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Remarks on the Theories on the Origin of Muslims in Bulgarian Lands – Nineteenth-Century and Present Perspectives¹

Zarys treści: Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu przedstawienie wybranych dziewiętnastowiecznych teorii o pochodzeniu muzułmanów żyjących na ziemiach bułgarskich oraz skonfrontowanie ich z obecnym stanem wiedzy o tym zagadnieniu. Opisano koncepcje dotyczące dwóch grup etnicznych: muzułmanów bułgarskojęzycznych (tzw. Pomaków) oraz Turków.

Abstract: The paper is aimed to present selected nineteenth-century theories about the origin of Muslims living in Bulgarian lands and to confront them with the present state of knowledge. The paper also presents concepts regarding two ethnic groups: the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (the so-called Pomaks) and Turks.

Słowa kluczowe: mniejszość muzułmańska w Bułgarii, Bułgaria, etnogeneza, historia Bałkanów, XIX wiek

Keywords: Muslim minority in Bulgaria, Bulgaria, ethnogenesis, Balkan history, 19th century

Introduction

One of the most enduring after-effects of the Ottoman rule in the Balkans was the formation of Muslim communities there – the biggest ones still live in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Bulgaria, and North Macedonia. The question of their origin has been causing powerful emotions – the discussion about their ethnogenesis played an important role in the process of the formation of the nations and proving the communities' rights to the territories they inhabited. In this context, Mary Neuburger writes about the blood mania which rules in the

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Balkans.² Self-identification, language, and faith are treated as secondary to the conviction about having common ancestors and more or less abstract theories about national origin. It is no different in the case of Bulgaria and the Muslims who lived on that territory. Until the 19th century, their ethnogenesis was the subject of many theories and discussions.

The paper is aimed to present selected nineteenth-century theories about the origin of Muslims living in Bulgarian lands and to confront them with the present state of knowledge about that issue. Some concepts regarding the two ethnic groups, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (the so-called Pomaks) and Turks, will be described. The case of the Tatars and Muslim Roma will not be addressed. The Tatars appeared in the Bulgarian lands relatively late – at the end of the 18th and in the 19th century. They emigrated from Russia and there are no doubts about their origin.³ Roma, regardless of their faith, were outside the system of the Ottoman religious communities, functioning as *millet*s due to their low social status and a lifestyle which was significantly different from the other communities. Roma Christians were not treated as part of the Orthodox Church by Greeks and Bulgarians, just as Roma Muslims did not belong to the *umma* according to the Turks, Tatars, and Pomaks.⁴

Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (Pomaks)

In the 19th century, the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims in Bulgaria lived in the Rhodope Mountains and in the regions of Lovech and Teteven.⁵ Before 1878, there were 50,000 Pomaks in central Bulgaria⁶ and 20,000 in the Rhodopes.⁷ In 1885,

² M. Neuburger, “Bulgaro-Turkish Encounters and the Re-imagining of the Bulgarian Nation (1878–1995),” *East European Quarterly*, 31, 1997, no. 1, pp. 1–2.

³ The Tatars appeared in the Balkans for the first time in the 13th century (the Nogais group settled in Dobruja), but these were not big communities and did not last long. K. Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History*, Leiden-Boston-Koln, 2002, pp. 202–234;

⁴ Ö. Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria (1878–1908)*, Ankara, 1998, p. 103; P. Даскалов, *Българското общество 1878–1939*, vol. 2: *Население, общество, култура*, София, 2005, p. 15; D. M. Crowe, “Roma Muslims in the Balkans,” *Nationalities Papers*, 28, 2000, no. 1, pp. 99–100.

⁵ V. Roudometof, *Collective Memory, National Identity, and Ethnic Conflicts. Greece, Bulgaria, and Macedonian Question*, Westport, 2002, p. 31; S. Raichevsky, *The Mohammedan Bulgarians (Pomaks)*, transl. M. Pencheva, Sofia, 2004, p. 82; Pomaks (in the sense of a wide group of Muslims who speak languages of the Eastern group of South Slavic languages) also lived in Macedonia, Thrace, and Albania – their total number in the first half of the 19th century was about 250,000, in the second half of that century – between 400,000 and 600,000. В. Арденски, *Загаснали огнища. Изселническите процеси сред българите мохамедани в периода 1878–1944 г.*, София, 2005, p. 9; К. Василев, *Родопските българи мохамедани. Исторически очерк*, Пловдив, 1961, pp. 5–6; Also: S. Raichevsky, op. cit., pp. 90–127.

⁶ С.Н. Шишков, *Българо-мохамеданите (помаци). Историко-земеписен и народоучен преглед с образи*, Пловдив 1936, pp. 73–74; S. Raichevsky, op. cit., pp. 64–66; В. Арденски, op. cit., p. 10.

⁷ S. Raichevsky, op. cit., pp. 76–77.

after the intensive migration following the War of 1877–1878 and the collapse of the Ottoman rule, 25,000 Pomaks lived on the territories of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia.⁸ The official data about this community were presented for the first time in 1900 – 20,638 Pomaks lived in Bulgaria (i.e. 0.55% of the population and 3.22% of the Muslims in the state). It was approximately the same number as the people who declared Islam as their faith and Bulgarian as their native language – 20,726. In the 1905 census, 19,360 people (i.e. 0.48% of the population and 3.21% of the Muslims in the state) claimed to be Pomaks, which was slightly fewer than the group describing themselves as Muslims and Bulgarian language users – 23,734 (respectively: 0.59% and 3.93%). In 1910, 20,332 people were registered as Pomaks in the census (respectively: 0.47% and 3.38%), and 27,008 as Muslims who spoke the Bulgarian language (respectively: 0.62% and 4.49%). The difference between the number of people who claimed to be Pomaks and the ones who declared Islam as their religion and Bulgarian as their native language is linked to the Muslim Roma people, who declared Bulgarian as the native language.⁹

Many names were used to refer to the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, among which Pomaks, Ahriani, and Torbeshi were the most commonly used. Most of them had a local range, such as Babechani or Bashi (in the Babiak region), Ruptsi (in Rupchos), or Skarnatsi (in the Western Rhodope Mountains).¹⁰ There were also national, ethnic, and religious categories in use, for example in

⁸ К. Иречек, *Княжество България. Негова повърхнина, природа, население, духовна култура, управление и новейша история*, pt. 1: *Българска държава*, Пловдив, 1899, pp. 119–120.

⁹ В. Арденски, op. cit., pp. 25–26; М. Иванов, “Невидимите помаци,” *Либерален преглед*, 2014, pt. 2, pp. 279–282.

¹⁰ S. Raichevsky, op. cit., pp. 130–139; П. Маринов, *Българите мохамедани в своето народно съзнание и възродителното им движение*, София, 1994, pp. 5–10; М. Lubańska, *Synkretyzm a podziały religijne w bułgarskich Rodopach*, Warszawa, 2012, p. 27; К. Василев, *Родопските българи*, pp. 9–14; М. Арnaudов, *Родопските помаци. Народно-исторически преглед*, София, 2010, pp. 59–60; Б. Алексиев, “Родопското население в българската хуманистаристика,” in: *Мюсюлманските общности на Балканите и в България*, ed. А. Желязкова, София, 1997, pp. 61–65; М. Todorova, “Identity (Trans)formation among Bulgarian Muslims,” in: *The Myth of “Ethnic Conflict”: Politics, Economics and “Cultural” Violence*, ed. B. Crawford, R. D. Lipschutz, Berkeley, 1998, pp. 480–481; М. Walczak-Mikołajczakowa, “Pomacy – bułgarscy poturczeńcy (na przykładzie wsi Selcza w zachodnich Rodopach),” *Balkanica Posnaniensia. Acta et studia*, 21, 2014, vol. p. 180; П. Вълков, “За значението на названието помак,” *Либерален преглед*, 2014, pt. 1, pp. 508–513; А. Пашова, П. Воденичаров, “Искаме да сме равни, не еднакви. Официални наративи на идентичността на студенти мюсюлмани от Западните Родопи,” in: *Помаците: версии за произход и съвременна идентичност*, ed. Е. Иванова, София, 2013, p. 79; А. Eminov, “Social Construction of Identities: Pomaks in Bulgaria,” *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, 6, 2007, no. 2, p. 9; The diversity of names referring to Muslims is nothing special compared to other territories of the Balkans. In Greek lands, there were terms like Linovamvaki (woolly), Valahadi (most probably derived from “Vlach”), or – in the case of Cyprus – Patsaloi (“colourful”). Serbs and Croats called Slavic-Speaking Muslims “Mohammedan,” “Poturnak” or “Poturec.” Е. Иванова, *Ислямизирани Балкани. Динамика на разказите*, София, 2014, pp. 66–67.

the Western Rhodopes the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims were called “Turks,” in the Central Rhodopes – “Bulgarians,” and in the Eastern Rhodopes – “Muslims.”¹¹ The Pomaks did not speak the same dialects of the Bulgarian language: the Rupts spoke in the same way as the Bulgarian Christians from the Rhodopes, the Pomaks from Lovech used Zagora dialects, and Torbeshi dialects were linked to the modern Macedonian language.¹² The term “Pomak” became commonly applied to the whole Bulgarian-speaking Muslim population at the end of the 19th century – it was first used in that context by Vasil Aprilov in 1841.¹³

Some mentions about “Turks who do not know Turkish” were recorded from the beginning of the 18th century in Western travellers’ notes. Bulgarian-speaking Muslims were noticed rather late by Bulgarians. During the National Revival period, they were mentioned by Vasil Aprilov (1841),¹⁴ Yordan Konstantinov (1852), Georgi Rakovski (1857), Lyuben Karavelov (1867) and Nayden Gerov (1876).¹⁵ Bits of information about the Pomaks were usually treated as a curiosity or took the shape of estimates of their population number. The ethnologic and topographic research conducted in the 1870s and 1880s by Stefan Zahariev and Stefan Verković (who was Serbian), among others, contained a more detailed analysis of this community. Later, studies on the Pomaks were carried out by local activists from the Rhodopes (Stoyu Shishkov, Vasil Dechev, Hristo Popkonstantinov), as well as the leading Bulgarian ethnographers (Vasil Kanchov, Lyubomir Miletich). Central figures of the Bulgarian intellectual life, including Ivan Vazov or Pencho R. Slaveykov, also spoke about this community.¹⁶ However, in the 19th century, only a small group of specialists were aware of the existence of Muslim Bulgarians. This is why at that time the differentiation between Pomaks and Turks was not widespread; for example, this kind mistake was made by one of the most prominent Bulgarian national activists of the 1870s and an important liberal politician, Zahari Stoyanov.¹⁷

Bulgarians believed (and still do) that Pomaks had been Christians in the Middle Ages and during the Ottoman rule they accepted Islam, but they resisted

¹¹ M. Lubańska, *Synkretyzm*, pp. 26–27; E. Иванова, *Ислямизирани Балкани*, p. 130; A. Eminov, “Social Construction,” p. 15; M. Lubańska, “Pomacy,” in: *Balkany. Etnokulturowe podłoże konfliktu*, ed. W. Konarski, A. Koseski, Pułtusk, 2006, p. 233; E. Иванова, “Идентичност и идентичности на помаците в България,” *Либерален преглед*, 2012, pt. 1, p. 843.

¹² S. Raichevsky, op. cit., p. 8.

¹³ A. Kalionski, *Communities, Identities and Migrations in Southeast Europe*, Sofia, 2014, p. 6; M. Todorova, op. cit., p. 480; Ц. Георгиева, “Помаци – българи-мюсюлмани,” in: *Общности и идентичности в България*, ed. A. Кръстева, София, 1998, pp. 286–287.

¹⁴ В. Априлов, *Деница ново-болгарского образования. Часть первая*, Одесса, 1841, p. 87.

¹⁵ М. Иванов, “Невидимите помаци,” pp. 275–276; Ц. Георгиева, op. cit., p. 289.

¹⁶ S. Raichevsky, op. cit., pp. 11–31; М. Иванов, “Невидимите помаци,” pp. 277–278; Б. Алексиев, op. cit., p. 58.

¹⁷ Х. Попконстантинов, “Чепино (Едно българско краище в северозападните разклонения на Родопските планини),” *Сборник народни умотворения, наука и книжнина*, 1890, no. 3, p. 364.

Turkification and preserved their language and customs.¹⁸ Bulgarian historiography described in detail the great campaign of forced conversions in the Rhodope Mountains in 1656–1661, which led to the destruction of 218 churches and 33 monasteries located between Kostenets and Stanimaka. Bulgarians believe that these events were the main cause of the emergence of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslim community in the Rhodopes.¹⁹ However, this account was based on the 19th-century fabricated *Chronicle of Pop Metodi Draginov* (*Летописният разказ на поп Методи Драгинов*), which was actually written by the Revival activist Stoyan Zahariev in 1860. There were also two other chronicles allegedly written in the 17th century which were published in the second half of the 19th century: the *Chronicle from Batkun* (*Баткунска хроника*) and the *Chronicle of Belovo* (*Беловска хроника*). Konstantin Jireček was the first to express doubts about the authenticity of the texts; however, he did not deny that a great Islamisation campaign took place in the Rhodope Mountains in the second half of the 17th century. Like another Czech researcher, Václav Dobruský, Jireček was a supporter of the theory about the gradual Islamisation of Pomaks, whose climax were the events of 1656–1661.²⁰ In 1984, the detailed analysis of Iliya Todorov showed that the *Chronicle of Pop Metodi Draginov* was a Revival mystification. The evidence was not only linguistic, but also linked to the anti-Greek undertone of the work and a series of inaccuracies contained therein. He proved that the text was not from the 17th, but from the 19th century. The same problems are linked to other sources on the great Islamisation campaign in the Rhodopes in the 17th century.²¹ However,

¹⁸ A. Eminov, “Social Construction,” p. 9.

¹⁹ X. Попконстантинов, *Спомени, пътеписи, писма*, ed. A. Примовски, Н. Примовски, Пловдив, 1970, p. 442; И. поп Панайотов Асянчик, *Принос за изучаване на Разлога и по-частно на с. Баня (Разложко). Бележки и спомени*, Пловдив, 1915, p. 18; R. Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, Cambridge–New York 2005, pp. 34–35; Кирил Патриарх български, *Българомохамедански селища в Южните Родопи (Ксантийско и Гюмюрджинско). Топонимно, етнографско и историческо изследване*, София, 1960, pp. 50–52; K. Popok, “Afera Brunnbauer-Walewa a współczesne nurty historiografii bułgarskiej wobec zagadnienia panowania tureckiego w Bułgarii,” *Studenckie Zeszyty Naukowe IFS UJ*, 4, 2013, no. 2, p. 120; F. Bieber, “Muslim Identity in the Balkans before the Establishment of Nation States,” *Nationalities Papers*, 28, 2000, no. 1, pp. 21–22; K. Василев, “Стою Шишков – просветител, възрожденец и радетел за щастливо бъдеще на Родопа,” in: С.Н. Шишков, *Избрани произведения*, ed. К. Василев, Пловдив, 1965, p. 20.

²⁰ К. Иречек, *Княжество България. Негова повърхнина, природа, население, духовна култура, управление и новейша история*, pt. 2: *Пътувания по България*, Пловдив, 1899, pp. 407–408; В. Добруски, “Няколко сведения за изтурчванието на Родопските Българи,” *Периодическо списание*, 1887, no. 21–22, pp. 332–338; id., “Българомохамеданската република в Родопските планини,” in: *България през погледа на чешки пътешественици*, ed. В. Бехиньова, София, 1984, pp. 88–89.

²¹ И. Тодоров, “Летописният разказ на поп Методи Драгинов,” *Либерален преглед*, 2015, pt. 1, pp. 26–58; М. Тодорова, “Ислямизацията като мотив в българската историография, литература и кино,” *Либерален преглед*, 2009, pt. 1, pp. 366–373; Б. Лори, “Летописът на

as Tsvetana Georgieva said, the question of the falsification of the chronicles is still a “voice in the desert” of the historical discourse, and Bulgarians do not take note of the results of the research which shows that forced and mass conversions were rare in the Ottoman Empire.²²

The earliest mentions of the Pomaks usually expressed the conviction that “they were just Turkified Bulgarians.”²³ There were opinions that they could not be part of the national community. In 1867, Lyuben Karavelov wrote that a Bulgarian could only be an Orthodox Christian; the Muslims, Catholics or Protestants who spoke the Bulgarian language were not members of the nation. His rigid thinking about the unity between nationality and religion was the effect of the Ottoman *millet* and Russian Slavophilism (at that time L. Karavelov lived in Russia).²⁴ Later, especially after the creation of the modern Bulgarian state in 1878, these kinds of ideas were rejected and the concept of integrating the Pomaks with Bulgarian culture through education and Christianisation became more popular. There were proposals to cast the term “Pomak” aside in favour of the term “Bulgarian Muslim,” expressing the unity between this community and the rest of the Bulgarian nation. At the end of the 19th century, Petko R. Slaveykov and Hristo G. Danov supported this idea.²⁵ Vasil Dechev posited that “it was a mistake to talk about the Rhodope Mountains as a multiethnic territory because one nation of two religions lived here.”²⁶ Ivan Vazov defined the Pomaks as “the lost Bulgarians,” whose “fanatical darkness of the soul needed to be healed,” and he postulated that “we need to breathe new life into their national identity.”²⁷ This kind of thinking was linked to the theories of crypto-Christianity, according to which the Pomaks were “pure-blood Bulgarians” who – despite the sacrifice of their faith – had succeeded in keeping their language and customs unchanged for centuries.²⁸

The negative or positive attitude to this population was usually related to the theory of its origin. The forced conversion to Islam was linked with the treatment of the Pomaks as victims of the “Turkish yoke,” even martyrs. In this approach,

поп Методий Драгинов като литературно произведение от 19. Век,” transl. Е. Алексиева, *Либерален преглед*, 2014, pt. 2, pp. 201–216; Б. Алексиев, op. cit., pp. 83–85, 94–98; Е. Грозданова, “Фалшификат ли е летописният разказ на поп Методи Драгинов?,” *Исторически преглед*, 37 (2), 1993, pp. 146–157.

²² Ц. Георгиева, op. cit., pp. 289–230; И. Карахасан-Чънар, “Мигът за ислямизацията и проблема за достоверността на българските исторически извори,” *Либерален преглед*, 2012, pt. 2, pp. 1179–1192.

²³ М. Иванов, “Невидимите помаци,” p. 279.

²⁴ S. Raichevsky, op. cit., pp. 40–41.

²⁵ П. Р. Славейков, *Исторически разкази за миналите времена*, София, 1885, pp. 364–367; S. Raichevsky, op. cit., pp. 50–51.

²⁶ В. Дечев, *Миналото на Чепеларе. Принос за историята на Родопа*, vol. 2, ed. Г. И. Чичовски, Чепеларе, 2002, p. 10.

²⁷ И. Вазов, *Пътеници*, ed. П. Динеков, И. Тодоров, София, 1977, pp. 81–82.

²⁸ M. Lubańska, *Synkretyzm*, p. 27.

the Bulgarian duty was to restore them to the national community.²⁹ The voluntary change of faith aroused mixed feelings – linked either to the betrayal of faith and national values for material benefits or to avoiding Turkification (sacrifice of faith to protect “the Bulgarian blood from mixing with the Turkish one”).³⁰

There were also alternative theories about the origin of the Pomaks formulated outside Bulgaria. Turkish historians recognise them as Slavicised Turks, accentuating the bonds of religion and culture among the Muslim community in the Balkans. There are opinions that the Pomaks are the ancestors of the Turkish settlers who appeared in the region during the Ottoman rule, or the oldest Turkic population in Europe: the Cumans, who came here in the 11th century.³¹ According to this theory, the evidence is the fact that until the 19th century the Pomaks identified themselves as Turks and later many of them accepted the modern Turkish identity.³² However, this theory ignores the fact that at that time the term “Turk” was synonymous to “Muslim.” Some of the attempts to prove this theory are quite ridiculous; for example, there are some pseudo-linguistic analyses showing that 30% of the Pomak language is based on Ukrainian lexemes, 25% on Cuman-Kipchak, 20% on Oghuz, 15% on Nogais, and 10% on Arabic.³³ There are no doubts that the Pomaks used and still use dialects of the Bulgarian language, which contains a number of Turkish and Greek loanwords.³⁴

Greeks consider Pomaks to be the ancestors of the ancient Thracians, who were first Hellenised, then Latinised, Slavicised, Christianised, and finally they converted to Islam. The evidence supporting this theory are the physical characteristics of the population, which allegedly show that Pomaks are the closest to Greeks.³⁵

²⁹ G. Lazarova, B. Alexiev, G. Nazarska, E. Troeva-Grigorova, I. Kyurkchieva, *Regions, Minorities and European Policies: A State of the Art Report on Muslim Minorities (Turks and Pomaks) in Central South Planning Region (Bulgaria)*, Sofia, 2003, p. 16; Similar theories about Bosnian Muslims were formulated by Croats, including in the second half of the 19th century by Ante Starčević. Е. Иванова, *Ислямизирани Балкани*, pp. 61–62; *Leksykon tradycji bułgarskiej*, ed. G. Szwat-Gyłybowa, Warszawa, 2011, p. 226.

³⁰ M. Lubańska, *Synkretyzm*, p. 27; X. Гиневски, *Миналото на Средните Родопи – XIX и назагато на XX век. Възраждане*, Варна, 2008, p. 23; S. Raichevsky, op. cit., pp. 45–46; M. Walczak-Mikołajczakowa, op. cit., pp. 179–180.

³¹ A. Гюншен, “Помаците като балканска общност,” trans. E. Алексова, *Либерален преглед*, 2014, pt. 2, pp. 773–785; A. Eminov, “Social Construction,” p. 9; M. Walczak-Mikołajczakowa, op. cit., pp. 180–181; V. Aarbakke, “Pomak Language Usage and the Spell of Nationalism: The Case of the Pomaks in Greece,” in: *Slavia Islamica: language, religion and identity*, ed. R. D. Greenberg, M. Nomachi, Hokkaido, 2012, pp. 151–152.

³² A. Пашова, П. Воденичаров, op. cit., pp. 78–79.

³³ H. Memişoğlu, *Pages of the History of Pomak Turks*, Ankara, 1991, pp. 17–23.

³⁴ M. Savova-Mahon Borden, *The Politics of Nationalism under Communism in Bulgaria. Myth, Memories and Minorities*, London, 2001, pp. 316–317.

³⁵ K. Ghodsee, *Muslims Lives in Eastern Europe. Gender, Ethnicity, & the Transformation of Islam in Postsocialist Bulgaria*, Princeton–Oxford, 2010, p. 38; A. Eminov, “Social Construction,” pp. 8–9.

The concept was originally created in the 19th century by one of the most important Greek demographers, Kleanthes Nikolaides.³⁶

Next to the Bulgarian, Turkish, and Greek narratives about the Pomaks' origin, since the 1990s, under the influence of traumatic events linked to the "Revival Process" (the policy of forced assimilation of Turkish and Muslim minorities in communist Bulgaria), there were also the community's voices about their own ethnogenesis. Authors like Mehmed Dobrunski, Momchil Petrov, Petar Yapov, Huseyn Mehmed, Nikola Churalski, Emel Balakchi, and Efrem Mollov created more or less exotic theories about the Pomaks' origins; some of them are not well documented, some of them are completely fictional. They include theories about the origin from the Arabs (who appeared in the Balkan Peninsula during the wars against Byzantium in the 7th–10th century; the evidence would be the term "Ahriani," which could be translated as "the last who accepted Islam"), from the Cumans and the Pechenegs (who invaded the region in the 10th–12th century), from the Thracians (as the autochthonic people of the lands), or the Bulgars (Proto-Bulgarians – the Turkic creators of the Medieval Bulgarian state). All of these theories have two characteristics in common: the manifestation of the pre-Ottoman roots of Balkan Islam and the independence of the Pomak nationality.³⁷

There is also an exotic theory about the Polish origin of the Pomaks. It was probably presented to the Bulgarian leader of the Uniate Movement, Dragan Tsankov, by the Poles who were involved in the negotiations with the Catholic Church in the 1850s and 1860s. According to the theory, the Pomaks were ancestors of the 100,000 Polish soldiers captured by Turks after the siege of Kamianets-Podilskyi in 1672, who converted to Islam because of Greek malevolence. The proof is supposed to be the similarity between the term "Polyak" and "Pomak."³⁸

³⁶ С. Шишков, *Тракия преди и след европейската война*, Пловдив, 1922, pp. 32–35.

³⁷ Е. Иванова, *Ислямизирани Балкани*, pp. 144–175; М. Todorova, op. cit., pp. 485–486; М. Lubańska, "Pomacy," pp. 235–236; Y. Konstantinov, "Strategies for Sustaining a Vulnerable Identity: the Case of the Bulgarian Pomaks," in: *Muslim Identity and the Balkan States*, ed. Н. Poulton, S. Taji–Farouki, London, 1997, pp. 39–40; П. Петров, "Абсурдни теории, фалшификации и заблуди за произхода на българите мохамедани," in: *Заблуди и фалшификации за произхода на българите мохамедани*, ed. Х. Гиневски, София, 2010, pp. 18–35; Е. Иванова, "Идентичност," pp. 852–858; С. Танев, "Истината за етногенезиса на българите мохамедани и нейното филшифициране в публикации на съвременни български автори," in: *Заблуди и фалшификации*, pp. 84–89; Х. Гиневски, "Произходът на българите мохамедани – съвременни фалшификации," in: *Заблуди и фалшификации*, pp. 118–121.

³⁸ S. Raichevsky, op. cit., pp. 23–24; М. Lubańska, *Synkretyzm*, pp. 27–28; Z. Klejn, "Próby stworzenia polskich przyczółków militarno-politycznych na Bałkanach w XIX w.," *Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowej*, 40, 2000, pp. 14–15; С. Станев, "Българите мохамедани в България и съседните страни," in: *Историческа съдба на помохамеданчените българи*, ed. П. Петров, Д. Шишманов, В. Пачилов, А. Печилков, Смолян, 2008, p. 38; А. Пашова, П. Воденичаров, op. cit., p. 81; С. Райчевски, "Рецидиви на приложната етнология – ненаучни теории и фалшификации за произхода на българите мохамедани," in: *Заблуди и фалшификации*, p. 67.

The Pomak identity was and is much more complicated. Ali Eminov assumes that there are two levels: religious (as Muslim) and ethnic (as “not pure” Bulgarian).³⁹ Later this theory was expanded. According to Mario Apostolov, there were three levels of the Pomak identity: as members of the local, religious, and – conditionally – Bulgarian (national, civic and/or lingual) community.⁴⁰ Evangelos Karagiannis proposes six models of the Pomak identity, which refer to the assimilative processes ongoing since the turn of the 19th and 20th century:

1. Assimilated
 - a. Bulgarian Christian
 - b. Bulgarian secular
 - c. Pomak secular
2. Non-Assimilated
 - a. Bulgarian Muslim
 - b. Pomak Muslim
 - c. Turk.⁴¹

However, in the historical perspective, there was no unified Pomak community but many communities among which different identity paradigms played a central role in various configurations. These paradigms include Islam, the local community, Bulgarian language, conviction about the origin (Thracian, Greek, Turkish, Cuman, Arabic, Slavic, etc.), citizenship (Bulgarian, Greek, Ottoman, later also Turkish, Macedonian), as well as the modern national identity.⁴² As a result of the eclectic and evolving identity, almost every Balkan nation claims the right to recognise them as part of their national community: the Slavic language links them with Bulgarians and Macedonians, the religion with Turks; the theories about the Christian origin and conversion to Islam could be linked with the Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Greek ethnogenesis.⁴³ Since 1878, due to the assimilation policy pursued by the Bulgarian state (first voluntary, in some periods forced), the Pomaks’ identity underwent subsequent transformations. Some of them accepted the Bulgarian identity (with Orthodox Christianity or in the secular version), some became crypto-Muslims, some backed away to the traditional identity paradigm, some declared themselves as Turks.⁴⁴ In the 19th century, compared to the Bulgarian or Turkish population of these lands, the Pomaks demonstrated a low sense of ethnic community (as Yulian Konstantinov says: “a dormant ethnicity”) and the main paradigm of their identity was still religion and localism.⁴⁵

³⁹ A. Eminov, “Social Construction,” p. 14.

⁴⁰ M. Apostolov, “The Pomaks: A Religious Minority in the Balkans,” *Nationalities Papers*, 24, 1996, pp. 729–730.

⁴¹ Quoted after: A. Eminov, “Social Construction,” p. 15.

⁴² K. Ghodsee, op. cit., p. 22; E. Иванова, “Идентичност,” pp. 844–851, 859–862.

⁴³ M. Neuburger, “Pomak Borderlands: Muslims on the edge of nations,” *Nationalities Papers*, 28, 2000, no. 1, p. 183.

⁴⁴ Y. Konstantinov, op. cit., p. 34.

⁴⁵ A. Kalionski, op. cit., pp. 8–9; Y. Konstantinov, op. cit., p. 39.

Bulgarian Turks

In the 19th century, Bulgarians were less interested in the origin of the Bulgarian Turks, but also in this case there were some intriguing theories. Turks are the largest community among the Turkic nations – they live mostly in Anatolia, where they started to settle in the 11th century. They are mostly Sunnis, but in the past in Bulgaria there were also some Shiites as well (known as the Alevi, Aliani or Kazalbashi).⁴⁶ The Bulgarian Turks are concentrated in Dobruja and the north-eastern part of the country – the “Triangle” between Razgrad, Silistra, and Varna (where 90% of the Bulgarian Muslim community lives) and in the south-eastern parts – the vicinity of Kardzhali and Haskovo. In the 19th century, they also lived in the west, but in more diffuse and smaller communities which started to disappear after the creation of the Bulgarian state.⁴⁷ In 1888, there were 607,331 (19.25%) Turks living in Bulgaria, in 1900 – 531,084 (14.18%), in 1905 – 488,988 (12.09%), and in 1910 – 465,988 (9.63%).⁴⁸ Of course, we need to remember about the mixing of the religious and ethnic categories (Muslims who did not speak Turkish but called themselves Turks), but there are no doubts that Turks were not only the biggest Muslim group, but also the biggest minority in the country as well.

Many Bulgarian intellectuals supported the theory that the local Turks had been Christian Bulgarians and that Turkification had been the effect of mass and forced assimilation carried out by the Ottoman Empire. This vision is strongly ingrained in Bulgarian culture. The *Short History of the Bulgarian-Slavic Nation* (*История во кратце о болгарском народе словенском*, 1792) by Spiridon Gabrovski⁴⁹ or *Tsarstvenik* (*Царсетвеник*, 1844) by Hristaki Pavlovich presented this theory about the origin of the Bulgarian Turks.⁵⁰ Konstantin Jireček also supported this

⁴⁶ The latter term can be translated directly as “red heads,” which referred to the characteristic hats with 12 red stripes symbolising the 12 imams constituting the central spiritual hierarchy of the Shiites. It was not a homogeneous community, but rather it was divided into several smaller sects, the most famous of which were the Bektashi. The liquidation of the Janissaries Corps in 1826 was a key event for this community due to the connections of this formation with the branch of Shiism. A few Shiite communities existed in Bulgaria until the 1930s. Н. Граматикова, *Неортодоксалният ислям в българските земи. Минало и съвременност*, София, 2011, pp. 20–26; И. Карахасан-Чънар, *Етническите малцинства в България. История, култура, религия, обреден календар*, София, 2005, p. 126; А. Eminov, “Islam and Muslims in Bulgaria: A Brief History,” *Islamic Studies*, 36, 1997, no. 2–3, pp. 232–234.

⁴⁷ V. Roudometof, op. cit., p. 128; Ж. Назърска, *Българската държава и нейните малцинства 1879–1885*, София 1999, pp. 7–8; P. Даскалов, op. cit., p. 15; С. Киселиновски, *Малцинствата во Романија, Грција, Бугарија и Југославия*, Скопје, 2011, p. 85; Y. Konstantinov, op. cit., p. 41.

⁴⁸ К. Иречек, *Княжество България*, pt. I, p. 55; *Historia Bułgarii 1870–1915. Materiały źródłowe z komentarzami*, vol. 3: *Polityka wewnętrzna*, ed. J. Rubacha, A. Malinowski, Warszawa, 2009, pp. 29–31.

⁴⁹ Its fragment about forced Islamisation was added to various editions of the *Slavic-Bulgarian History* (*История славянобългарска*) written by Paisius of Hilendar – the text which symbolically started the Bulgarian National Revival.

⁵⁰ Е. Иванова, *Ислямизирани Балкани*, pp. 70–71.

idea: “The Balkan Ottomans [e.g. Turks] are not of Turkish origin, they do not have features like them, their origin is Slavic, Albanian, Caucasian, or Armenian.”⁵¹ At the beginning of the 20th century, Lyubomir Miletich tried to prove that the local Turks were of Bulgarian origin using the toponymies of the north-eastern lands and the physiognomy of representatives of this community. According to the ethnographer, the Bulgarians who used to live in this region accepted Islam and the Turkish language during the Ottoman rule (mostly in the 17th century), or escaped to another part of Bulgaria or Wallachia.⁵² Also today, Vera Mutafchieva, who supports the theory that Islamisation in Ottoman Bulgaria was mostly voluntary, says that the term “ethnic Turk” in the context of the Balkan Peninsula is logically inconsistent with regard to the actual origin of the people.⁵³ However, the same could be said about every Balkan ethnic or national group.

Turkish historians mostly preach the theory that the Bulgarian Turks are the descendants of the Ottoman colonists, which is evidenced by the national unity and close relations with the inhabitants of Anatolia. This concept was supported by some Bulgarian authors, although for different reasons. In 1884, Marin Drinov wrote that it was proof of the foreignness of the Turks living on the Bulgarian lands, which was the native homeland of Bulgarians. He expressed the opinion that the Bulgarian Turks should be removed from the north-eastern region of the country.⁵⁴ There were also other theories about the non-autochthonic characteristics of these people: in 1898, the Czech archaeologists Karel and Hermenegild Škorpil wrote that the Turks of Deli Orman (present-day Ludogorie) could be the ancestors of Proto-Bulgarians, so “they are more Bulgarian than Bulgarians (Slavs) actually are.” This theory was supported by one of the most important Polish orientologists of the first half of the 20th century – Tadeusz Jan Kowalski.⁵⁵

Current state of research

The present state of research shows that the appearance of the Muslim community in the Balkans was linked to two processes: colonisation and Islamisation, and one process did not exclude the other.

⁵¹ К. Иречек, *Княжество България*, pt. 1, p. 160; Jireček wrote that the case of the Turks of Kardzhali was the exception – according to the Czech intellectual, they were direct descendants of nomadic colonists. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁵² Л. Милетич, *Старото българско население в североизточна България*, София, 1902, pp. 5–15.

⁵³ V. Mutafchieva, “The Turk, the Jew and the Gypsy,” in: *Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria*, ed. A. Zhelyazkova, J.S. Nielsen, J. Kepell, Sofia, 1994, pp. 14–15.

⁵⁴ М. Дринов, “Историческо осветление върху статистиката на народносите в источната част на Българското Княжество,” *Периодическо списание*, 1884, no. 7, pp. 1–24.

⁵⁵ Б. Лори, *Съдбата на османското наследство. Българската градска култура 1878–1900*, transl. Л. Янакиева, София 2002, pp. 47–48.

The aim of the Ottoman policy of settling the Anatolian people in the Balkans was to stabilise the Turkish rule in strategic regions. The biggest colonisation campaign took place in the 14th–16th century in Bulgaria, Thrace, Macedonia and Thessaly, which had been settled by nomads (the Yuruks, among others). In the following centuries, there was also mass colonisation of the Crimean Tatars (from the end of the 18th c. until the 1850s) and the Circassians (in the second half of the 19th century). In accordance with the Ottoman settlement policy, Muslims settled mainly in towns and border areas.⁵⁶ The Ottoman doctrine said that a large population was key to economic development, state prosperity, and effective defence of the borders. In the Tanzimat era, the settlers were to be the foundation of the reconstruction of the empire based on new models.⁵⁷ According to the Sublime Porte, Muslim settlement also facilitated the achievement of political goals: to create a buffer against foreign (Russian, Austrian) expansion and to lead a more effective fight against the *hayduks* and later the national liberation movements.⁵⁸ The Ottoman Migration and Settlement Decree of 1857 exemplified this concept. It was announced that Turkey was open to everyone who wanted to be the sultan's subject and would accept the applicable laws. The Sublime Porte guaranteed that settlers would have religious freedom, free land, tax breaks, and exemption from military service (for 6 years in the Balkans and for 12 years in the Asian provinces).⁵⁹ Some aspects of the Ottoman migration policy were positive. For example, next to large foreign investments, immigrants were the main stimulus for Turkish economy in 1885–1912, which marked a stable growth.⁶⁰ On the other hand, colonisation campaigns were sources of conflicts with the local Christian population, as illustrated by the Circassian settlement. Even though the Ottoman authorities denied that the colonisation's purpose was to change the ethnic and

⁵⁶ A. Eminov, "Islam and Muslims," pp. 210–212; Ts. Georgieva, "Migrations in the History of Multiethnicity and Multiculturalism in the Balkans (Bulgarian Sources)," in: *Forced Ethnic Migrations in the Balkans: Consequences and Rebuilding of Societies*, ed. E. Popova, M. Hajdinjak, Sofia–Tokyo, 2006, pp. 15–17; E. Радусев, "Демографски и етнорелигиозни процеси в западните Родопи през XV–XVIII век," *Либерален преглед*, 2011, pt. 3, pp. 1004–1009.

⁵⁷ K. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830–1914. Demographic and Social Characteristic*, London, 1985, pp. 61–62; id., *Studies on Ottoman Social*, p. 322.

⁵⁸ В. Мучинов, *Миграционна политика на османската империя в българските земи през XIX век (до 1878 г.)*, София, 2013, pp. 227–228.

⁵⁹ This offer was not extended exclusively to Muslims. Among others, the Old Believers settled in Dobruja, fleeing from Russia during the reforms of Peter the Great. After 1878, when these lands were annexed by Romania, they fled to Turkey again, settling down in Eastern Anatolia (later some went to the USA). K. Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, p. 62. Another example is the migration of Hungarians and Poles to Turkey after the Spring of Nations (1848). The number of the Polish immigrants is estimated at around 1,000 people, who settled mainly in Shumen, while the Hungarian ones – at around 5,000. G. Parvev, "Polscy emigranci i społeczeństwo bułgarskie w latach 1849–1850," in: *Wielka Emigracja i sprawa polska a Europa (1832–1864)*, ed. S. Kalembka, Toruń, 1980, pp. 184–185.

⁶⁰ K. Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, pp. 76–77.

religious composition of the region in favour of Muslims and to make Christians emigrate, this was how the local population perceived the policy of settlement.⁶¹

There is no doubt that the ethnogenesis of Muslims in Bulgarian lands was also linked with Islamisation. The Bulgarian historian Evgeni Radushev divided the theories about the conversions into two groups: (1) the mythological-revival theories, linked with light literature used to create national narratives (not only Bulgarian, but Serbian and Greek as well) and (2) the social-economic theories, which were based on actual analyses of Ottoman documents.⁶² The current state of historical knowledge shows that the Islamisation which led to the creation of the Muslim community in the Balkans had a mostly voluntary character linked with material and social benefits. Of course, during the crises in the Balkan Peninsula, there were cases of forced conversions, but they had a secondary significance in the process of forming the Islamic community. The only official and state-supported form of forced Islamisation was linked to the *devshirme* – there are estimates that a total of 200,000 boys were converted into Janissaries during the Ottoman rule.⁶³ But the “blood tax” became limited in the second half of the 16th century and was abolished in the 1630s or 1640s. One theory says that the biggest number of conversions occurred among the Bogomils – members of the neo-Gnostic sect which was popular among Bulgarians during the Second Tsardom. Islam was a chance for the Bogomils to escape from social isolation and persecution of the Orthodox Church. There are analogous theories about the origin of the Bosniaks – in Bosnia the Bogomil sect was also widespread. The theory is not strongly reflected in the sources, but it has an important place in the Bulgarian historical consciousness.⁶⁴

Conclusion

Ethnogenesis theories played an important role in the Balkans. The most important contemporary conflicts in the region, the Serbian-Albanian conflict about Kosovo or the recently ended one between Greece and North Macedonia, in some way concentrated on the issue of origin and the question of who had lived on these territories first. The same problems are linked to the Muslims in Bulgaria – the theories about the Bulgarian origin of the Pomaks and Turks were an important part of narratives prevailing during the forced assimilation campaigns in

⁶¹ “До валите и каймаканите на Видин, Тулча, Варна, Разград, Русе, Търново, Кюстенджа и Шумен, 30.04.1861,” in: *Документи из турските държавни архиви*, pt. 1: 1564–1872, ed. and transl. П. Дорев, София, 1940, pp. 40–405.

⁶² Е. Радусhev, op. cit., pp. 996–1003.

⁶³ A. Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahası petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670–1730*, Leiden–Boston, 2004, p. 67.

⁶⁴ Е. Иванова, *Ислямизирани Балкани*, pp. 22–26; K. Karpat, *Studies on Turkish Politics and Society*, Leiden–Boston, 2004, p. 525; Zs. Bottlik, “Geographical and historical aspects of the situation of Muslim population in the Balkans,” *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin*, 58 (4), 2009, p. 262.

the 20th century: during the Balkan Wars, Second World War, and Communist Regime. Discussions on this subject started with the formation of modern nations in the Balkans in the 19th century. Compared with the present state of research, forced Islamisation was then considered to be crucial for the formation of Muslim communities in the Bulgarian lands. However, these visions were not based on actual historical research; some of them were linked to 19th-century falsifications. Recent detailed studies of Ottoman archival materials have showed that the process had a different character. Voluntary conversions did not fit the Romantic visions dominant in the 19th century: narratives about the “Turkish yoke,” the suffering of the Christian nation, and oppression suffered at the hands of Muslim barbarians. The most absurd theories about the Muslim origin, such as Cuman or Arabic ancestors, were created more recently, but the population was already linked with Proto-Bulgarians in the 19th century. Both in the 19th and the following century, formulated theories often did not attempt to search for the truth about the past, but were linked to narratives of national unity and – in some circumstances – used to justify assimilation campaigns. Until today, some Bulgarian authors support the theory that Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks are just Bulgarians “whose national identity is benighted by Islam.”⁶⁵

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⁶⁵ В. Божков, *Възродителният процес и българите махомедани*, София, 2012, pp. 9–10; C. Riis, *Religion, Politics, and Historiography in Bulgaria*, New York, 2002, pp. 17–22.

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