

## HISTORY OF PREISLAMIZATION AND ISLAMIZATION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Islamization had the biggest influence on culture and society in Bosnia from 15th to 19th century. The social-historic range and facts of pre-history and history of islamization are necessary in understanding material as well as spiritual culture of muslims and other religious communities in BiH. Islamic religion and its art influenced the way of thinking, the way of life, social and family organization, literature etc, what formed folk characteristics, unique among South Slavs and Slavs in general.

First written documents of inhabitants refer to Illyrians<sup>1</sup>. Archaeological excavations also give evidence of their spiritual living, based on strong connection with nature. The supreme god was Silvan, imagined as hairy male being with goat legs and horns. His companion Diana (Thana) was goddess of hunting with an arrow in her hand. Over 300 monuments dedicated to them was found all over Bosnia. Illyrians also believed in mountain fairies, water nymphs etc.

After conflicts with Roman conquerors and after the last revolt in 9. AD, this whole area came under roman rule. Colonists immigrated from all over the Roman Empire spreading the roman language. At that time in antique Bosnia there were 40 different beliefs in 52 different gods.

In 5th or 6th century AD two new groups appeared: Slavs and Avars populated the lowland of Bosnia, while Illyrians, who were already mixed with Celts<sup>2</sup>, Goths<sup>3</sup>, Huns<sup>4</sup> and Alans<sup>5</sup>, withdrew to the mountains. The first written traces of bosnian state appeared as early as the 4th century, but »Horion Bosona«, the name of Bosnia, is mentioned in 935<sup>6</sup>.

It is hard to claim unity of original ethnic origin in medieval bosnian state. The first news about heretics in BiH appeared in the 12th century when governor Kulin with his family and more than ten thousand citizens practiced »the wrong belief«. Those accusations brought the country and the governor into a difficult position because the pope threatened with the crusade for propagating heresy. To avoid this, the wise ruler pretended to except catholicism, but he really stayed a member of the Bosnian Church, an indigenous christian sect considered heretical by both the roman catholic and eastern orthodox churches. However, in the year 1234 the war started and lasted for three years. Crusaders didn't achieve anything significant except plunder and killings.

The Church of Bosnia and its dualistic-gnostic teachings have roots in the 9th and 10th century in Persia, Bulgaria and Macedonia. Dualistic gnosticism became mass movement during the middle ages in west Europe. One characteristic is the opposition of good and bad, where material is identified as bad. Since leading class differed from ordinary members on material status, connections with feudal class and taking part in state business, it reflected negatively inside this religious and social movement. Those contradictions, bigger and bigger social distinctions, fights among feudal lords and royal authority, pressure from Hungary and the catholic church lead to exploitation of peasants and farmers. Early ottoman records write about devastation, abandoned villages, escaping of residents and taking their land from them. They also testify about pursuing bogomils - followers of the Church of Bosnia, massacres and taking their land. The ottoman army also took part in invasions and plunder. So the number of those followers reduced by the end of the Bosnian Kingdom, were not really physically

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<sup>1</sup> West indoeuropean tribe who settled on territory of west Balkan.

<sup>2</sup> Peoples in Europe using the celtic languages which were once predominant over a wide area from Ireland and Portugal in the west to northern Italy and Slovakia in the east

<sup>3</sup> East Germanic tribe who supposedly came from Scandinavia.

<sup>4</sup> Nomadic or half-nomadic cavalry from Central Asia.

<sup>5</sup> Iranian nomadic group.

<sup>6</sup> Byzantine emperor Constantine VII. in *De administrando de imperio* describing the territories which he reigned over.

destroyed. They could convert to christianity on the outside just because of persecution of authority and really stay members of the Bosnian Church, so called kryptobogomils.

Social circumstances, which define history of all nations, defined the history of Bosnians and their culture. After the christian-bogomil medieval bosnian state, in 1463 the Ottoman dynasty began to rule. They brought their own civilisation of islamic East. At that time slavic-islamic ethos was creating inside which were constituted spiritual and aesthetic characteristics. Society of medieval states identified life with religion and its ordinance, therefore the state of Bosnia also had foundations in christian faith. Three populations and three christian confessions; bogomilism, orthodoxy and catholicism were not religiously compartmented nation by the end of Ottoman rule in 1878<sup>7</sup>.

Bogomilism ideologically shaped collective resistance of bosnian society against hungarian, srbian and papal aggression. That explains fundamental reasons of islamization in BiH, although it doesn't mean mainly bogomils as the biggest part of population embraced islam and present the basis of islamization. During first decade of the Ottoman rule the number of islamized feudal lords was quite big while the number of islamized peasants and townsmen was minimal (Huković, Kasumović, Smailović, 13). The fact that bogomils opposed catholicism and orthodoxy and defended themselves against Hungarians and the pope doesn't necessarily mean they excepted islamic reign and religion just like that. However, with the arrival of Ottomans the hiding stopped so they could express their faith.

Franciscans<sup>8</sup> are present on bosnian territory since 13th century. Their province of Bosna Srebrena is the only institution continuously working since the middle ages<sup>9</sup>. Replacing dominicans, they came to Bosnia to unroot teachings of »bosnian christians« and organized franciscan community there. With the arrival of Turks, they got certain guarantees for their activities based on decree by sultan Mehmeda II in 1463. Although turkish local authorities not always respected the document, it was still of certain importance.

Bosnian Croats are one of three constituent nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina which makes around 14% of todays population (estimated in 2004). They mostly live in west and south areas of BiH, less in the central and north part.

Vlachs is a term covering several related ethnic groups, descendants of roman colonizers and latinised population<sup>10</sup> in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe. The word is allegedly of germanic and slavic origin meaning Romans or romanic people. Early ottoman documents show settlement of orthodox half-nomadic stockmen, Vlachs, in eastern Herzegovina, central and northern Bosnia. Metropolitan, the orthodox bishop, got headquarters in Sarajevo in 1532, while first churches in Vrhbosni<sup>11</sup> are mentioned since 1616.

Today bosnian Serbs make around 38% of population. They are found mainly in east and south part of Bosanska Krajina. Since the end of bosnia war in 1995 they mostly live in smaller entity where they make around 90% of population after ethnic conflict.

First Sephardi Jews as ethnic religious community appeared in present Bosnia and Herzegovina in 15th century fleeing from spanish and portugese inquisition. Regardless of some restrictions, they had certain autonomy. They brought their culture and the way of life which affected local peoples, while they adopted some characteristics of new enviroment. But

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<sup>7</sup> Austrian-Hungarian Empire gained bosnian territory on Congress in Berlin.

<sup>8</sup> Mendicant religious order of men tracing their origin to Francis of Assisi (1181-1226).

<sup>9</sup> Middle ages: 5th century (the fall of western Roman Empire) - 1492 (discovery of America).

<sup>10</sup> Illyrians, Thracians and Daco-Romanians.

<sup>11</sup> Sarajevo.

one thing is sure: certain level of assimilation of old nations, ethnic and religious groups is a fact. Their language is ladino, derived mainly from old castilian (spanish), hebrew, Turkish and some Greek.

Jewish community on BiH territory still exists today. Its presence is confirming a synagogue in Sarajevo just like jewish cemeteries in Sarajevo and Tuzla. Jews, as well as Bosniaks, are considered religious, national and ethnic group.

Excepting islamic religion didn't mean only transition from one faith to another, but also excepting authority and social order along with class and material interest. Ottoman structure of society brought important tax reliefs and facilities in social status, that is equalisation with privileged classes. Muslim peasant easier spreaded his land, because ottoman reign took the land of christian farmer on behalf of the muslim one.

Rough survey of outer and inner factors of social, religious and political background explains the reasons for excepting islamization, ottoman social and political order from point of view of peasant's of all three confessions. Although everyone could practise their own faith under muslim rulers, reality was often very different and believers were to exile.

Newer researches show Vlachs<sup>12</sup> to be a majority as islamized population on certain areas. Farmers as cosial class were islamized untill middle of 17th century, therefore it could be assumed that there wasn't mass transition of bogomils to islam. Also, the catholic church was pushed aside for a long time, badly organized and material weak just like orthodox one, which didn't have connections strong enough with the Nemanjić state<sup>13</sup>.

Changing the nature and positions of towns into oriental-islamic influenced islamization of city folk. Enormous means were invested into it. The site by main routes made trade and craft flourish and material and spiritual culture was developing. Excepting islam was a condition for peasants to come to town and to include themselves into city life. Catholic population also embraced it eventually or they were pushed into certain part of it called *varoš*. That's how transformed towns took part in islamization of peoples.

Bosniaks were closer to the Ottoman empire than european powers. Bosniak aristocrats gained the right to carry ottoman titles of *beg*, *aga*, *paša*... Noblemen from middle age began to rise till full local autonomy paying taxes to the sultan. Turks showed big attention to the bosnian part of the empire since that was a main border territory with the Austrian empire and Venetian state and was also used as a base for military operations against christians. It was special area<sup>14</sup> inside Ottoman empire where present bosnian language was one of the official languages. There were no foreigners ruling but Bosniaks themselves, which was a very important step toward independence and what made Bosnia special and privileged compared to other countries in Ottoman empire.

Though under the rule of foreigners, it is important to mention that there was continuity of creating a mother tongue. Parallel using several scripts gives it special value. Bosnian cyrillic

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<sup>12</sup> Ottoman documents from 1470's and 1480's testify about settlements of orthodox half-nomadic stockbreeders Vlachs in areas, destroyed by war, in central and northern Bosnia. Ottoman authorities actively took part in it. As distinguished from other christian groups in Bosnia, they were exempted from paying *harač* (a kind of tax which was left for leasers *haračlije* to collect). In boudary parts taxes on sheep were smaller and vlach dukes got some property. They were allowed to carry weapons because they were in ottoman military service and they were supposed to take an active part in defendig borders. Ottoman decrees from the end of 16th century show that Vlachs in northern Bosnia mostly abandoned nomadic way of life.

<sup>13</sup> Serbia.

<sup>14</sup> In the year 1580 was formally found Bosnian eyalet - administrative subdivision of Ottoman empire. First center was in Banja Luka, then was movet to Sarajevo in 1639, then to Travnik in 1697 and again to Sarajevo in 1850, which got the name after many *sarajs* - mansions.

is called *bosančica* dates back to the 10th/11th century. This script is significant to bosniak as well as bosnian history and linguistics, since it is native to Bosnia. Another script was used - arebica<sup>15</sup>, while first signs of renaissance opened a path for srbian (Vuk Karadžićs) cyrillic; Austria brought latin alphabet which finally dominated over others in this literature and culture.

Islamization comprehended all social classes and was important in forming social, mental, religious and cultural ethnic; this represents not only embracing faith, but also civilization of islam, its courses, vision of world, law, culture and aesthetics. Islam effected social, economic, political organization of society as well as ethisc of individual and family. Bosniak connection to ottoman structure pushed christians to social, political and moral opposition, therefore many connected themselves with national-liberational movements in the 19th century becoming orthodox Serbs and catholic Croats. What they certainly have in common is ethnic and linguistic baics.

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<sup>15</sup> Adapted arabic script for writing down native language; also appeared among muslims in Spain, Albania, Bolgaria, Poland, China and former Dutch colonies.