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Beyond Tolerations and Accomodation: Amicable Religious Coexistence in the Late Medieval Balkans

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BEYOND TOLERATION AND ACCOMODATION
AMICABLE RELIGIOUS COEXISTANCE IN THE LATE MEDIEVAL BALKANS

A Thesis

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master's of Arts

By

Marianne Kupin

May 2012

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ABSTRACT

BEYOND TOLERATION AND ACCOMODATION AMICABLE RELIGIOUS COEXISTANCE IN THE LATE MEDIEVAL BALKANS

By

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May 2012

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Jotham Parsons, Associate Professor of History

The common image that is associated with the religious atmosphere of the Middle Ages is paradoxical. On the one hand there is an aura of fervent religious piety, which also fueled religious animosity, most notably in the bloodshed and brutality of the Crusades. This overwhelming conflict makes it hard for anyone to imagine the Middle Ages as an era in which there could have been cordial or harmonious religious coexistence of any kind. This must be considered. In the Balkans during the Late Medieval/ Early Ottoman Period, there existed a form of religious coexistence unlike anything else in Europe. Amicable religious coexistence, that is the sharing of saints and shrines between different faith groups, existed in the Balkans during this time, and continued well into the Modern period. This paper is a discussion of this occurrence and describes the significant factors, which allowed for amicable religious coexistence to take place.

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The common image that is associated with the religious atmosphere of the Middle Ages is paradoxical. On the one hand there is an aura of fervent religious piety, which also fueled religious animosity, most notably in the bloodshed and brutality of the Crusades (1095-c.1272). These constant wars were presented as the Christian West versus the armies of the Islamic East, as each battled to gain control of the holy city of Jerusalem, the supposed sacred epicenter of the world. This overwhelming picture of conflict makes it hard for anyone to imagine the Middle Ages as an era in which there could have been cordial or harmonious religious coexistence of any kind. But according to an article published by the BBC in April of 2010 entitled “Secret Shrine Shared by Muslims and Christians,”¹ houses of worship in Macedonia, and across the Balkans, were shared; religious coexistence was, for the most part, harmonious. In the article, ethnologist Elizabeta Koneska, a specialist in this area, asserted that, “For centuries, people who lived together, also prayed in common temples. Although the ritual was observed discretely, people respected it and tolerated each other.”

The implications of such an event may seem shocking, yet they have occurred more frequently than scholarship acknowledges. This sharing of the sacred was a phenomenon that had occurred throughout the Medieval world, from the Maghreb to the Levant, the Middle East to Western and Eastern Europe. Whether it was at ambiguous sanctuaries or popular pilgrimage sites, peoples of the prophetic monotheistic faiths have shared, venerated, and worshiped together; this is part of what we are calling amicable

¹ Dusko Arsovski, “Secret Shrine Shared by Muslims and Christians,” *BBC News*, April 4, 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8618275.stm> (accessed July 10, 2011).

religious coexistence. Amicable religious coexistence is a different way of dealing with the religious other, surpassing toleration and accommodation. The sharing of sacred places, peoples, ideals and superstitions that was found within the Balkans during the Late Medieval/Early Ottoman period fits that description. Any argument to the contrary cannot easily be entertained: as historian Alexandra Cuffel stated, “Too much evidence exists to the contrary.” Other prominent scholars would agree: F. W. Hasluck, Noel Malcom, Francine Friedman, Dionigi Albera, and others, provided irrefutable primary evidence that confirms this breaching of religious barriers, peoples, and houses of worship during the late Medieval period.²

The sources that will be used to prove this point were written in the late Medieval/Early Modern period. This is indeed problematic when stating that the practice itself was very “Medieval.” However, the reason for this characterization in time is twofold. Firstly, Balkan chronology seems to be a few centuries behind its Western European counterpart. Thus what is considered “Early Modern” in the west is still either late Medieval or Early Ottoman in the east. Second, the argument behind calling it a “Medieval” practice is because these actions did not occur overnight. Rather they had clearly been common practice for an extended period of time before there was any

² Alexandra Cuffel, “From Practice To Polemic: Shared Saints and Festivals as ‘Women’s Religion’ in the Medieval Mediterranean.” *Bulliten of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 68 no. 3 (2005): 415. For More information see, F W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans*, Albera Diogini ed. *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean*, and Friedman’s *Bosnian Muslims*.

documentation to prove it. While chronological details remain a subject of inquiry, for the purpose of this study, the practice will be labeled as late Medieval in nature.

This changes our perspective of the religious landscape within the late Medieval/ Early Ottoman period. An apparent lacuna exists and it must be addressed. The first step in doing so, is to distinguish the different ways territories dominated by a particular faith existed with the religious other. By examining places like Reconquered Moorish Spain and Ottoman territories and their handling of the religious other, the regions can be distinguished as either being tolerant or accommodating. These definitions originate from an analysis of the combination of religious doctrine and political dictates that existed within the regions during this period. Since both of these regions possessed stable religious and political centers, with clear social hierarchies already in place, there was little question as to how one should exist with the religious other. These definitions of religious coexistence in stabilized regions provide a framework for comparing the amicable religious coexistence that existed in the marginal, frontier region of the Balkans. This region lacked stability or consistent doctrine during the late Medieval/ Early Ottoman period, which was a key factor in its religious coexistence being distinctly different from the other regions that will be discussed. Without the stability of metropolitan centers, and their ability to be able to enforce and maintain socio-religious dictates, there was the possibility for religious coexistence within the Balkans to be more harmonious.

This is not to say, of course, that coexistence in either Spain or Ottoman territories are limited to these definitions of tolerant and accommodating: there is evidence of contradictory actions either way. But whenever such occurrences took place

they were short lived. Diogini Albera, in “Why Are You Mixing What Cannot Be Mixed? Shared Devotions in the Monotheisms” had argued that such occurrences were fragile; a certain delicate balance must exist in order for what we are calling amicable religious existence, to remain persistent.³

People within areas that were occupied by specific and distinct religious centers had to tolerate and accommodate each other on practical levels in dealings with daily life in order for life to continue as normal. Charles J. Halperin explains in “Ideology of Silence: Prejudice and Pragmatism on the Medieval Religious Frontier”⁴ that sometimes Medieval people had no choice but to reconcile their ideological differences in order to coexist. However, the practicality and pragmatism that occurred was limited due to the clearly defined regulations from the political and religious centers. Any accommodation that occurred did so within the socio-cultural constructs that were set by the centers of their world.

Amicable religious coexistence can be defined, at least for the purposes of this study, as something that created a sort of “separate yet equal” religious community, where sacred peoples and ideologies were capable of breaching barriers of religious doctrine and shared in worship, prayer and praise. They did so without the loss of their distinctive

³ Diogini Albera, “‘Why Are You Mixing What Cannot Be Mixed?’ Shared Devotions in the Monotheisms.” *History and Anthropology* 19 (2008): 55.

⁴ Charles J. Halperin, “The Ideology of Silence: Prejudice and Pragmatism on the Medieval Religious Frontier,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 26 no.3 (Jul. 1984): 443-445.

religious identity, yet their lives were clearly intermixed. The religious communities of the Balkans maintained this diversity while being liminal and fluid; a semi- syncretic, folk, intermingled, and diverse religious populace. In many respects it would seem, to the modern individual, to be a sort of religious pluralism, as such sharing of the sacred happens very often in what could be defined as the modern zone of the “spiritual, but not religious.” However that cannot be definitely stated, because the evidence that exists is written not by these people who practiced amicable religious coexistence, so that their theological and ideological perspectives cannot be known for certain. Rather the evidence comes from the observations of outsiders. The purpose of this study is not to define and analyze the ideologies and religious theologies of the people who practice amicable religious coexistence, but to bring to light this phenomenon that appears to be something more, and distinctly different within the Balkans during the Medieval period.

Amicable religious coexistence prevailed within the Medieval Balkans due to the location where it occurred, the lack of any stabilized religious and political center, and the unparalleled religious diversity that existed within the region. The location is on the fringes of Europe, which had been a frontier region even before the dissolution of the Dacian or Illyrican Empires in the second century, AD. Dacia, as an empire, had stretched from the coast of the Black Sea all the way to the kingdom of Bohemia at the height of its power in the first century, and engulfed a large portion of the Balkans. Illyrican, the area that is made up of present day Albania and portions of what was Yugoslavia, is also another part of the Balkans, (and was just as important in antiquity). This region has been known for its lack of stability, existing as a frontier region for

millennia. From the earliest records the area was rife with conflict, owing to the rich salt, silver and gold mines that were located within the Transylvania region.⁵ Moreover, it had the unfortunate fate of being at the juncture of many empires and kingdoms throughout history. This created an area with a uniquely diverse population because with this came a constant influx of people to the region: soldiers, refugees and others, who settled and colonized as they passed. The original people attempted to maintain their own cultural and religious identity, while they assimilated with the cultures coming into the region, thus finding commonality in an intermixed culture while still maintaining individuality. Thus its nature as a frontier was the largest significant factor in the prominence of, not only amicable religious coexistence occurring, but also, the length of time in which it lasted.

The Balkans was also a frontier. A frontier is a space, or area, that exists on the peripheries of one or more empires or kingdoms. Usually the area is distinguished by conflict, with the desire of some political or militant power to conquer and have control of this particular region. The conquest of new territories brought with it more income from the land, a growth of the empire or kingdom, and an extension of the borders, making it more difficult for enemies to reach the centers or strongholds of the kingdom. These frontiers on the peripheries were often diverse, as influxes of peoples who came to colonize such areas were either refugees from other war-torn places, voluntary colonists, or these people that were conquered. They were left hodge-podge together in an attempt to create a unified region. The result was rarely successful in the beginning. Frontiers took centuries to stabilize; in the case of the Balkans it took nearly millennia (at least

⁵ Ion Grumeza, *Dacia: Land of Transylvania, Cornerstone of Eastern Europe* (Lanham: Hamilton Books, 2009), 65-82.

400- 1400) since no one political or religious center could gain control of the entire region to create a homogenous community, religiously or politically. This instability, characteristic of a frontier, created a fluid existence, where people adapted in a manner that was suitable for life to continue within the region. Dan Jones, in “The Significance of the Frontier in World History,” noted that this perseverance of peoples in these frontiers created a place where unique and isolated people and histories interacted, so that things occurred differently than within more stabilized regions in the world.⁶ The Balkans, along with other frontiers, were one of the few places where amicable religious coexistence could occur; their population was diverse culturally and religiously, the area was unstable for an exceptionally long period of time, and there was no strong center preventing the practice.

The Balkans were also a region with a unique religious history, which was caused by it being the unsteady frontier region that it was. Some of the earliest religious influences in the region came from the Vedic and Greco-Roman traditions, which were intermingled with the already monotheistic pantheistic beliefs of the native Dacians. The people of the Balkans possessed religious ideology that was receptive and incorporating. For example, the religion of Zalmoxism, the monotheistic religion prominent in the region prior to the Dacian Wars waged by the emperor Trajan, was supposedly ripe with Vedic and Greek philosophical influence; it is said that the main “prophet” of Zalmoxism, Zalmoxis, was exceptionally similar to the Greek mathematician, Pythagoras, perhaps

⁶ Dan Jones, “The Significance of the Frontier in World History”, 1.

even a follower of his.⁷ Of course this interpretation is up to scrutiny. However dubious Eliade's interpretation may be, scholars of Romanian history like, Ion Grumeza, and others in the field still see it as having some validity.

Christianity at any rate had also been present within the Balkans since the second century, as Saint Paul himself preached to the people of Illyricum. Islam was also prevalent in the region from the ninth century, and continued to be part of the Balkans' religious community. This added to the religious diversity in the area. Despite political instability, the region seemed to have a knack for, assimilating and bringing together religious ideologies in order to accommodate the constant influx of new populations and shifts in political control. The lack of a stable political center prevented any particular religious center from establishing itself within the region. Therefore, variety religious groups, and in dealings among them, was the norm. New peoples, coming and going, were not out of the ordinary, nor was the announcement of a new lord. Thus people could easily be intermixed and semi-assimilated as this was already a common part of the routine within the region.

Religious diversity went beyond orthodox doctrines. Within this region, by the late Medieval/ Early Ottoman period, there was Christianity, both Roman and Eastern Orthodox; Islam, including Sunni, Shi'a and Sufi sects; and tremendous numbers of heretical and heterodox groups, that, owing to the laxity brought on by a lack of a strong political or religious center, existed without any hindrance. There was no overarching

⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Romanians: A Concise History* (Bucharest: Roza Vinturilor Publishing House, 1992), 10-15.

religious or political authority to dictate that these actions were criminal, damnable and contrary to the Scriptures and one's immortality. More to the point, since they were separated from the pre-existing political centers of Rome and Byzantium during the Gothic and Slavic invasions they remained isolated and had nowhere to turn to for guidance. This lack of any set political center, which in turn would have associated itself with a defined religious center, created the necessity for a social construction, typical within frontier regions, to help define a way of dealing socially and culturally with the others that kept coming to the region.

As time passed, the religious demographics in the region became ever more diverse, and politically there was a lack of stabilization internally and externally. Religious ties and conversions of kings and peoples were done within a kingdom only when it proved to be beneficial for that country, such as alliances with Rome or Byzantium.⁸ After alliances were sworn and conversions took place, however, there were few religious authorities in the region to enforce whatever laws were implanted. Heterodox practices were fully capable of existing, and in cases like bogomilism, were perhaps encouraged by the few religious authorities that had existed in the region, who may have relocated to the Balkans in order to be freer with their own religious ideologies.⁹

Cultural tendencies towards mixtures made the diversity stem from a similar culture, thus creating a world that was different than Western Europe. A common

⁸ For more information see, Noel Malcom, *Bosnia: A Short History*, and John V. A. Fine Jr. *The Early Medieval Balkans*.

⁹ For more information see, *Bosnia: A Short History*, and *Kosovo: A Short History*, by Noel Malcome.

background created space for the sharing of all things sacred. These things include religious syncretism, transfer of saints, folk practices, houses of worship or sacred places, and crypto faith. This means that conversions from an original faith took place, but the conversion was not true, and in private the individual would continue to practice their old faith, but publicly would profess another. Understandably, immediate superseded religious affiliation, as in cases of drought or illness which would ultimately affect the entire community, which could provide an explanation for such practices. As one of the things that anthropologist Robert M. Hayden suggested is that superstition preceded everything, and if the common good was at stake than religious allegiance was abandoned for supposed spiritual strength for a miracle.¹⁰ Thus, amicable religious coexistence could have existed in a region of tumultuous chaos that was more concerned for stability and well-being than strict adherence to doctrine; and the religious centers that determined doctrine were too distant or too busy with war to pay attention to their deviant flocks.

Scholars have not truly taken up this field of study, at least not within every aspect of the argument within this essay. The one book that has done so, *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, delves more into the modern period, and barely provides information for the late Medieval/ Early Ottoman period.¹¹ However, since this argument is multi-dimensional, it takes historical argument and evidence from a plethora of sources. There are a few

¹⁰ Robert M. Hayden, "Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans," *Current Anthropology* 43 (April 2002): 214.

¹¹ Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli, eds. *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012.

historians that approach this topic, notably Alexandra Cuffel and Dionigi Albera. Several of their scholarly articles, including “Henceforward All Generations Will Call me Blessed: Medieval Christian Tales of Non-Christian Marian Veneration;” “From Practice to Polemic: Shared Saints and Festivals as ‘Women’s Religion’ in the Medieval Mediterranean;” and “Why are you Mixing What Cannot Be Mixed? Shared Devotions in the Monotheisms;” are groundbreaking within this field of shared religious peoples, sanctuaries and ideologies.¹² They point out a truism; that the faiths of Christianity and Islam (Judaism also is one of these faiths, but is not within the scope of this paper.) come from the same Abrahamic tradition, and thus already share a sacred lineage, at least to a point. Sharing of pilgrimage sites sacred to Abraham, Moses or Jesus should not be surprising to any scholar. The faiths had shared peoples and sacred places, thus these actions were natural.

Other scholars have attempted to examine specific heterodox groups that were prominent within the Balkans, such as the Bektashi dervishes. A Sufi order known for its open-mindedness and syncretic practices, they have been argued to be a significant factor of amicable religious coexistence within the Balkans. Authors like F. W. Hasluck, and John Kingsley Birge have written in depth analysis about the effects Bektashism had in

¹² Alexandra Cuffel, “Henceforward All Generations Will Call me Blessed: Medieval Christian Tales of Non-Christian Marian Veneration.” *Mediterranean Studies* 12 (2003): 37-60. Alexandra Cuffel, “From Practice To Polemic: Shared Saints and Festivals as ‘Women’s Religion’ in the Medieval Mediterranean.” *Bulliten of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 68 no. 3 (2005): 401-419. Dionigi Albera, “Why Are You Mixing What Cannot Be Mixed? Shared Devotions in the Monotheisms.” *History and Anthropology* 19 (2008): 37-59.

the region.¹³ Hasluck, in particular, in his *History of Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans*, attempted to analyze the importance that this syncretic faith had within the Balkan region when dealing with the religious other.¹⁴

Some discussions have occurred in larger monographs concerning the countries themselves, as Noel Malcolm has done in his works *Kosovo: A Short History*, and *Bosnia: A Short History*. In passing, he spends a few pages in discussion of the religious diversity and coexistence within the Balkans.¹⁵ Other writers, such as R. J. Crampton in *Bulgaria*, and Frank Kressing in *Albania: A Country in Transition*, have briefly mentioned the sharing of saints and sacred spaces.¹⁶ Historians like H. T. Norris and Francine Friedman discuss the effects that Islam had upon the Balkans, but did not fully analyze the plethora of contact and interactions that occurred with the different faiths during the Medieval period. Finally there are works that discuss the makeup of the religious dynamics within the region, but they are often small and focusing on the modern rather than the medieval worlds, like the aforementioned work of Francine Friedman, *Bosnian Muslims*. There is also a substantial literature concerning the Medieval sharing of saints and the cults of saints, but few focus on the sharing of these in the Balkans or in Eastern Orthodoxy to any great extent.

My next step is to present the basic evidence of religious coexistence within the Medieval world as well as a description of the three categories of the sharing of the sacred: those permissible acts such as pilgrimages, ambiguous sharing of the sacred, and

¹³ John Kingsley Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*, (Bristol: Burleigh Press, 1937)

¹⁴ F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, 2 vols. [2nd ed] (New York: Octago Books, 1973)

¹⁵ For more information see, *Kosovo: A Short History*, and *Bosnia: A Short History*

¹⁶ For more information see, *Bulgaria* pp. and *Albania: A Country in Transition* pp.

sharing that equates to amicable religious coexistences. For example, the instances of shared pilgrimages to holy sites, and shared sacred peoples, were well within the confines of religious doctrine so long as they were individuals already shared among the monotheistic traditions. There is also an examination of a few instances of sharing of the sacred, which does not fit within the previously mentioned explanation, but still must be noted as they are part of this important history of the sharing of the sacred. These distinctions are important for this study, as there are many different types of sharing of the sacred. However, the purpose of this study is to focus on the heterodox forms of sharing, rather than the permissible sort.

Moorish Spain and the Ottoman Empire in Europe and the religious coexistence that existed there must then be discussed, so there can be a comparison of toleration, and accommodation in comparison to what will be defined as amicable. The religious texts, laws, and doctrine should be understood in order to illuminate the dynamic of the religious coexistence that pertained to the Medieval world in stabilized regions where social constructs and hierarchies were clearly defined and followed. A brief description of how the political and religious centers stabilized within both Christianity and Islam will provide further understanding of these distinctions. The Balkan stabilizing process is a bit more tricky to discuss, but by providing further context will help clarify it. The evidence of what occurred with the Balkans, of what is amicable religious coexistence will be presented and analyzed. The sharing of sacred spaces, saints, and the cultural and religious development that allowed for such amicable religious coexistence to develop had become the established norm within the region as a whole, and at least from the Ottoman conquests during the sixteenth century. Finally after all of this, we will see why

the Balkans were unique in amicable religious coexistence as a frontier region, in terms of polemics against, and problems of prevention, unlike the rest of the Western world which could not allow with their strong political and religious centers, clearly defined that there was little chance of what had happened in less stabilized times which allowed it to occur.

Sharing of the Sacred: The Monotheisms

I will ask each one who is sick with this disease: Are you a Christian? Why, then, this zeal for Jewish practices? Are you a Jew? When, then, are you making trouble for the Church?..The difference between the Jews and us is not a small one, is it? Is the dispute between us over ordinary, everyday matters, so that you think the two religions are really on and the same? Why are you mixing what cannot be mixed?¹⁷

These words of John Chrysostom's *Adversus Judaeus*, are the perfect way to begin this discussion of monotheistic sharing of the sacred. In the introduction, it was pointed out that there are common aspects of the sacred within the monotheistic faiths that were capable of being shared because they fell within a shared religious heritage. Too often, in the study of religious history, these commonalities are forgotten; these faiths all claim the rights to the same sacred lineage that had begun with the prophet Abraham. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all accept this lineage of the prophets: from Abraham to Joseph, Moses to Elijah: there is an agreement among them of the importance of these prophetic divinely revealed messages.¹⁸ In a way, Chrysostom's argument about these differences not being small is incorrect, at least within the scope of

¹⁷ Quoted in Diogini Albera, "Why Are You Mixing What Cannot Be Mixed? Shared Devotions in the Monotheisms." *History and Anthropology* 19 (2008): 37.

¹⁸ This is a rather Muslim perspective, but the Christian perspective is similar enough. The prophetic heritage is the same (aside from Mohammed), but Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of all the promises and covenants that occurred between God, his people, and these prophets. The Muslim perspective is used for its simplicity and inclusiveness.

the Old Testament with Judaism, and many aspects of the New Testament within Islam. Many similarities existed between Christianity and Judaism, notably the fact that Jesus himself was a practicing Jew. Chrysostom's outrage, however, and the animosity towards this practice got to the heart of the problem of this sharing of the sacred; any sharing diminished claims of legitimacy and salvation of the one true faith. Despite all three faiths sharing the same starting point, where the truth lies, where the "covenant" of God is fulfilled is highly disputed among the three.

There is also another reason why Chrysostom argued so vehemently against the practice of sharing of the sacred: Jews denied the fulfillment of the prophecy that was Jesus. They were Christ killers, and the entire nation was to blame, for all eternity, for his death.¹⁹ This is, perhaps, why Christianity and Islam have more of an intermixed community of the faithful than what is found between Judaism and Christianity. The stigma that extended to all Jewish people, and the anti-Semitism that arose from that, made it difficult to consider fluid and harmonious sharing of even the common aspects of the sacred. Shortly after the death of Jesus, those that followed the Christian message worked hard to divorce Judaism in favor of a claim to possessing God's true message. Christianity ended with Christ as the fulfillment of the covenant made between God and the Jews centuries before. Christ was the messiah, the savior, and so long as the Jewish community denied that fact, they were forever separated from the Christian faithful, despite the strong similarities they had in their sacred heritage.

¹⁹ This is the Christian view of Jews, though Muslims had their own reasons for anti-Semitism as well. See Safi-ur Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri, *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum, The Sealed Nectar: Biography of the Noble Prophet* (New York: Darussalam International Publications, 2002).

What provided a stronger foundation between Christianity and Islam was the fact that Jesus and Mary were revered and accepted within the latter faith. Both were (and are) seen as prophets in their own right. Mary in particular was and is given much more attention in the *Qur'an*, than the *Bible*, and was a much more prominent figure in this history of the sharing of the sacred, as argued by Alexandra Cuffel in her article “Henceforward All Generations Will Call me Blessed: Medieval Christian Tales of Non-Christian Marian Veneration.”²⁰ Mary was a much more fluid and liminal character within these faiths. Her role as prophetic woman and mother was rather malleable within the sharing of the sacred. Cuffel had even argued that Mary had her own prophecy to fulfill before the end of the world, which provided an explanation as to why she aided individuals from other faiths. Citing Luke 1:48 she explained that “Behold all generations would call me blessed” was a Christian affirmation of the benevolence of the Virgin Mother and her importance as the mother of all humanity, regardless of the religious path they walked.

Whether Christians during the Medieval period considered Luke 1:48 a prophecy or not is questionable; however they saw any devotion towards Mary an affirmation of the truth of the Christian faith. Many were shocked at Muslim veneration and call to Mary in times of duress. Cuffel noted, quoting father Suriano, a fifteenth century friar, that Muslims prayed and asked Mary for her aid when they faced mortal peril at sea.

But he [the custodian] never ceased to invoke and call on the Virgin Mary that she help and save him. Having fallen asleep, Our Lady, pious advocate of all those who with faith recommend themselves to her, appeared to him and said to him that for his sake all were saved from shipwreck. The he cheered up all the sailors

²⁰ Cuffel, “Henceforward”, 37-60.

and told them of the vision and how the Virgin Mary had saved them despite the fact that they were Muslims.²¹

Mary was an advocate for all those who came to her in their time of need. This could have been a reason why Marian devotion was so strong, and noticeable on both sides of the religious divide. Mary, as a liminal sacred figure, was capable of maneuvering between Christianity and Islam, and had won fame through her seeming role of intercessor and benevolent mother. It was only the question as to whether she was mother of a man or a divine being that caused disagreement between the two groups.

Christianity was still seen to have validity, as a faith, because it came from God to a most revered prophet. Christians sometimes, later in the Medieval period, were surprised at the claims of the Muslims when they pointed out that the differences between their faith and Christianity were rather smallish something Chrysostom would have highly disagree with if Islam had existed during his time. A Franciscan reported about impious people who made such ghastly claims:

After all, we all have only one God, we venerate your Christ as a prophet and holy man, we celebrate many of the festivals of your saints with you and you celebrate Friday, our festive day. Mohammed and Christ are brothers.²² And this error was so widespread that in the same family one person would be catholic, one Muslim and one Orthodox.²²

Despite how shocking this occurrence may have been later on in history, it certainly was not shocking for the people who were not unfamiliar with the practice. Unorthodox though it may have been it was widespread and common because of this shared peoples within the same sacred heritage. Whatever the case may be, this common thread between

²¹ Cuffel, "Henceforward", 44.

²² Noel Malcom's *Kosovo, A Short History*, from *De Gubernatis and De Turee Orbis Seraphicus*, p. 590, p. 133 written around the late seventeenth century.

the two, these marginal sacred people who had a mobility to move within these faiths in a lesser and greater importance, gave rise to the actions of veneration, and praise; a sacred shared community of the holy people that was common through this prophetic lineage.

The Act of Pilgrimage

The permissible sharing that occurred between individuals of different faiths most often occurred in the act of pilgrimages to sacred, venerated sites, and shrines. A pilgrimage is a journey undertaken by a group or an individual for a sort of spiritual benefit. The place of the pilgrimage reflected its purpose; that is what people expected to gain from undertaking it. For example, in the famous *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer pointed out early in the prologue that the destination of Canterbury, where the martyr Thomas Beckett was buried, was chosen in the hopes that they may be healed of their ailments.²³ Alexandra Cuffel in her article, “Henceforward,” mentioned the going to sacred and holy milk grottos for the purpose of women being healed of their infertility.²⁴ “Along with the holy pools and trees, these caves became sites of pilgrimage for those Muslims and Christians wishing to express their devotion to Mary (and Jesus) and to seek healing.”²⁵ The practice of going on a pilgrimage was not unfamiliar to Christianity. Since the early Medieval period, Christian populations have made a point to travel to the sacred sites important to the life of Jesus. From his birthplace in Bethlehem, to Jerusalem where the prophecy had been fulfilled, they had flocked to these places in order to gain some blessed benefit from them. Islam too, was no stranger to pilgrimage; in fact the idea of performing *hajj* to Mecca had existed for centuries in Arabia even before the time of the

²³ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classic, 2008)

²⁴ Milk grottos were the hiding places, usually caves, where Mary hid with the infant Jesus while Herod was in pursuit of them.

²⁵ Cuffel, “Henceforward”, 38.

Prophet Mohammed. Even the direction for prayer for Muslims was dictated by the place that they should go to for pilgrimage; first it was Jerusalem and then, after some time, it was Mecca.²⁶

Other places were frequented by fellow pilgrims of mixed faiths: the Hebron, or the burial place of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob and Leah, or the place where Mary had supposedly given birth, as noted by Friar Francesco Suriano, were all destinations for Christian, Muslim and Jewish pilgrims during the Medieval Period.²⁷ As pointed out by Dionigi Albera's "Why are you Mixing what Cannot be Mixed?" "Shared Devotions in the Monotheisms," places like Sinai, which had a Christian Church as well as a mosque, intertwined together atop of it, were shared by Christians and Muslims, though Jews were excluded. Felix Fabri, as quoted by Albera, noted, "Men of all rites and all sects flocked here from all parts of the world...only Jews cannot go up, and if they could, pagans [i.e. Muslims] do not accept; even more, Christians would not let them pray with them."²⁸ a rather curious fact, since Sinai is rather significant, as a place, in the Jewish tradition. Anti-semitism, as this act shows, was another a shared component in Christianity and Islam.

Pilgrimage to sites that possessed a multi-faith association owing to this shared sacred heritage was permissible as the faithful who undertook them still maintained their doctrine while traveling to these overlaying shared sacred places. So long, as Cuffel put it, these "spiritual hierarchies" and doctrinal distinctions were maintained, there was no

²⁶ Safi-ur Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri, *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum, The Sealed Nectar: Biography of the Noble Prophet* (New York: Darussalam International Publications, 2002) 226-235.

²⁷ Cuffel, "From Practice to Polemic", 404.

²⁸ Felix Fabri, quoted in Albera, "Why Are You Mixing What Cannot be Mixed?," 45.

danger to their immortal souls. Religious distinctions were preserved and true faith was ensured.

Ambiguous Sacred Sharing: The Shades of Grey in the Medieval World

While the sharing of pilgrimage sites fell within the permissible dictates of faithful doctrine there were questionable practices that occurred during the Medieval period through the sharing of sacred peoples and ambiguous sites. These shared practices fall within a blurred concept of sacred sharing that was, potentially, unorthodox in the cases of both faiths. Some of these practices were done at shared ‘ambiguous shrines’ that could be found throughout the late Medieval world, but more specifically in areas where these two religions lived side by side. While there is a sense of understanding to the shared practice there is also a bit of a confusion as to why these ambiguous shrines were shared- a question that has yet to find a solid answer. The ‘why’ could have been convenience, an attempt to move in to conquer, or the fact that individuals who shared these places, simply liked the place; perhaps it was something even more complex that was known only to the faithful. The point of the matter is that these ambiguous shrines and sanctuaries *were* shared and in many instances accommodations were made for the religious other for the known purpose of this sharing.

There are a few cases that Diogini Albera specifically mentioned. The first is the Basilica of St. John the Baptist which was retained by Christians during the conquest of Damascus. As he noted, “The Muslims only used the courtyard for their prayers...A similar phenomenon took place at the shrine converged to pay homage to the tomb of the Saint...they [Muslims] built a mosque near the shrine. The two buildings shared the

same court.”²⁹ There is little mention of John the Baptist in Islamic religious lore. So there is no obvious sanction from doctrine for this practice. So, perhaps, this incident showed a respect for a revered individual that may have been helpful to the person that was Jesus, who was revered in Islam. This was no ambiguous site, so it is curious to note the importance it had within the Muslim community.

Albera mentioned the work of S. Oginbene, *Umm al-Rasas: la chiesa di Santo Stefano ed. Il ‘problema’ iconfobico*, which discussed the church of St. Stephen in Umm al-Rasas (Jordan) where a rather peculiar action appeared to have taken place. Oginbene suggested, “That changes in the eighth century mosaics in the church...with the removal of images of living creatures and the development of non-figurative motives, were apparently executed to meet the demands of the Muslims attending the church.”³⁰ “To meet the demands of the Muslims attending the Church” is a rather extraordinary statement. Why were Muslims, first of all, attending mass? In many ways, the aspect of the mass celebrates the divinity of Christ, the key doctrine of Christianity that Islam vehemently rejects. More so, why were the Christians so willing to provide such a level of accommodation to the Muslim “faithful.” Did the removal of icons within the church make it more ambiguous and thus capable of being shared? It is, truly, baffling. This is a phenomenon that overreaches the ideas of understandable sharing of the sacred.

Thus the sharing of the sacred within the Medieval world can be placed within three categories within the scope of this paper. The first is the permissible acts of the sharing of the sacred. The sharing of pilgrimage sites to individuals common to the monotheistic faiths is understandable. While shocking for individuals at the time,

²⁹ Albera, “Why Are You Mixing What Cannot be Mixed?,” 42.

³⁰ Albera, “Why Are You Mixing What Cannot be Mixed?,” 42.

modern scholarship realizes that this is well within the realm of possibility since all three faiths shared the same sacred heritage and lay claims to the fulfillment of its prophecies. There is also the ambiguous sharing of the sacred, which falls within these two examples given above. These have no real claim within religious doctrine and are seemingly highly unorthodox. The reaction of “what they were thinking” is rather natural and expected. Yet these occurrences were not long lasting; they were not persistent and thus they lose a bit of their shock value and cannot be deemed amicable. Amicable religious coexistence was a religious coexistence that was consistent and developed as a part of the cultural fabric of society, as is the case within the Balkans. Before there can be a discussion of what amicable religious coexistence is, it is best, first, to distinguish it from other prominent types of religious coexistence within the pre-modern period: the ‘tolerant’ religious coexistence in Christian controlled territories, such as Reconquered Moorish Spain, and the ‘accommodating’ coexistence that existed under the Ottoman Empire. Only then could amicable religious coexistence of the Balkans be properly defined.

Understanding the Developments of Religion and Politics

A key aspect of the Medieval West that distinguishes it from modernity was the interweaving of politics and religion. Any political action that was undertaken was either justified or dictated by doctrine. Analyzing this development of religion and politics will make it easier to define the types of religious coexistence that were prominent in Christian and Islamic territories. Distinctions can be made by comparing the different and distinct ways in which religion affected politics, and vice versa. The ways that doctrine influenced political action provided the creation of a social construct that was

within the realms of doctrine. Political power then enforced and maintained these social constructs and hierarchies that were created and justified by doctrine. The understanding of this balance between the two, and the rise of religious- political might is key to understanding the laws, dictates and actions of the faithful flock towards the religious other. The Catholic Church, for its part, was not the political authoritative powerhouse that it later became during the early Medieval period. Rather it developed slowly over time, building its political and religious authority gradually across Christendom through complex alliances with the nobility in Europe. An examination of how the Church gained this political authority will shed light as to how it could dictate the actions of the princes in the Christian kingdoms.

Rome got to the forefront of political affairs through the stabilization of the papal authority in Rome and the rise of a highly educated and separate clergy. Prior to the mid-eleventh century, the papacy was under control of Italian lords or individuals who were seeking the power of the papacy. The Germanic kings attempted to prevent this abuse of power with their attempts to establish a way for popes to be elected and maintained in their office without being displaced by individuals seeking control. Finally the papacy was stabilized and this allowed them to create a stable and consistent religious community. The papacy sent legates across Europe in an attempt to keep with further transformation of the Church that began during the Gregorian reforms. These legates connected and met in councils, called synods, which helped to decide the state of the clergy in Europe and solidify the Christian way of life by placing the clergy as a separate

category of people bound only to the papal authority of Rome. The clergy had to be educated, and follow to the authority of the pope rather than local lords or kings.³¹

This shift of open secular appointments of clergy to Church dictation was significant as the king had lost a large portion of their ability to gain political control through these appointments. This change of secular control of the clergy continued with the condemnation of the practice of simony, the buying of church offices. This led to the Lay Investiture Controversy (1075-1122). Originally a disagreement between the German Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV (1050-1106) and Pope Gregory VII (c.1015-1085), this was a dispute over who has a right not just to appoint bishops, but to also invest them into their office, which should have only been granted by the authority of the pope. Instead the bishops were selected and ceremonially placed by the Emperor who needed the political power of these bishops to further support his rule. This had now changed as the pope claimed his right and authority to appoint high clergy positions to suit his purposes. After the lands of Europe stabilized politically, the religious authority found its voice and power within European affairs.

Rome's political power was also enhanced through monasteries and education. The monasteries, with their wealth, became centers for learning. They were built up as powerful institutions educating clergy, and aristocrats. There was a need for further education and thus there was the rise of scholasticism and the university. Law, both secular and canon, developed within these universities, as well as philosophy and theology. The growing popularity of Aristotelian and Platonic logic enhanced the

³¹ For more information see R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970.)

theological tradition. Theologians, such as Albert the Great (c.1193-1206) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) applied this logic to further discuss canon law, and theology in every aspect of life; especially with the placement and dealings with the religious other. This theological education would influence the greatest thinkers of Christendom who would utilize all forms of logic, reason, and scripture to education themselves, the populace, and the aristocracy, in ways of living a sound Christian life in order to obtain the salvation promised by Christian revelation. These theologians, following the secular and spiritual authority of the Church, became a constant reminder to kings of their duty of leading their people to salvation and became strong reprimands if the kings neglected in their duties. It would be this constant reminder, along with staunch faith, that led the kings of Europe to perform their divinely ordained duties as rulers of the faithful.

One challenge to amicable religious coexistence was the intermingling of secular and religious authorities. The goal, especially in the Christian West, was to create a kingdom of heaven on Earth; a kingdom of moral righteousness to lead their people to salvation. The goal of the Muslims, at first, was to create a land of peace within war-torn Arabia. Then, they set their sights elsewhere for a kingdom of righteousness and praise to Allah. Both religious cultures had the same agenda in mind, but with slightly different justification. Christians, in some aspects, did it in order to help prepare for the Second Coming, which was seemingly imminent.³² This is often attributed to one of the many biblical passages that speak of the second coming: “Watch, therefore, for you do not

³² R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 26-27.

know on what day your Lord is coming.”³³ Yet, not all communities saw this as important. Many kingdoms considered themselves divine communities in their own right. In order to do this they had to create kingdoms that they believed were pleasing to God. The same basic idea is to be found within the *Qur'an*, regarding what Muslims call the “Last Hour” “People will ask thee about the Last Hour. Say: ‘Knowledge thereof rests with God alone; yet for all thou knowest, the Last Hour may well be near!’”³⁴ Obviously, if it was not known when the Day of Judgment would come, and if salvation was the goal for both Christians and Muslims, it made sense to create a kingdom that was good in the eyes of their God, in the manner that was ascribed to them by their holy texts: the *Bible* and the *Qur'an*. Despite the fact that they had attempted to make a similar moral world that would be pleasing to God, their viewpoints of how to do that were religiously different, especially in finding a place in their societies for the religious other. For Christians, Islam was a heresy, for Muslims, Christians were misguided: so where did they place them in their societies in a way that would be pleasing to the Divine?³⁵

Despite any similarities of moral action, the faiths were separated by their own desire to achieve personal Paradise. Thus, their treatments of the religious other went as far as their faiths dictated. The two main religious texts, the *Bible* and the *Qur'an*, along with theological writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, and the *Hadith* elucidate why each religion dealt with the religious other in such different ways.

Religious Toleration-The Christian West

³³ *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Catholic Edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Matthew: 24:42.

³⁴ Muhammad Asad, trans. *The Message of the Qur'an*, (Bristol: The Book Foundation, 2003), 33:63.

³⁵ Southern, *Western Views of Islam*, 3.

Toleration is simply allowing something to exist without attempting to stop it; even if there is a great deal of disagreement or evil connotation connected with the permitted act. In this case it is one religious order or institution permitting another to practice its belief, at least in part. The distinction that can be made between what occurred in Christian controlled territories and in Muslim controlled areas is that toleration was maximum that was permissible in terms of the Christian faith. Remi Brague argued in *The Legend of the Middle Ages* that Christians merely tolerated Muslims for pragmatic reasons, especially when the existing non-Christian population, (in the case of Moorish Spain, the Muslim population) was more numerous than the conquering Christian population. This was due to the fact that Islam, as a religious message, was an anomaly - something that should not exist, and had no preexisting category, unlike Judaism or paganism.³⁶ The distinction that makes the act of toleration different from the act of accommodation is well described by ‘Abd al-Hakeem Carney who makes clear why toleration was an act of medieval Christianity in dealing with the religious other, “‘tolerance’ implies evil within the other: the other is tolerated as a much as a body tolerates a small dose of strychnine.”³⁷ Christianity made unusually strong claims as a unique possessor of truth and salvation. The *New Testament* claimed that the only way to Paradise, to obtain salvation was by following the path of Jesus Christ. John

³⁶Remi Brague, *The Legends of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 198.

³⁷‘Abd al-Hakeem Carney, “Twilight of the idols? Pluralism and Mystical *Praxis* in Islam,” *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 64 (2008): 4.

14:6, for example, states that, “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, the light; no one comes to the Father but by me.”³⁸ John 9: 35-38 expands on this:

Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and having found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of man?” He answered “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him? Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you.” He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshipped him.³⁹

Such doctrines left little room for a positive evaluation of other religious traditions.

Christians knew that Muslims needed to find Christ, and until that point were still heretical damned heathens.

Since the Christians knew that Muslims needed to find Christ, conversion from Islam to Christianity was sought and highly encouraged. This would not only to save the souls of the heretical religious other, but it would also solidify the claims of the truth in the divine message of Christian revelation. This would be a difficult task, however, as Islamic society did not go through the problematic setbacks in light of the fall of Rome. Rather, their societies, for the most part, flourished economically, socially, and politically. One of the ways they surpassed the Western Christian world was in education. Their society was exceptionally learned, and literacy was often higher in Islam than in the Christian West well into Middle Ages. Thus more skillful tools would be required if there would be any hope in converting the heathens of Islam.

It was this growth in high learning, especially in the Aristotelian and Platonic philosophies that the great theologians of Christianity, like St. Thomas Aquinas, utilized to develop a greater argument of the truth of Christianity through logic and reason.

Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Contra Gentiles* used ancient logic to argue the truth of

³⁸ John 14:6

³⁹ John 9: 35-38

Christian revelation against the falseness of the Islamic creed. In this way it gave another way of arguing and dealing with the religious other by utilizing even old and familiar logic and literature to debate theological truths.

The *Summa Contra Gentiles* was written, as translator Anton C. Pegis stated, particularly for the learned Islamic audiences. It is part of the Christian intellectual reaction against the Arabian intellectual culture, and especially against Arabian Aristotelianism. Moreover, "The *SCG* did not have a Christian audience in view but rather, through the teaching of Christian missionaries, an intellectual Arab audience."⁴⁰ The purpose was to refute Islamic message through logic in the hopes of aiding the missionaries work in the highly educated Islamic societies of the Iberian Peninsula. Though Pegis suggested that the *SCG* was a refutation of Arabic intellectualism, Aquinas certainly argues that the message of Mohammed was something only those with small minds would have believed by their own free will, logically. "As for proofs of the truth of his doctrine, he brought forward only such as could be grasped by the natural ability of anyone with a very modest wisdom." Those with any real intellect on the divine ways did not believe him willingly. More to the point, Aquinas claimed that, "the truths that he taught he mingled with many fables and with doctrines of the greatest falsity."⁴¹

The doctrines followed by the Moors were "erroneous" and brought about by the seduction of the Prophet Mohammed in promises of carnal pleasure over divine truth. The messages that Mohammed brought were false according to Aristotle because they defied the logic of how a divine message should come about. "He did not bring forth any

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book 1* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 21, 26.

⁴¹ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book 1*, 73.

signs produced in a supernatural way, which alone fittingly gives witness to divine inspiration; for a visible action that can be only divine reveals an invisibly inspired teacher of truth." Neither was it preceded by any divine proclamation prior to the coming of the Prophet Mohammed: "Nor do divine pronouncements on the part of preceding prophets offer him any witness. On the contrary, he perverts almost all the testimonies of the Old and New Testaments by making them into fabrications of his own, as can be seen by anyone who examines his law."⁴² Islam in particular had no more truth or salvific value than other non-Christian faiths in general.

Toleration of Muslims, however, was prudent despite how blatantly wrong and defiant of reason their message was. In no place was this truer than Reconquered Moorish Spain under the reign of James I of Arago-Catalonia (1208-1276). James I, the "Conqueror" as he would come to be called, spent his time as king winning back the majority of Moorish lands to Spanish control. Known for his practicality in his dealings with the Moors, he also was direct in his dealings with them, and tolerated no opposition to his rule. As Halperin argued, it was a very wise move to tolerate previous religious institutions when the majority of one's subjects followed that faith due to the fact that the religious group that had just gained power was the minority, and therefore, any harsh action against the current religious majority would have severe political consequences.⁴³ After his *reconquista* he opted not to deport the existing Moorish population, at least not unless they did something that caused them to fall out of his good graces. Instead "he issued sweeping guarantees of their political autonomy, religious inviolability and socioeconomic rights in order induce them to surrender" but out of necessity and not as a

⁴² Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book 1*, 73.

⁴³ Halperin, "The Ideology of Silence" 450.

reflection of genuine toleration.⁴⁴ The changes and agreements he made with the “Moors” or “Saracens,” as he calls them in his *Chronicle*, were dealt with on different basis, depending on the way they acted with the King.

Throughout the *Chronicle* James discusses his plans of *reconquista* across Spain and the various treaties he made with Moorish subjects in order to gain lands and castles. In his dealings he gave the Moors rights to choose their terms and usually gave them to them in abundance, depending on their loyalty. For example, James describes one incident where Saracens, seeing the king coming with his armies, sent out a letter asking his terms which were that, “they would make a treaty with me and surrender the castle at once, provided I allowed them their religion, and the liberties they were wont to have under their Saracen kings. They added that they were prepared to deliver the town and castle to me on such terms.”⁴⁵ At another city, James discussed the terms of a treaty with another group of Moors:

I told them that it pleased me to see that they too accommodated themselves to my requirements, and that I would thereby love them and treat them well. They made treaty with me that they should remain in Algezira with the same customs as in the time of the Almohades; that they could have service in the mosques as they were wont and that every captive (Moor) who might escape to Algezira should be free and that I could not take him, nor any one for me.⁴⁶

Such examples could be multiplied.

James permitted the Saracens not only their rights to maintain their faith but to be judged by their own religious laws.

These were the things they asked: one that they should remained there with all there possessions’ another that they might observe their Law as to crying from the

⁴⁴Halperin, “The Ideology of Silence” 444.

⁴⁵John Forester, Trans. *James I (The Conqueror), King of Aragon Chronicle*, (Ontario: Parentheses Publications Catalan Series, 2000) 106.

⁴⁶James I, *The Chronicle*, 157.

top of their mosque [the hour of prayer]; another that they might be judged according to Saracen customs and not be summoned into a Christian court, and the Saracens being their judges as in the time of the Miramamolín. These terms I granted.⁴⁷

James' pragmatism not only extended to the generous terms that he granted to the Moors in the treaties that he made with them, but also to their protection, since they honored their treaties with the king. In several instances throughout the *Chronicle* James came to the aid of Moorish subjects who sent word of mistreatment by raiding Christian knights or servants of the king. For example, in Valencia there was maltreatment of the Moors by one of the local lords, to which James responded by apologizing for their ill-treatment and reprimanded the lord that had done so. In the *Chronicle* he wrote:

When I was at Valencia I had great complaints from the Saracens who had surrendered to me, saying that En Guillem d'Aguilo and the company of "almugavars" and footmen I left there had done them hurt and robbed. He owned that he had done hurt to the Saracens, but did not consider by so doing that he had done me disservice. I said Yes, you have done me disservice; for one thing in that you have done hurt to the Saracens; for another in that you have broken my commandments; for the Saracens are living under my faith and you have broken my promise to them. I then spoke to the Saracens and told them that I was sorry for the hurt done them and I put back each into his farm; and they felt safe so long as I was in the country.⁴⁸

There were a few, though not many, instances where James I had to reprimand his own men for creating trouble with the Saracens in order to keep the peace that he was aiming for. His prudent pragmatic dealing with the religious other was not something that was simply one sided; his Christian subjects had to also follow the rules of pragmatism, despite whatever animosity they felt towards the religious other.

⁴⁷ James I, *The Chronicle*, 187.

⁴⁸ James I, *The Chronicle*, 148.

The “inherent evil” that Carney described nevertheless existed within the Muslim faith and thus James’ I treatment towards the religious other was tolerant. This can clearly be seen in the following passages of the *Chronicle*. James I was using military force to reclaim the lands of Spain from the heretical Moorish inhabitants; thus he was not above discrimination against the religious other, despite the protection and freedom he gave them. This becomes apparent in his taking of one city where he allowed the Moors to keep their faith and their prayers and customs. Yet, his limit was shown in his occupation of the great mosque of the city. The reason for it was to turn the mosque into a Church for Christian worship, since it was near the gate an area which James I would occupy. “That a muezzin should proclaim the Sabbath or the name of Allah close to my head where I am sleeping may seem to you a fit thing, but it is not one of my liking.”⁴⁹

When the Moors argued against it, he wrote:

Just as they wished to have the best place for their prayers so did we; and the thing could not, nor out, to be otherwise for it was a proper thing that we Christians should have a great place for worship since they themselves had so many. They assured me that they could not nor would do anything else but what they had said. Matters came to that pitch between me and them, that I said I was sorry for the evil they would bring on themselves for not giving their mosque up, for I would in any case have it; they should therefore return to the city and reconsider the case.⁵⁰

In the end, James gained possession of the great mosque, converted it into a Church in honor of the Virgin Mary, and when it was finally established, he wept. There was also another instance in which James also showed his disdain for the Moorish other. In this instance James had described his troubles to a pair of Saracen lords, who, in response,

⁴⁹James I, *The Chronicle*, 196.

⁵⁰James I, *The Chronicle*, 197. It should be noted that this was a common practice on both the Muslim and Christian side of conquest and this should not be seen as the only component of what was defined as toleration.

merely smiled and apologized for his troubles. He spoke to his wife describing the terrible nature of their behavior. “Have you observed,” he asked, “what those Saracens did? How joyfully they came and how they turned aside from our troubles and went away so lightly?” The Queen replied that, “These people care little or nothing about our troubles, not a word did they say about your going to them or inviting you to the city.” At which point the king awaited the time when he could gain a good opportunity to take revenge on the Saracens.⁵¹

As time passed, and political rule was stabilized, the laws became stricter, permitting only the bare minimum toleration towards the religious other. One important set of laws, the *Siete Partidas* described the status of Jews and Muslims in Castile during the early fourteenth century.⁵² The differences between the treatment of Jews and Muslims clearly depict the distinction between (at least minimal) accommodation and mere toleration. For example, Jews were permitted to keep their synagogues, though they were not allowed to rebuild ones that had fallen or to construct new ones.⁵³ Moors, however, were not allowed to maintain their mosques.

We decree that Moors shall live among Christians in the same way that we mentioned in the preceding Title that Jews shall do, by observing their own law and not insulting ours. Moors, however, shall not have mosques in Christian towns, or make their sacrifices publicly in the presence of men.⁵⁴

⁵¹ James I, *The Chronicle*, 167.

⁵² Oivia Remie Constable ed., *Medieval Iberia: Readings From Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

⁵³ As will be later shown, this is similar treatment that Muslim rulers gave to Christian subjects in Ottoman controlled areas.

⁵⁴ Constable, *Medieval Iberia*, 270-273.

Further, Jews were not pressed to do anything during their holy day; no such accommodation was even mentioned for the Moorish faith.⁵⁵ Converts to Christianity, whatever their original faith might have been, were to be treated with respect. Anyone who converted to Islam, on the other hand was stripped of property and put to death, for it was better to be dead than to be a Moor: “Men sometimes become insane and lose their prudence and understanding as, for instance, where unfortunate persons, and those who despair of everything, renounce the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and become Moors.”⁵⁶

Christian-occupied regions, such as Reconquered Moorish Spain, then, during the Middle Ages tolerated Islam, for no other reason than that it was pragmatic and to no greater a degree than pragmatism required. To have done otherwise would have been problematic for it would have made occupation of the land in the beginning more difficult. The laws put in place by James I and afterwards, were done so for practical reasons rather than sincere toleration towards the religious other. A policy of Emperor Frederick II (1194-1250) in Italy demonstrates the limits of such pragmatism. During his reign, Frederick created a colony of Muslims in Lucera, Sicily, something that was in accordance with canon law and aroused little opposition from Pope Honorius III. The purpose of this colony was the collection of tax revenues and to encourage agricultural production. The Muslims in this community were free to practice Islam, assimilated by obtaining Christian names, and some were even knighted. There were some restrictions of movement but they were commonly overlooked. They were permitted public displays of faith, something that could not have been done under the *Siete Partidas*. When an ambassador from Egypt visited the colony he observed the gathering of Muslims on feast

⁵⁵ Constable, *Medieval Iberia*, 270-274.

⁵⁶ Constable, *Medieval Iberia*, 274.

days and the ability to make the *hajj*, and saw Muslim men holding places of honor at the king's court. It seemed that these Muslims were capable of living among Christians in a setting that was far more accommodating than what was found in Spain during the implementation of the *Siete Partidas*. In fact, this appeared to be a case of full coexistence. However, after a brief time these pleasant conditions changed. Despite their protected status both under canon law, and as possessions of the Crown, the colony was destroyed by Charles II (1271-1295), the Angevin king. He sold off the inhabitants into slavery in 1300 because they had posed, according to him, a spiritual threat to the Christians within the region.⁵⁷ This further demonstrates that though there were times that religious coexistence went beyond what is defined as toleration this was something that was not consistent and were consistently short-lived exceptions rather than the rule, for pragmatism's sake. For the kingdoms of Spain it was for the practical purpose of the solidification of rule in a new land, while in Lucera it was a matter of economic gain and thus a fair dealing with the other that went beyond staunch toleration was something short lived and implemented until rule and status solidified in the region.

Religious Accommodation- Islam

The political and religious development of the centers of Christianity led, at most, to its tolerant coexistence with the religious other. As the Church stabilized, it gained the ability to establish social hierarchies. These hierarchies were enforced by the political centers and thus were maintained throughout the Christendom. The examples of Reconquered Moorish Spain and Lucera further illustrate the distinguishing nature of Christianity's tolerance towards the religious other. There are some distinct differences

⁵⁷Julie Taylor, *Muslims in Medieval Italy: The Colony at Lucera*, (New York: Lexington Books New York, 2003),67-70.

that should be noted, in order to understand the development of Islam as a religious and political power. The reason for this is straightforward. Islam created a very clear and seemingly peaceful relationship with the religious other from the earliest stages of its development, beginning with “The Charter of Medina.”⁵⁸

Unlike Christianity, Sunni Islam was not an institution with a central authority figure, such as the pope. Religious authority was not continually passed down to subsequent individuals who had the ability to make changes and interpretation to scripture. In this way the religious hierarchy of Islam was completely different from in the Christian churches, and in many ways it seems that the religion of Islam was made for just that reason.

Islam, at least the Sunni fraction, (politically dominant in our period outside of Fatimid Egypt and Safavid Iran) was and is centered around two documents: the *Holy Qur'an* supposedly given to the Prophet Mohammed by the Angel Gabriel, and the *Hadith*. The latter is a combination of testimonies of what the Prophet Mohammed said, or what others had observed him doing, in particular situations. The sources for the trusted Hadiths (that is, those which are believed to be reliable) were a group of people called *sahabi* who were companions of the Prophet during his lifetime. These two sources were considered to be the authoritative sources for Islam. Any lingering debates should be answered through the examination of the *Qur'an*, and then through the examination of the *Hadith*: thus, if the *Qur'an* was unclear, then the example of the Prophet Mohammed would suffice in cases of uncertainty. Caliphs, who took charge of

⁵⁸ In Safi-ur Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri, *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum, The Sealed Nectar: Biography of the Noble Prophet* (New York: Darussalam International Publications, 2002), 226-235.

the Islamic community after the death of Mohammed, followed this order when they faced any unclear situation.

Islam and its followers came from West-central Arabia, which was war-torn and littered with a plethora of religious practices in the sixth and seventh centuries. Despite this constant state of warfare, the ruling tribes of Mecca, the center of Arabia owing to the location of the popular pilgrimage site the *kabbah*, was capable of holding substantial peace with neighboring tribes to assure safe passage for pilgrimage and trade across the region. The ruling tribe of Mecca was the Quraysh, and was the family tribe of the Prophet Mohammed. Their animosity towards Mohammed was at first small, as he was a much beloved member of the community for his supposed excellent manner and wisdom.⁵⁹ However, he found himself exiled from his own city for his attempts to overthrow the old tribal religions.

Mohammed, along with the new Muslims, migrated to the city of Medina, a rich oasis community north of Mecca. This is where more information concerning the treatment of the religious other comes from. Medina was home to a major Jewish community at that time. When Mohammed came in 622 AD the communities created the peace treaty the “Charter of Medina.” The main groups mentioned in the “Charter” were the tribes of Yathrib, (the major Jewish tribe within Medina) and the Muslims, but it also included the local pagans within Medina as well. Despite the fact that the term ‘Jew’ is used within the context of the “Charter,” it is seemingly applicable to all non-Muslims who were living at Medina during this period. It states, “To the Jew who follows us,

⁵⁹ For more information, see: Safi-ur Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri, *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum, The Sealed Nectar: Biography of the Noble Prophet* (New York: Darussalam International Publications, 2002) 71-83.

belongs help and equality. He shall not be wronged nor shall his enemies be aided.”⁶⁰

From the very beginning it was noted that anyone who suffered with the Muslims during their exile, and lived in Medina at this time, were given help and treated as equals.

Further, “The Jews of the B. ‘Auf are one community with the believers (the Jews have their religion and the Muslim have theirs), their freedmen and their persons except those who behave unjustly and sinfully, for they hurt by themselves and their families.” Here is the portion of the “Charter” that offers reasonable information about how Muslims should treat the religious other. There was a guaranteed protection against treachery with an understanding that the actions of one individual would not condemn an entire group to retaliation or expulsion. It also mentioned that advice would be given to anyone who sought it and that no force would, or could, be used against anyone without justification. Thus, the other was treated as equals unless they had provided a reason to change that behavior.

The “Charter of Medina,” then, provided the Muslims and others within the city, a way of existing with each other, which allowed for each person their own religious communities, the rights to loyalty, protection, and advice in exchange for fair and peaceful relations. Thus Islam, from its very outset, was an accommodating faith towards the religious other. This left room for the religious other to practice freely, so long as they did not commit treacherous acts towards the Muslims within the community.

This concept is not only found within the “Charter of Medina,” or the *Qur’an* but also within one of the oldest political treaties between Muslims and Christians, “The Pact of Umar.” Written between the eighth to tenth centuries, this pact was created between

⁶⁰ Al-Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar*, 230.

Umar ibn al-Khattab (c. 592-664) and the Christian populations of Syria. Umar, a *sahabi* and third caliph, was named “*al-farooq*,” “the truthful one,” and was known before and after Islam for his diplomatic dealings and sound judgment, so it is not surprising that this “Pact” was a work of his. As the first generation of Muslims were at war with Syria inconsistently for a number of years, (629, 634) it was a continued practice that began with Mohammed to give populations options and incentives to lay down their arms so terms could be agreed upon. Like the *Siete Partidas* in Spain, this pact described what Christians were permitted to do, religiously and otherwise, in Muslim occupied Syria, and set the precedence for treatment of the *dhimmi*, in other Islamic occupied territories, such as sixteenth century Cairo⁶¹.

The differences between the “Pact” and the *Partidas*, and the differences between toleration and accommodation, are shown in a few distinct differences between what was and was not admissible, which was similar to the treatment of Jews in Moorish Spain. To begin with, Christians, much like the Jews in Christian-occupied Spain, were permitted to keep their churches, though they were not allowed to build new ones anywhere in Muslim territories. “We shall not build...new monasteries, churches convents or monks’ cells, nor shall we repair...them as they fall in ruins or are situated in quarters of the Muslims.”⁶² Further, it clearly permitted Christian worship, though with some conditions attached. “We shall use only clappers in our churches very softly.” Obviously, this is in complete contrast with the worshipping rights of Moors. The allowances to exist, and to

⁶¹ “Islam and the Jews: The Status of Jews and Christians in Muslim Lands, 1772 CE” *Jewish History Sourcebook*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/1772-jewsislam.html> (accessed March 31, 2011)

⁶² “Pact of Umar, 7th Century ?” *The Medieval Sourcebook*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/pact-umar.html> (accessed March 31, 2011)

have the freedom to practice their faith showed accommodative attitude that existed within Ottoman controlled Constantinople, as well as other territories within the Ottoman Empire..

The Ottoman Empire

Accommodation is an action that brings about harmony, agreement, and tranquility. The act of accommodation then, was an act, which brought with it a sort of peace between two seemingly opposing forces thus. In comparison to religious toleration, it was an exceptionally different way of dealing with the religious other. As Diogini Albera noted in “Why are you Mixing What Cannot be Mixed?” Islam brought with it a unique attitude about the other monotheistic traditions and created a much more accommodating atmosphere that clearly distinguished it from the tolerant attitude of Western Christianity.⁶³ While toleration was pragmatic, to a point, and possessed no doctrinal base within medieval Christianity, accommodation was part of Islamic doctrine, and prescribed in authoritative texts. The *Qur'an* states:

We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and that which as been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and that which has been vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus, and that which has been vouchsafed to all the [other] prophets by their Sustainer: we make no distinction between any of them.⁶⁴

Christianity was the message of Jesus and thus, to Islam, was an old story, especially since Jesus was considered one of the prophets of Allah. Although Muslims may have viewed Christians, as Brague put it, “as objects of sympathy, treated ... with condescending affection, one of a doddering old uncle...” they held them in a level of respect owing to their shared reverence for Jesus and because of the validity that

⁶³ Albera, “Why Are You Mixing What Cannot be Mixed?,” 42.

⁶⁴ *Qur'an* 2:136

Christianity possessed as a sacred message.⁶⁵ Because Christianity was a religion of the book, a *dhimmi*, its followers and the faith were to be treated with respect and without persecution. Islam was divinely given by God, due to the fact that the previous religions of God, Judaism and Christianity, had changed the original message, and thus there was the need of Mohammed to come in order to bring about God's final message.

The Muslim view of Christianity was that it was an old story, and Mohammed was the Seal of the Prophets; i.e. the last one. Due to this, the *Qur'an* notes the good nature of people of these faiths since they followed previous revealed messages of Allah. Surah *Al-Imran*, for example states:

They are not alike' among the followers of earlier revelation there are upright people, who recite God's messages throughout the night, and prostrate themselves [before Him]. They believe in God and the Last Day, and enjoin the doing of what is right, and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and vie with one another in doing good works: and these are among the righteous.⁶⁶

The revelation of the *Qur'an* made a distinction: that those individuals who believed in the Last Day, God, and who committed good deeds were among the righteous. By "followers of earlier revelations" is meant to mean followers of Judaism and Christianity: if they are good in deed then they are among the virtuous. This provided an explanation for the accommodating mentality of Muslim rulers, and the reasoning as to why they treated their Christian subjects in the manner that they did. If the *Qur'an* was the holy revelation of Allah, and that if Allah himself said that by doing good works then they were among the righteous, then Christians and Jews had to be treated with respect. To do

⁶⁵ Brague, *The Legends of the Middle Ages*, 198.

⁶⁶ *Qur'an* 3:113-114

otherwise would clearly be going against the doctrinal beliefs within the *Qur'an*, and thereby against Allah himself.

In the *Qur'an* were are also several other portions which mentioned the people of the Torah and Jesus by name, and stated the legitimacy of their messages and the respect that must ensue as a result; an odd thing for any faith claiming the true salvific message to do. The surah *Al-Maa'idah* mentions the religions of the people of the book by name and explains their significance and closeness to God.

And we caused Jesus, the son of Mary, to follow in the footsteps of those [earlier prophets], confirming the truth of whatever there still remained of the Torah; and We vouchsafed unto him the Gospel, wherein there was guidance and light, confirming the truth of whatever there still remained of the Torah, and as a guidance and admonition unto the God-conscious. Let, then, the followers of the Gospel judge in accordance with what God has revealed therein: for they who do not judge in the light of what God has bestowed from on high- it is they, they who are truly iniquitous!⁶⁷

Here the message of Jesus and the Torah are considered valid. They were the past messages of God. However, truthful as they were, they were then superseded by the legitimate message of Islam. Yet, there was still an amount of truth within God's past revelations to his previous prophets. As it is noted in surah *Yunus*:

And so, [O man] if thou art in doubt about [the truth of] what We have [now] bestowed upon thee from on high, ask those who read the divine write [revealed] before thy time [and though wilt find that,] surely, the truth has now come unto thee from thy Sustainer. Be not, then, among the doubters.⁶⁸

Surah *An-Nahl* further confirmed this settlement, along with surah *Al-'Ankabut*, there is a detailed description given on the specific treatment towards the people of previous divine

⁶⁷ *Qur'an* 5: 46-47

⁶⁸ *Qur'an* 10: 94

revelations- something that is unique because there is no equivalent within the other monotheistic faiths in terms of religious coexistence with people of other faiths.

And do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner- unless it be such of them as are bent on evildoing- and say: 'We believe in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, as well as that which has been bestowed upon you: for our God and your God is one, and the same, and it is unto Him that we [all] surrender ourselves.'

This direct statement clearly dictates that dealing with a believer of a prophetic tradition, must be done with respect and kindness, as they worship the same God and all judgments are done through Him alone. The *Qur'an*, provided, a plethora of information about how Muslims should treat the religious other, directly and indirectly; there was little room for doubt about the place of the followers of past revelations.

The fact that Christianity was a *dhimmi*, did not mean that the *Qur'an*, as well as the *Hadith*, lacked any polemical language against faiths, or saw the religious other as anything but misguided. For example, in the surah *Al-Imran*, it states:

Now if the followers of earlier revelation had attained to[this kind of] faith it would have been for their own good: [but only few] among them are believers, while most of them are iniquitous...Overshadowed by ignominy are they wherever they may be, save [when they bind themselves again] in a bond with God and a bond with men, for they have earned the burden of God's condemnation, and are overshadowed by humiliation: all this [has befallen them] because they persisted in denying the truth of God's messages...⁶⁹

In denying the truth that is being presented to them by the *Qur'an* they broke their bond with God, and are doomed to suffer the fires of hell. Since the *Qur'an* also had given this perspective of the religious other, it is no wonder as to why there also existed stories of outright persecution under Islamic rule. However, many of the aforementioned scholars believe this to be either isolated instances, or exceptional cases.

⁶⁹*Qur'an* 3:111-112

As a general rule, Muslims treated those of different faiths better than their Christian counterparts. The *dhimmi* were permitted freedom of religious practice, granted property rights and even held positions of high rank at court.⁷⁰ Noel Malcome explained that the *dhimmi* were given the rights and freedoms to practice their faith, and were merely taxed for doing so.⁷¹ This is where arguments of mass conversion seem to fall short, as most historians agree that the accommodating practices of the religious other were also highly profitable to the expanding Muslim empires; Malcome and Alpera certainly agree that mass conversions were not the case within the Ottoman empire (at least in its earlier stages prior to the eighteenth century), and that economics may be a good reason as to why.

Historians in the past had claimed that the Ottoman Empire had a policy of forcing conversions on individuals as a way of maintaining power and control within a region. However, some continue to argue to the contrary; like Francine Friedman. In *The Bosnian Muslims*, she argued against the concept of forced conversions and reiterates the theories of many historians, who viewed the lack of forced conversions as a financial benefit for the Ottoman Empire.⁷² With an overwhelming *dhimmi* population in the Balkans, there came a large amount of money to the government due to the *dhimmi* tax. Since the Ottoman Empire was still attempting to control the region, forced conversions would be counter-productive in terms of control and, more importantly, in terms of revenue. Thus, forced conversions were not something that was undertaken unless it was

⁷⁰Jo Ann H. Moran Cruz and Richard Gerberding, *Medieval Worlds: An Introduction to European History 300-1492* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 114.

⁷¹ See *Bosnia: A Short History*, and *Kosovo: A Short History*

⁷² Friedman, *Bosnian Muslims*, 17-19.

necessary, as in the case of Albania in the seventeenth century, in order to curb the constant revolts within the region(though it did not help much).

David Nicole's monograph *Cross and Crescent in the Balkans: Ottoman Conquest of Southeastern Europe*, further attested to the accommodating treatment of the non-Muslim populations along with the argument that forced conversions would hurt the empire financially.⁷³ Bruce Masters's work *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism*, strongly agrees about the financial benefits of the accommodation policies of the Ottoman Empire towards its *dhimmi* population.⁷⁴ While religions accommodation was something that had a base within religious doctrine, it also seemingly had a financial benefit which funded the growing Empire, at least to c. 1570.

This is, then, where accommodation differs from tolerance: tolerance was, for the most part, pragmatic, and hints at an evil nature of the religious other, whereas accommodation has, in this instance, a basis within religious doctrine. As Halperin noted, "According to Islamic law, the Christians, like the Jews, qualified as People of the Book. They could practice their religion as long as they recognized Muslim authority, paid the poll tax, did not insult Islam and did not interfere with the conversion of Islam."⁷⁵ If they respected their rulers and obeyed the laws, they were permitted their religious practice. Albera did state that the status of the *dhimmi* was not something one envied; however, as previously discussed, basic religious freedoms were guaranteed

⁷³David Nicole, *Cross and Crescent in the Balkans: The Ottoman Conquest of Southeastern Europe*, (Barnsley South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Military, 2010), 36-37.

⁷⁴Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 16-40.

⁷⁵ Halperin, "The Ideology of Silence," 454.

which was considered to be a far more open attitude towards the religious other than outright physical exile and elimination that was seen to come from the Christian West.⁷⁶

A final note should be given in order to understand the mixed religious households and amicable religious coexistence that will be discussed in the following chapters, on the subject of crypto-faith. While the Ottomans were reluctant to force conversions of their newly conquered Christian subjects, financial and social benefits were a motivation for the practice of crypto Christianity, which led to the appearance of multi-religious households. Crypto faith is someone having the appearance of conversion while still maintaining their old faith in private sectors of their lives. Often it was the men who converted as the social and financial benefits primarily affected the males within a household. Women often retained their Christian faith, which was the perfect excuse for a priest to come into a home without bringing suspicion on the male relatives.⁷⁷

More often than not, crypto Christianity occurred as a practice among merchants in search of opportunity; they desired the lower taxes, greater privileges and social benefits their conversion to Islam would provide them with.⁷⁸ The *dhimmi* tax was paid by the religion of the male within the family or at least that is the appearance of the case, because the female members of the family could remain Christian without having to pay the tax. As previously noted Malcome's *Kosovo: A History*, presented a primary source explaining that it was not uncommon to find multiple faith households, and while the Franciscan states that this was not a good thing, it was seemingly a chance for

⁷⁶ Albera, "Why Are You Mixing What Cannot be Mixed?," 43.

⁷⁷ Malcom, *Kosovo: A Short History*, 133.

⁷⁸ Friedman, *Bosnian Muslims*, 18-19 and Andrew Rossos, *Macedonia and the Macedonians*, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2008), 40-50.

opportunity and economic prosperity. Stravo Skendi, in “Crypto Christianity in the Balkan Area Under the Ottoman Empire,” also explained the value of conversion monetarily, for individuals in the Balkans.⁷⁹ Thus any conversions that did occur, especially in multi-faith households would have quite probably been done for the purpose of worldly advantage; and who knows for certain the truth faith that they held within their hearts.

Religious doctrine had a large influence on the content of laws, that dictated how to deal with the religious other. Coexistence was determined by doctrine which made interaction with the religious other. The religious other in Christian occupied territories, then, was tolerated, due to pragmatism and views of heresy. But, under the rule of Islam, religious others were accommodated, due to their *dhimmi* status and the laws that dictated their treatment within the *Qur'an*, as well as historical documents, like the “Charter of Medina,” and “The Pact of Umar.” It will be in areas where political rule and doctrine were not fixed structures that religious coexistence can further be defined as something beyond mere tolerance and accommodation. These areas were consistent frontier regions with an ever increasing diverse population, allowing for a continuity of practicality of life and amicability to exist with a superseded notion of culture and peoples existing before faith. This area is the Balkans.

Frontiers and the Balkans

What distinguished the types of religious coexistence that occurred in stabilized areas, such as Western Europe and the Ottoman Empire was a form that had very fixed social constructs, which were dictated and enforced by these religious and political

⁷⁹ Crypto-Christianity in the Balkan Area under the Ottomans

centers. These constructs and classifications stemmed from doctrine and became integral parts of the society through political enforcement. A significant factor in the occurrence of amicable coexistence in the Medieval Balkans was the fact that the Balkans were, persistently, a frontier region. Thus the fluidity and flexibility that were indicative of frontiers became the static social construct and self imposed hierarchies when dealing with the religious other. Without distinct political and religious centers with an ability to establish, enforce, and maintain social order, the Balkans were left to develop a more fluid society which held to the ethos indicative of frontiers.

Western Europe and the Ottoman Empire had gone through a stabilizing process while the regions were developing, at the metropolitan and religious centers, which led to the reconstruction of social norms and hierarchies that were conducive with the beliefs of the metropolis. They were then enforced at the solidified peripheries. The reason why these kingdoms did not maintain the ethos of the frontier was that the fluidity, flexibility, and the pragmatism that were integral parts of the frontier existed only until the relations, centers, and peripheries were established. After that point the social hierarchies that were characteristic of doctrine and policy were reinstated by the now stabilized centers. One of the best-known examples of the emblematic process of a frontier region's movement from fluid to static was the Americas in the development of the Atlantic World. What distinguishes the Balkans from all of these, however, was that there was no real stabilization of the political centers, nor was there a clearly identifiable single, unifying religious, or political center. As a result, the Balkans had a socio-religious culture that continued to exist as it had done at the early stages of frontier-ism ; those constructs became the rule owing to their millennia of frontier existence.

The region was the geographical throughway between various parts of the world to Europe; Goths and Slavs, invaded Western Europe through this route, Crusaders went through this area to get to the Holy Land, and Ottoman conquerors attempted to use this region as a bridge to Christendom, to provide a few examples. This movement of armies, nations, empires, and conquerors upset the populace and caused a displacement or movement of peoples. Internal strife aided this as well, for internally, the Balkans were in a constant state of warfare. This led to the movement of peoples of an already similar culture to another region, or to become part of another kingdom. Kingdoms like Albania were mixed religiously as half was Catholic and the other Orthodox by the mid twelfth century, and Croatia and Bosnia had a similar experience throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Thus, any political changes internally led to a shift of population being part of one or another region, while still having a religious diversity that was already established before the replacement of political control. This smorgasbord of diversity, culturally and religiously in the region, called for some sort of pragmatism and practicality owing to the direness of the situation. The people had few options available to them except to accept these diverse people and create a world in which diversity, as a normal construct, was permissible; something, all people within a frontier have to do at one point or another.

The focus of this chapter will first be the common life-cycle of the frontier region. We will move onto the development of socio-political religious constructs, and the rich networks of cross culture, multi-confessional communication, along with an understanding of when a frontier begins, and identifying when it ends. This is important in understanding how the frontier ethos establishes itself and how it remained an integral,

persistent social aspect in the Balkans. Similar examples, such as the Atlantic world, will be juxtaposed so as to be able to clearly distinguish the differences of typical frontiers and the Balkans. The region itself will then be analyzed, to identify the movements that had made the region a frontier, and what these movements of peoples and these constant fluctuations created in the most remote areas of the peripheries. There must be a clear understanding of what resulted in terms of policies within the peripheries, outside of socio-religious control. These remote areas are important, as it was in these places that “superstitious,” folk practices were capable of thriving and where the few authorities that did exist seldom dared to venture. When the Balkans were separated from the rest of Europe due to Central Asian and Slavic invasions, people survived by withdrawing into the interior where Christianity was still practiced, but without any central authority to determine if it was the correct form. This also created the freedom for the various Slavic and other Balkan peoples to maintain any folk, pre-Christian ideologies that were left over from Roman times. When missionaries finally were able to enter the region in the eighth and ninth centuries, Islam had already found a home within the Balkans. The religious dynamic at this point, within the Balkans, was thriving.

As the Western portion of Europe stabilized, heretical religious groups were persecuted, so they migrated to regions in which they could settle. Many found a place within the Balkans, spreading and settling within the region. They were left to their own devices; national churches and religious institutions did not solidify until the later half of the Medieval period. Even then, religious diversity had become such a cultural norm that persecution progressed slowly, and, perhaps, with little enthusiasm. Even if there was a determination to persecute these individuals and groups, the geographical landscape was,

to some extent, a saving grace. It allowed targets of persecution to disappear into villages within the interior and continue unchecked by the centers even when they did possess some sort of control. As a result, these diverse peoples came and existed within this region for centuries and had assimilated, at least in part, with the local culture, while exchanging parts of their own. The resulting multi-faceted, multi-confessional population was a prismatic populace, unparalleled by any existing in Europe during this period. The product was that the fluidity of the frontier region existed the cultural norm within the Balkans, well after the Ottoman Empire managed control within the region.

The Lifecycle of the Frontier

A frontier is, as noted in the introduction, a space, an area, or region that existed on the peripheries of some organized society. It is unstable, often being largely defined by conflict or war. Geographical barriers and places, too, define them, as Monica Spiridon noted, functioning as distinguishing geopolitical discontinuities; i.e. different nations or kingdoms with different rulers or centers of control.⁸⁰ While this created a “strenuous” life, it also had created the opportunity for unique interactions to occur between completely different populations. Dan Jones, in "The Significance of the Frontier in World History," provided some facts that helped to define frontiers and their importance in the histories of development of peoples within the world.⁸¹ Frontiers provided the opportunity for interaction between different types of peoples. This also provided these individuals with the ability to remodel aspects of their own culture, to take from the others aspects that they found suitable for their own way of life. David

⁸⁰Monica Spiridon, “Identity Discourses on Borders in Eastern Europe.” *Comparative Literature* 58 no. 4 (Fall 2006): 376-386.

⁸¹ Dan Jones, “The Significance of the Frontier in World History.” *History Compass* 1 (2003): 1-3.

Chappell, in his article "Ethnogenesis and Frontiers" goes further to describe frontiers as places for "transformative interaction" in which populations then have a cultural redefinition of themselves.⁸² These redefinitions are done within ways that, obviously, made their own cultures and societies seemingly better.

As a result of these conflicts, these borders of frontiers were liminal spaces, which were malleable with their daily interactions and concepts of the other. Static social classifications were not yet enforced within the region of conflict. Jones went further to define the fluidity and flexibility that came with the periods of conflict, conquest, and settlement of peoples. "While conquest is often the dominant theme of frontier areas, there are often long periods of balance and cultural accommodation. Sometimes these periods generate unique and long lasting cultural groups of their own."⁸³ Moreover,

Such peripheral societies thus become distinctive from their parent metro-poles because of their partial, processional nature. Even the power of asymmetry of colonialism leaves room for a double dialectic to operate, whereby indigenous actors adjust their cultural order to a reality that is structured by the 'articulation of systems dominant and subordinate.'⁸⁴

This holds true in the case of the Balkans. As a region within the world, they were always on the peripheries of empires, thus a frontier in their own right. The societies they created were distinctly different from the parent empires around them; the cultures and, more importantly, religions, adjusted themselves as a result. While they began with a tumultuous period of conflict and strife, which led to hostility and chaos, there was also the construction of frontier societies that were a dissent from the social norms of the

⁸² Chappell, David A Chappell, "Ethno genesis and Frontiers." *Journal of World History* vol 4 no. 2 (Fall, 1993): 267.

⁸³ Jones, "The Significance of the Frontier in World History," 2.

⁸⁴ Jones, "The Significance of the Frontier in World History," 2.

metropolitan, and religious centers. Pragmatism took precedence in the creation of a society that would be able to maintain itself in a tumultuous world.

The frontiers of the Atlantic World and the establishment of social norms within the settlements help to illustrate this osmosis indicative of frontiers. The English colonies with their adjustments to pastoral and agricultural practices provide an excellent example. Virginia Andersons' *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* showed how something as seemingly insignificant as animal domestication, had to go through exceptional changes in the New World. The English method of herding and raising cattle had to be adjusted to serve this new and harsh environment of North America. While it was a slow process, the result was the ability to maintain some domesticated animals within this foreign terrain. However, the entire process had to be changed to such a degree that it seemed completely backwards to "true" Englishmen and despite how practical it was because it was conducive to this new and foreign environment it was seen as an uncivilized way, and the colonists were viewed as if they were "going native." Also consider such regions as the New Spain, where the lack of women in the colony led to intermixed families with offspring from Europeans and natives, couples, Europeans and Africans, and natives and Africans. The result was an entire new race of people, with an intermixed heritage that lacked any place within the social categories of the old world. This allowed, at least until some social hierarchy was established, for a flexibility of these mixed, mulatto women.

After some time, stabilized frontiers, like those within the Americas, would have to reconstruct the social classifications and categories in order to create a society that matched the center. Yvonne Fabella, in her article, "An Empire Founded on Libertinage: The Mulatresse and Colonial Society in Saint Domingue" studied the liminal place within

society that the mulatresse (mixed) women had in the community of Saint Domingo.⁸⁵ She pointed out that these women were feared because of their unstable place within society. They were not simply women, and thus were not to be treated in the same manner as the white women, yet they could not be classified as African either. This lack of definition did not go unnoticed, and was feared, as their liminality became more prominent. There was, noticeably, a “confusion of rank, [a] rank based on colour gender and class.”⁸⁶ Society, particularly upper class white women, were afraid that this dangerously fluid category would result in an ambiguous social hierarchy in which color did not correspond with economic status. After all, free descendants of slaves were socially mobile and they were said to flaunt their wealth before whites in the colony’s towns. This would not be allowed to occur within non-frontier societies, as it went against every aspect of the social norm. Frontiers and their liminality created the possibility for society to, in a way, transcend the social hierarchies that have already been established. However, once the community had stabilized, within St. Domingue and was no longer a frontier, there then was a reconstruction of society that would much more closely resemble those of the mother country. It is at this point that a frontier ceases to exist and the fluidity crumbles with the stabilization of the empire.

The point at which a place ceases to be a frontier is difficult to discern. The reason for this is that a frontier ceases to exist after the political center is stabilized, and this dependent upon various sets of circumstances. Once the center is stabilized there can

⁸⁵Yvonne Fabella, “‘An Empire Founded on Libertinage’: the *Mulatresse* and Colonial Anxiety in Saint Domingue,” In *Gender, Race and Religion in the Colonization of the Americas*, Ed. by Nora E. Jaffary, 109-123. Hampshire, England & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007.

⁸⁶ Fabella, “‘An Empire Founded on Libertinage’: the *Mulatresse* and Colonial Anxiety in Saint Domingue,”122.

be the creation of policies and laws, and desired social constructs for the entire empire. The stabilized center then has the ability, military power, and the focus to implement, enforce, and maintain these constructs on the peripheries, which are no longer fluid and moving, but have become clearly defined to both the people at the peripheries and those within the metropolitan center. It is at this point, where focus and ability to create and maintain new social constructs, that a frontier ceases to be a frontier and becomes part of the stabilized metropolitan system.

Thus frontiers were areas that were a result of instability and conflict during a nation's desire to expand their empire, which resulted in the displacement and settlement of peoples. While having to deal with war, at least at the outset of a frontier, people grow to develop an excellent ability to accommodate, adapt and exist with a realistic sense of pragmatism and practicality. The interactions on the frontier often led to a reconstruction of social hierarchies and culture suitable for the frontier society. Once the political center formed some sense of stability, then, there was the creation of the social constructs and hierarchies that were implemented, enforced, and maintained within the peripheries of the empire. These peripheries then reconstructed the center's social norms in order to make others that were the products of the frontier, to fit within the greater social hierarchy of the motherland. Once these reconstructed social norms were maintained, then the frontier region dissolved and became the stable borders of the empire. In the case of the Balkans though there was no real stabilization of metropolitan center which led to a reconstruction of social hierarchies, as was seen in the previous discussion. Rather, the Balkans were a frontier region for such an extended period of

time that they, instead, maintained the frontier ethos as what would have been a reconstructed social norm.

The Balkans and the Frontier Ethos

There are two key factors within this region that created such a unique socio-cultural landscape with a lasting frontier ethos, which, ultimately allowed for amicable religious coexistence: the fact that it was a frontier internally and externally, and that it had a plethora of diverse spiritual traditions. The receptive, incorporative, and flexible nature of the Balkans showed an ability to adapt within this ever-changing world. “The outcome [of these population movements] was an ethnic diversity without analogies in Europe. There is no zone with true autochthonous population...A specific Balkan feature is the perseveration of the ethnic identity...although some parts of them were absorbed by others.”⁸⁷ Thus it was part of the intrinsic nature of the Balkans to be flexible with others entering their region.

One difficulty in understanding this region is the lack of accuracy from ancient historical sources. The ancient history of the region, lumped together under the name of Dacia, or the Dacian Empire, or Illyricum, presents a guessing game for modern scholars. As Ion Grumeza explains in his text *Dacia: Land of Transylvania, Cornerstone of Ancient Eastern Europe*, the greatest difficulty that present day historians have is trying to figure out what name ancient historians used to describe Dacia. For example, Herodotus and Thucydides confused Dacia with Thracia (Thrace), and thus Dacians were listed as, interchangeably, Thracians, Gepids, or Tartars, creating difficulties for historians in distinguishing among these groups. The information that comes from such

⁸⁷Alexandru Madegearu, *The Wars of the Balkan Peninsula: Their Medieval Origins* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2008), 7.

texts, undoubtedly, aids in understanding the significance of the Balkan area from the beginning, shedding light as to why it was the frontier region that it was.⁸⁸ It also proves useful later on, as when historians quoting Early Medieval sources continue to use these rather ambiguous names. When H. T. Norris mentioned the actions of the Byzantine Emperor Basil I and explained how the undesirable peoples were all thrown into Thrace, there has to be a question as to where, exactly, Thrace was. “Thrace was a dumping ground for undesirables, a melting-pot wherein oriental peoples, some transferred there at a far earlier period, formed a significant part of the population, and they infiltrated into more Westernly regions.”⁸⁹ Thus ambiguity from the outset makes it trying to clearly identify the region and its historical narrative.

The Balkans significant location, by the Dardanelles and the mouth of the Danube River, which would then allow one to travel into Northern Europe, its close proximity to the steppes, and its vast natural resources made it a desirable location to possess. The Roman Emperor Trajan (r. 98-117 CE) desired control of this region, not only to expand Rome’s borders beyond Moesia, but to also have possession of the salt, gold and silver mines that were hidden in the Carpathian Mountains within the Transylvanian region. The Dacian Wars (101-102, 105-106 CE) opened the Balkans’ borders to the Western World. Even before then, St. Paul had introduced Christianity to Illyricum, on the other side of the Balkans. “From Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ, thus making it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ

⁸⁸ Grumeza, *Dacia*, 19-42.

⁸⁹ H. T. Norris, *Islam in the Balkans: Religion and Society Between Europe and the Arab World*, (Columbia: South Carolina Press, 1993), 18.

has already been named.”⁹⁰ A significant point to note as missionaries who came in around the eighth and ninth centuries were not the first people to bring the Word to the area.

After Rome fell there came, as one scholar put it, a “millennium of invasions.”⁹¹ The first were the Slavic and Bulgar invasions (c. fifth to eighth centuries), which severed any ties that there were between the Balkans and the Empires of Rome and Byzantium. Their routes were cut between these powers and they each were preoccupied with recovering from the fall of Rome that they did not have the means to extend and reach out to their neighbors. Due to all of this, the Christianity of the Balkans was far from identical to that in Rome or Byzantium. Illyricum’s Christianity was destroyed by these invasions, around the fifth and sixth century, as well as many of the remnants of Christianity across the region.⁹² This rupture allowed for a distinct form of Christianity to evolve, one that was a product of these interactions which led to an introduction of the pagan religions of the incoming invaders, as well as a revival of previous folk culture and pre-Christian ideologies that were prominent within the region. Communication was cut off, and insecurity within the region led to urban decline. There was little external trade, and invasion caused people to flee from the urban centers to the safety of the mountainous territory. Thus they disappeared to the interior, and remained there, left to their own

⁹⁰ *Romans* 15:19-20

⁹¹ Alexandru Madgearu, *The Wars of the Balkan Peninsula: Their Medieval Origins* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 7.

⁹² Norris, *Islam in the Balkans*, 11.

devices, socially, politically and, most importantly, religiously.⁹³ The intermixed hybrids of peoples that resulted would be one of the few common factors within the region.

It is common knowledge that the further separated the churches of Byzantium and Rome got, the more they disliked each other, on a number of levels, as each claimed to hold the true salvific, doctrines dictated by faith. This aggressive religious rightness became apparent between the missionary movements entering the Balkan region, around the eighth and ninth centuries. While these movements were slow going, and had a difficult time keeping in touch with their religious centers, their goal was clear; to gain religious converts, more, perhaps for strategic alliances than for the salvation of souls. The reasons why were obvious; the further these ‘empires’ could shift their borders, the more safe their centers were. An allegiance that was gained through faith aided the safety of the empire and the true faith. Rome, for example, not only sent missionaries, but also had other allies watching countries within this strategic location in order to gain some alliance or advantage over Byzantium, especially in the case of Albania during the twelfth century. For example, Bosnia was under the constant watchful eye of Hungary, who wished to gain control of the region, which the Church fully supported as it would be under the control of Rome. Hungary and Rome’s desire to have control of the region, religiously, led to accusations of heresy, claiming that bogomilism, which was already rampant in the Bulgarian region was prominent within Bosnia. Such claims would give Hungary the right to invade and take over the region, with full Church support. However,

⁹³ Francine Friedman, *The Bosnian Muslims: Denial of a Nation*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 9, 36.

Hungary had to be careful, because any war would have a cataclysmic effect on the entire region.⁹⁴

The same thing happened within Macedonia and Albania, direct routes to Byzantium, which was seeking to gain religious converts and alliance in order to protect its borders from Western Europe and papal authority. Albania's coastal borders were under constant assault by Venice, and from the twelfth century, their nation was split religiously and politically. The north, as noted in *Albania: A Country Study*, was under the control of Rome, while the South was under Byzantium, thus the people were members of each faith.⁹⁵ Kingdoms in the region, of course, were not about to idly sit by as these foreign powers attempted to take control of their land. They hired Islamic mercenaries, from the thirteenth century, and brought them into the region to fight against the invaders; Bulgaria brought in such mercenaries, and then allowed them to settle within the region, even, in the ninth and tenth centuries.⁹⁶ Thus, as the region's politics were becoming more complicated, they allowed for the entrance of others, including Muslims, in order to help protect their kingdoms and maintain autonomy.

These attempts to gain allies caused further internal strife within the region. Each region was already attempting to define its kingdoms and borders. Bulgaria, in the ninth century, attempted to gain control within the region and create a Bulgarian Empire, so as to be a force against Byzantium. Thus Islamic mercenaries were brought into the region, which were noted by H. T. Norris for causing problems within the region. "That

⁹⁴ For more on this see Malcome, *Bosnia: A Short History* and Fine Jr, *The Early Medieval Balkans*

⁹⁵ Raymond Zickel and Walter R. Iwaskiw, *Albania: A Country Study*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1994)

⁹⁶ Norris, *Islam in the Balkans*, 26-27.

Muslims in Bulgaria presented problems for the Danube region is confirmed by a letter of Pope Nicholas dated 866, which ordered the ‘expiriation of the Saracens’ from the region.”⁹⁷ These Muslim populations migrated across the region, from Bulgaria to Hungary, where they were permitted to live in liberty and even served in the military.⁹⁸ There was also an attempt by Croatia and Bosnia to maintain their independence from Hungary, which led to the short-lived empire of Croatia and Hungary which ended in the early twelfth century. Macedonia attempted to maintain some autonomy by staying at constant war with invading Bulgaria. There was the slow rise and build up of the Serbian Empire, which became a force to be reckoned with in the Balkans in the early fourteenth century.

Thus the religious make up of the region was already diverse, as parts of nations, or individuals within nations were exposed to several forms of mainstream and heterodox Christianity and Islam as well. While missionaries came to the cities or the centers of these regions, they rarely ventured to remote areas where syncretic practices, exchanges, different forms of Christianity, Paganism and Islam flourished. There was also a lack of religious centers within the region; there was a shortage of priests and monks, so there was no one to turn to for religious guidance. Bosnia, as both Malcome and Friedman mention, had very few monasteries, a whopping four in the mid thirteenth century.⁹⁹ So even if there was a desire for religious guidance and there was some sort of religious stability in the region, where could the people turn to for any help or education in their faith? Bulgaria also suffered from a similar shortage. There was a lack of religious

⁹⁷ Norris, *Islam in the Balkans*, 27.

⁹⁸ Norris, *Islam in the Balkans*, 27.

⁹⁹ *Bosnia: A Short History*, *Kosovo: A Short History* and *Bosnian Muslims*

authority, and as a result, the development of religious ideologies and what was and was not heretical was not defined and allowed to continue for centuries, becoming part of the local religion, culture and doctrine in the region and belief system. This ultimately would become a part of the reason why amicable religious coexistence occurred in the Balkans.

Groups like Bogomils, Poturs, Manichean and non-Manichaeian dualists, etc. existed in this region along with dervish Islamic orders, like the Alevis and Bektashis; there was no stable authority concerned with getting rid of them.¹⁰⁰ In Western Europe, such as in France, or Spain, heresy was sought out and persecuted, owing to their ability as stable nations to persecute with the aid of established inquisitorial courts. However, the political centers of the Balkans, and kingdoms themselves, were not stable enough to enforce deep-rooted religious doctrine; defense of the borders took precedence. As a result these groups were allowed to exist, despite accusations and threats of excommunication that came from Rome and other religious centers. Instead, “a number of cosmopolitan urban islands formed, in which adherents of different faiths and carriers of various cultures lived side by side and learned from each other.”¹⁰¹ As we see in the case of Hungary and Bosnia, the Bosnian king was not troubled by heresy, and was hesitant to get any sort of outside help from the religious center. Rather, the stable external country, Hungary, called on Rome, and accused the nation of heresy, more for their own gain and because they had the stability to recognize that this undesirable practice was occurring and had the ability to take action to curb the practice.

¹⁰⁰ There is a great deal of controversy as to when Sufis entered the Balkans. While there are claims, especially by Ibn Battuta, that dervish followers of Sari Saltik were in Babadag Romania around the twelfth century, there was not a substantial dervish presence until around the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. For more information see J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

¹⁰¹ Wachtel, *The Balkans in World History*, 53.

With each conquest the religious demography of the area changed; the population became more diverse as members of different faiths settled in the area and stayed there after their particular ruler had lost control. As the religious landscape changed, the local population was exposed, and in some cases was receptive, to the new faiths; they assimilated and transferred ideologies with the folk religions of the area; yet they maintained their distinct religious identities as well. Each invading army and population brought with them their own ideology to throw into the melting pot that was already brewing in the region creating a cultural and religious kaleidoscope. The Balkans became a land of many faiths.

Thus the Balkan region was a frontier region with distinct kingdoms of their own right but, collectively, a periphery. Internally and externally they existed on peripheries of other nations around the region, and were internally in a tumultuous state of instability. It was not for one or two centuries, as is seen with the Atlantic World, another famous frontier region in the world's historical narrative. Rather it was under this frontier existence for nearly a millennium arguably, to this very day, even longer. As a result the instability internally and externally created a cultural social construct and norm that was indicative to the frontier region and even after stabilization was not reconstructed but continued throughout the history of the region. Until the Ottomans came there was no peace in the Balkans; they were in a constant state of local warfare as well as victims to invaders. Many disputes were settled with the invasion and conquest of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *The Balkans in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 30-50.

The Frontier Social Construct

Frontiers lead to makeshift social constructions in which society has some semblance of normalcy during a time of internal, and or, external strife. This is the case with all frontiers, but at some point the frontiers become stable borders of some greater power. This then, leads to the reconstruction of social norms, and the destruction of the makeshift ones, in order to create some sort of hybrid that pertains more to the already existing social hierarchy of the center. The center, the orthodoxy that is maintained, and the social mechanisms that are used to prevent a society from falling into downright chaos, is best suited when partnered with faith to implement these classifications. Religious doctrine upholds them, and military might, which is now free from warfare to be utilized in such a manner, maintains them.

What then prevented the Balkans from falling into downright chaos? There was no shortage of reasons to be sure; the multi-confession, multi-personality peoples, at least from the start, led to an utter confusion of social norms and constructs. Ruling elites changing so rapidly left a weak upper class, and if that upper class was ethnic specific, it also led to a lack of clarity of which ethnicity had the upper hand within society given at any given point in time. There was probably no group of 'elders' or individuals that dictated that the frontier society ethos must be the maintained social classification system. Rather, it was something done out of the human necessity of survival. It is difficult to know how individuals felt of these intrusions, religiously, culturally or otherwise. However, there must not have been too much of a disagreement against these shared sacra and societies because the sharing of the continued, well into the Early

Modern period, even after Ottoman rule had solidified, at least in part, within the Balkans.

Amicable religious coexistence then, was a product that could not exist without the flexibility of a frontier society. The fluidity that was indicative of frontiers, the practicality, the pragmatism, and the necessity of survival, superseded any doctrinal prejudice. Without a single stable doctrine, there was a fractured, multi-confessional existence, which was normal within the region and allowed for a shared culture to develop despite the distinct religious identities that they possessed.

Amicable Religious Coexistence: The Sharing of the Sacred

Amicable religious coexistence within the Balkans can be divided into three parts. The first is the effects of frontier-ism, which include the mixtures that occurred with folk superstition including the common sharing of practices such as baptisms and prayers. The second aspect is the transition and merging of saintly or holy persons that were not found within scripture; within the Balkans there is the mixture of the persons of Sari Saltik, the famous Bektashi saint, with Saint Nicholas, and the mixture of the mysterious Al-Khidr, an ambiguous figure within the *Qur'an*, and St. George. Finally amicable religious coexistence comes within the realm of mysticism, with the examination of the heterodox Sufi order Bektashi, and their influence within the region. This unique combination of the three forms of syncretism, which was particular to the Balkans as a frontier region, provided a very clear picture as to how amicable religious coexistence existed in comparison with their more established counterparts within the preindustrial world.

The first thing to examine is what developed out of frontier-ism- that is the aspects that, over time, had generally become mixed parts of the everyday life and were practiced in this fractured, multi-confessional world. These practices were the sharing of sacred aspects interchangeably, without any intervention from religious authority. Disgust and disparagement against such practices from outsiders provide the greatest sources on this sacred osmosis. George Wheeler, in the early seventeenth century, commented that individuals within Bosnia were unaware of the tumultuous effects of these forms of heresy. As quoted by Noel Malcom in *Bosnia: A Short History*, he stated, “The Christians here, for want of good instruction, and able faithful Pastors to teach them, run daily into Apostasies, and renounce their religion for the Turkish Superstation upon every small calamity, and discontent that happens to them.”¹⁰³ The Christian populace, then, attended their services, as all good Christians must, but then turned to any superstitious, folk, or magical practice when it seemed that Christianity could not assist their “calamity” or problem. In truth, this is no extraordinary event, as within modern day there is the mentality of ‘if this doesn’t work, we’ll try that’ but this rather laid back attitude when it came to doctrine, and the risk of one’s immortal soul considering the late Medieval/ Early Ottoman world, was quite bizarre.

Folk religious practices have a history, of course, within Christianity and Islam, and were often taken from the pre-Christian traditions within the region. Belief in the protective powers of certain objects, or in the power of sacred water, herbs, writing or peoples, was not surprising. When a multi-confessional society possessed a shared cultural tradition of folk practices, however, is where you see this blurring over the lines

¹⁰³ Wheeler’s *Journey Into Greece*, 441 as cited within Malcom, *Bosnia: A Short History*, 58.

of faith. Thus, amulets made by ‘magical’ individuals, or individuals of sacred powers were not questioned when shared.¹⁰⁴

Sacredness superseded doctrinal limitation for many believers within the Balkan region which again, can be attributed to the effects of frontier-ism and shared culture. As was noted by Paul Rycault in 1668, the practices of special prayers for the dead, given by priests to deceased Muslims, recorded an aspect of this unique mix of Christianity and Islam.¹⁰⁵ Sufi dervishes also did something similar by reading the *Qur’an*, at the request of Christians suffering from serious illness, as an attempt to heal their afflictions: F. W. Hasluck quoted a Franciscan friar at the monastery of Olovo complaining about the practice.¹⁰⁶ Or, as the parish priest of Prizren, a city in Southern Kosovo, complained in 1651, individuals who were of his flock, when sick, would ask for assistance from both gypsy and Muslim women who would “breath into their mouths and on the places which hurt...while saying certain words brought up from the bottom of hell; and I have even found some Christian women who perform this practice.”¹⁰⁷ This also extended to sacred objects, as it was recorded that Muslims were kissing venerated Christian icons, or that Muslims attended churches for prayer and mass. Fra Cherubion reported during his visit to Kosovo that faithful Catholics had asked Muslims to act as godparents for their children, and Muslims used the holy chrism on their young in order to protect them from

¹⁰⁴ For more information, see Malcom’s *Bosnia: A Short History* and Albera’s *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean*.

¹⁰⁵ Paul Rycault, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire, Book 2*, 129-131. Quoted within Malcom, *Bosnia: A Short History*, 61-62.

¹⁰⁶ Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans*, 77.

¹⁰⁷ Cited in, Malcom, *Kosovo: A Short History*, 175.

disease.¹⁰⁸ Muslims also had their own children baptized, and thus had double religious affiliation. As the practice was continued, it seems that no steps were taken to stop it. It is difficult to tell whether the practice was considered an attempt to find affirmation in the truth of the Christian faith on behalf of the priests or not. Most likely, it was simply done as a measure of protection by the Muslim families and seen as a superstitious cure for the illnesses that were most commonly caused by the “evil eye.”

A final practice of amicable religious coexistence that stemmed from frontier-ism and common culture was the action of sharing of holy festivals. Presided over by priests, this two-day festival outside of Prizen, honored the assumption of the Virgin Mary, and was a holiday in which both Christians and Muslim faithful took part. Pjeter Bodgani’s recollection of the event in 1681 noted that the festival was a mixed affair, with dancing and singing, and a procession of Muslims and Christians, both Catholic and Orthodox, to the highest peak of the mountain in which the festive took place. Muslims would even lead the procession on horseback.¹⁰⁹ We have already mentioned that Mary was a transitional figure of monotheism, who had an important and revered place within both Christianity and Islam, but what is interesting to note is that a festival, not a pilgrimage site, was shared and Muslims were permitted to join by the priests that were presiding over the affair. Muslims leading the procession up the mountain is significant as they were permitted to do so, and there was seemingly no argument against it, despite their view of Mary. Mary was not the mother of God to the Islamic faithful, yet they were allowed such a seemingly high position in a festival in her honor. It is a curious action to

¹⁰⁸ Fermendzin Izprave, 175, Peiter Bogdani 1680, ASCPF SOCG 482 fol. 286, quoted in Malcom *Kosovo: A Short History*, 175.

¹⁰⁹ Fermendzin Izprave, 175, Peiter Bogdani 1680, ASCPF SOCG 482 fol. 286, quoted in Malcom *Kosovo: A Short History*, 176.

note, and question as to whether crypto faith had a hand in this or not, or if it was something else entirely.

Crypto- religion had, no doubt, affected such practices. Given the nature of crypto-Christianity, it would be difficult for an observer to discern the true religion of an individual. While historian Noel Malcome in both *Bosnia: A Short History*, and *Kosovo: A Short History* has stated that crypto-Christianity seemed to be an uncommon occurrence, it is nearly impossible to know, for certain, either way. Any Muslim asked to be a godfather to a Christian child might have been a crypto-Christian, of which his fellow Christian was fully aware, and thus agreed to do so because really he was doing as he truly believed. The same could be said for the use of holy chrism on a child, or the baptism of Muslim children. Perhaps the parents were crypto-Christians and they wanted to baptize their children to protect their souls. To the observer, how would they realize the difference? Some conversions were done out of economic advantage and perhaps not done out of the belief of the salvific nature of the new faith they had accepted, so could these actions be true acts of amicable religious coexistence or just proof of crypto faith practices? It is a conundrum, but not outside the realm of possibility. Another explanation could be that children were baptized because the mother was still a practicing Christian and if the child was a girl, it was perfectly acceptable. In truth, there is no way to truly know. The people who did such practices left nothing written, and outsiders are the only sources of information. It is also important to consider that they actions of true believers of the faith they appear to be part of. Or, perhaps they are crypto actions but a syncretism occurred between the practitioner who may have taken aspects of the faith that they supposedly converted to and incorporated them within their old tradition. All

things considered, there is no real way to distinguish between crypto practices and syncretic ones. Crypto practices in their very nature are syncretic, even if it is halfheartedly done. In the end, the distinction is blurry at best.

Saints and Holy Figures: Identity Crisis?

The first aspect of amicable religious coexistence was parts of everyday existence -- the birth of children, the necessity to heal the sick and the sharing of festivities that were significant to the community. Another aspect that showed amicable religious coexistence was the sharing and transfer of holy figures that were not part of doctrine or easily discernable within scripture: saints. In *Arab Folklore: A Handbook*, the author noted that holy persons and saints were venerated for their piety and miracles added to the legends and embellished the spiritual power of these individuals.¹¹⁰ There were two pairs of individuals who were seemingly merged within the Balkans and were shared by faithful Christians and Muslims, whether under a different name or names, which led to the intermixing of legends and shared reverence and or festivals. The first pair is Saint Nicholas (Sveti Nicolae) and Sari Saltik. Their stories are quite different, to be sure. Saint Nicholas, known very commonly for his work as a bringer of gifts, was also the protector of the afflicted, a miracle worker and even supposedly resurrector of innocent children.¹¹¹ He was revered in both Catholic and Orthodox circles across the Balkans and was seen as a protector of the innocent and faithful; emblematic of Catholic piety and fierce belief in the true faith. Sari Saltik was quite similar in his religious zeal, though he was more known for his brilliance in all religious knowledge, both Christian and Islamic,

¹¹⁰ Dwight Fletcher Reynolds, *Arab Folklore: A Handbook* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), 194.

¹¹¹ See Joe Wheeler, *Saint Nicholas*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010.)

and for his strength in protecting the innocent and converting thousands of infidels to Islam. Haji Bektash, his mentor and founder of Bektashism, seemed like a better comparison to Saint Nicholas, as he had also cured and aided the innocent, as well as providing food for the hungry, as Saint Nicholas was said to have done with the miracle of the multiplication of wheat. Yet the transfer of Saint Nicholas and Sari Saltik was what occurred.

Celebi Evliya's work concerning his travel within the Balkans, discussed the conquest and travels of Sari Saltik, and affirmed the transference and merging of Sari Saltik and Saint Nicholas. "At Danzig he [Saltik] conversed with Sv Ty Nicola the patriarch, whose name is the same as Sari Saltik, whom he killed, adopted his habit, and by this means converted many thousands to Islam."¹¹² While Celebi did not take into account that Sari Saltik lived 1000 years after Saint Nicholas, and that Saint Nicholas died before the creation of Islam (at least, traditionally), this illustrates at least a negative conflation of the two figures. As Evliya further noted, "In Christian countries he [Saltik] is generally called St. Nicholas, [and] is much revered and the Christian monks ask alms under his auspices."¹¹³ Here, Celebi was not merely equating St. Nicholas with Sari Saltik, but had also stated that Christian monks offered alms to him. Now, whether or not they addressed the individual as Sari Saltik or St. Nicholas is unclear, but what is clear is that this ambivalent figure allowed for the sharing of prayers and alms with a figure that had two completely different hagiographies. Was this transference done, as argued by F. W. Hasluck, as a way to claim dominance over the newly conquered

¹¹² Celebi Evliya, *Narratives of Travels in Europe Asia and Africa, in the Seventeenth Century*, (2 vols) (Memphis: General Books, 2010) 58.

¹¹³ Evliya, *Narratives of Traves in Europe Asia and Africa*, 60.

faithful? If so, why would monks willingly pray to this person? Was it done as a way of uniting the multi-faith populace under the guise of the mystical ideology of the Bektashi dervishes, who, as will be discussed, were prominent within the region? There is no real way of knowing. The truth remains elusive and is difficult to discern. Regardless, the practice occurred and it was between sacred people of both faiths, and they were still worshipped regardless of the transference.

Another pair of figures, who were seen as transitional, is nothing short of a conundrum, and appears to be a hodge-podge conglomerate of individuals that had absolutely nothing to do with each other, except for, perhaps, their apparent importance in culture. This topic is discussed in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean*, as well as other works, concerning figures of transference within the Balkans.¹¹⁴ The festivals of Jurjevo, Ilinden, Alidjun¹¹⁵ and Gjurgjovde depicted this transfer of the individuals Al-Khidr, Saint Elias, and Saint. George. These were festivals of Saint George, but were, and still are, associated with his Muslim counterpart, Al-Khidr (and sometimes, Saint Elias). Khidr is an anomaly as a religious figure, though in the *Qur'an* he is presented as a significant prophet. Khidr's task, or mission, was to teach thoughtful insight and patience to the Prophet Moses. When Moses saw Khidr, described as "the sage" within the *Qur'an*, and asked to accompany him, he replied, "Behold, thou wilt never be able to have patience with me- for how couldst though be patient about

¹¹⁴ Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli, eds. *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012.

¹¹⁵ This name was mostly used by Muslims within the region. See Malcom, *Bosnia: A Short History*, 58.

something that thou canst not comprehend within the compass of [thy] experience?"¹¹⁶

Moses was allowed to accompany Khidr, so long as he promised not to speak against any action that was done by the sage. Moses' patience was tested to the limit as Khidr put a hole in the boat they were riding, killed a child, and fixed the house of a man who refused them shelter. Each action caused Moses to speak, and when he spoke out for the third time, the sage told him that he must depart, but explained that his actions were done because of the benefit that they would have in the future. The king within the region was confiscating all of the ships out of greed, and made an imperfection in the boat so the people may keep it, the child would bring his faithful parents to suffer an eternity of hell, thus he was disposed of. Finally, the wall of the man was fixed because beneath it was the inheritance of orphan children, unknown to anyone. If the people had found it, the children would have been left with nothing.¹¹⁷ There is no other information given in the *Qur'an* about this prophet who taught a greater prophet the lessons of foresight and patience.

How he was ever equated with St. George remains a mystery. Certainly, as a figure of ambiguity, Sufi mystics who were seeking for esoteric people and information within the *Qur'an* to justify their practices favored him. Did they bring about this equation with Saint George? It is a mystery to be sure, especially since the story of Saint George is vastly different. Taken from the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Western Christendom claimed that George was a noble Roman soldier under the Emperor Diocletian (284-

¹¹⁶ *Qur'an* 18:67

¹¹⁷ *Qur'an* 18:67-82

305).¹¹⁸ His parents were both Christians and so he was brought up with strong Christian values, which conflicted with the Edict of Diocletian (302). This Edict called for all Roman soldiers to make a sacrifice to the Roman gods to prove their allegiance to the emperor. George not only refused, but also brought his complaint before the emperor himself. Despite how hard Diocletian tried, through bribery and threats, George would not sacrifice before the Roman gods, and was executed for treason. The story of Saint George's slaying of the dragon was also legendary throughout Europe, and gained further popularity during the Crusades. George was often depicted in artwork slaying a dragon, which as thought to be Satan, drawing on *Revelations*, "And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his head." (12:3) The woman within the paintings was often thought to be the wife of Diocletian, though legend has expanded upon that notion. Thus, George was renowned for his martyrdom, his slaughter of Satan who often equated with the infidels in the Crusading period.

There is also another Saint George, perhaps more prominent in the Mediterranean and Byzantine¹¹⁹ traditions, who was a bishop of Amastris which is on the Black Sea coast. He was a staunch defender of widows and orphans, and a protector of the people against the Saracens. It should be noted that in many cases these two legends of Saint George are either mixed together, or are given more details in order to make the

¹¹⁸ "St. George," The Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5066> (accessed February 25, 2012).

¹¹⁹ See Acta Sanctorum's entry on Saint George, "Commentarius præuius" http://acta.chadwyck.com.authenticate.library.duq.edu/all/fulltext?ALL=Y&ACTION=byid&warn=N&div=4&id=Z400060558&FILE=../session/1332252857_10482&SOURCE=config.cfg&CURDB=acta (accessed March 20, 2012).

“nationalize” the saint.¹²⁰ Either way, neither story really correlates with the story of Al-Khidr.

Al-Khidr and Saint George are exceptionally different people, realistically and within hagiography. One taught patience to a prophet and was ambiguous in nature. Another was seen as a defender of the true faith and a conqueror over true evil. While Al-Khidr did not speak against the religious other, Saint George is a difficult person to equate with amicable religious coexistence; his actions are rather contradictory to it. The time spans of the two are also different. Saint George’s tale placed him either in Diocletian’s reign or much later in the ninth century. Al-Khidr however, is far older of a figure in the Islamic tradition. While there are many discrepancies about the return(s) Al-Khidr after his encounter with Moses, none are verified. For example, *The Sainly Exploits of Haji Bektashi Veli* mentioned that Haji Bektashi had encountered a mysterious figure, who was equated with the enigmatic persona of Al-Khidr.¹²¹ There is also an oral tradition that places Al-Khidr at the funeral of the Prophet Mohammed in the late seventh century. There is no consistent chronology within either story. Also, Al-Khidr is rarely, if at all, mentioned within these festivals, but seemed to have been implanted by the dervishes.¹²² Yet these shared festivals that are often attributed with the two, were shared between the faiths. As quoted within *Bosnia, A Short History*, the saying went,

¹²⁰ That term is used very loosely.

¹²¹ For more information see, *The Sainly Exploits of Haji Bektashi Veli*. Trans. Hussayin Abiva

¹²² For a good explanation see Cheetham’s *Green Man Earth Angel: The Prophetic Tradition and the Battle for the Soul of the World*. Also see *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, specifically chapter 2.

“Up to midday Ilija [Elijah]; after mid-day Ali.”¹²³ The day begins with Saint George or Elijah (they often confused these two as well), the festivals of Jurjevo, Illinden and Gjurgjovde and end the day with Ali, who was a central figure in Islam, especially the Shia sect, which were practiced by the Bektashi dervishes. The first article mentioned in this monograph, “Secret Shared Shrines of Christians and Muslims,” described the celebration of this festival, and the sharing of the holiday between Christians and Muslims at the Bektashi *tekke*. These saints were individuals who called for a mutual, transferred reverence from the populace, regardless of creed.

Shrines of saints were also frequented by both Muslims and Christians, those attributed to Saint Nicholas more than Saint George.¹²⁴ As noted in “St. Nicholas Churches in Anatolia and Thrace,”¹²⁵ these churches were shared places between Christian and Muslims, who donated to these sacred places, and took part in their holidays and festivities.¹²⁶ Also, Bektashi convents attributed to Saint Nicholas/Sari Saltik, were frequented by Christians and contained relics that were revered by both faiths. F. W. Hasluck, in *Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans*, noted that there was a sanctuary for sailors, frequented by Muslims and Christians, on the coast between Malta and Barbary. There the priest had an altar and statue of the Virgin Mary alongside a grave of a Muslim saint, showing the veneration of both faiths and this transference of sacred space and figures.¹²⁷

¹²³ Malcom, *Kosovo: A Short History*, 58.

¹²⁴ Saint George gets little recognition outside the previously mentioned festivals.

¹²⁵ Yildiz Otrken, “Saint Nicholas Churches in Anatolia and Thrace” from *Second International St. Nicholas Symposium in Anatolya*, 1987: 123-130.

¹²⁶ Otiken, “Saint Nicholas Churches,” 126.

¹²⁷ Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans*, 46.

Amicable religious coexistence within the Balkans occurred through shared practices that stemmed from frontier-ism and the transference of faiths and holy people, which were incorporated into shared festivities and places. In some instances it would seem that the incorporation of the religious other and their ideology was considered, especially in sacred places, to be attributed to a holy figure. The last portion of amicable religious coexistence to be examined is the frontier of religious ideology, mysticism, and specifically, the Sufi order, the Bektashi dervishes, which as the final lynchpin permitted amicable religious coexistence to occur and persist after the solidification of rule by the Ottoman Empire.

Mysticism: The Religious Frontier

Mysticism was, arguably, a religious other. Seen as highly pious due to their extreme asceticism and devotion, mystics were respected, as a general rule, by the population. To those in power, they were viewed as rebellious, extreme, and heretical. This was because they went beyond the control of doctrinal faith establishments, with their theories, writings and practices. The methods they utilized in their search to reunite with and experience the Divine were unorthodox and limitless. While masters of doctrine, mystics felt that basic orthodoxy was not enough to quench their spiritual thirst; in fact the Bektashi order thought orthodoxy so useless that they made a habit of mocking it.¹²⁸ Doctrine was limited, and lacked the fluidity that was necessary in order to obtain a true mystical experience.

What made the mystical philosophies so unique was their kaleidoscope-like perspective of the Divine. Though they had distinct differences in things like the names

¹²⁸ Birge, *The Bektashi*, 93.

of the Ultimate which originated from their faith, mystics did not limit the Ultimate Reality. Their search for nourishment beyond the everyday practice of faith, made mystics seek for extreme ways to surround themselves with the Divine. This was an especially important part of *ma'rifa*, or knowing God, a practice of the Sufis.¹²⁹ This practice was something that was seen as commanded by Allah in the *Qur'an*: “And [tell them that] I have not created the invisible beings, and men to any end other than that they may [know and] worship Me.”¹³⁰ There was no knowledge greater in this world than that of knowing God. In contrast, Western Christian mystics frequently equated this knowledge of God with a marriage between the mystic and the Divine. Their separation from God made them lament this existence. Yet mystics from both sides shared many attributes concerning their relationship with the Divine; which shows the plurality of the mystical ideology, thus allowing for the possibility of amicable religious coexistence to occur.

God, as noted above, was seen as Infinite, and this was a truth that was abundantly clear to the mystics, Muslims and Christians alike. Carney, speaking from a Sufi perspective, explained that the Ultimate Reality was limitless and could not be bound by doctrine. Her explanation went further to say that any attempt at making something infinite as the Ultimate Reality into something finite, bound, by a single religious text, or doctrine was a violation against God Himself.¹³¹ Mystics, in their own realization of the Infinity of the Divine wrote that to bind God by any human rule or restriction was

¹²⁹ The term is associated with the mystical orders of Islam.

¹³⁰ *Qur'an* 51:56

¹³¹ Carney, “Twilight of the idols,” 4-6, 14.

preposterous and harmful to oneself. Ibn' Arabi (1165-1240) wrote the following advice for those seeking to know God who were searching for a path to follow:

Those who adore God in the sun behold the sun, and those who adore Him in living things see a living thing, and those who adore Him in lifeless things see a lifeless thing, and those who adore Him as a Being unique and unparalleled see that was no like. Do not attach yourself to a particular creed exclusively so that you disbelieve in all the rest; otherwise you will lose much good: nay you will fail to recognize the real truth of the matter. God, the omnipresent and omnipotent, is not limited by any one creed. Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of Allah.¹³²

Quoting a most famous line from the *Qur'an* Arabi got to the heart of the matter:

whatever one adores and thanks God for in this world is how God would be perceived.¹³³

If it is a limited adoration, then God is restricted and forced to fit into human ideals. To confine God is to lose the truth of the matter, and the significant truth is, to Arabi, an open mind, for God could be found everywhere, within everything.

Another Sufi mystic of the same tradition, Jalal-al-din Rumi (1207-1273) expanded upon his idea of the nature of the reality of the Divine:

Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu,
Buddhist, Sufi or Zen. Not any religion
Or cultural system. I am not from the East
Or the West, not out of the ocean or up
From the ground, not natural or ethereal, not
Composed of elements at all. I do not exist,
Am not an entity in this world or the next,
Did not descend from Adam and Eve or any
Origin story. My place is placeless, a trace
Of the traceless.¹³⁴

¹³² James Fadiman and Robert Frager, ed *Essential Sufism* (New York: Harper One, 1997), 279.

¹³³ *Qur'an* 2:115

¹³⁴ Soltes, *Mysticism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 179.

The Almighty then, did not bind people with any ideology, even with existence. The Divine was paradoxical in its nature: natural and ethereal, trace, and traceless-ness, no body nor soul. The divine was beyond such limits of this confined, finite world.

The philosophy of love was another, and perhaps the largest, theme in Western and Sufi mystical writing; love was central to understanding the Divine. The most complex of all emotions, it was equated with getting closer to, and knowing, God, for it was as limitless in its diversity as was the Ultimate. A Christian mystic, Maximus Confessor, the theologian of Constantinople (560-662), wrote in his work *The Four Hundred Chapters on Love* about the illuminating power that came from the love that one had for God:

If the life of the mind is the illumination of knowledge and this is born of love for God, then it is well said that there is nothing greater than love. Love is a good disposition of the soul by which one prefers no being to the knowledge of God.¹³⁵

Love for God bore an illumination of knowledge for the greater things of this world and thus was most sought out. Ramon Lull (1232-1315) goes further with the concept of love and how it unites both Lover and Beloved:

Love and loving, Lover and Beloved, are so closely united in the Beloved that they are one reality in Essence. And Lover and Beloved are distinct beings, which agree without any contrary element or diversity in essence. Therefore the Beloved is to be loved above all other objects of affection.¹³⁶

Here, Lull brings up another concept that came up in many mystical writings; the concept of the unity of the Lover and the Beloved, the mystic and the Ultimate. Love was seen as the ultimate, the bit of humanity that connected them directly with the supreme Godhead

¹³⁵ Harvey Egan, S. J. *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 127.

¹³⁶Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, 289.

and they sought for the unity that love brought a couple on Earth with their Beloved in heaven.

Hesychasm was part of the mystical tradition that was most prevalent within the Byzantine tradition in the Balkans from the thirteenth century on. While it possessed many of the same attributes of mysticism that was already discussed, it also had a few unique components that enhance this argument of the universality and individuality of mysticism. The best source for understanding the tradition is *The Triads* of Gregory Palamas in which he discusses the idea of the accessibility of the living God, particularly in an individual setting. This spiritual knowledge was something that was due to any person because of their baptism. Thus God was not inaccessible to all but a select few. Rather, the mystical knowledge and experience could come to anyone. Much of the high intellectual component of Western mysticism was lost in hesychasm, which was something of the heart and mind, and not found within a high intellectual tradition. It was one of the senses, the “spiritual sense” that laid dormant in all people. This has been argued to be very similar to the Sufi ideology, so it certainly added to the syncretic and amicable religious coexistence that is found within the late Medieval/ Early Ottoman Balkans.¹³⁷

The ambiguous, open mystical outlook made it entirely possible that amicable religious coexistence could occur in places where doctrine was lax or mostly non-existent. The mystical experience and ethos were pluralistic in nature and shared by mystics of both faiths. Combined with the unique socio-cultural and religious aspects of

¹³⁷ For more information on the connection between hesychasm and Sufism, see, J.R. Dupuche, “Sufism and Hesychasm,” in B. Neil, G.D. Dunn, and L. Cross, eds., *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church III: Liturgy and Life* (Strathfield, N.S.W., 2003), 335-43.

the Balkans, it makes it all the more plausible for amicable religious coexistence. This will certainly hold true with the ethos of the Sufi order, the Bektashi Dervishes that were prominent in the Balkans and were one of the significant factors in amicable religious coexistence.

The Bektashi Dervishes

The flexibility of the religious ideology of the Balkan population made it easy for the Bektashi order to find a home in the Balkans, without persecution for their heterodox ideas, and introduced Islam into the region as well. This aided frontier-ism in the ability for amicable religious coexistence in the Balkans. The Bektashi order had been introduced to the Balkans around the early thirteenth century. Their ‘founder’, Hajj Bektash (c. 1209-1271) had supposedly studied Christianity to help the Islamization of Europe, but this study created a more forward thinking community with spiritually syncretic ties to Christianity and Judaism. The unique philosophical make-up of Bektashism made them especially popular among the lower class, whose folk religion and ideology was easily incorporated into Bektashism. When attempting to deal with and convert new territories of the Ottoman Empire, they had to create and adapt a more flexible religious ideology to be accepted by the local populace.¹³⁸

The Bektashi ideology had prided itself on its pluralistic attitude towards members of other faiths. While it is foolish to assume that this modern pluralistic ideology existed from the outset of the order, it has to have historical origins and it is not impossible to imagine it having been around since the later medieval period. After all,

¹³⁸Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein eds. *Bektachiyya : e'tudes sur l'ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1995), 16.

Bektashi way, which was originally from Anatolia, was exposed to and assimilated with a variety of faiths, which made it all the more malleable. Macheil Kiel states that:

In their ancient homes in Central Asia men like Haji Bektash and Sari Saltik¹³⁹ had been exposed to centuries old religious syncretism between Buddhist, Zoroastrain, Manichae, Christian, Gnostic and Islamic elements and an atmosphere laden with religious spirituality.¹⁴⁰

From the very beginning Bektashism was already a faith that was richly enhanced by a mixture of diverse of religious ideologies. F. W. Hasluck gives an even more detailed understanding the diversity of Bektashi thought:

The theology of Bektashism ranges from pantheism to atheism. Its doctrine and ritual have numerous points of contact with Shia Mahommedanism, of which it is confessedly an offshoot, and with Christianity, to which it acknowledges itself akin. In theory at least abstinence from violence and charity to all men are inculcated: the good Bektashi should make no distinction in his conduct between Musulmans and non-Musulmans, and members of non- Musulman religions may be admitted to the order.¹⁴¹

Hasluck, then, believed that Bektashism had taught that good conduct, charity, and behavior should not change when dealing with people of different faiths as well as one's own.

Owing to this, as well as to it being a mystical tradition, it possessed an open-minded perspective that stemmed from the acceptance of the limitlessness of God shared by all mystics. Like many of the mystical traditions, though unlike the majority of Sufi orders, they interpreted scripture in allegorical terms. In this way, it could find itself more flexible: "Perhaps more than any other Anatolian sect, the Bektashis interpreted Scripture allegorically and effaced all sharp contrasts and vicissitudes, preaching as they

¹³⁹ The founder of the Bektashi order, and their most famous saint.

¹⁴⁰ Kiel, *Studies on the Ottoman Architecture* 211.

¹⁴¹ F. W. Hasluck, "Ambiguous Sanctuaries and Bektashi Propaganda," *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 20 (1913-1914): 95.

did, their favorite theme of unity of existence.”¹⁴² Thus, they found aspects of doctrine and scripture disposable if it would hinder unity and amicability among the masses.

Bektashis’ disdain for orthodoxy was seemingly apparent.¹⁴³ They mocked orthodox faith and held it in a great deal of contempt. Their apparent lack of respect and mockery of the foolishness of orthodox faith, especially in their disregard for *Sharia* law made them a religious other within Islam. This disregard for Islamic law permitted them to have a deeper religious coexistence, which extended from the accommodating attitude of the Empire. This caused displeasure among Sunni counterparts, who wanted the Balkans to be exposed to the true, orthodox, Sunni version of Islam. Margaret Hasluck, wife of F. W. Hasluck, was another prominent scholar in the field and explained the disdain that Sunni Muslims had for the Bektashi and how they were more beloved and accepted by their non-Muslim and Shia counterparts:

By its preached and practiced gospel of love Bektashism therefore maintains its position among non-Sunni Moslems. Sunnis however abominate its adherents for their laxity about drink, veiling, daily prayer, etc., and their blasphemous equation of Ali to Mohammed. Said a Sunni, ‘We may eat and drink with a Christian without harm, but we break the spoon with which a Bektashi has eaten, we refuse him water when he is thirsty or if he has already drunk, we break the pitcher and destroy the fountain from which he has drunk.’¹⁴⁴

Fellow Sunni Muslims, then, found the Bektashi to be so deplorable that they would not even touch items that were exposed to Bektashis. Perhaps such disdain made Bektashis

¹⁴² G. G. Arnakis, “Futuwwa Traditions in the Ottoman Empire Akhis, Bektashi Dervishes, and Craftsmen,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 12 no. 4 (Oct. 1953): 243.

¹⁴³ This seemed to be a fairly consistent component of Bektashism, at least according to the sources.

¹⁴⁴ Margaret Hasluck “The Non-Conformist Moslems of Albania,” *The Moslem World* 15 (1925): 394.

seek out the camaraderie of the religious other, who were fellow religious pariahs within the greater political scheme of the Ottoman Empire.

An aspect of Bektashism that helps to explain the phenomenon of shared religious sites is the idea of transference of a holy or sacred site from one religion to another. This transference occurred from the constant claiming and reclaiming of sacred spaces; thus, the holiness of a particular site, or an individual saint, became shared and revered by followers of both faiths. This is very common with Bektashi and Christian saints such as St. Nicolas and his equation with the most famous Bektashi saint, Sari Saltik. Such belief that the sacredness of a site or person was not bound by doctrine, or a religious text, and could therefore be fluid, allowed for amicability to occur and for mutual worship to continue unhindered. Margaret Hasluck provided an excellent description as to the nature of this phenomenon:

Bektashism makes definite attempts at bridging the gap between Christianity and Islam. On the religious side, its tolerance has resulted in Bektashis and Christians frequenting each other's shrines. The primary reason is the ordinary human desire for health of mind and body, fertility of crops, and the gift of children, which leads those to whom such blessings are denied to seek help from all possible quarters.¹⁴⁵

Hasluck is not the only source for this. The pamphlet, *The Bektashi Pages*, while, written in the nineteenth century, clearly echoes this open-minded ethos that was prevalent within this Sufi order.

The followers of the Bektashi Way are spiritual brothers to all those who strive to do good. They love their neighbors as they love themselves, both Muslim and Christian, and they behave blamelessly towards all humanity. Above all they love their countrymen and their homeland, for these are noble virtues.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ M. Hasluck, "The Non-Conformist Moslems of Albania," 397

¹⁴⁶ Naim Frasheri, *The Bektashi Pages/ Fletore e Bektashinjet*, Muhammed al-Ahari, Trans, (Detroit: Babagan Books, 2006),35.

Thus it is expressed that they loved their countrymen, and saw members of both faiths as recipients of their love and respect. It goes further, to state,

The Bektashi Way considers all men as acquaintances and view them as one soul and one form. This reality only the most advanced can recognize. Nevertheless the genuine Bektashi respects all, no matter what religion they may profess. They look upon that individual as their sibling and beloved, never as an outsider. They rebuke no religion, but value all of them. Nor do they reject the sacred scriptures of other faiths or the belief in the life to come.¹⁴⁷

Again this is a testament to the genuine respect that Bektashis give to all followers regardless of faith. The last portion of the *Pages* states,

Together with the chiefs and notables let them promote love, brotherhood, unamity, and camaraderie among all Albanians. Let not Muslim be estranged from Christian, and Christians from Muslm. But rather let them both work together. Let them endeavor for illumination so that the Albanian, wo was once disclaimed throughout the world, may be not so today.¹⁴⁸

This is, undoubtedly, was modified for nationalists within the nineteenth century, as the Balkans were attempting to gain their independence as respective nation-states in their own rights. Bektashis were among the League of Prizren in 1878, which had demanded Albanian and Kosovo autonomy from the Ottoman Empire. Bektashis, which were then a suppressed Sufi order in the empire, were the most prominent of nationalists as the Albanians, and the Serbians, attempted to gain political freedom. Regardless of how propagandist this pamphlet may have been it must be considered as insightful to the Bektashi ethos, and note that the perception that Albanians had of this group was one that was open-minded towards the religious other. Despite the time difference between the late Medieval/ Early Ottoman period and the nineteenth century, this pamphlet could be a

¹⁴⁷Frasheri, *Bektashi Pages*, 39.

¹⁴⁸ Frasheri, *Bektashi Pages*, 40.

doorway to stereotypes and preconceived notions of this group as it had existed within the region for centuries.

Conclusion

Amicable religious coexistence undoubtedly existed within the late Medieval Balkans, and afterwards. Owing to the social constructs that existed due to frontier-ism, individuals with different faith identities shared many superstitious, folk, and seemingly “magical” aspects of faith and culture. They sought out anyone who could provide cures from both faiths, and utilized any measure that seemed to bring about a result. They also, in times of difficulty and strife within the region, joined in prayer for a solution, thereby transcending doctrine in an attempt to solve a problem that affected everyone, despite their creed. Shared legends and holy figures were combined, whether as a tool for conversion, or as something that just happened as a result of local folklore. Sacred saints and individuals became mixed and revered by practitioners of conflicting creeds. Festivals became the outlet for such shared practices. The influence of mysticism, specifically the pluralistic mentality of the Bektashi dervishes, had an affect on the populace, as their unorthodox and heterodox ways permitted and justified acts of amicable religious coexistence. Despite any disparagement from outsiders and perceptions of backward practices, religious figures and political ones allowed these practices to continue, long after frontiers had solidified. Was the religious frontier still fractured? It seems to have been the case. Amicable religious coexistence thrived in the blind spot of orthodoxy, the encouragement of the sacred authorities and the longstanding practice becoming part of tradition rather than stemming from justification of faith. The Balkans, despite their common perception of a backwards society, was seemingly more modern in

construct of amicable coexistence religiously than anywhere else in the late Medieval and Early Modern West.

The late Medieval world is now seemingly more complex than ever before. The distinctive images formed about coexistence with the religious other, while compelling and rooted within historical tradition, must be reexamined. While the focus of this study was on the late Medieval Balkans, many other parts of the Medieval world, including small pockets within Western Europe, had similar documented evidence of such phenomenon occurring, thus they need to be examined and a portion of Medieval history needs to be expanded upon. Perhaps, more so, Medieval history will have to make room to include the region of the Balkans, and these intermixed areas that are amicable in their religious coexistence. This is hard to do, as the region does not lend itself as an easy topic for examination. The lack of easily acceptable archives, the difficulty of the languages, and the unreadable culture and tumultuous history makes it a daunting task to the most talented historian. Despite all of this, there will hopefully be pioneers within the field of history that will tackle this new approach and enlighten this missing link within the Medieval World.

The definitions of tolerant and accommodating that have been imposed upon the Medieval West and Ottoman territories seem to fit, in general, as overall explanations of the religious coexistence that occurred there. However, they are not absolute. Historians like Alexandra Cuffel provide solid evidence that, at some point, the religious coexistence within the Medieval West, and even Spain, went beyond tolerance. The same can be said for the Ottoman territories, which have been noted to be far more restrictive than the definition of accommodation that has been given. These distinctions

were not meant to be absolute, but rather as a tool in understanding the general perceptions of and enhancing the late Medieval world. \ While historians would argue against the definition of *dhimmi* existence in the Ottoman Empire as accommodating, they must examine Islamic doctrine which permitted the Empire to be far more accommodating than is realized. The importance of these definitions was not to bind the religious coexistence in the late Medieval world, but to provide a distinct framework for the explanation of amicable religious coexistence.

In the frontier region of the Balkans, whose borders were constantly redefined there was a different religious population and thus a different way of coexisting with the other. This new form of religious coexistence that occurred was a mix of pluralism, tolerance, accommodation, transference and many more added to this concoction of coexistence. The significant factors that add to the possibility were the flexibility of the religious ethos of the mystics, particularly the Bektashi Dervishes, who prided themselves on their pleasant dealings with non- Muslim individuals who existed in a persistent frontier for over a millennia. The very nature of the mystic, as one that sought a closer union with the divine, made their journey more open minded in learning about the religious other rather than attempting to change their perspective. There were probably cases of attempted conversion on both sides but noting the possibility that amicable religious coexistence, something beyond known concepts had existed within the late Medieval period creates now a new way of studying the Medieval world. The historian's focus now shifts to the Balkans and other frontier regions that sit on the fringes of great empires, and realize their coping mechanisms, and their impeccable

nature to allow room to welcome large influxes of people. The impact of such malleability is nothing short of astounding.

The practice of amicable religious coexistence, as it is studied within this work and others, does not take into account the perception of doctrine as well as the people who are claimed to have coexisted within this way. As a rural peasant they were, most probably, illiterate and left no written record of their own to examine. This means that there is nothing to state their own thoughts about religious doctrine and ideology. There is also nothing left that provides their own definition about their religious identity. Did they see themselves as any less “orthodox” as the next practitioner or did they feel that their practices delineated their claim of their own distinct religious identity? Were they, in essence, pluralistic? There is no way to know for certain. While anthropologists within the Balkans have noted that many individuals are not fond of the continuance of these practices and see the religious other as intrusive to their faith and holy figures, can the same be said of earlier periods? The frequency of this occurrence, again, lends anyone to think that the answer is no, they did not have a huge problem with it, but there is no way to say for certain.

A few of the sources used within this paper to prove amicable religious coexistence are not part of what is commonly considered the late Medieval period. That is problematic because then, did amicable religious coexistence occur in the Medieval Balkans or in the Early Modern Balkans? The later can be argued, but it truly is better to say that it began in the Medieval period and continued throughout the Early Modern. Usually when the late Medieval period was discussed it was paired with the early Ottoman period; which showed that periods were often blurred within the Balkan region.

So can it be labeled a Medieval practice? Arguably so. The reason for this argument is that these actions of amicable religious coexistence did not happen over night. It is perfectly within the realm of plausibility that the actions that have been recorded have been long standing acts that simply did not have the ability to be recorded before this date and time. As the region was a frontier region for so long, it probably was not easily accessible or a desired travel location for many people. Individuals that did venture there did so probably more out of necessity than anything else, before the borders found some stability under the Ottoman Empire. Thus the argument can be made either way, but owing to the frontier thesis, this practice could have continued long before any record was available. Besides, since it is claimed by the population that these practices have a long existed, their oral record must be given some consideration as proof for this practice. As is noted by the scholars who contributed to *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, the communities in which this has occurred claim their history proudly. Those who do not do so, note their displeasure that such an unorthodox practice has gone on for so long, and demand for it to cease. This newfound 'orthodoxy' may be connected with the wars of the twentieth century which ransacked the region. The lack of historians within this field provides a problem in answering some of these questions as this field is monopolized through European and Eurasian scholarship. But the information that comes from their work makes these claims more than plausible.

An interesting thing to note from all of this is the stereotype of the Balkans as a backward region. This stereotype had existed at least since about the mid eighteenth century. It can be argued, with all of these sources noting the 'backward' and downright

wrong religious practices of the region helped to create this stereotype more than the political instability that the region suffered. This argument is more of food for thought than anything else. These records came from outsiders who, at some point in time, went back to their homeland and described these unorthodox and heathen practices with the infidel populace and these actions undoubtedly shocked the “true” Christians that heard about them. Thus the region had gotten a reputation for being a religiously backwards region, with no concept of the true faith, for lack of religious instruction or otherwise. Thus, the region was deemed backwards. However, many modern readers may reconsider that notion as the region would now be considered far more modern in their tolerant¹⁴⁹ ways than the rest of Medieval Europe. This re-reading of the classification of the Balkans would prove useful with any attempt to incorporate this region within the larger historical narrative and would also shed some light on the stereotypical examination of the region throughout history.

This study of amicable religious coexistence in the Medieval Balkans, and across the Medieval world now opens doors to new areas of research that will focus on how a world that was once considered ‘dark.’ The Dark Ages, can now be considered, perhaps, as one of the more enlightened times of human history, or a precursor to enlightened thought. Connections and juxtapositions can now be made, along with comparisons, with other great movements of religious history, and the coexistence that stemmed from it, such as the sharing of churches between Lutherans and Catholics in Augsburg, and the religious coexistence that grew out of the wars of religion in Early Modern France. By examining the fringes of the other parts of the world, and by looking at the flexibility of

¹⁴⁹ In the modern sense

the religious ideologies that were prominent will open doors to a better understanding of a far more complex world than previously thought. Further advances can be made in the study of frontiers, and the effects that they have on societies, religious ideologies, and interactions. More to the point, this can open avenues that will help to further understand the actions that took place in the tumultuous early twentieth century which make the Balkans seem like a powder keg, ready to explode, rather than a place that possessed a sense of modernity that is fairly unknown in the world during that period of time. Whatever further study that can be taken from this, it will surely help to further illuminate the already prismatic Medieval world, connect the disjointed historical narrative, at least at some level, and expand upon the vibrant complexities that it already has to offer.

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