From the very beginning the Islam had a significant part in forming the special outlines in the essence of Bosniaks. In the Ottoman society the division of the population was on confessional basis. Because of that the Christians usually referred to all the Muslims as Turks. Out of them, only the Albanians and Hungarians, as well as Macedonians, always called them Bosniaks. In addition the Bosniaks were adhered to the Islamic principle that religion is supranational category.⁴⁶ The Muslims in Bosnia ethnically identified themselves as Bosniaks, primarily in relation to Turks and the other Muslim people, because they had the need to express their distinctiveness, their identity and culture. In official documents there are several forms of their national sign (Bošnaklar, Bošnak taifesi, Bosnalı takvimi, Bosnalı kavım), all of which had the meaning Bosniaks or Bosnian people. It is noted that in 1568., a group of Bosniaks, while signing a work contract, refused to sign themselves as Turks, and at their own request they are introduced as Bosnian Muslims (Musolmani di Bossina).⁴⁷ A remark about Bosniaks worth mentioning made by the travel-writer Evlija Čelebija in the beginning of XVII is that: "the people in these areas in speech call themselves Bosniaks. However, they like more being called Bosnevi",⁴⁸ which in fact is the same thing, except that the latter is in Arabic.

In relation to the other population of Slavic linguistic base, the religion is the main element of difference. One of the reasons for which is the imposing of the feeling of not being a part of this land and encouraging emigration, as well as increasing the pressure on the Muslim population as the defeated side and someone that needs to pay "the depths of the Turks" in these areas.⁴⁹ After the Austro-Hungarian occupation, the term Mohammedans was introduced and at the same time the term Muslim was more used among people. From the beginning of the XX century, the word Muslim in Bosnia and Sanjak, as well as in Kosovo and Macedonia, gains a wider connotation than its basic meaning of being a member of Islam. The religious factor was strong, but the Islamic universalism did not

43 Страшко Стојановски, Колективниот идентитет кај Македонците Муслимани, Алфа 94, Скопје, 2009, 18.

44 Александар Матковски, Отпорот против исламизацијата, Зборник: Историја, фолклор и етнологија на исламизираниите Македонци, Републичка заедница на културно научните манифестации на македонските муслимани, Скопје, 1987, 37.

45 Александар Матковски, Отпорот против исламизацијата..., 37–38.

46 Зекир Рамчиловиќ, Бошњациите во Македонија во текот на XX век..., 46.

47 Mustafa Imamović, Historija Bošnjaka..., 13-14.

48 Evlija Čelebi, Putopis Odlomci o jugoslovenskim zemljama, translate: Hazim Šabanović, Svjetlost, Sarajevo, 1967, 120.

49 Зекир Рамчиловиќ, Бошњациите во Македонија во текот на XX век ..., 46.

repress their feeling of ethno genetic connection and unity with the environment in which they lived. Namely, based on the medieval affiliation and commonality the “bosniakcism” was a unifying component of the whole bosnian population.

Before getting into the nationalistic movements from the neighboring Serbia and Croatia to the Bosnian political arena, the citizens were regarded as Bosniaks with different religion and not as members of the Serbian or Croatian people.⁵⁰ So, Vojislav P. Nikoćević writes: “before the coming of the Turks, in Bosnia there were no Serbians, but all those people were Bosniaks, since the time of existence of the Bosnian country until the end of XII century.”⁵¹ Later, the Catholic Franciscan Bosniakcism was left undeveloped and then disappeared in Croatism and the same from Bosniak Ortodox go to Serbism. In this way the religious division and affiliation in time determined the national membership too.

Under this differentiation the entering of the Islamic civilization in Bosnia had its impact. This civilization is built on the medieval Bosniak ethnic base and Bosnian language, as well as on the existing materialistic culture that in time was enriched with elements of the long tradition of the urban life on the Islamic orient. On that way arising one new spiritual Islamic development that through the long historic evolution has determined the Bosniaks national being opposing the other people with Slavic linguistic base, but with a different ethnic, religious, cultural and socially experience. Still, having in mind the differentiation between Croats and Serbs, in and out of Bosnia, we can say that the Ottoman influence was crucial in the continuity, identity, name, distinctiveness, and existence of the Bosniaks in the Balkans.

The historical continuity and distinctiveness of Bosnia as a country in the past was confirmed by the Ottomans too. In the division of the country in vilayets, that the Ottomans took after the invasion, in the Bosnian vilayet was included today’s Sanjak, thus the Bosniaks in continuity were a part of the same administrative and legal union. Bosnia had an internal military and civil administration. The old Bosnian feudal aristocracy did not lose its privileges and its lords, they stayed in their country and within the Ottoman society.⁵² The Bosnian sanjak-bey was not prone to the Rumelian beylerbey, as the other European Ottoman provinces, but to the sultan. With invasion of the territories of today’s Bosnian Kraina, parts of Dalmatia, Lika, and Slavonia, in 1580. was founded the Bosnian Pashalik (eyalet).⁵³ That means that with that region ruled a pasha of the highest rang – Beylerbey (lord of the lords), in which way Bosnia was strengthened as a unit. Serbia, for instance, stayed divided in several small administrative and legal unions, each of which was just one of the many such units in the Budin and Rumelian eyalet. Bosnia conducted that status of a separate unit until the end of the Ottoman’s presence in these regions.

In the biggest rise of the Ottoman Empire, in the time of Mehmed, Bajazit, and Sulejman, the Bosniaks had a remarkable role and gave to the Empire more than twenty

50 John V. A. Fine, *The Historical Roots of Bosnia’s Unique Ethnic Identity*, paper presented at the conference “The Bosnia Paradigm”, International Forum Bosnia Sarajevo, 1998. во Florian Bieber, *Muslim identity in the Balkans before the establishment of nation states...*, 20.

51 Vojislav P. Nikoćević, *Porijeklo i značenje imena Hrvat i Srbin*, Dubrovnik, br. 6, Dubrovnik, 1987, 17.

52 Марија Пандевска, *Присилни миграции во Македонија 1875-1881*, Институт за национална историја, Книгоиздателство Мисла, Скопје, 1993, 102-103.

53 Hazim Šabanović, *Bosanski pašaluk, postanak i upravna podjela*, Svjetlost, Sarajevo 1982, 80–81.

great *Vezi*rs. Regardless of the reasons, of which there were of course many Bosniaks and Bosnia were put in a hard and responsible, as well as privileged position in the time of the Ottoman Empire, which enabled them further development and strengthening of the state and national capacity of Bosnia. Up until the reforms in XIX century, the Ottomans, during their several centuries of ruling affirmed the idea of Bosnia as a compact historic and geopolitical unit within the Ottoman Empire.

The history of Bosnia as a part of the Ottoman Empire was characterized with the development of more fields, but all of them were in the shadow of the big battles, for which there was always the need for additional financing, along with the unreturnable loss of many Bosniaks on different fronts that were leading the country. Because of that Bosnia had constant uprising of the population. In the past all the big countries were being born out of wars, thus the constant wars made the contribution for their downfall. In XVIII century the Ottoman army led three battles with the Habsburg Monarchy in 1714.-1718.; 1737.-1739. and in 1788.-1791., and in the armies the most numerous were the Boaniaks. Especially meaningful is the big victory in 1737. in Banja Luka against the Austrian army. In the next battle, taught by the previous defeat, the Austrians guaranteed the Muslims their religious rights, nevertheless, every victory over the Ottomans was accompanied with taking over of territory, emigration or Christianization, and assimilation of the Bosniak population.

All of this resulted to the Bosniak Muslims, unlike the other non-Muslim people, to experience huge demographic changes, most of all in loss of the young population. They served military service for years and fought on different sides of the Ottoman Empire. The rest of the Christian people marked continuous demographic growth. After the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, with all the suffered losses, without anyone's support, the Bosniaks were treated as a "symbol of the Ottoman presence and Islam" by the newly formed countries. They were the "sad remains from Turkey on the Balkans", "a non-state element", "sebab orphans", unhistorical group that should be out of the scene, emigrated, or assimilated with one of the accepted nations.⁵⁴ The pressure of the national political imperative forced the historians in production of national myths and performances that only further encourage the religious impatience and exclusion to other different civilizational and cultural values.

WHAT NEXT?

For the modern men today what is needed is an objective information, freed from all the interpretations of facts that build walls between people, impatience and misunderstandings. With all the cited scientific analysis we can conclude that the spreading of Islam was not a violent process. There is no source found yet that displays on violent imposing of Islam on the population. I claim with all responsibilities, that such kind of source does not exist. The reason for this is that the Ottoman Empire was resting on the Islamic laws and principles, according to which "in religion there is no coercion". Apart from the media, the objective presentation of the facts, without myths, is crucial in the education. The course books are overloaded with content that is indoctrinating

54 Safet Bandžović, *Etničko-historiografski stereotipi i "sintetičke nacije"*, Zbornik radova sa Naučnog skupa historijska nauka o Bosni i Hercegovini u razdoblju 1990–2000, Posebno izdanje, CXX/36, ANUBiH, Sarajevo, 2003, 67–96.

the youth from an early age. As an example, I will take the Republic of Macedonia. In one textbook we can find the following statement: “The population that did not want to abandon Christianity was punished by Ottomans. It means they were forcibly Islamized”.⁵⁵ The authors have the right to create and impose assumptions. In another textbook, it is said that “The feudal in order to keep and preserve their privileges and property accepted the Islam voluntarily. Islam was also accepted by some of the poorest people, in order to get rid of the big taxes that Christians were paying.”⁵⁶ After the paragraph in a separate field for the analysis is stated: “Think about it: What were the reasons that some Macedonians accepted Islam?” In addition are stated only “two reasons” to accept Islam with which are devaluated the postulates of Islam. On the same page in the manual it is said that “the teacher should explain to the students the examples of forced islamisation in the Macedonian tradition.”⁵⁷ Even if an adult reads this, it is not clear how the forced islamization can be a part of the tradition of the Macedonian people. In this textbook, we can find the following formulation: “Macedonians who did not want to accept the Islam were killed”. This is only a part of the many negative interpretations of Islam in education, which are accepted as a truth that need not be discussed.

Many concepts are explained incorrectly and inappropriately. For example: “Islamization – a process of imposing the Islamic religion on the Macedonian people”. This term is found in the dictionary of less known terms and expressions at the end of the textbook for 6th grade.⁵⁸ The term “Islamization” is questionable and portrayed as a violent process. It is never used in a context of voluntary acceptance of the religion, as more acceptable system of belief or as the right of choice.⁵⁹ The term “islamization“, apart from the course books, is frequently present, even in scientific conferences organized by Muslims. This term has entered the common usage as a definition and way of spreading the Islam. The acceptance of Islam, like it is stated in the title of the article, cannot and must not equate with islamization. There is no islamization, neither violent nor nonviolent. It is a matter of choice. People are prone to pressure and to save themselves they are prepared for anything. Just like the air that is forced into the balloon, and that escapes when the balloon bursts. Just like most things that are forcedly imprisoned or locked, after the liberation, they go back to its primary position. However, the Bosniaks that accepted Islam, remained Muslim. If they were Islamized, they would go back to the life they led before Islam. Moreover, because of them being Muslims they were discriminated, killed, and forcedly Christianized, and for this there is proof, documents, photographs etc. Still, the decision that was made out of the deepest motives in search for the truth and existing was defended even with the price of life or abandonment of homelands. The free choice and faith is the only right path and something that gives you peace and significance of existing. That is the truth, was the same then as it is now. It is a matter of personal choice of every individual.

55 Ненад Нанески and others, *Историја за 6 одд., Свезда, Скопје*, 2006., 96.

56 Милан Бошкоски and others, *Историја за 6 одд., Просветно Дело, Скопје*, 2009., 100.

57 *Ibidem*.

58 Ненад Нанески and others, *Историја за 6 одд.*, 116.

59 Zecir Ramcilovic and others, *Islam and Christianity in the History Curriculum of the Primary Education in the Republic of Macedonia*, *Journal of Social and Human Sciences*, vol. 1 no. 1, International Balkan University, Skopje, 2014., 16.

According to F. Muhic, the national and cultural identity of the population in Bosnia in the time of Ottoman Empire was crucial motive and main criteria for willingly accepting or willingly not accepting Islam. Both choices were based on rational, although diametrically opposed assessments and plans of collective actions, essentially connected with the correlation toward perspectives for existing of Bosnia as a country: Bosniaks, for existing of Bosnia, non-Bosniaks, for its tearing apart and taking a part for themselves.⁶⁰

The quest for the truth and appropriate way of believing in interaction with the given moment and feeling of state-building, for existing of Bosnia were the main motive for accepting Islam by the Bosniaks.

In order to build a healthy society for all the citizens, no matter their differences, the truth is essential. And the truth is that in five hundred years of ruling by the Ottomans, and then leaving, in these regions, all of them, even the least numerous ones, the people were left with their identity, religion, language, culture, traditions, churches and monasteries, they simply stayed their own, and with their own way of living. There is no case similar to this one. The affirmation of the historic truth about the willing acceptance of Islam and analyses of the motives that brought them to accept it or not accept it, should be an imperative for the scientist and intellectuals. Through them the nationalistic ideologies and mythologies will be dismounted and will be erased from the course books and any other form of transmission of such information. The main purpose here was, to build a healthy human potential that will allow all the collectivities of the Balkans, in Europe and the world to live together.

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60 Ferid Muhić, *Islamski identitet Evrope*, CNS, Logos A, Sarajevo, 2014., 330.

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