

THE HISTORICAL FATE OF CROATIA AND TURCO-CROATION RELATIONS IN THE PAST

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My aim is to present a survey of Croatian history to the Turkish Scholarly public with special reference to the extremely rich and important complex of influences arising from the contact with Turks that the Croats have experienced through many centuries. Who are the Croats? What is Croatia? Croats and Turks: how did the two peoples contribute in shaping of their respective historical legacies?

Like any other, the Croatian people is a living, dynamic community which has never ceased to develop. The many faces this people has shown in his long history are firmly united by factors of constance and durability: *the language, the territory and the culture.*

Let us start with the proto-history. We must be aware that the crucial event in the Croatian history was the arrival of the Slavic (or slavonicized) tribe named "Hrvati" (Croats) in the Western Balkans from the North in 627. A.D. But they have been the *last* Slavic group arriving there, i.e. the area was largely slavonicized already in the 6. century A.D., and there were numerous groups of older, superficially romanized inhabitants present in more remote places. The towns on the coast had rests of Roman population, remaining for some time under Byzantine control. All these elements participated in the process of national integration. The rests of Illyrian and Roman population left their mark in the physical appearance and some linguistic features of the Croats; the large Slavic mass left their language and a considerable part of popular customs, especially in the northern parts of the country; the newcomers from 627. Imposed to others their *name*, and founded a *state*, which will last up to this day when it is just about to reaffirm itself succesfully.

The name itself, "Hrvat" (Croat) can be traced back to the 2. or 3. century A.D. when it was recorded as a personal name in Tanais

on the mouth of the river Don. The etymology of the name is still debated, but the most favored solution seems to be the "iranian" interpretation, which points toward a noun meaning "girl, woman" (cf. *haher*, "sister") + suffix *vant* (*vend*): "having women". So we may guess that either a small iranian group has organized a larger Slavic population into a new unit, where the iranian language was lost, but the name survived, or that merely a name itself found somehow its way to the Slavs.

Until the beginning of the 7th century the Croats were moving West, some of them continuing to live in western Ukraine and northwestern Bohemia. Then one group (Whether at the request of emperor Heraclius or not) migrated southwards across the eastern fringes of the Alps and broke the power of the Avars, already weakened by their defeat of 626. at Constantinople. These Croats established a principality which became a part of the western european world, after it has embraced Roman Catholicism and political influence of the Frankish state.

In the 10th century Croatia became a kingdom. But there were in fact three large areas where the Croats established their political units: the core area along the shores of the Adriatic sea with a portion of the Dinaric hinterland, called "Hrvati" ("the Croats"); the northern region between the edge of Dinaric mountains and the river Drava (Slavonia) and partially Bosnia, where the medieval population has to be regarded as ancestors of the both of the country's actual inhabitants, namely the Bosnaks and Croats, while the Seriban group arrived mainly in the 16th century. At the beginning of the 12th century the dynastic crisis resulted in personal union with Hungary. This event has not provoked any changes in the inner organization of the southern kingdom, which has preserved all the essentials of its independence. However, Slavonia, which has formerly been under varying influence of both Croatia and Hungary, became an autonomous banate (vicerealty) within the broader Hungary. Bosnia continued to pursue its own way, although periodically its rulers paid allegiance to Hungarian kings.

In the southern kingdom and Bosnia the social and political life was marked by a feudal system based upon tribal territorial units, while in Slavonia it was akin to the royal Hungarian system of counties and land grants to the nobility. At the same time in the vicinity of coastal towns the mediterranean colonate was holding its sway.

The Croatian culture was stringly influenced by the Roman Catholic church, with the exception of Bosnia, where the local heterodoxy has prevailed. Beside the use of Latin language, the literacy in Croatian was making progress steadily, using glagolitic and a special form of cyrillic script. Very fine works of Romanic and Gothic art must be mentioned too, mainly in the architecture of coastal towns. In the economy extensive forms of agriculture and animal husbandry were dominant. The semi-nomadic pastoralism was especially prominent in the mountainous regions with their high plateaux, and there existed a well-developed mining in Bosnia. All this preconditioned the nature of townsmens crafts and trade networks.

The consequences of the Ottoman expansion in the 15th and 16th century were tremendous, and we shall discuss them in detail later. After the Ottomans withdrew, the Croats had to face substantially different problems than in any other section of all their history before 1700. First of all, there was a problem of territorial disunion, which heavily embarrassed attempts of becoming a modern nation. The old core area in the South -now called Dalmatia- came under Venitian, then under Austrian rule. Although the rest of old Croatia has gradually extended its factual and juridical statehood to Slavonia and to the eastern counties as far as the middle Danube, nearly a half of the country was in fact alienated. The Habsburg Military Border, which until the 18th century has consisted of fortresses and garrisons, became now a large territory where the whole population lived under military regime to the benefit of the Habsburgs and their wars in Europe. Yet the formal rights of Croatian kingdom in this area have never been disputed.

Starting from the middle of the 18th century, reforms dismantled the body of feudal institutions, but not radically. Moreover, reforms had been applied from above, in the interest of the Habsburg ruler and his centralization programs, or, later in the 18th century, under pressure and usurpation of sovereignty by Hungarian government, as was the case in many modernization projects, like railway-building, some branches of the emerging industry etc.

When the Croatian national renaissance movement began to display real strength after 1830. there was hardly any sizeable social group which could be named bourgeoisie. But the moment has come, and despite all barriers a blend of national revival and liberal ideas has taken root among citizens, clergymen, nobility and soldiers. To

this we must add a strong political awakening of peasantry at the beginning of the 20th century calling for social justice and preservation of traditional values. So the modern Croatian national identity was born, coupled with demands for political unity of different regions of the Croatian state, a state that was theoretically recognized, but in practice divided into half-dependent Croatia under Hungarian supremacy, and Austrian provinces of Istria and Dalmatia. We must not forget that even in such unfavorable conditions, the national movement succeeded in gaining support from the large majority of the people, because of the presence of the most important factors of inherent unity: the language, the cultural background and the geopolitical position.

But the national program had several weak points, the most fatal of them consisting of frequent vacillation between the "only-croatian" and "south-slavic" or "yugoslav" line. I do not want to blame the latter group as presumable "bad" Croats. The real problem was how to gain independence from Austria and Hungary (and to repel Italian Irredenta), and not to get into (or at least not to deepen) the virulent conflict with the expanding Serbian nationalism (backed by Russia). The "only-croatian" line ment an approachment to the German bloc, the future looser in World War I; the "yugoslav" one ment submission to the worse master after the war.

In the period between two wars Croatia was administrated like a colony, but unlike European colonies, its administrators were agents of a less developed country, performing their business in a very primitive way. Nevertheless, Croatian political resistance was growing ever stronger, headed by the largely supported Peasant's Party. Only tiny groups of extremists followed communist and fascist ideas. The leadership of the Croatian Peasant's Party foughy stubbornly, and in 1939 a minimum of understanding with the government in Belgrade was achieved, leaving some room for Croatia's natural rights. In 1941 the military coup in Belgrade and the outbreak of war ruined this short-lived arrangement. After the CPP leaders refused to collaborate with the German occupants, pro-fascist groups established a state under German protectorate. This was the beginning of the war of extermination between them and Serbian extremists who wanted to reanimate Yugoslavia or Greater Serbia. Both sides used mass terror and committed massacres over civilians. The sympathies of the Croatian people were on the side of Western democracies, but there was no resolute western-style organized resistance nucleus which could lead the insur-

rection. Therefore some have joined the communist-controlled partisan movement, hoping that western influence would help democratic changes after the war, while others, mobilized by the extremist regime preferred sabotage and hidden cooperation with the partisans. Unfortunately, the communists, who sometimes have committed even greater evil deeds than their adversaries, managed to win support from the West -the Soviet aid beign already assured- and the war too.

The communist Yugoslavia (1945-1990 / 91) was a federation of republics, built on the Soviet model, and in 1974 the dependence of the republics from the central government was somewhat loosened. In 1991 this state broke apart. What did really happen? Although Yugoslavia was not an unitary state in theory, the freedom of its republics, was in many respects very limited. The supremacy of the Serbs was reinforced in the central government as well as in Croatia itself, especially by the fact that large number of Serbs in parts of Croatia and Bosnia where they were a minority joined the partisan forces in the war, thereby becoming a bullwark of communist oppression in the post-war period. After the regime that was bankrupt already in the mid-sixties tried to save the essentials of communism by introducing in 1974 a sort of "authoritarian anarchy" under the name of "self-management", the Serbian nationalists of all kinds (communists, fascists and even semi-liberals) forged a theory of conspiracy against Serbian people. According to this theory, "fascists" and "separatists" among non-Serbian peoples of Yugoslavia entered a coalition backed by Germany, the Pope, and the Islamic world in order to dismantle the federation, overthrow socialism and reduce the Serbian territory to the boundaries of the "Belgrade pašalık", i.e. the Principality of the year 1817. This kind of propaganda found a large echo in Serbian masses, in particular where they were a minority and / or ill-educated. They estimated themselves jeopardized by the calls for freedom on the side of non-Srebian, Last but not least, those prejudices were coupled by real fears of democracy and market economy where many of them could no longer enjoy the privileges they had in the period of communist rule. After the leaders of Pan-Serbian revanchism came to power in Serbia they began to realize their projects by manipulation, repression and terror in many parts of Yugoslavia; finally they waged open war against the new democratic Croatia in 1991. Today the agressor is about to leave the last occupied parts of Croatia. His power is broken, and now, in 1992, Croatia has won international recognition as a fully independent state.

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During the history, the Croats have had contacts with different peoples. Only a few of these meetings were really important. Together with Italian, German, Hungarian and various Slavic and Balkan influences, a very prominent place belongs to historical contacts with the Turks.

In their early history the Croats must have made some borrowings from the vernaculars of their Turkish neighbours in the regions of present-day Ukraina, and perhaps also in Pannonia when they arrived at their ultimate home. In both cases the main source for the loan-words was doubtless the language of the Avars. It is rather hard to decide whether this or that word has a definite Turkish origin. But some are doubtlessly Turkish, while many other have to wait for the final proof of linguists. We may consider as a borrowing from Turkish the suffix *-ci*, which was productive in the early Middle Ages. Then there are dignitaries, e.g. *ban* (derived from the personal name of the Avar ruler, *Bayan*), denoting viceroy. The title *zupan* (denoting a function below that of the ban, vaguely comparable to count), although not satisfactorily explained as yet, could still be reasonably linked to *çoban* or *çapan*. Another possible Turkish etymology could be established for *tepcica* or *tepcija* (a court title), probably deriving from the root *tap-* or from the Avar word *tapci*. Finally, the legend about the coming of the Croats to their present home in the 7th century mentions the names of their leaders (five brothers and two sisters), some of them being convenient to an explanation on the basis of a Turkish word.

In the High Middle Ages Croats and Turks have met comparatively seldom. The only important occasion was the Mongol incursion in 1242, when the Turko-Mongol army overrun quickly the country trying to capture the king, but could not take the fortified coastal town of Trogir where the king was hiding.

The next five centuries brought about contacts of extraordinary importance in almost all fields of human activities, including war and peace alike. The first armed conflict was the battle on Kosovo in 1389, where a participation of a Croatian military unit was recorded, while the operations of the Austro-Hungarian army in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 may be considered in a sense as the last one (the commander and the majority of the troops were Croats).

Now we shall try to examine the central subject of our interest, i.e. the balance of the "Ottoman period" in Croatian history. This is in fact the first attempt of such an explanation in Croatian historiography from the side of a Turkologist; former surveys and partial analyses were written by non-Turkologists and therefore of substantially limited value. No wonder that they adopted the notorious "catastrophe theory" without undertaking a study of even non-Turkish sources in a way that were enough free from ideology. Though real historical-turkological studies in Croatia are still in their initial phase, their present results sufficiently prove the assumption that it is impossible to label the "Ottoman period" of Croatian history "good" or "bad". It was extremely complex, and its consequences were just decisive and extraordinary important. The essential marks of present-day Croatia in almost every aspect (territorial shape, ethnic map, a large portion of cultural heritage etc.) of its national identity have their origin in the period from ca. 1450 to ca. 1750.

Territorial and political changes.

In ca. 1550 Croatia was reduced to smallest proportions the country ever had. More than a half of its present-day surface has come Under Ottoman control. If we add to this other territories where the Croats live, we may speak of more than twothirds. Nowadays the territory of Croatia includes only a part of those areas, whereby the process of restoration was lasting from ca. 1700 to 1945. That fact was used by writers and historians who, regardless of epoch, preached a romantic outlook on history, as an important argument in favor of the "catastrophe theory". But they forget that, in spite of all territorial losses, it was precisely the "Ottoman factor" with its two faces, i.e. the nearly permanent war and the social and economic system of the conqueror, that served unintentionally as a catalyst for the birth of modern Croatia as different of the mediaeval one. So the mediaeval dualism of the southern kingdom and the northern banate gradually disappeared; many noblemen migrated from the more endangered south to the more prosperous North and the institutions of two Croatian lands merged together, making effective the concept of the "Triune kingdom" (Dalmatia, Croatia and Slavonia). Thereby the losses caused by the war turned into "gain". Moreover, the Ottoman rule in the region between the rivers Sava and Drava has destroyed its former ties with the rest of Hungary, so that after 1699 this land entered a process of de facto annexation to Croatia.

Depopulations and ethnic changes.

During the wars and raids large numbers of Croats fled, were enslaved and deported, or died. In some regions where the entire population was Croatian, only a small number of them has remained, or even none. To this fact the advocates of the "catastrophe theory" added the statement that depopulations continued after the conquest, as an effect of Ottoman policy. But the archival sources show us a very different picture. The only really depopulated area was the belt of no-man's-land between the river Drava and the sea. The cattle- and sheep-breeding areas in the hinterland of southern Croatia were already sparsely inhabited, so that the Ottoman conquest could not provoke great changes. For the fertile territories in the North, from the hilly region of today's central Slavonia down to the Danubian plains, the examination of Turkish sources demonstrates a recovery in the second half of the 16th century, and slow increase of tax-paying houses in the 17th.

The tax burden, legal status and social condition.

These questions are probably the most misunderstood and ill-interpreted of all. Popular prejudices die hard in this field even today, and the picture of financially ruined, socially deprived and religiously harassed masses of Ottoman subject Croats still lingers on. But this is the matter of ignorance, not of ideological malice, while the opposite is true in some technically more skilled Balkan historiographies.

As for the taxation, we can say that the situation in the South was quite different from that in the North. There the agriculture was poorly developed and only in some places taxes in kind could be handed over to the sipahi class or to the owners of a few large *çiftliks*. Consequently, the irregular taxes (the *avariz-nüzil* system) were nearly nonexistent. Moreover, the whole area was incessantly plundered by Habsburg and Venice-sponsored raiders. In the fertile plains and grape-rich hills of the North the *rayas* had more to pay, but their obligations were by no means too onerous, if not for other reasons then because of the delicate position near the border and the theatre of war. This implied the need for avoiding social dissent and procuring regular supplies in food for the army. In spite of that, uprisings and brigandism were almost daily phenomena, especially in the 17th century. But the rebellions were not a symptom of the desperate state of have-nothings; on the contrary, we can assert that many groups of comparatively well-

to-do rayas who have had certain privileges (and arms too) wanted *more*.

When discussing the legal status of the Croats in the Ottoman Empire, we must be aware of the fact that very little is known about the everyday functioning of the legal institutions in cases when Christians and Muslims were opposing each other at the kadi's court. So we can only propose some very general observations concerning the subjects "islamization" and "tolerance". In my opinion, there was no forcible islamization. But this statement requires an explanation. The Ottoman regime did not compel Christian rayas to change religion but not because it was "good" or "just". It simply had no interest in making more except in some particular cases. It encouraged men of remarkable talents to convert and to enter the service of the state. It was even imposing the Muslim faith to young boys destined to become janissaries. But these cases were limited in number and specific in character. Such political measures were neither particularly islamic nor particularly Turkish, nor have they been essentially important throughout the whole history of the Ottoman Empire. In any case, mass conversions, when they happened, must be explained on the basis of social and spiritual factors *inside* the Christian population, not by pressure from the side of the state. So e.g. Bosnian heterodox Christian population after 1463 was left without almost any spiritual authority for its Church has collapsed together with the protectors of this faith, the Bosnian nobility. Many noblemen embraced islam probably offering an example for the masses. Beside this case, no mass conversion has ever taken place among Croats and Serbians in the western Balkans. On the territory of present-day Croatia, only one kaza has had a majority of muslim villagers, but it was an effect of immigration (Pozega).

Finally let us say a word about the heavily-debated question of "tolerance". At first glance, the sources offer enough material for both "tolerance" and "intolerance". Of course the problem cannot be resolved in that way. Many historians too often forget that "tolerance" is a mediaeval concept and consequently has very little in common with "freedom" or even less with "civil rights". Every kind of behaviour towards those who do not adhere to the state religion (Christianity, Islam, Communism etc.) which includes "politeness" and maltreatment alike, and excludes only modern-style human rights and extermination of the other as its final goal, *is tolerant*. If we do not agree with this view, we cannot escape the absurd: now one pre-modern sta-

te is "tolerant", now the other. Turning back to Croatian history, we may say that the Ottoman regime was tolerant. On the contrary, the victorious Habsburgs were less than tolerant in the reconquered Croatian lands, using expulsion and christianization by force, which led to the extinction of Islam.

- Economic life.

According to the "catastrophe theory" the economy too was ruined by the Ottoman conquest and did not recover but remained in steadily worsening condition. This can be true for the belt of no-man's-land near the frontier, but as for the regions where constant raids were not imminent this must be considered impossible. The towns grew bigger than in the pre-Ottoman period, and their development did not cause destruction of the rural economy. The number of taxpayers both in towns and in the villages has been increasing from ca. 1550 to ca. 1630 and then stopped for the rest of the Ottoman period. After the Ottoman rule has been consolidated, an important network of trade began to develop, connecting the Pannonian plain with Italy. The almost exclusive item of Ottoman export consisted of cattle and related products, such as leather. From this trade many drew profit: Slavonia has had a large number of *tanners* in its towns and villages, probably working on the behalf of long-distance merchants in important urban centres, who were undertaking business trips to Italy via Dubrovnik or towns controlled by Venice (Zadar, Split), where Ottoman *iskeles* were installed. This trade has established connections between Croatia towns in Slavonia and Croatian ports on the Adriatic sea for the first time in history in such proportions. That was also an occasion for Croatia merchants in Bosnia to intensify their commercial activities with much success.

The culture.

In ca. 1450 there were many hundreds of churches and monasteries in territories populated by Croates which later came under Ottoman control; in 1680 only a tiny fraction of this number was standing intact at the disposal of the believers. To this it may be added certain number of castles and palaces. Some of those buildings were decorated with fine sculptures and frescoes. The secular monuments disappeared almost completely, and so did other marks of mediaeval culture: schools, miniature painting, poetry etc. Was it a cultural catastrophe?

In my opinion the catastrophe has indeed happened, but for the type of culture that has lost its material, political and ideological support, embodied in Croatian and Hungarian kings, counts, archbishops etc. The feudal society in Croatian lands was in a state of incessant competition among the nobility in endowing the church, building castles and chapels and the like. There were far more priests, monks and fortified places than the basic needs of religious life and defence were requesting. The Ottomans fought against a class, not against its culture, even less against *the culture*. When a new pattern of culture bearing catholic marks began to develop owing to the activities of the franciscan order, the authorities did not hamper it. Last but not least, we must not forget the islamic culture in the towns. This culture cannot have a single "owner". It was born on the Ottoman-held Croatian soil as a sing of the local Muslim cultural creativity in a sense that its very soul was threefold: islamized Croats, Muslim Bošnjaks and Turks participated in its shaping. Therefore the achievements of this culture belong virtually to three peoples. Unfortunately this culture had its own catastrophe in the years 1684-1718.

Better than the architecture's was the fate of literary and linguistic legacy of the time. In this field we can distinguish between "the picture of the other" on each side and borrowings and mutual influences. Here I can offer only some of the most outstanding examples.

Just like in the everyday life, so in the writings of educated men the Turko-Croatian relations resembled the pendulum, swinging from conflict and repulsion to understanding and even fascination. Of course the degree of understanding depended on one's personal fate and the duty he had to perform. Therefore it is possible to classify those writings into "sober" and "emotional". The poet Marko Marulic (he was active around 1500) composed anti-Turkish verses because he saw the destruction of the surroundings of his native town Split by the akıncıs. Similarly the poetry from the circle of the family Zrinski (Zrinoğlu) in the 16th and 17th century was also anti-Turkish tempered, for the Zrinskis considered themselves heroes and champions guided by the Providence in the never-ending war against the Ottomans. On the other side, some baroque poets were attracted by the destiny of Ottoman personalities they have found fit for a tragedy. The best Croatian epic, "Osman" was written by Ivan Gundulić (died in 1638), who chose the destiny of Osman II Genç for his meditations on the instability of worldly things. The last important baroque poet, Petar Kanavelović

(d. in 1719) started to write, but did not finish, an epic entitled "Kara Mustafa, Vezijer Azam". The 19th century epic "The Death of Smail aga Cengic" written in 1846 by Ivan Mazuranic has technically good verses and reflections about freedom and sacrifice, but its weak points is romantic nationalism.

Many Croatian travellers have left excellent reports on Ottoman lands. I shall mention only three of them. Bartol Durdevic who was taken prisoner at Mohacs spent nine years in Anadolia and compiled exhaustive reports on many aspects of the life in the Empire. Starting with "De Turcorum moribus" ("On Turkish Customs") which was printed in Antwerpen in 1544 his works were reissued many times and served as a source of information to Western Europe for a long time. Bartol Kasic (d. in 1650) was a jesuit who visited the Middle Danube area around 1620. He was deeply impressed by the Ottoman administrative system as well as by the friendly approach he experienced in contacts with representatives of the state and other Muslims, Turks and non-Turks alike. Finally we must mention the report of Matija Mazuranic (the brother of the poet) entitled "A Look upon Bosnia" published in 1842. These works surpass in objectivity the poetical ones by far.

There is no need to discuss Turkish linguistic influence. The high rate of loan-words from Turkish is still present in Croatian, although less in the official language than in vernaculars. But we must stress the fact that there has been also an influence in the opposite direction, namely that the necessity of communication with ethnic Turks encouraged Bosnian Muslims to develop their own kind of Turkish, with strong South Slavic elements in its structure and pronunciation. This phenomenon was studied by the Hungarian scholar Gy. Hazai. Beside Muslim Bošnjaks who were not or did not consider themselves to be of Croatian origin, some islamized and Catholic Croats have participated in the shaping of this "Far North-Western Turkish". Franciscan monks spoke it and taught it in the monasteries. This language has found a place in the Croatian literature of the time. Stijepo Durdevic (d. in 1632) wrote two poems, one of which is lost ("Memişah"). The preserved one, named "Derviş" contains a number of words and expressions that cannot be labeled "everday turcisms". As he lived in Dubrovnik and had contacts with Ottoman subjects it is safe to assume that he did know this type of Turkish. I shall try to translate some lines, while leaving the Turkish element in the form the poet himself used:

"My Amazon lady, *çik meydane* (meydana çik)
 gyure şelum *dure selum* (güreşğim) in sweet embrace...
yarali (Yaralı) *oldum* everywhere
 on my body so unhappy...
Allah ise verse, don't trouble my longing...
 All happiness *benden gyiti* (gitti)..."

This kind of linguistically mixed poetry was not unknown in other countries, let us recall the Hungarian poet Ballasi Balint. But in the case of Durdevic we have more than this. With good reason one can guess that he has had at least some knowledge of the islamic mystical poetry, because he portrays a poor dervish unhappily fallen in love with Christian girl, who offers her his "roasted hearth", together with hi's tekke and meadow. This reminds us of the story of şeyh San'an narrated by 'Attar. Former critics were classifying this poem as if it were a parody on Petrarchism, but I think it is very far from just a Petrarch turned upside-down.

Although we had enough time for only a very small part of the vast area of Turko-croatian relations in the past, we do hope that they will become a subject of greater interest that they were before, to the benefit of both peoples. In the process of discovering how deep our historical links were, we also hope that new links will be established in the future.