ISLAM IN THE BALKANS

H. T. Norris

Religion and Society between Europe and the Arab World

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To Karen

Land of Albania! where Iskander rose,
Theme of the young, and beacon of the wise,
And he his name-sake, whose oft-baffled foes
Shrunk from his deeds of chivalrous emprize:
Land of Albania! let me bend mine eyes
On thee, thou rugged nurse of savage men!
The cross descends, thy minarets arise,
And the pale crescent sparkles in the glen,
Through many a cypress grove within each city's ken.

(From Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*)

copies of his valuable books, and the Revd Arthur E. Liolin, Chancellor of the Albanian Orthodox Archdiocese in America, in Boston, who has helped me with useful information regarding Longfellow, Skanderbeg and the Persian studies of Bishop Fan Noli. I would also thank Dr Alexander Lopošić of Reading University and Dr Ian Netton of Exeter University. A debt is owed to my friend Dr Muḥammad Mūfākū of the Universities of Prishtinë (Kosovo) and Yarmouk (Jordan). Although at the date of writing we have not had an opportunity to meet in person, we have been in regular correspondence for several years, and his Arabic writings on Albanian and Balkan Islamic topics are discussed and quoted throughout the book. He is himself a Syrian-Albanian, and has probably undertaken more research into the writers in Arabic from among the Albanian disapora in the Middle East than any other scholar. His name is known in the Gulf, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Algeria, and Tiranë as well as in Novi Pazar and other Islamic centres in former Yugoslavia. It is a pleasure to make his writings better known in the West through this book.

Three members of the staff at SOAS have been of special help to me: Mr Paul Fox with the photographs; Mrs Catherine Lawrence who kindly drew the maps; and Mrs Mary O'Shea who gallantly typed and retyped the entire text for me. I cannot repay her kindness, thoughtfulness and constant encouragement.

Postscript

This book was completed at a time when the Muslim community in Bosnia and Hercegovina was being subjected to ruthless assault, slaughter and expulsion through a 'cleansing' operation by Serbian irregulars and ex-members of the Yugoslav army. This has brought about a grevious loss of life, and considerable destruction and desecration of Muslim monuments in such gutted towns and cities as Foča, Goražde, Banja Luka, Mostar and Sarajevo. Important collections of Oriental manuscripts have been utterly destroyed. The very future of the entire Muslim community in this republic is wholly unclear. At the time of going to press, I do not know whether several Bosnian friends, Muslim and non-Muslim, whose names appear above are still alive.

Newport, Essex
July 1993

H. T. NORRIS

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NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION

In the spelling of Arabic and Islamic proper names and miscellaneous terms, I have followed the system used in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (London).

H.T.N.

INTRODUCTION

This book began as a study of the relationship between the Arabs and those sundry peoples that inhabited Europe to the north of the Black Sea. Circumstances were to prevent the publication of such a wide study. The field of interest soon appeared to be over-ambitious. By then, it had become narrow and focused upon the Balkans, and upon Albania in particular. The stimulus that was provided by such works as F.W. Hasluck's *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (Oxford, 1929), and Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush's *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union* (London: Hurst 1985) may be detected in the pages that follow. Travel in the Balkans was also a spur. The thrill of entering unknown territory as one carried one's luggage through the wild no-man's-land between Yugoslavia, as it then was, and the atheist PSR of Albania at Hani Hoti in the days that followed the death of Enver Hoxha was a memorable experience. Subsequent visits to Macedonia, Romanian Dobrudja and Bulgaria stimulated and sharpened an interest in these Muslim peoples, which has in no way diminished over the years. Even during visits to North Africa it was an extra pleasure to meet representatives of the dwindling Balkan communities that survive in Algiers and elsewhere.

Apart from the valuable essays brought together in the publication *Islam in the Balkans* (papers arising from a symposium held to celebrate the World of Islam Festival at the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, 28–30 July 1976, published in 1979), there are few current works in English that aim at being a general introduction to the subject. It should be said at the outset that in my book it is principally the selected list of books and journals in the bibliography and the notes accompanying each chapter that provide such an introduction. Some of the references listed are in Balkan publications. I have however found that it is quite possible to obtain xeroxed copies of many of these publications through inter-library loan arrangements and the facilities afforded by good lending libraries in Britain. Some other publications are in Arabic and Persian. Their inclusion is deliberate. There is much ignorance of Balkan Islam among many Muslim readers in the Arab world, Africa, Pakistan and South-East Asia. As many of these Muslims have a reading knowledge of Arabic, it seemed reasonable to include these references together with those in West European languages.

Islam in the Balkans is often viewed as suffering from a kind of

terminal ailment, deprived of almost all means of self-renewal, with nothing to contribute to the reform and revivification of world Islam as a whole, and dependent on funding from the heartland of the Arab East. Professor W. Montgomery Watt wrote in his book *What is Islam?* (Longman/Librairie du Liban, 1968), p. 142:

> There are also three and a half million Muslims in Europe [sic] (other than Turkey), chiefly in Yugoslavia, Albania and Bulgaria; but this is a part of the periphery where Islam has been on the defensive, and indeed in retreat, for centuries. These European Muslims are unlikely to make any great contribution to the general life of Islam in the visible future, but influences from other parts of the Islamic world might some day lead to revival and renewal among them.

It is a fact that for centuries there has been quiet and continuous contact between Balkan Muslims and the Islamic Middle East, besides Turkey, either individually or through the Balkan families that established homes in Egypt, Syria and North Africa.

Historical and religious studies (I exclude anthropological ones) devoted to the Muslim peoples of the Balkans (especially Albania, Bosnia and the Turks in Bulgaria) may be divided broadly into two angles of vision. The first regards Islam in the Balkans as a branch of Ottoman studies, and the region as one formerly part of the 'Ottoman East' (the 'Near East', as it was often called in an older distribution of the 'East' as viewed from Western Europe; D.G. Hogarth wrote that 'the East' denoted 'some regions also of South-Eastern and Eastern Europe'). This view is admirable and eminently sound if one considers the overwhelming impact that the Ottomans indeed made on every aspect of life (for example architecture of all kinds) in this part of Europe. In the weighty articles and books by writers such as Hasan Kaleši, Alexandre Popović, Peter Sugar and Machiel Kiel, the Balkan lands tend to be seen as part of 'European Turkey'. Their views are sustained by archival documentation, numerous linguistic borrowings and the styles of both religious and secular architecture. Theirs is a very formidable case, even though it does not explain the whole story.

The second point of view is that of a quite independent 'European Islam'. A distinguished writer on the cultural achievements of the Bosnian and Hercegovinan Muslims who sees it in this light is Smail Balić, together with several other contributors to articles published in the *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. The 'Islamisation of the Balkans', in their view, is not merely to be equated with 'Ottomanisation'. The gateways are many and the people diverse, and the genius of Islam is to be perceived at its deepest in the character of the Balkan peoples themselves.

Islam reflects their own identity just as hitherto Oriental Christianity has become acclimatised among the Illyrians and the Slavs.

These two views are not mutually exclusive. They are a matter of relative weight and balance. I admit that my approach is sympathetic to the latter, and this is one of the themes that run through the seven interrelated chapters of this book. Those links are emphasised that have brought together the Balkan Muslim peoples and the Arab world in particular. Nevertheless, I do not share all the premises of those who advocate a 'European Islam'. That cause, seems at times to be almost an apologia not backed by adequate proof. Sometimes its advocates seem to be trying too obviously to show, or prove, that Islam is not a 'heat-belt religion'. It is capable, in the Balkans, as it was in the ex-USSR via the Caucasus or the Volga, of being propagated among European peoples, however one happens to define 'European'.

A scholar such as Francis Robinson in his *Atlas of the Islamic World since 1500* (Oxford, 1982, p. 176: 'Islam in the West') remarks: 'The map illustrates, as far as can be accurately ascertained, the Muslim populations of European societies and the main places from which they came. The Muslims of the Balkans are long established.' However, what it is that unites, say, a Bosnian Muslim in Sarajevo, a convert in Bradford, a Maghribī settled in Marseille and a Tatar in Helsinki is nowhere properly explained other than by the fact that the dictate of geography determines that they share an abode in a locality on a specific continent that is marked in a particular colour on the pages of an atlas. In many ways the thoughtful and moving article by Michael Ignatieff, 'Stones of Sarajevo put us to shame' (the *Observer*, 17 May 1992, p. 19), answers that question.

'Balkan Islam' has come about because it is a part of the European continent that is a cultural bridge and has a coastline (and to a degree an interior) adjacent to and opposite the great heartland of Islam in North Africa and the Middle East. In the same way that al-Andalus, parts of Italy, Sicily, the Balearics, Crete and Cyprus became, for a while at least, important cultural centres of the medieval world of Islam, so it was destined that at least some parts of the Balkans would become directly or indirectly a mission field, a 'tide-mark', for the Islamic faith. It was to gain a tiny following in that peninsula before the arrival of the Ottomans in the fourteenth century, just as it has obviously survived the Turks' departure. Seeds of Islam were nurtured in Mamlūk Egypt and Syria before they were transferred to fertile soil in parts of the Balkans; so too other cultural elements were transplanted via Hungary

or came direct from the steppes and river systems of Eastern Europe and from Central Asia. Slavs who had once been settled on Byzantium's Syrian frontiers were to be influenced by the manners, customs and folk-epics of the Persians, the Arabs and other Muslim enemies. Albanians and Bosnians who served as Janissaries in the Maghrib or Mashriq were exposed to various Islamic influences. Their relationship with the Arabs sometimes had a detached relationship to life in the Ottoman heartland in Asia Minor or west of the Bosphorus.

A brief word may be added about the frequent invocation of 'syncretism' and 'heterodoxy' in these pages. To many a pious Muslim in the Middle East (Sunnite Albanian-Arabs among them) such a term may cause distress. It is equated with unorthodoxy, heresy and beliefs gauche or queer. This is an outsider's subjective view. Furthermore, the heterodox in the Balkans have much in common with the Middle East, where Druze, Nuṣayrī Ismā'īlī and Kizilbaş display some kindred beliefs. There are numerous Balkan Muslims, especially in Bosnia, who are orthodox Sunnite to the core, sober and God-fearing, lofty in ethic, loyal servants of the Prophet. Where Ṣūfīsm is to be found among them, it is a personal matter and tends to be scholarly. To this may be added a further point. The 'heterodox' do not at all view themselves as such. *Baktāshī Bābās* and the like regard themselves as no less 'orthodox' than their peers (as one may see from extracts from the writings of Baba Rexhebi and Shaykh Aḥmad Sirrī Bābā in this book). Some even maintain that their daring and questioning Islamic ideal is a fulfilment of the Qur'ānic message, and in particular even a refinement of the teachings of Ṣūfīsm.

Be this as it may, it will also be observed that in the past there was a difference between Slav Islam, as practised in Bosnia, and much nominal Islam as practised amongst the Albanians. Believers may be shocked to read this description by M. Edith Durham, in her book *High Albania*, published in London in 1909, p. 313:

> The ground fact is this. The North Albanian tribesman is an Albanian first. He has never absorbed the higher teaching of either Christianity or Islam (I speak of the masses only). Christ and Mohammed are to him two supernatural 'magic dickies,' each able, if propitiated, to work wonders. Looked at, impartially, through the eyes of a tribesman, which has succeeded better? As a Christian, the tribesman was trampled by that hated unbeliever, the Slav (he has never called the Slav a Christian). With the help of Islam, on the contrary, the Slav has been beaten back. The Albanian has regained much territory. But for foreign intervention, he would have regained much more. The magic of Mohammed has given him fat lands, ruling posts in the Government, has not

exacted compulsory military service, has paid him well when he chose to fight, and has never troubled to teach him Mohammedanism properly, but has left him free to keep his old customs.

He does not veil his women, nor seclude them more than do many Christians, and rarely has more than one wife, save a sister-in-law. He pays no more attention to his Hodja than to his priest. Except at a mosque, I have never seen him perform either the proper prayers or ablutions. If he be an earnest believer, he belongs to some Dervish sect — preferably the Bektashes — which love the Orthodox Mohammedans as do the Dissenters the Church of England. Briefly, he has had all the advantages of Islam, and gone his own way. As a counter-attraction, Christianity offers him the position of underdog, problematic advantages in another world, and, mark this, probable foreign domination in this one.

Can Muslim Albanians (their faith eroded by years of Marxism) be judged benighted in having such an earthbound view? Is Islam, or indeed Christianity, primarily a portfolio of investments to secure unending bliss in the world to come (*al-ākhira*)? On this criterion alone, are the Balkan Muslims given a low rating for piety, commitment to their faith or a show of sincerity in their confession? Has the Westerner ever truly understood the real Albanian Islam? In the past, Sunnite orthodoxy has been disparaged by Westerners. The gnosticism of the *Baktāshiyya* has been viewed with a sympathy beyond its deserts, possibly because its creed has been seen as a 'half-way house to Christianity'. All these are valid questions, and it is hoped that in these pages Islam in the Balkans (not simply because of its topicality) may enjoy a far higher regard, and that those who profess the faith there and indeed who are dying for it may receive much more support from Arab and non-Arab fellow-believers.

The feeling of neglect among Yugoslav Muslims, in particular the Bosnians, is stressed by the Arab journalist Munīr Naṣīf:[1]

But they scold their Arab Muslim brethren. How often have we heard cross words of complaint, that Muslim brethren in the Arab and non-Arab countries do not know much at all about the Muslims of Yugoslavia. The University [of Belgrade] is desirous of being supplied with books, with sources and with cultural and literary journals and Arabic newspapers. A Muslim Yugoslav student, who was studying Arabic language and literature, said to us, 'Isn't it strange that Arabic books and newspapers reach Athens, capital of Greece, and

1. In his article 'Arabo-Muslim Civilisation in Yugoslavia', *al-ʿArabī*, Kuwait no. 233, 1978, p. 75.

stop there. The distance by air between Athens and Belgrade is no more than half an hour.'

The journalist was not surprised by the student's remarks since during his visit to Belgrade and Sarajevo, which lasted a fortnight, no Arabic newspaper could be purchased. Arab students studying in Yugoslavia had complained to their ambassadors, who had promised to help, but so far nothing had been achieved.

Muslims in Britain in their unstinting support for victims of the tragedy of Bosnia have shown what should be done by way of sympathy, aid relief and understanding. Believers and unbelievers alike should have more thought for the faith and the culture that has made its individual and fascinating contribution to the life of South-Eastern Europe.

Note on the use of certain ethnic, geographical and historical terms in this volume, in the light of the current situation in the Balkans and especially in Bosnia-Hercegovina

The origin of the Bosnian Muslims. This subject is still a controversial one. The historical facts are unclear and are open to wide differences in interpretation. The simple equation 'ex-Bogomils' equals 'Muslims' is a gross over-simplification and unlikely to be correct. According to Ivo Andrić in *The Developement of Spiritual Life in Bosnia under the Influence of Turkish Rule*:[2]

> The situation in Bosnia was all the more awkward on account of the frightful religious struggle that was raging within the country. As mentioned, this struggle had reached a critical point just before the invasion when some resolution was unavoidable, whatever the direction taken. Bosnia might have turned entirely to the Catholic West and participated to the fullest in its spiritual life. (The fact that two of the last Bosnian kings openly leaned towards Catholicism, followed by a respectable number of the nobility, makes this the most likely possibility.) Or on the other hand, less plausible, a kind of minor scale Slavic Reformation in Bosnia's spiritual life would have been brought about by a victory of the Patarins.
>
> At the decisive moment this far-reaching process was abruptly broken by the sudden intrusion of a conquering people foreign in faith, spirit and race. The confusion was compounded when the upper, better-off part of the population, in order to save its possessions, adopted the religion of these intruders. So it

2. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990, pp. 16–17.

came about that down the middle of the South Slavic lands a line was etched, a line generally following the Danube, Sava and Una rivers and the Dinaric Alps if we disregard strong fluctuations. This dividing wall split in two the Serbo-Croatian racial and linguistic complex, and its shadow, where four centuries of ghastly history were played out, was to lie heavy on the landscape to either side into the far distant future.

Therein we see the whole meaning of Turkish rule and Turkish influence on Bosnia's spiritual life.

By right of geographic position Bosnia should have linked the lands along the Danube with the Adriatic Sea, two peripheries of the Serbo-Croatian element and two different zones of European culture. Having fallen to Islam, it was in no position to fulfill this, its natural role, and to take part in the cultural development of Christian Europe, to which ethnographically and geographically it belonged.

Far more succinctly, Alexander Lopašić remarks:[3]

A special case of peaceful conversion to Islam is Bosnia where, shortly after the conquest in 1463, a considerable number of Christian inhabitants, peasants and lesser nobility adopted Islam. Many of them belonged to a Christian sect called the Bogomils, who, after being expelled from Serbia, Bulgaria and other Balkan countries, settled down in Bosnia where they formed a kind of national church. The Bosnian kingdom was troubled by both Hungary and Rome, and as a result of this the Bogomils' religion became an expression of Bosnian independence and national identity. It received support even from the court which was officially Catholic. After the Ottoman conquest many Bogomils accepted Islam at least formally since it did not make too high demands on them. On the other hand it secured them a future in the new political situation.

Muslim nationality in Bosnia and Hercegovina. In my final chapter I make reference to the muslims of Bosnia and Hercegovina (and to a lesser degree elsewhere) as being *sui generis* within the Islamic *Umma*. In no way is this pejorative. The whole question has been examined in great detail, and thoroughly documented, by Sabrina P. Ramet, who remarks:[4]

Today in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there are Muslims who consider themselves primarily 'Muslim Croats', those who consider themselves 'Bosnian Muslims'

3. 'Islamisation of the Balkans: Some general considerations', *Islam in the Balkans*, Edinburgh, 1979, p. 50.

4. 'Primordial ethnicity or modern nationalism: The case of Yugoslavia's Muslims reconsidered', *South Slav Journal*, vol. 13, nos 1–2 (47–48), p. 15.

(i.e. 'Muslims in the ethnic sense'), and those who, in the spirit of the 'Islamic Declaration', see themselves simply as 'Muslims'. In addition, there are those Muslims who in the 1981 census declared themselves 'Yugoslavs'. This already complex picture is made more so by the presence of persons like Fuad Muhić, who describe themselves as 'atheist Muslims', and who therefore completely divorce religion from nationality.

Current events are certainly changing this situation completely, including the question of Bosnian (*Bosanski*) identity. There is no intention here to predict the future outcome.

Yugoslavia (Jugoslavia). Throughout this book I have used the former name of the entire Republic to express a geographical region (in the same way as 'Indian sub-continent' is currently in use), without any intention of a political connotation.

Kosovo and Kosova. The former is the Serbian spelling, the latter that of the Albanian Kosovars, used also in Albania itself. I have retained the form of Kosovo since it is the most commonly used spelling in Anglo-Saxon countries; it is also the spelling used by Isa Zymberi in his Preface to *Colloquial Albanian* (Routledge, 1991), himself a Kosovar, and avoids the current Albanian spelling of Kosovë (as used by Ramadan Marmullaku in his *Albania and the Albanians*).

Macedonia. Unless Greece or Bulgaria is specifically indicated, Macedonia denotes the republic of that name in former Yugoslavia.

The future of the Muslim communities in the Balkans. In the concluding chapter an attempt is made to see what lies ahead for these small and predominantly minority communities. A future where Islam and Christianity will to some extent overlap seems very likely in Albania where religious friction is rarely found in popular practice or in Albanian thought. Whether Ṣūfīsm will be revived is harder to predict. In Bulgaria, among both Turks and Pomaks, mosques are being restored and rebuilt, and increasing support, especially financial, is being sought from Turkey and Saudi Arabia in order to build *madrasas* and finance training courses for *imāms*, who are exceedingly few. Arabic is hardly understood and the Qur'ān is a closed book unless a Turkish translation is used. The size, the territory and the character of the Bosnian Muslim community in the future cannot be predicted. Many of the refugees and

displaced persons will never return to their homes — villages and towns which have been erased from the Balkan map. Instead we are likely to see the establishment and growth of small or even sizeable Muslim communities in parts of Croatia, Slovenia and Hungary, where Muslims have been few in number since Ottoman times. The Zagreb mosque has become increasingly central for Bosnian Muslim relief and religious activities.

1

THE ARABS, THE SLAVS, THE HUNGARIAN SARACENS AND THE ARNAUTS

'In the city of Aleppo, I met a large number of persons called Bashkīrs, with reddish hair and reddish faces. They were studying law according to the school of Abū Ḥanīfah (may God be well pleased with!) I asked one of them who seemed to be an intelligent fellow for information concerning their country and their condition. He told me, "Our country is situated on the other side of Constantinople, in a kingdom of a people of the Franks called the Hungarians.

"We are Muslims, subjects of their king, and live on the border of his territory, occupying about thirty villages, which are almost like small towns. But the king of the Hungarians does not allow us to build walls around any of them, lest we should revolt against him. We are situated in the midst of Christian countries, having the land of the Slavs on the north, on the south, that of the Pope, i.e. Rome (now the Pope is the head of the Franks, the vicar of the Messiah in their eyes, like the commander of the faithful in the eyes of the Muslims; his authority extends over all matters connected with religion among the whole of them); on the west, Andalusia; on the east, the land of the Greeks, Constantinople and its provinces." He added, "Our language is the language of the Franks, we dress after their fashion, we serve with them in the army, and we join them in attacking all their enemies, because they only go to war with the enemies of Islam.' I then asked him how it was they had adopted Islam in spite of their dwelling in the midst of the unbelievers. He answered, 'I have heard several of our forefathers say that a long time ago seven Muslims came from Bulgaria and settled among us. In kindly fashion they pointed out to us our errors and directed us into the right way, the faith of Islam. Then God guided us and (praise be to God!) we all became Muslims and God opened our hearts to the faith. We have come to this country to study law; when we return to our own land, the people will do us honour and put us in charge of their religious affairs." ' (Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, translated by Sir T.W. Arnold: *The Preaching of Islam*, London, 1935, pp. 193–4)

The Arabs enter Balkan history

Francis Dvornik[1] maintained that the establishment of the Slavs as conquerors in Southern Europe was not simply an event of major impor-

1. In *The Slavs, Their Early History and Civilization*, Boston, 1956, p. 42.

tance for the evolution of Europe, but also an event of significance for the history of humanity. In his opinion, the destruction of Christianity within the extensive region of the Roman empire then called Illyricum, which today we know as Albania and a large part of ex-Yugoslavia, had another important consequence. The region hitherto had come within the jurisdiction of the Roman see. Thessalonica's metropolitan was appointed as a special apostolic vicar for Illyricum. Latin- and Greek-speaking populations intermingled, living in peace with each other, and the Balkan peninsula formed a bridge, economically knit together by that great highway the Via Egnatia, joining the Latin West to the Greek East.

Christian Illyricum's civilisation was to be destroyed by the Avars and the Slavs. This destruction and this severance were eventually to be compounded by the late medieval expansion of Islam as a world religion. However, the main development was to take place in the future, although Islamisation began earlier than is sometimes supposed. Balkan Islam was a force that eroded Christianity, aggravating further the estrangement of Western and Eastern Europe. At the same time it provided a channel for the westward diffusion of Oriental culture and commerce.

It was also the view of Dvornik that the Western and the Eastern churches might have remained in constant touch and that their evolution would not have taken the contrary direction that it took during the Middle Ages and later. The Avars and the Slavs were the most decisive of the intruders. The Byzantine Emperor Heraclius (610–41) sought for allies among the Serbs in order to fight the Avars. Furthermore, he appears to have sent an embassy to the Croats, offering them a new homeland in Illyricum after they had expelled the Avars. The Croats sent a body of troops to Byzantine territory. There, in league with the small Serb army and with the support of the Byzantine navy, they began operations against the Avars. First Dalmatia, then the remainder of Illyricum and finally the territory between the Drava and Sava rivers were liberated.

Both Croats and Serbs were settled by Heraclius in the lands liberated from the Avars, and assumed the leadership of the other Slavic tribes that had been inhabitants of much of Yugoslavia from the end of the sixth century. Heraclius continued to claim overlordship of the territory and, according to the Byzantine imperial writer Constantine Porphyrogennetus, he asked Pope Honorius to send missionaries to the Croats and the Serbs. To these, even at this early date, the growing

impact of the Arabs in Asia Minor may be added. Arab control of much of the Mediterranean made contact between East and West more difficult across this vital Balkan peninsula.

Unquestionably the 'Slavs', however loosely this term was conceived, made an impression upon the Arabs. To cite a description of them by Ibrāhīm b Ya'qūb (as quoted by Abū 'Ubayd al-Bakrī, died 487/1094):[2]

> Constantinople is sited to the south of Bulgaria. The Pechenegs (*al-Bājānakiyya*) are neighbours of the Bulgarians to the east and to the north. To the west of Constantinople is [situated] the Venetian Gulf. It issues from the Syrian sea between the great land [mass of Europe] and Constantinople. The great land mass is encompassed by the littorals of Rome, and those of Lombardy, and it terminates, decisively, at Aquileia [in the north-eastern Adriatic]. All these places become as one peninsula, being surrounded by the Syrian sea in the south and by the arm of Venice in the east and in the north. An opening from the western side of the peninsula remains.
>
> Both sides of this Venetian Gulf [northwards], from its exit in the east from the Syrian sea, are inhabited by the *Ṣaqāliba*. To the east of them are the Bulgarians, and to the west of them there are 'Slavs' who are other than them. Those who dwell in the western part of the Venetian Gulf are of a greater courage and of a doughtier metal. The people of that region seek for their protection and guard against their violence. Their land is lofty in height and is mountainous. It is one where routes are rough and are difficult to traverse. Generally, the *Ṣaqālib* [*sic*] are violent and aggressive. Were it not for the diversity in the branches of their stock, and the numerousness of the subdivisions of their clans, no nation would stand up to them in toughness and in vehemence.[3]

The first contacts between the Arabs and the Slavs are best seen as a tripartite interelationship between the Byzantine Emperors who reigned

2. See Abdurrahman Ali El-Hajji, *The Geography of al-Andalus and Europe*, from the book of '*al-Masālik wal-Mamālik*': *(Jughrāfiyat al-Andalus wa-Ūrūbbā)*, Beirut: Dār al-Irshād, 1387/1968, pp. 179–81.

3. Although the Arabs in a later age (as is shown in Chapter 4) created fantasies, including genealogies and fictitious migrations, all of which linked the Albanians and some Slavs with themselves, they seem to have been unaware of the ancient ties of the Maure-Vlachs with Moors who were settled by the Romans in the Danube region and in adjacent provinces which included Moesia (modern Serbia), Dacia, Bessarabia, and Illyria. See D. Mandić, *Postanak Vlaha prema novim povicsnim iztrazivanjima* (the origin of the Vlachs in the light of new historical research), Buenos Aires, 1956. Mandić has carried out much further research since and the reader is referred to *Croatia, Land, People, Culture*, vol. II, University of Toronto Press, 1970, pp. 383–5, and his footnotes wherein early sources are cited.

during the seventh and the ninth centuries, the Slavs who bordered Byzantine territory in Thrace, and the Arabs who pushed north through Asia Minor towards the Caucasus and Byzantium, or alternatively, by sea along the southern coast of Asia Minor, the Aegean, the entrance of the Bosphorus and, along the coast of the Adriatic in both southern Italy and Dalmatia.

The Byzantine emperors were faced with a challenge on two fronts, the threat of Slav encroachment to the north and west and the problem of the Arab and Muslim advance. Constans II (641–68), when he failed to stem the Arab onward march in Asia Minor, turned his attention westwards. The Imperial armies moved against the Slavs. He used them afterwards as an emigrant population in Asia Minor both to serve his purposes as farmers and to curb and control them. It is no surprise therefore that when 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Khālid led his raid in 664 he should have come face to face with 'Slavs'.

Under Justinian II some 30,000 Slavs, many now armed, were settled in the Theme of Opsikion (especially Bithynia) in western Asia Minor. According to Michael, the Syrian, about 7,000 of these Slavs deserted to the Arabs in 692/3. Many of them were to be incorporated within the Arab forces.

In the reign of Constantine V, the number of transplanted Slavs is reckoned to have totalled 208,000. In the campaign of 716–8 the Arabs seized an entire fortress or town of Slavs, (*madīnat al-Ṣaqāliba*). It was sited at Loulon, a key fortress on the eastern border of the Empire, though E.W. Brooks[4] believes that this fortress could have been situated nearer to Constantinople.

The presence of Slavs in the path of the Arabs and the subsequent desertion of many to their cause, and to Islam, was an important factor in developing a relationship between the Arabs and the southern 'Slavs' as peoples. Graebner notes: 'Thus, in little over a century (657–762) close to a quarter of a million Slavs were settled in Asia Minor, the heartland of the empire. This Slavic immigration represents the largest series of population transfers in Byzantium's history.'[5] He further

4. E.W. Brooks, 'The Arabs in Asia Minor (641–750), from Arabic Sources', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 18 (1898), p. 194, fn. 6. However, T. Lewicki, in his 'Un témoignage arabe inconnu sur les Slavs de l'an 720', *Folia Orientalia*, vol. IV, Krakow, 1968, p. 3321, suggests either Asia or Thrace.

5. Michael Graebner, 'The Slavs in Byzantine population transfers of the seventh and eighth centuries', *Etudes Balkaniques*, no. 1, Sofia, 1975, p. 43.

adds: 'Although bribery and promises played a part, once the Slavs were on the Arab side they remained there.'

Dvornik maintained that the Byzantines were forced by the Persians and the Arabs to look increasingly towards the East when danger threatened. Having lost almost all the European provinces, they were forced to increase their reliance upon the eastern provinces, especially upon those in Asia Minor. A gradual 'Orientalisation' of the Empire and the Church was its natural consequence. Hence Illyricum, 'instead of being a bridge between West and East, contributed most to the estrangement of the two Churches. It finally became the battlefield on which the two forms of Christianity waged the first great struggle which led to that complete separation so fateful for the whole of Christendom.'[6]

Illyricum (Albania and Yugoslavia) was destined later to become a Balkanic 'drawbridge' between West and East, between Christendom and *Dār al-Islām*. Yet what is perceived as such a bridge may, instead, be viewed as troubled border marches of an alien extra-European intrusion. This latter view is not uncommon among non-Muslim Balkan peoples. No less a figure than the world-famous Yugoslav writer Ivo Andrić, in his doctoral thesis, remarks: 'The part of Bosnia's population assimilating to Islam which constituted a dominant warrior cast throughout Turkish rule, first directed its energies to conquest and then to the defence of property. This was a caste whose spiritual and intellectual life grew petrified in the twin moulds of a foreign religion and an alien language.'[7]

Middle Eastern beliefs among the Slavs

At the beginning of the Christian era, Slav tribes occupied a region that extended from the Baltic to the Carpathians, and from the Elbe to the Black Sea. To this latter may be appended the Balkan peninsula itself. Both the Black Sea region and the Balkans exerted a strong pull upon these Slavs. The climate was drier and warmer, and the trade routes of the Roman East and the Persian Empire were a magnet that drew them to the South. About 200 AD they replaced Sarmatians in South Russia. Later they expanded deeper into Europe, and by the third century they had reached the northern bank of the Danube. In this process they had

6. F. Dvornik, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

7. Ivo Andrić, *The Development of Spiritual Life in Bosnia under the Influence of Turkish Rule*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990, p. 67.

been compelled to contend with two other invaders, the Huns and the Antes – the latter appear to have been Slavs under Sarmatian leadership. Once the Huns had disappeared, the Antes extended their territory towards the lower Danube. Two other tribes, who may also have been of Sarmatian origin, or whose leadership may have been Sarmatian, achieved a prominent position. They were the Croats and the Serbs. These had originally settled in the northern region of the Caucasus and were all but free of Slav elements. Nonetheless, in their flight from the Huns, they migrated beyond the middle Dnieper and were joined by a tribe of Goths. In this northerly region they formed a kind of state, joining to themselves the Slav tribes of Galacia, Silesia and eastern Bohemia. This state is mentioned by King Alfred in his Anglo-Saxon translation of Orosius' *History of the World*, and by Constantine Porphyrogennetus. It is also mentioned by the early Arabic sources, notably by al-Mas'ūdī (943):

> The Slavonic tribes living in the middle and upper reaches of the Laba river, in the upper reaches of the Vistula river, and in the basin of the middle Danube [among other S(A)RBIN – the Serbs of Lusatia or Lusitians, M(O)RĀWA – Moravians, H(O)RVĀTĪN – White Croats].[8]

In several areas, the Serbs and the Croats were intermixed, especially in the region of the Upper Vistula. 'White Serbia' was geographically situated between the Elbe and the Saale rivers.

When the Goths departed from Central Europe, the Slavs who were in search of land, moved in a southern and in a south-westerly direction. They attained the middle reaches of the Danube, crossed it in 517, and appeared in large areas within the Balkan peninsula. They raided Dardania, Macedonia, Epirus and as far-away a region as Thessaly. The Byzantines deemed them savages.

The Slavs had their own material culture and their own beliefs that

8. Cited in Tadeusz Lewicki, 'al-Mas'ūdī on the Slavs' in *al-Mas'ūdī-Millenary Commemoration Volume*, Aligarh University, 1960, p. 12. According to Stanko Guldescu: 'There are Arabic sources, the compte-rendus of Ibn Rusta and of Kardisi or Gardizi [1048–52] on the Slavs, which refer to the Galician Croats. The first part of the accounts of these Arabs was probably written between 842 and 847. It is an interpolation of the original, added during the last twenty years of the century, that mention is made of the Croats of little Poland or Galicia and of their powerful prince, Svetopouk or Svetopolk (Sviat-Malik). . . . The tenth century Arab geographer, Al-Masudi, also uses the name 'Charvats' to designate a military tribe and its prince Avandza, who fought against the Greeks, Franks and Lombards. If he was a Croatian ruler, this mysterious Avandza has still to be identified.'

were to have a marked influence on Christianity and, later, popular Islam, when both these faiths were to compete dramatically to change their lives. They were organised into family groups and formed village communities, although only the South Slavs were to know a loose confederation of such communities. Slav social life was either pastoral or agricultural and their religion was centred on nature and the cycle of the seasons, especially the harvest. Some of their gods however were independent of these seasonal preoccupations. They show some relationship to ancient Iranian or Indian deities, especially those to do with the sun. Key words such as 'god', 'paradise' and 'holy' illustrate these Asian connections and influences.[9]

According to Matthew Spinka:

> Their ancient gods were converted into Christian saints: Veles became St Blasius and continued to guard the flocks of the Christianized Slavs: Perun became Elijah and continued to drive his thunderous car over the clouds and to wield the thunderbolts of the sky; the household gods were retained as family saints, and the belief in fairies and dryads and other members of that delightful ilk persisted without any apology or camouflage. Most of the sacred days and religious customs of the Pagan Slavs were likewise retained, having been but slightly changed or adapted. Thus for instance, the worship of ancestors is still observed in the so-called 'slava' celebrations, where the Serbian peasants bring food and drink to the graves of their dead.

Kozarac, in an article about the ancient Drenica pillar in Kosovo, describes his discovery of a modern wooden pole in Lauš village. Carved of oak in 1950, it was the handiwork of a partly crippled thirty-year-old Albanian peasant who was himself part carpenter and part farmer. It was shaped in the form of a human being. During the threshing season, this pole and several others were decorated with fifteen ears and stalks of wheat. This local custom was explained away as a harmless ceremony to ensure good fortune, fertility and abundant blessing of all kinds. He

9. Simargl, a winged monster who in the mythology of the Sarmatians guarded the tree that produced the seed for every plant, appears to be derived from the Iranian Simurgh which features in Islamic mythology of the Persians and, later, of the Arabs. The goddess Mokosh is a form of the Iranian goddess Anahita. Triglav, a three-headed god, was worshipped by the Slovenian Slavs when they settled in the Julian Alps in the sixth century. The name survives today in that of Yugoslavia's highest mountain.

Also of Middle Eastern origin was the belief in a Slav god of the underworld. He supported the earth with his arms raised to a sky. A city suspended in the air by the supernatural is not unknown in Islamic romances that owe much of the substance to Iranian legends and to ancient beliefs. Slavonic idolatry took the form of wooden poles, carved in human shape, though sometimes any ornamentation was wholly symbolic.

was told it was *per bëreqet* (for blessing); this latter Albanian word derived through Turkish from the Arabic '*baraka*', meaning 'grain and cereal' and, figuratively, 'prosperity and success, gain, increase and abundance'.[10]

A Glagolithic church document of 1452 from the Croatian-Dalmatian area states that he who bows to the sun, the moon or any created thing and prays to them commits a mortal sin. Bosnian Orthodox church documentation condemned magical practices and also condemned the following of pagan customs well into the seventeenth century. These included dancing in the square, especially a special mask-dance that was popular on the eve of the Day of the Assumption where men wore women's dresses and women mens'. Belief in the nymphs called *vilas* was also condemned.

The Bogomils were especially inclined to continue observing these customs however much they might, in theory, contradict their otherwise 'nonconformist' beliefs. In a description of Poturs (Turcisised Bosnians), Paul Rycaut in the 1660s tells of them reading the Gospel in Slavonic though having an interest in learning the Qur'ān. They drank wine in Ramaḍān but abstained from spices. They protected Christians, believed that the Prophet Muḥammad was the Paraclete, abhorred images and the sign of the cross, and practised curcumcision. Double-faith was in places almost a norm. The magic of both faiths worked, and occasionally Muslim mothers sought Fransiscan baptism in Bosnia since baptism brought good luck, success in battle and protected against evil spirits.[11]

But however important such survivals may have been at the popular 'pagan' level, at a higher level, especially among the proto-Bogomils, the tenth-century Bogomils of Bulgaria and Macedonia, and then those of the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries in Bosnia and Hum, it was contact with Manichaean and non-Manichaean dualists, or with Paulician 'adoptionists', that filtered and even transferred beliefs of the Christian Middle East into the Balkans. Many of the Paulicians (who were also strong in the Caucasus) were to be transferred from Eastern Anatolia to the area of Thrace, bordering Bulgaria, following their defeat at the

10. V. Kozarac, 'The Drenica Pillar', *Glasnik Muzeja Kosova i Metohije 1* (Prishtinë, 1956) pp. 317–18.

11. See D. Lang, 'The Slavs' in *Mythology, an Illustrated Encyclopedia*, London: Orbis, 1980, pp. 972–7, and John V.A. Fine, 'The Bosnian Church, A New Interpretation' *East European Quarterly* (Columbia University Press), 1975, pp. 16–20.

hands of the Byzantine Emperor Basil I in 872. 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 westerly regions along the Via Egnatia. Foremost amongst them were Paulician and non-Paulician Armenians, whose influence was to last for centuries.[12]

From a later age, a little of this transcontinental character may be observed in Bogomilism. In the thirteenth century, from the information given by the Italian writer Rajner Sacconi, Bogomil Byzantine communities existed in Asia Minor (Philadelphia) and in Constantinople itself (*ecclesia graecorum de Constantinopoli*); at that time there was also a community in Bosnia (*ecclesia Slavoniae*). Ties were established between all of these. They were united in a single front and shared a common ideology. As organisations, these Balkan dualists led a secret life (structured within their hierarchy of 'perfect/ascetic', 'believer' and 'listener'). Only in Bosnia were the Patarine Bosnians (who in their church were spurred on by the aspirations of a feudal nobility, yet threatened from without by a Catholic Hungarian feudal nobility) able for a while to enjoy some relative liberty. When Bosnia's sovereigns, who were intent on obtaining Hungarian assistance against the Ottomans, declared the Patarin church to be a heresy and instituted measures to eradicate it, a body of the Bogomils, hating Catholicism, embraced the Muslim faith out of choice.[13]

12. On the Asian origins of this heresy, see S. Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee*, chapter 3 and *passim*. For Balkan implications, see John V.A. Fine, 'The Bulgarian Bogomil Movement', *East European Quarterly, vol. XI*, pp. 385–412, and Bernard Hamilton, 'The Origins of the Dualist Church of Drugunthia', *Eastern Churches Review*, vol. 5, no. 5, pp. 115–24.

13. See Dimitar Angelov, *Les Balkans au Moyen Age, la Bulgarie des Bogomils aux Turcs*, London: Variorum Reprints, III. 'Le Mouvement Bogomile dans les pays Slavs Balkaniques et dans Byzance', 1978, pp. 607–16.

According to Runciman, 'The Arab geographers took little interest in Balkan Bulgaria; and the Arab and Armenian chroniclers only repeat, very occasionally, items that trickled through to them from the Empire: though the Armenians took a flickering and unreliable interest in the adventures of Armenian soldiers in Basil II's Bulgarian wars. Only two of the Oriental chroniclers were interested in Balkan affairs. Eutychius, the Patriarch of Alexandria, as a Christian, kept watch on events in the Imperial Court. His chronicle ends at the year 937, and he died in 940. His continuator, Yahya of Antioch, who died in 1040, is more important. When he wrote, Antioch was a Christian city under the Empire; he therefore was in touch with all the contemporary history of the Empire.'

The Arab threat to Byzantium

In 634, Constantinople was menaced by the Arabs and the Muslim armies. Byzantium faced a double threat almost alone, although at one time in 717, the Bulgarian Khan gave powerful assistance which helped to thwart a threat from the Arabs, killing 20,000 of them. This was an exception. On at least one occasion, both Arabs and Bulgarians conceived of an alliance that would serve their respective interests. In these stratagems the Arab armies already had Slav troops in their midst. By the end of the seventh century and certainly early in the eighth, the *Ṣaqāliba*, as they came to be known in the East and in al-Andalus, formed a significant military component in the Muslim Middle East. Yazīd b. al-Muhallab, who had been imprisoned by the Caliph, 'Umar II, in 717, escaped to Baṣra and fought his former master in the battle of Babylon in 720. Yazīd rallied his forces by insulting the Caliph's forces, calling them 'non-Arabs'. Probably these contingents were recruited among the Slav colonists whose presence in the Umayyad Caliphate, and above all in Syria, in the later seventh century has been established. They were mostly men who had changed sides from among the Slav military colonies that had been organised by Byzantium in Anatolia. They had crossed over with those in the Arab ranks during 663, 665 and 690, and had installed their headquarters in northern Syria. There were also other Slav groupings that had established themselves in the Caliphate under the Umayyads. It is not unlikely that after his expedition to Constantinople in 717, Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik brought and installed some Slav groups within Syria.

The raid on Constantinople by Maslama was heavily defeated by Leo the Isaurian (717–40) who was himself of Syrian origin; he was aided by Bulgars and other Slavs. The Arab fleet was dispersed. This disaster did not leave the Arabs unaffected. It produced a major folk hero who was to enter into both Arabic and Turkish literature, Abū'l-Ḥusain 'Abdallāh al-Baṭṭāl al-Anṭākī (d. 740). He inspired the name and the role of the warrior Muslim, Sayyid Ghāzī, who is believed to lie buried near Eskişehr (Seyyit Battal gâzi türbesi) in Asia Minor. A former *tekke* of the *Baktāshiyya* Ṣūfī order is still to be seen there. The model character of the Muslim martyr in *jihād* that Baṭṭāl provided was one of major importance in the popular heroic literature of Islam, Arabic and Turkish alike.

At the same time as Dalmatian Adriatic attacks, the Arabs were engaged in raids in the area of Epirus. In 805 or 807, as allies of the Slavs of the Peloponnese, they took part in the siege of Patras, which was

reportedly saved only through the intervention of Saint Andrew, the protector of the town.

In 827, the Arabs of al-Andalus chose to land in Crete and eventually to settle there. Commanded by Abū Ḥafṣ, they were able to establish a strong fortress within the island, surrounded by a moat (*khandaq*) on the site of the city of Candia. The population were reduced to the status of slaves and only one church was preserved for the use of the Christian inhabitants.

In 862, the Arabs from Crete disembarked near Mount Athos, close to the monastery of Vatopedi, and they carried its monks into slavery. The church was burnt, and the raiders returned to Crete. In a subsequent raid, the monks of Athos were themselves captured and the region was deserted. In 866, the Arabs attacked the island of Néon, near Athens, where the famous anchorite Euthyme was living together with his brethren. The latter were captured although they were released later and subsequently transferred their place of meditation to Athos itself. Despite several attempts to dislodge the Arabs from Crete, it was only retaken in 961 by the Byzantine Emperor Nicephoros Phocas[14] aided, it seems, by a Russian detachment.

Arabs and Bulgarians at the beginning of the tenth century

A kind of alliance between the Bulgars who had settled in the Balkans, and the Arabs, could have mutual advantages.[15] A continued campaign on the Arab front in Asia Minor forced the Byzantines to reduce their garrisons in Europe, while their Bulgarian operations were a respite for the Caliph's forces. What in theory seemed advantagous never materialised. The Bulgars were insufficiently organised to launch a strategically planned and concerted attack. However, in the tenth century such an alliance did assume a serious form. Tsar Simeon (893–927), from his capital at Preslav in eastern Bulgaria, to the west of what is today Varna, conceived a design to conquer Byzantium and to have himself crowned Tsar of Bulgaria and the Romans. In order to achieve this it was imperative to obtain a fleet that could overcome the Byzantine naval mastery of the seas surrounding the capital on the Bosphorus. He

14. V. Christides, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca. 824), a Turning Point in the Struggle between Byzantium and Islam*, Athens, 1984, pp. 61, 66–7, 83–4. There is a lengthy discussion of Arab operations in the Greek islands and mainland.

15. M. Canard, 'Arabes et Bulgares au début du Xe siècle', *Byzantion*, Brussels, vol. XI, 1936, p. 213.

adopted two plans and approached two possible allies, the Fāṭimids in Ifrīqiyā and the Amīr of Tarsus. The latter plan proved abortive, and the former was countered by the skilful diplomacy of Romain Lecapene, who captured the embassy that had sailed to Africa to finalise a treaty and was on its way home. The Bulgars were held prisoner and the Arabs from North Africa were released.[16] The project was exceedingly ambitious. An African fleet was to meet a Bulgarian army which was to be led by the king in person across Thrace. The spoils of Byzantium would be shared. Tsar Simeon would rule Byzantium, the African Arabs would return to the Maghrib. Al-Mas'ūdī, in his *Murūj al-Dhahab*, furnishes a number of details concerning Tsar Simeon's eastern contacts with the Arabs which seem to have had no greater success.[17]

Canard concludes:

> From 927, there could be no more question of any alliance of convenience between the Arabs and the Bulgars. Simeon's successor, who married a granddaughter of Romain Lecapene, was devoted to Byzantium. From the second third of the tenth century, conforming to this new attitude of Bulgaria, numerous Bulgars engaged themselves in the service of the empire and they fought in its armies against the Arabs. They are frequently mentioned by the historians in the wars of this epoch between Byzantium and the Hamdānid, Sayf al-Dawla, as well as by the contemporary poets.[18]

Far earlier, the Bulgars had come under Sasanian Persian artistic influences, but it was during the reign of Tsar Simeon that some traces of Islamic artistic influence began to appear in Bulgarian illuminated manuscripts and elsewhere in Bulgar art. These artistic borrowings were apparent in both Bulgarian and Serbian liturgical gospels and continued well into the fourteenth century. André Grabar, who has studied this art in detail, traces such borrowings to southern Italy and its cosmopolitan communities that were subject to Muslim influences, and to the Christian art of the Copts. To explain this influence, he suggests, one might invoke the tradition according to which Islamic missionaries were said to have diffused Arabic books in Bulgaria in the middle of the ninth century. 'But in admitting that to be so, the memory of these manuscripts, which must have been destroyed at the time of the conversion to Christianity, had no chance of being perpetuated in the

16. *ibid.*, p. 214–15.
17. *ibid.*, p. 219.
18. *ibid.*, p. 223.

ornaments of Bulgarian manuscripts.'[19] He prefers to trace the major influence to Byzantium and Preslav in the ninth and tenth centuries where early Muslim style and motif had exerted a powerful influence on the decorative arts.

However, other artistic influences reveal the continuous contact between the Arabs and the Slavs. They may be perceived in the music of the Eastern Church. As Egon Wellesz remarks in his *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography* (Oxford, 1961, p. 235):

> Investigating the melodies of the Serbian Oktoechos I found that they were composed of a number of musical phrases, repeated either exactly or with slight variations. Since the melodies of the Serbian Church derived from the Syrian — introduced into the Balkan countries along the pilgrim-routes which by-passed Constantinople — the occurrence of an identical principle of composition in both Syria and Serbia was explained, a principle to which Idelsohn had first drawn attention in his study of the technique of Arabic music and which had been confirmed by Dom Jeannin and Dom Puyade in their publications on Syrian music.

After the Arabs had gained control over the greater part of Southern Italy, they launched raids on the eastern shores of the Adriatic. Arab ships appeared before Budva, Risan and Kotor. They extended their activities to the area of Ragusa (Dubrovnik), Split and Trogir. In the middle of the ninth century, the Arabs made an alliance with the Niritliyani (the Narentane tribe in the area of the Naretva valley in Hercegovina), who had not embraced Christianity, in a joint war against Venice.

The 'Slavs' (*Ṣaqāliba*), numbers of whom had few, if any, connections with the Balkans, were to play a prominent part in the life of Islamic al-Andalus, and in Fāṭimid North Africa during this period and up to the eleventh century. There were *Ṣaqāliba* among the guards of the Arab princes in Egypt. At the end of the tenth century, the 'Slav' named Raydān was appointed commander of the guards of the Caliph, al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh. It is well known that 'Slavs' of sundry origin and background filled important posts in the state and the army during the rule of the Arabs in al-Andalus, forming the bodyguard of the Caliph in Cordova. The number of these 'Slav' guards, belonging to the Umayyad Caliphs, attained a total of 13,750 men. Among these there

19. André Grabar, 'Influences musulmanes sur la décoration des manuscripts slaves Balkaniques', *Revue des Etudes Slaves*, 1951, p. 132.

were men of letters and of culture who left a noted mark on Arabic Spain. One was al-Khādim al-Ṣaqlabī, a literary figure during the reign of Hishām II (976–1013). Another from the same period was the noted Ḥabīb al-Ṣaqlabī, who hotly defended the origins and accomplishments of those like him in his work 'Clear and victorious arguments against those who deny the excellence of the Slavs' (*Kitāb al-Istiẓhār wa'l-mughālaba 'alā man ankara faḍā'il al-Ṣaqāliba*).[20] Anecdotes, histories and verse were prominent in this valuable composition. However ethnically comprehensive the *Ṣaqāliba* were, Croats were included among the body of the 'Slavs'.

There were contacts between the Croats along the Adriatic coast and the Arab Muslims who were centred around Lucera in southern Italy. These contacts were to continue up to and beyond the fourteenth century, when the Croatian bishop, Augustin Kozotic, came to convert them to Christianity, which he did with some success. Nonetheless, it is also certain that Croats became converted to Islam. According to Stanko Guldescu[21], Croatian conversions to Islam, even before the fall of Bosnia and Hercegovina (Hum, as it was then known), far exceeded the Muslim proselytes who were brought into the Christian fold by Croat missionaries. The Bosnian Bogomils and Catholics were to follow a precedent that had begun at a time before the Ottoman conquest.

20. Ḥabīb's identity has given rise to some speculation. His work is lost and we have no certain idea of his ethnic background or how many 'Balkan Slavs' were included among the *Ṣaqāliba*. A Yugoslav Slovenian and Croatian theory, admittedly dated now, was proposed by Vladimir Mazuranić, *Sûdslaven im Dienste des Islams* (vol. X, to 16th century) Zagreb and Leipzig, 1928. Further comment is furnished by Dr Jury Andrassy, *Tragom Vladimira Mazuramica*, Zagreb, 1927. Such views on the Spanish *Ṣaqāliba*, however fascinating, have to be reconsidered in the light of Daniel Ayalon's reconsideration of the whole question of the *Ṣaqāliba*, as set out in his 'On the eunuchs in Islam', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, Jerusalem, 1979.

Further examples that show the value of Slav eunuchs in Fāṭimid times are furnished by Ibn Khallikān (De Slane's translation, vol. 1, pp. 253–4), who refers to the slaughter of Barjamān, the negro eunuch, at the command of al-Ḥākim in 390/1000. He was killed by Abū'l-Faḍl Raydān al-Ṣaqlābī, the prince's umbrella-bearer. He, in turn, was killed three years later by Mas'ūd al-Ṣaqlābī, al-Ḥākim's sword-bearer. The author calls Ṣaqāliba 'a race which produces eunuchs'. The great Fāṭimid general in Egypt, Jawhar, was of Dalmatian origin. He founded Cairo and al-Azhar. His career is one of the greatest ever made by a Balkan convert to Islam before the Ottomans.

21. Stanko Guldescu, *History of Medieval Croatia*, 1964, p. 304.

Dubrovnik and the Arab East

With Ragusa (Dubrovnik) the Arabs maintained a long and often close relationship. Earlier the city had been the goal of raiders, but it later became a valuable partner in trade. Ragusa was decreed to be a safe haven from the disturbances within the Balkan interior. For example, Albanians and Bosnians, partisans of the tribe of Dukagjinas (Duchagini) around Shkodër, fled there to escape punishment. Survivors from Arab sea attacks sought asylum within its walls. We are told that the men of two castles on the mainland, from Chastal Spilan and Chastal Gradaz, made their dwellings on the coast, 'for they were of the race of Epidauros destroyed by the Saracens'.

Arab attacks on Ragusa were mounted for a number of reasons. Wood, which was scarce in the Levant, was an important incentive. One major siege of the walled city took place in 866–7. It lasted fifteen months and was only raised after the intervention of the Emperor, Basil the Macedonian, with his fleet. It is this siege that may have inspired the all but legendary, allegedly earlier, defeat of the Saracens in 783 by Orlando, or Roland, the Paladin. In this earlier phase, Ragusa's most active trade with the Muslim world was to be with the Caliphate in al-Andalus.

However it was later in the Mamlūk age that Ragusa's connection with the East attained its apogee. Despite the Crusades, and despite papal and ecclesiastical displeasure, commerce throve, with a profitable trade with Mamlūk Egypt in timber and iron in exchange for Eastern spices. Ragusa also actively participated in commerce with slaves in the Levant.

According to Krekić:

> At the end of the thirteenth century, the epoch when documents contain precise details about the traffic of slaves in Ragusa, in the majority they were exported in the West into Italy and to the Levant. Bosnia furnished the greatest number.

The schismatic Bogomil Bosnians were preyed upon by Western merchants. The reduction of schismatics to slavery was in no way deemed sinful. Ragusa was one channel whereby slaves were imported into the Balkans from Levantine countries. By the fifteenth century other categories of slaves had grown in number. These were men of Tartary, others were Circassians, some were black slaves from North Africa.

Spices that were transported from Alexandria and from Syria were of prime importance for the Ragusans, while in the Muslim ports in the East lead was the most sought-after commodity. It was mined in Bosnia

and elsewhere deep within the interior of the Balkan peninsula. Although the Venetians played a part in this trade, Ragusa dominated it.

Ragusa's commerce with the Muslim East received a significant boost through the extraordinary concessions granted by the papacy in 1341. These enabled the city to carry on commercial relations with unbelievers. Diplomatic links with the Muslim East followed. With their formidable fleet of some 300 ships, the sixteenth-century Ragusa merchants were to sail and travel freely, and they were able to establish factories in what were by then Turkish-held towns and in Ottoman Balkan cities. There were significant Ragusan colonies in North Africa as well, including Fez in Morocco. Many Croats lived in Egypt in the Mamlūk age, including citizens from Dalmatia, Istria and Slovenia.

The capitulations of 1510, which Ragusa (*Rakūziyya*) received from the Mamlūk Sulṭān al-Ashraf Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī (1500–16), enabled its merchants to trade beyond Alexandria. Henceforth, their efforts were concentrated on the safe conduct of merchandise from the area of Suez and southern Sinai to Cairo and Alexandria, where their ships waited for the spices form the East Indies. There seems to have been a connection between this understanding of 1510 and a project by the Ragusans to dig a canal between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, one of the earliest serious attempts to construct a Suez canal, although the effort to induce the Mamlūks to attempt it was to end in failure.

When Selīm I conquered Egypt and Syria in 1516/7, the Ragusan establishments in Alexandria and Cairo were of a long standing. What was to follow was a yet bolder commercial discovery of Persia, India and beyond. It was short in duration since the Ragusans were hotly challenged by both Venetians and Portuguese. This enterprise was to be the conclusion to the centuries-old record of sea communication between the Adriatic coast and the Islamic East.[22]

The oldest Arabic document (925/1519) in the Archives of Dubrovnik is an appeal by Marin, the Ragusan consul in Alexandria, addressed to the first Ottoman governor, Khāyir Beg, requesting the lifting of a payment to the Catalan consul that had been imposed by the city Qāḍī

22. On this project Professor Charles Beckingham has kindly given me the following three useful references:
F. Kinchmayer, *La Caduta della Reppublica aristocratica di Ragusa*, Zara, 1900, p. 46.
R. Fulin, *Il Canale di Suez e la Reppublica de Venezia in Archivio Veneto*, vol. 2, 1871, pp. 175–213.
F.M. Appendini, *Notizie istorico-critiche sulle antichità, storia e letteratura dei Ragusei*, Ragusa, 1802, vol. 1, p. 213.

on his fellow-citizens, who hitherto had been exempt, having been awarded a special and independent status by the Sulṭān of the Burjī Mamlūks, al-Ashraf Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī. His name clearly inspired memories of a cordial and privileged relationship between the merchants of the city-state and the ruler of Egypt and it evoked a vision of an age of great prosperity.[23]

Pecheneg and Khwārizmian Muslims in medieval Hungary

One of the earliest Arab geographers who referred to the Pechenegs in south-eastern Europe was al-Iṣṭakhrī (*circa* 950). He identified them as a nomadic Turkish tribe which, in his days, was moving westwards between the kingdom of the Khazars, in the Caspian region and the North Caucasus, and Byzantium. The vigorous action of Vladimir of Rūs in the late tenth century against these nomads, and their defeat at Kiev by Yaroslav less than a century later, pushed them further to the west in the direction of the northern borders of the Balkans. Eventually they crossed Byzantium's Danubian frontier. This was in part due to the pressure of other nomads, Oghuz and Cumans, who in turn were also moving into regions of Eastern Europe from Inner Asia. Pecheneg pressure and intrusions of the eleventh century had been preceded by others at least a century earlier. In 1048, the Pechenegs caused havoc in Bulgaria, and the interior of the Balkans was to suffer widely from their intrusions. Continued military efforts by the Byzantines, aided by the Cumans, achieved success in 1122. From then onwards the Pechenegs were to enter the Balkans as part of a far wider and diluted movement of Turkic groups. Already in the tenth century they had entered Hungary. However, it was in the eleventh century that the greater part of them, whether pagan, nominally Christian or Muslim, were to begin to play a part in the history of Hungary and of the Balkans as a whole.[24]

One of the countries through which Muslims entered Hungary during the reign of Prince Taksony (mid tenth century) was Bulgaria, although the Muslim groups in question are more likely to have been traders or merchants (possibly Pechenegs) who had originated in the

23. Besim Korkut, *Arapski Dokumenti u Državnom Arhivu u Dubrovniku*, Sarajevo: Orijentalni Insitute, 1961, vol. 11, document from Alexandria (925/1519), pp. 143–154.

24. On the activities of the Pechenegs in this early period see Denis Sinor (ed.), *Cambridge History of Inner Asia*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, esp. pp. 270–5.

Volga region of Bulghār. Two of them were called Billa and Boscu.[25] That Muslims in Bulgaria presented problems for the Danube region is confirmed by a letter of Pope Nicholas, dated 866, which ordered the 'extirpation of the Saracens' from the region.[26] It was during the reigns of the Hungarian kings Stephen I (997–1038) and especially Stephen II (1115–31) and Geza II (1141–61) that the incoming half-Muslim population were given considerable liberty. They served in the border-guard system or in other duties, both military and civil.[27] According to John Kirnamos (1150–65) these subjects of the King of Hungary fought at the time alongside the Dalmatians against the armies of the Byzantine emperor Manuel Comnenus. Numbers of them accepted Christianity, while some relapsed or remained crypto-Christians; they were always at risk of royal displeasure and oppression, especially at the time of the First Crusade.

The question of the precise ethnic and national identity, and the lasting influence, of the Hungarian Muslims, who are referred to in both the Arabic and the medieval Hungarian sources, has inspired a number of hypotheses that have been aired in articles published both in Hungary and elsewhere, and there is much variety of opinion among those who

25. T. Lewicki says in his article, 'Madjar, Madjaristān (in pre-Ottoman period); *Encyclopedia of Islam* (new edition), p. 1014, 'According to a passage in the Hungarian Chronicle known as the *Anonymi gesta Hungarorum*, composed in 1196–1203, there arrived in Hungary, during the reign of the prince Taksony (?955–972 AD), a group of Ishmaelites, i.e. Muslims, originally from *terra Bular* (Bulgaria), led by two semi-legendary figures (whose names begin with the letter 'b'), Billa (Ar Bi'llāh?) and Bocsu (?). Lewicki suggests that the weight of scholarly opinion favours Bulghār as the departure point of these two 'Ishmaelites', though he himself does not exclude Bulgaria of the Danube as an alternative. It might be pointed out that the story of a Yemenite expedition into the Bulghār region, reported by Abū Ḥāmid al Gharnāṭī (d. 1160), mentions an army of Yemenites led by two commanders, one of whom reached the Bulghār capital on the Volga, while the other reached the Hungarians (Bāshghūrd). These accounts may not be connected. On the other hand they may reflect some Islamic folktales that circulated in the region of Eastern Europe in the twelfth century.

26. Lewicki, *ibid.*, p. 1014, says that a letter exists written by Pope Nicholas in the year 866. In it he orders the extirpation of the Saracens in Bulgaria of the Danube. On this whole question see Smail Balić, 'Muslims in Eastern and South Eastern Europe', *Journal of the Institute for Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. V1, 1985, pp. 361–74.

27. A duty they would seem to have fulfilled, in some ways similar to the employment of the Tatars in Lithuania and Poland at a later age. See Sir Thomas Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, London, 1935, pp. 193–4.

are most expert in judging the issue.[28] A number of names, sometimes interchangeable and occasionally superseded, the one by the other, are to be found. They include the Ismaëlitae, the Bissermini (Bezermen or Buzurmen), Hungarian Böszörmény (meaning Muslim) the Caliz, Kalez or Qualiz, and the Saraceni (Szereezen).

The Ismaëlitae were predominantly Pecheneg, although, according to Szekely[29], it is known that the Ismaëlitae (Hysmaelitae), in a document of the Hungarian king Emeric (196) written on the occasion of the market at Eszék (Valkö, now Osijek on the lower Drava in Yugoslavia), were apparently not Pechenegs.

The Bissermini (Buzurmen) were in all likelihood arabised or persianised Khwārizmians from Central Asia, either agriculturalists or traders, who had entered Hungary from the Volga region or from Bulgaria. The Caliz (Arabic *Khawālis*) were similarly Khwārizmians, though including some Khazar Kabars and Pechenegs who were to be employed as auxiliaries by the Hungarians. To what extent these peoples were other than nominal Muslims is uncertain. Some were superficially Islamised and some others were to exchange their beliefs, under pressure, for Christianity. Some for a time retained Zoroastrian beliefs. However, according to al-Bakrī (*circa* 1068), there were to be found *faqīhs* and Qur'ān reciters among them. The Pechenegs were frequently settled close to Hungary's frontiers, which were delineated by a wooden stockade on its western border, around Fejervár Tolna and between the Danube and Lake Balaton. Like all the Hungarian Muslims these communities were to be particulary ravaged and dispersed following the arrival of the Tatars in 1241.

Who the 'Saraceni' were has been debated. Much of the argument is based on the Arabic terms for nationalities that are employed by the Hispano-Arab writer and traveller Abū Ḥāmid of Granada (1080–1170), who came to Hungary in 1150/1 and stayed in 'Bāshghīrd/

28. For a breakdown and description of all the groups in question, see Lewicki, *op. cit.*, pp. 1014–15. For a general introduction to the role of the Pechenegs in Balkan and East European history, see C.A. Macartney, 'The Petchenegs', *Slavonic Review*, 1929, pp. 340–55. On the first incursions of the Pechenegs into the Balkans and the Arab writers, see Petre Diaconu, *Les Petchénègues au Bas-Danube, Bibliotheca Historica Romaniae* (no. 27), Bucarest, 1970, pp. 11–21.

29. All these matters are discussed by György Szekeley in full in 'Les Compacts entre Hongrois et Musulmans aux XIe-XIIe Siècles', *The Muslim East: Studies in honour of Julius Germanus*, edited by Gy. Kaldy-Nagy, Budapest: Lorand Eötvös University, 1974, pp. 53–74.

Bāshghūrd' for three years. He put down his impressions in two of his works, *Tuḥfat al-Albāb* and *al-Mu'rib 'an ba'ḍ 'ajā'ib al-Maghrib*[30]. In the former he remarks:[31]

> This [land] of Bāshghūrd is [the home] of numerous communities. It has seventy-eight cities, each one of which is like Isfahan and Baghdad, wherein is to be found [God's] bounty, favour and abundant blessing and a luxury and easiness of living that can neither be accounted for nor quantified. My eldest son, Ḥāmid, there married two ladies from among the Muslim noblemen and he [by them] begat male offspring.

In the *Mu'rib*, Abū Ḥāmid subdivides the Muslims of Hungary into two broad categories, the *Awlād al-Maghāriba* (who were in royal favour) and the *Awlād al-Khawārizmiyyīn*, whose East European or Central Asian origin is not disputed. As for the former, views diverge as to whether the term 'men of the Western lands' indicates, as it does so today, Muslims principally from North Africa and Spain, or is perhaps a reference to Pechenegs or Cumans from the region of Kiev.[32]

Vilmos Voigt, would see the former as a reference to Arabs or other Muslims, whose original home was in Muslim Spain or in southern Italy or Sicily. He bases his hypothesis on the following three points:

(*a*) At the end of the eleventh century, Kálmán (Coloman), king of Hungary, made a treaty with the southern Italian and Sicilian Normans, and in 1087 he married Busilla, the daughter of Roger, the Norman ruler of Sicily. She came to Hungary with members of her court. In view of the nature of the half-Oriental life and culture of Sicily at that time, he supposes that a number of the communities could well have been Arab or Muslim.

(*b*) The thirteenth-century Anjou kings Károly (Charles) I and Lajos (Louis) I tried to place Naples and Sicily under the Hungarian crown.

30. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Sulaymān al Mīzinī al-Qaysī was born in 473/1080 and died in 565/1169. His two known works are *Kitāb al-Mu'rib 'an ba'ḍ 'ajā'ib al Maghrib*, published and translated by C.E. Dubler, Madrid, 1953, and the second, *Tuḥfat al Albāb wa nukhbat al-a'jāb*, was published by Gabriel Ferrand in *Journal Asiatique*, 1925, pp. 1–148 and 195–307. Although sections on Russia and Africa have been translated, it is only recently that a complete translation has appeared in Madrid.

31. There is a full discussion by Ivan Hrbek of the question of Bāshgīrd (Bāshghūrd) and its precise ethnic and geographical connotation in the text of Abū Ḥāmid al Gharnāṭī in 'Ein Arabischer Bericht über Ungarn', *Acta Orientalia Hungarica*, 5, 1955, pp. 205–30.

32. See 'Les noms des Hongrois et de la Hongrois chez les médievaux geógraphes arabes et persans', *Folia Orientalia*, 19, 1978.

This indicates a continuing interest of the Hungarian kings in the Arab-influenced south.

(*c*) The Hungarian term *Szerecsen* (from the Arabic *Sharqiyyīn*) is derived from the northern Italian *saresin-seresin*. This same word in southern Italy explicitly denotes an Arab, later a negro. It is not likely that such a term would have come into Hungarian by this channel if it were meant that the people in question were Pechenegs from Southern Russia or Arabs from the Levant.

The above arguments, are taken up in his concluding remarks:

> At the very end of the eleventh century, Hungary entered into Mediterranean trading life. By 1105 the Hungarian conquest of the Dalmatian seaports was complete and the long-lasting military and commercial war of the Hungarian kings mainly against Venice (but against other Mediterranean trading centres as well) then began. These historical contacts are reflected by some of the Italian loan words of the Hungarian language: eg *bárka* (bark), *gálya* (galley), *sajka* (small boat) and *szamár* (donkey) which are all inevitable requirements of sea trade (and sea battle). In the course of the Crusades it becomes evident that the Mohammedans of the Holy Land are in Hungarian eyes (Saracens) (szerecsen), in the same way as the Arab traders of the Maghreb or the Mohammedan minters, usurers and mercenaries of Hungary. The quoted development of the meaning of the Latin word saracenus in Hungary is accounted for by this complicated crosscurrent.
>
> From what has been said above one may draw the following conclusions. The Hungarian sources prove that traders and soldiers of the western part of the Mediterranean were known by the name szerecsen 'Maghrebean Arab' at the latest in the first half of the twelfth century, and they lived in Hungary as well. At this time the Hungarian Kingdom was probably the most north-eastern point of their expansion.[33]

Not dissimilar is the view expressed by Charles d'Eszlary in his article 'Les musulmans hongrois du Moyen-Age (VIIe–XIVe siècles)',[34] though in more general terms. Here he is more concerned with one of the alternative nomenclatures, the Ismaëlitae, whom he identifies as Muslims coming from both East and West. Again, the Arabs are included. 'On account of the liberation of the Spanish provinces, a

33. Vilmos Voigt, 'Hungarian Sources on Early Mediterranean Contacts', *Proceedings of the First Congress of Mediterranean Studies of Arab-Berber Influence*, edited by Micheline Gallay and David R. Marshall, Algiers: Société Nationale d'Edition et de Diffusion, 1973, pp. 213–28.

34 In *Revue Ibla* (Tunis), vol. XIX, 1956, pp. 375–86.

number of Moors emigrated. They felt insecure because of the Crusades and the rigorous stipulations of the synods of Toledo and Latran. The so-called negroes, as they were known at this time, were a mixture of Arab refugees from the Byzantine Empire that had fallen under Latin domination, immigrant Muslims, Bulgars and Bashkir Hungarians who, in fleeing from the Mongols, had crossed the Volga, and, lastly, apostate Hungarians. Such newcomers established themselves in the countries of purely Hungarian population of the Great Plain and beyond the Danube: quickly adopting the Hungarian language, they remained strangers in regard to their religion and their customs.[35]

Al-Idrīsī (548/1154) describes the Yugoslav coast, Albania and the Macedonian interior

Alain Ducellier, in his book *La Façade Maritime de l'Albanie au Moyen Age*[36] which especially centres on the region of Durrës and Vlorë in Albania between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries, has indicated that Idrīsī's *Book of Roger*[37] was perhaps the most important source for our knowledge of the trans-Balkan itineraries. Idrīsī provides valuable information about the Adriatic coast of Yugoslavia, including such ports as Kotor, Ragusa, Trogir, Sibenik, Zara and as far north as the regions to the south-east of Venice and Trieste. He also supplies an especially valuable itinerary inland from the Albanian port of Durrës towards Constantinople. Also interesting are references to the Black Sea coast. A number of these routes meet at key localities, whether the final destination be Belgrade (Bilghrādūn) or Thessalonica. Several of the localities that he lists have not been identified with certainty although there is enough precision to indicate that the ancient Via Egnatia was substantially preserved despite the intrusion of Robert Guiscard's Crusading exploits and the riposte of the Byzantines, whose mercenary forces contained many nationalities.[38] The lakes of the

35. *ibid.* A passage from the Arab geographer Yāqūt, cited in W.T. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, pp. 193–4, is quite inconclusive; any reference to Bulghār, or Bulgaria, merely indicates that the 'Islamic reformers' came from that region. The informants (who were Ḥanafīs) had no clear idea of their ancestry.

36. Ducellier, *Variorum*, *op. cit.*, XV, pp. 1–7.

37. *ibid.*, pp. 6–7 and *passim*.

38. Set out in Henri Grégoire's article 'La Chanson de Roland et Byzance', *Byzantion*, XIV, 1939, pp. 267–315.

Kosovo-Macedonian region are particularly singled out as crossing points, Ohrid being among the most important.

Idrīsī remarks:

> The road from Durrës to Gjirokastër leaves Durrës on the Adriatic sea and pursues an inland route in the direction of Constantinople. It passes over Deabolis [Tabarla?], a distance of two days. This is a town located on the summit of a mountain and it is four days distant from Ohrid. Ohrid [Ukhrīda] is a mighty city. It is amply housed and populated. Broad in its scope in trade and in commerce. It is located above pleasing mountains. Near to it is a lake wherein fish is caught by fishermen in skiffs. The lake is situated to the south of the city. It takes three days to circumvent the lake and some of the city is sited by the lake side. Between Ohrid and Polog/Tetova [Būlghū] is a journey of two days march. It is a beautiful town on a large mountain. Between it and Skopje [Usqūfiya] is a day's journey to the north-east. Skopje is a large town with adjacent public buildings and habitations. It has an abundance of vines and of cereal crops.[39]

Idrīsī describes the major rivers of Serbia and Macedonia and he also describes lakes in the region of Kastoria and Ioannina.[40]

In ancient times, the Via Egnatia was important both economically and strategically. Relations between Albania and Macedonia, under the Byzantines, were largely military and political. This route, via Deabolis and Ohrid, is, in the opinion of Ducellier,[40] the one which gave access to 'the nerve centre of the Balkans, the region of the lakes', a reality that was not to be lost on the Turks, or on those wandering dervish orders that originated in the Middle East and in Central Asia, and which sought new territories and sanctuaries when Islam began to penetrate the interior of this peninsula. For the enemies of Byzantium, the Normans and the Crusaders, the Via Egnatia afforded the obvious route for them to follow in order to reach their eastern destinations. Durrës was a valuable Adriatic harbour, and the route between it and Thessalonica was the principal access to the Levant. Another connected Vlorë and Almyros on the coast of Thessaly. Idrīsī is remarkably precise in the detailed information that he furnishes. At that time, Durrës, and Vlorë to a lesser degree, had two essential economic functions: they were used for the export of local produce, and were intermediary links in a chain

39. al-Idrīsī, *Opus Geograhicum* (E. Cerulli, F. Gabrieli, G. Levi della Vida, L. Petech, G. Tucci), Fasc. V, Naples-Rome: Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli 1975, pp. 792–3.

40. Ducellier, *Variorum*, *op. cit.*, IV: 'L'Arbanon et les Albanais au XIe siècle', p. 367.

that united the West and the Levant, being the outlet on the Adriatic of the most important land-routes of the Balkans. The economic axis which gave life to the Albanian coast was an East-West axis.[41]

The coastline had maritime importance, as is also confirmed by Idrīsī. The Albanian ports were stages. 'To go from Durrës to Constantinople, following the contour of the coast-line, one first passes Vlorë [Valona]. From then onwards this route enters the Aegean Sea and finally reaches Constantinople itself.'

Our Arab geographer gives little information about the inhabitants of the interior, although the Serbs are specifically mentioned. It seems certain that he received reports from travellers who had journeyed into the Balkans from Italy and Sicily. Trade to the south has already been mentioned in connection with Hungary's relations with that quarter. What we know of the presence of Oriental peoples at that time in the Balkan interior is extremely sketchy. However, Grégoire, in his studies of the significant part played by this region in the geographical setting for the *gestes* of both West and East, emphasises that the battle of Butentrot (Butrint) opposite Corfu, in 1081, was a major one. The Normans of Robert Guiscard were faced by a Byzantine army that included a barbarous and a pagan vanguard, some 2,000 Turks, including auxiliary Patzinaks (Pechenegs).[42]

The Arnauts

The Albanians (whom the Turks were to call Arnavut and the Arabs al-Arnā'ūṭ) claim to be descended from the Illyrians, the ancient people of Bronze and Iron age times in this region. Their ancestors had been bold seamen whose ships had taken them to Italy and along the Adriatic to the Levant. They bartered with foreign lands, especially with the Phoenicians, with the Hellenic ports and with the cities of Italy. Later the Illyrians came under the rule of the Greeks and the Romans. The second-century AD geographer, Ptolemy of Alexandria, listed the

41. Ducellier, *Variorum*, *ibid.*, XV, 6–7, furnishes details as to the changes in this ancient axis, by land and sea, at this period. See also Stojanka Kenderova and Bojan Běšeliev, *La Péninsule Balkanique Réprésenté sur les Cartes d'al-Idrisi*, Sofia, 1990, for the Black Sea regions.

42. See Grégoire. 'La Chanson de l'an 1085 ou l'étymologie de Baligant et de Califerne', *Bulletin de la Classe de Lettres de l'Académie Royale de Belgique*, XXV, 1939, pp. 240–4.

Illyrian tribes. He noted among them the 'Albanoi', who dwelt in the mountains between Durrës, Dibra and Albanopolis.

To a large extent, the Illyrians preserved their language, although under Roman rule many Latin words were incorporated within it. In the first century of the Christian era, Christianity found a response. One recalls the statement by St Paul in Romans 15, verse 19: 'Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.'

In the second century, two of the earliest proselytes of the faith proclaimed its message, St Donat in Aulon and St Ast in Dyrrah. In Albania, as elsewhere in the Balkans, ancient paganism lingered on, and within the deep and inpenetrable interior it has continued to linger, or was but partially transformed by the Christian, whether Catholic or Orthodox, Muslim (and Marxist) beliefs that were to be transfused within it, or imposed, willingly or reluctantly, upon it. Ramadan Sokoli, in his *Chansons populaires albanaises*,[43] illustrates how the cult of the sun is alive in Albanian folklore, in its oral tradition and in its toponyms, especially in regard to caves, during special seasons or during hours of daylight, where the sun's rays are perceived in their gloomy depths. The festival of St George is celebrated in a way that preserves a solar myth. In Kosovo horses and carts are loaded with cakes and sweetmeats and entire towns and villages take part in the festivities. Around Midsummer Day is the festival of St John, Shëngjin, when bonfires are lit in a blaze that turns a mountainous night into day. In time of drought a child is stripped and clad in grass and green leaves from head to toe. One sings from door to door:

'Rona, Rona, rain maker, bear rain to our ploughed fields, May grain swell in the ear, may good men eat harvests to the limits, from the corn that shall grow in abundance.'[44]

During this early period and later, under the Byzantines, the Via Egnatia was the principal route in the mountainous interior for the publishers of the Christian faith, as well as for caravans that transported articles of commerce between East and West. Dyrrachion (Durrës) became the most important Byzantine port in the West. It was named 'the flower

43. Ramadan Sokoli, *Chansons populaires albanaises* (vol. 1: *Chansons Lyriques*), translation by K. Luka, Tirana: Editions 'Naim Frashëri', 1966, pp. 53–85.

44. *ibid.*, p. 79.

garden of the Adriatic'. Notable towns that were to grow up along the Via Egnatia were Skampa, near the later town of Elbasan, and Deabolis (later mentioned by Idrīsī) near the river Devoll.

Towards the end of the sixth century, the Slavs began to settle in both Albania and Macedonia, colonising the lands most suited to agriculture.[45] As a consequence of the barbarian invasions, of Slav colonisation, and of the revolts of slaves and tenants, the ancient system of slave-ownership that had hitherto been practised came to an end. The Illyrian population entered the annals of medieval history known by a new name coined from the Illyrian Albanoi tribe that had inhabited the region between Durrës and Dibra, north of lake Ohrid. The medieval Albanians came to be called Arbër/Arbën and their country Arbanon.[46] In the ninth century Byzantium, in order to defend the Albanian provinces that were under threat from the Bulgarians and the Arabs in southern Italy, established two 'themes', Durrës (Durazzo) and Nikopoja. However, in 851 the Bulgarians captured Ohrid and then, between 852 and 927, Berat and Mallakastra. Finally, under Tsar Simeon (893–927), they captured all the 'theme' of Nikopoja and thirty castles in the 'theme' of Durrës, although the city itself did not surrender.

At the end of the tenth century the Bulgarian kingdom renewed its expansionism under Tsar Samuel, and Ohrid became its capital. In 989 he captured Durrës. By 1018, however, Byzantium had re-established its rule in Albania and its borderlands. Half a century later, Pope Gregory VII incited the Normans in Sicily to attack the Byzantine territories in this part of the Balkans. In 1096 the Crusaders, led by Bohemund son of Robert Guiscard, passed through Albania. There was another invasion in 1107 when the Normans landed in Vlorë although they could not capture Durrës and withdrew a year later. By 1190 the Albanian nobles had founded principalities. The first of these was centred at Krujë. These did not last long, although the Albanians revolted and stubbornly resisted the Byzantine empire of Nicea.

Michael II, the despot of Epirus[47], took advantage of the rebellions in order to renew his struggle against the Nicean emperor. He also made

45. Ducellier, *Variorum, op. cit.*, X, 'Des Albanais ont-ils envahi le Kosovo?', pp. 1–8.

46. Ducellier, *Variorum, ibid.*, IV, 'L'Arbanon et les Albanais au XIe siècle', pp. 353–68, where the geography and society during this period of the history of medieval Albania and Epirus are discussed.

47. On the alliance between the Albanians and Michael II, on all fronts, see D. Nicol, *The Despot of Epirus*, Oxford, 1970, esp. pp. 48–9.

an alliance with the king of Sicily, Manfred Hohenstaufen. He granted to the latter the hand of his daughter Helena, and gave her as her dowry Corfu, Vlorë, Kanina, Berat and other Albanian towns in his possession. Manfred's help, however was not sufficient to prevent the triumph of the emperor of Nicea, who conquered Constantinople in 1261, restored the Byzantine empire, and subsequently subdued the despot of Epirus.

Although Manfred Hohenstaufen retained his possessions in Albania for a short period, it was only with the help of German and Arab vassals that he did so. He was eventually defeated and killed in a battle fought with Charles of Anjou, who became king of Sicily. The latter seized Vlorë, Kanina, Berat and Durrës in 1272. On February 2, 1272, Charles in Naples proclaimed the 'kingdom of Arbëria' and declared himself its king. He granted fiefs to the Albanian nobles, although his intentions were unrealised when the chief office of state and the fiefs were filled by members of the Catholic French and Italian nobility. Suppression of popular resentment followed and the Albanian locals were thenceforth to support the Byzantines against the Anjous, who withdrew from Albania in 1286.

They returned, under Philip, in 1304. This time the Albanians, fearful of the growth of the Serbian state, were compelled to side with Philip who divided power between the Arbënesh nobles. Tulielm Blenishti was appointed as marshal of the Angevin armies in Albania, Tanush Thopia was made a count and recognised as feudal lord of the lands between the Mati and Shkumbi rivers. Andreas Muzaki was given the title of 'despot of Arbëria' and the lands between the Shkumbi and Semani. Despite this, Albania fell under Serbian domination for a time, especially during the reign of Stephen Dušan (1331–5). The fourteenth century, however, was a prosperous time for the Albanian cities, Durrës in particular. Great nobles lived in castles, like the Thopias in Krujë, the Muzakis in Berat and the Dukagjinas in Lezhë. Money was minted and banners depicted lordly emblems, the crowned lion of the Thopia, a two-headed eagle for the Muzakis and a white single-headed eagle for the Dukagjinas. In the fifteenth century the Kastriots identified themselves by the now famous two-headed eagle against a red background.[47]

It is with these Albanian principalities of the later medieval period that one finds the first reference to Turkish mercenaries and auxiliaries. This was especially true of the region around Krujë (Arbanon). In Turkish documents of the fifteenth century onwards that region was to be called

Sancak-i Arvanid or Sancak-i Arnavud.[48] The name was extended to the whole of Albania.

The Ottoman conquest in Albania was accomplished according to a well established pattern. First the Turks were mercenaries, serving Christians. Later, by involvement in local or wider conflicts, they subdued the Christian lords and reduced them to vassalage.[49] As early as 1291, Michael Palaeologos used Turkish mercenaries to halt the advance of the troops of Charles of Anjou into Albania. In 1337, Andronikos III Palaeologus subjugated the Albanian nomads, living between Kanina and Arta, with the help of a Turkish army. In the fourteenth century the annexation of Krujë was a grave loss to the Venetians in Durrës. It was governed by Helena Thopia and by her Venetian husband Marco Barbadico. In 1394 the couple gave it to the Turks. Its inhabitants were rewarded for this surrender. Yaqut Pasha and Khodja Firuz granted them exemption from various taxes.[50]

Balkan regions, the 'Chanson de Roland' and medieval Arabic folk epics

Towns and districts mentioned by Idrīsī in his *Book of Roger*, especially in Albania, Epirus, Macedonia and a part of Serbia, were a source for toponyms in the *Chanson de Roland*. They may also be alluded to in several of the major Arabic folk epics, those that were composed in Egypt and Syria, particularly in the *Sīras* of 'Antar b. Shaddād, Dhāt al-Himma and perhaps, Sayyid Baṭṭāl.[51] To Henri Grégoire we owe the pioneer detective-like assembling of the evidence which mainly reflects the historical landings of the Normans in Albania and the clashes

48. *Arnāut(i), Arn'ūd, Arnā'ūd*, etc. is still used in the Balkans, though most frequently among families of Albanian origin in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. I have heard village boys in the region near Struga and Kališta and Radolišta, west of Lake Ohrid, call themselves by this name.

49. Elizabeth A. Zachariadou, 'Marginalia on the History of Epirus and Albania (1380–1418)', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, vol. 78, Vienna, 1988, p. 196.

50. *ibid.*, p. 206.

51. The Arab hero Sayyid Baṭṭāl is both Arabic and Turkish. In ancient Arabic versions (which are lost, or survive principally in *Dhāt al-Himma*) events are concerned with wars between Arabs and Byzantines. The account is transformed into that of a Gazi whose burial-place is allegedly in the Baktāshī sanctuary at Seyyit Battal Gazi in Asia Minor.

that followed against the Byzantines, assisted by their Oriental and non-Oriental mercenaries, between 1080 and 1085. The wars ended with the death of Bohemund and the sound defeat of his father, Robert Guiscard, the leader of the military expedition. The names of towns, harbours and lakes such as Butrint in Albania, where a major battle was fought, or 'Jericho' and Kanina in Epirus, or 'Malprose' Lake Prespa in Macedonia, have been convincingly identified; so too the identities of major heroic figures and political leaders such as Baligant, who is none other than (George) Palaeologos, the Byzantine general. Grégoire pairs him with a certain Balkūm (Baligant) in the Arabic romance of '*Antar*.[52]

The Balkan framework for the Pyrenean setting for the *Chanson de Roland* was an exciting discovery. The Orientals were not the allies of the Spanish Moors, nor Turks and others of the enemy that were fought by the Crusaders in Asia Minor: Twenty-seven were names of nations. The Esclavoz were the Slavs, Sorbres and Sorz the Serbians and Serbs, the Ermines and Ormalens were the Armenians, the Turs and Pers were the Turks and Persians, the Pinceneis were the Pechenegs, the Avers the Avars, the Hums and Hongres the Huns and Hungarians, the Astrimonies were the people from Strymon in Macedonia. All of them were represented in the Byzantine army. There were strong contingents of Pechenegs already in 1069 with Romanoes Diogenes' expedition against the Turks, and the presence of Pechenegs in Alexios' troops was resented by the Normans, who a few years later complained to the Pope that their adversary was employing Scythian barbarians. Armenians had always been numerous in the Byzantine army, and during the siege of Durrës, a mass of Serbs came under King Bodin to help the Basileus against the Normans. The linkage between Norman, Byzantine and Arab was explored in detail by Grégoire.[53]

Over and above this, Grégoire considered the impact of Guiscard's failed campaign in the Balkans as not only having influenced the *Chanson* but, in a not dissimilar way, as having furnished the names of individuals and, somewhat less, countries, peoples and events within Arabic popular romances of the same period. Although several are mentioned by him,

52. See H. Grégoire, 'La Chanson de l'an 1085 ou l'étymologie de Baligant et de Califerne', *Bulletin de la Classe des lettres de l'Académie Royale de Belgique*, XXV, 1939, pp. 211–73.

53. Grégoire's view was that although the *Chanson de Roland* had a Northern author, *circa* 1085, perhaps in order to exhort the Normans of Italy and of France to support the effort to regain Epirus, a *trouvère* was added to the *Chanson* proper, a lengthy episode full of Byzantine materials.

it is with the most famous of them, the *Sīrat 'Antar*, that he especially observed a connection:

> I think that nothing can be found in the Antar Romance, which could not belong to the end of the XIth nor the beginning of the XIIth century. What is Antar's last exploit? He kills . . . Bohemond, and rescues Rome besieged by the latter . . . He does that as an ally of the Byzantine Emperor, as an ally of the King of Rome called Balkām. One remembers that the killing of Bohemond, the greatest enemy of both the Byzantines and the Moslems, was mentioned also in the Del-Hemma, where it is said to be the merit of Del-Hemma herself. It is an epic law that the supreme victory over the national enemy 'number' one must be kept in store for the greatest hero of the 'geste'. In the German epic, it is always the insuperable Dietrich von Berne or Theodoric of Verona who survives all other champions.
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> Antar, the Arab knight *par excellence*, saves Byzantium and Rome and kills the great Norman Bohemond. This is certainly a direct echo of the alliance of the Byzantine Empire with Moslem states and princes in their fight against the Normans. And if we had the slightest doubt about that, that doubt would be suppressed by the very names of the relatives of Bohemond; Mubert, Subert, Kubert. History is so vaguely known to philologists that even Heller has not seen the truth: 'Hier haben wir erst mit einer Gruppe von Namen auf -bert zu tun. Tatsächlich ist dies villeicht die häugigste Endung der altfranzösischen Namen (Aubert, Dagobert, Englebert . . .)', and he cites a dozen or more similar names, forgetting that Bohemond's father was Robert (Guiscard).
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> Antar's expedition as an ally of Byzantium is simply Alexios Comnenos' and Palaeologos' war against Robert and Bohemond: and this at once clears up the name of the King of Rome, or of the Romans, Balkām, who is Palaeologos himself, but under the French form of Baligan.
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> The Antar Romance thus affords us an unexpected confirmation of our identification of Palaeologos with Baligan in the *Chanson de Roland*. In the Syria of the Crusaders, evidently, the famous war of 1081–1085, celebrated by the French *trouvères*, inspired the Arab novelist, and we may conclude that the Antar Romance was completed exactly at the same period as the other epics aforementioned.[54]

However, the most recent part of this folk epic of interest to Grégoire, after detailed inspection, reveals the hand of a romancer of the Mamlūk age.[55] It was shaped, or retold, at least a century after the Balkan

54. H. Grégoire, 'The historical element in Western and Eastern Epics Digenis – Sayyid Battal-Dat-El-Hemma-Antar-Chanson de Roland' in *Autour de l'épopéé byzantine*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1975, pp. 531–2.

55. There are references to Mamlūk weaponry and to technical terms that brings the 'Antar Romance into the same company as the typically Mamlūk *Sīras* of *al-Ẓāhir Baybars* and *Sayf b. Dhī Yazan*.

campaigns of Robert Guiscard and Bohemund. Furthermore, the geographical setting includes Spain where there is a reference to the talismanic idol (*ṣanam*) that once guided Norse ships near (Cadiz), and allusions to a major sea battle, fought with Mamlūk weaponry, in the eastern Mediterranean, to Rome and to Adriatic Italy, and to Sicily (where, in an adjoining section of the *Sīra*, a church at Najrān in Arabia has been merged with tales about the suspended remains of Aristotle in a church in Palermo or Cyprus stories that were reported by the Arab geographers).[56] Kūbart's name may have been inspired by that of Robert (Guiscard). Sir Jawān/Sinjāwan (Shëngjin?) could have been inspired by (Raymond de) St Gilles, a person found in the Turkish folk epic of Abū Muslim, Balkām (Baligant) by Palaeologos, and King al-Ṣāfāt (possibly Ṣāffāt 'archangels in ranks') might conceivably have some association with the name of the port of Suffada (rather than Safad) to the north of Durrës in Albania. Recorded as Sopot(on), and receiving mention in Idrīsī's *Book of Roger* (1192), it was a zone for commercial exchange between the Dukagjinas and the Thopias.

However, no such identifications can be made with the person of a certain 'King of the Islands', and of a large expanse of land on the northern coast of the Mediterranean extending to a distance of some forty days' journey. In the text he is called Laylamān, the son of Ṣarāyir, His name suggests a connection with the people, the Alamani — Grégoire indicates that the 'German' mercenaries of the Byzantines, the Micenes and Nimetzi, were sometimes also called Alamani. However, this would place them in the wrong camp, as between foe and ally in the events recounted in the *Sīra*.

In view of the identifiable borrowings from Arabic geographical and historical literature within the *Sīrat 'Antar*, it is possible that the juxtaposition of the names Laylamān/Līlamān and Ṣarāyir, together with the visit in state of the former to Heraclius, may have been inspired by Ṣāḥib al-Sarīr (the 'lord of the throne' or 'the couch', or 'the ruler of the Dagestani province of Sarīr' in the Caucasus), namely the 'king of the Ṣanārians', who was given permission by Heraclius to sit on a throne in the palace in Byzantium. Laylamān, with variants, could have been a deformation of the name of the Sarmatian Alans (al-Lān) who had penetrated as far as Dalmatia in the age of the wanderings of Balkan

56. See F. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans, passim*, and his *Letters on Religion and Folklore*, London: Luzac, 1926, p. 91.

peoples. The Alans were deemed to be within the domains of the 'lord of the throne' or one of the provinces of Dagestan.

Still facing north, there is also another possibility (supported by the known commercial connections with that region, between Mamlūk Egypt and the Golden Horde) This is the region of Novgorod, Jūlmān or Gūlmān (Holmgard in the *sagas*), the trading state of Novgorod. Another possible explanation is the intrusion of a name not associated with Robert Guiscard's earlier campaign in the Balkans, but of a person that came to Arab ears somewhat later. Enrico Pescatore — Henry of Genoa, count of Malta — in association with the Genoese corsair Alamanno de Costa, count of Syracuse, became master of much of the Mediterranean. Alamanno was the principal figure in the conquest of Syracuse in 1204. Both were lauded by the Languedoc troubador Peire Vidal, whose adventurous life took him to Hungary and the Levant. Genoa figures notably in the *Sīrat Baybars*. In that same folk epic Maryam is described as a daughter of the King of Genoa. Maryam, or Māriya, is also the name of a wife of ʿAntar in this particular section of the *Sīrat ʿAntar*.[57]

An effort like this to link somehow the folk epic of *Roland* and *ʿAntar* is rarely convincing and is highly speculative; others may suggest alternatives. Its interest can only be marginal in postulating any conceivable direct influence on the Islamised Balkan peoples, whether before or after the Ottoman conquest at the end of the fourteenth century. Sounder

57. It is not intended to press such specific identifications or digress on the possible sources cited for the Arab romances. For example, Saint Gilles may have no Crusading connections and the name Sirjwān or Sanjwān (etc.) may be a simple borrowing from *The Story of Sarjīl ibn Sarjūn* (of Syria) who is referred to by Anwar G. Chejne, *Islam and the West, the Moriscos*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983, p. 105. Nevertheless, I would agree with Grégoire (and scholars before him) that there is a general atmosphere of the first Crusade present in the *Sīras* of ʿAntar and Dhāt al-Himma in particular. To this may be added specific references to relevant geographical localities, including ports, in all likelihood in Italy, Sicily, Greece, Albania and Dalmatia.

There is the distinct possibility that the 'German' ruler in question is none other than the Hohenstaufen, the half-Oriental ruler of Sicily, Frederick II (1215–50). According to al-Dimashqī (d 727/1327): 'The King of Kings of the Germans (*malik mulūk al-Lamān*), named the "Inbirāṭūr", and called al-Inbirūr, has as his dwelling place the island of Sicily. In his kingdom there are fifteen lands.' It is likely that a copyist misread *al-Inbirūr* and changed it to Ibn Ṣarāyir.

58. Rade Božović, *Arapi u Usmenoj Narodnoj Pesmi na Srpskohravtskom jezičkom području*, Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade University, 1977, pp. 223–4.

evidence for folk-copies influences has emerged from the research carried out, and the examples collected, by Dr Rade Božović, an Arabist in Belgrade University. His examples display shared themes and episodes that mark both Arabic and Serb-Croat folk epic. They are especially centred around the person of Marko, the major hero of the South Slavs.[58] In the verse that Božović has examined:

> . . . . Arab is superseded by the Gypsy, because they too are black, by the Turks, as a result of a genetic extension of the function, and the Arnauts, because folk tradition held them to be of Arab origin and also because they were sometimes treated as national enemies. The explanation for Arabs appearing as black should be sought not only in the influence of myth but also in the oral Arab tradition of frequent black heroes (Antara, Abu Xaid, Hilali, Abdul Wahab in the folk romances on Antara, the Hilal tribe and Princess Zatul Himma), and in black being the heraldic and war colour of the Abbasides.[59]

What is also clear, is that the impact of the Arabs and of Islam in this literature most surely predates the ascendancy of the Turks. Pre-Ottoman Islam in the Balkans played at least some part:

> The Arab appears very early in the epic tradition of Southern Slavs. He enters it already during the Byzantine-Arab wars in the frontier area between Byzantium and the Arab Caliphate. At that time (700–1000 AD) the Arab may very well have assumed the function of the ancient Slav Crnbog (Black God), and the Slav hero the function of Belbog (White God). However, as the Byzantine-Arab conflicts receded into the past, the character and function of the Arab began to take on mythical features. The structure of this character regresses, tending to return to its archetype, irrespective of the growing numbers of Southern Slavs adopting Christianity.
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> This is the situation in which Marko appears as a new factor in the collision. He assumes the function of the old Slav hero from the Byzantine-Arab frontier area. The arrival of the Turks marks the beginning of a revitalisation of the Arab's function. The myth fades and reality returns. Thus, with the Turks, the Arab enjoys a comeback in the epic poems of Southern Slavs, he will remain until after the new national enemy, the Turks, have finally established themselves.'

59. Božović, *op. cit.*, p. 224.