



ZONES OF IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICTS BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM IN THE BALKANS

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with some little known aspects of the ideological rivalry between Islam and Christianity in the Balkans. The accent is put on the so called “Tebshirat” – one of the branches of Islamic theology concerning the problems of Revaluation and defending the legitimacy of Islam in the context of the history of monotheistic idea. The manifestations of Tebshirat in the Balkans during the Ottoman and post Ottoman periods and its influence on the national ideologies of the Muslim communities are traced out.

Key words: Islam, Christianity, Balkans, Tebshirat

“Gospel: The meaning of the word is “a book of the books”. As a term it means good news. That is the holly book of the Christians. It comprises of texts collected by Mathew, Luka, Marko and John which concern the life and orders of Jesus. It consists of two parts – the first is the Old Testament that refers to the history of the Jews from the time of Moses to the birth of Jesus. The second is the New Testament and covers the life and teaching of Jesus. The first Gospel was written in Greek and Jewish. During the Middle Ages it was translated into Latin and red in this language. Martin Luter translated the Gospel to German in 1521. It was also translated to and red in other languages. The Gospel was gathered after the death of Jesus.” (Altay, Ş., 212)

This explanation of the history and the contests of gospels, strange as it might seem to any educated Christian, is enlisted as a separate article in the “Dictionary of the Law and Social Terms” whose author is Şakir Altay – a renowned Turkish jurist from the middle of the XX century. The dictionary was the first attempt in the post-Ottoman Turkish jurisprudence to bring together and present the basic terms from the field of law, economics and religion. That was the fact that made Altay’s work very popular among the scientific circles in Turkey and after its first publication in 1962 it was reprinted in 1969 and 1983.

Our interest in that dictionary was provoked by the obvious terminological mistakes in the text

cited above. Theoretically, they can easy be ascribed to the author’s incompetence or to his lack of sufficient information on the gospels but at the same time these “inexactnesses” appear to be, to a certain extend, a repercussion of some of the firmest Islamic notions of Christianity. In this context we will not be wrong to add Altay’s article to the long list of superficial or real miscomprehensions between the East and the West known in the literature as “Orientalism” and “Occidentalism”. But if we are to regard the problem in the light of cultural distinctions and stereotypes, two important questions are likely to arise: what the significance of the Gospel, often proclaimed as “the most fundamental document of the Western civilization”, is in the spiritual doctrine of the Islam and how the Islamic conceptions on the Gospel influenced the mentality and weltanschauung of the modern Muslim national intelligentsia and its attitude to the “Occident”.

However, contrary to the theories of inevitable “crash of civilizations” many of these conceptions are actually due not only to the “ideological antagonism” between the two alternative monotheistic religions (Islam and Christianity) which for more than 10 centuries fought for dominance in the Mediterranean region but also to their active contact and interaction. That interaction was realized by a constant exchange of religious, doctrinal and even political ideas on the different levels of

both conscious and subconscious social culture. In the exposition we will use the term “Islamic paradox” as indicative of the whole complex of concepts accepted or elaborated by the Muslim theologians in respect to the gospels and Christianity, because as we will see below, it consisted of several hidden “paradoxes”. The Tebshirat – one of the main branches of the Islamic theology investigating the continuity between the monotheistic religions appears to be the core of this “paradox”. In the present article we will focus on the role of the Tebshirat in the processes of transformation of the old Ottoman high social strata into national Turkish elite and the subsequent transition from one classical Muslim umma towards a modern society. Such an approach can shed an additional light on the connection between the Balkan model of secularism - and in particular on its Muslim variant, and the religious tradition, as well as the consequences of their “concubinage”. Without a detailed study of their relationship many aspects of the national ideologies and the nature of the westernization on the Balkans will remain indistinct.

I. The Tebshirat – appearance and basic trends
The first most significant source of the Tebshirat was the Koran and its evidences. A big number of Koranic texts concerning the appearance and development of the monotheistic idea in general and the place of the Torah and the Gospel in its history in particular are concentrated mainly in the suras which the Islamic tradition attributes to the Medina period of Mohamed’s ministry and life. The texts in question are under in the form of orders, accusations or brief judgments directed to Mohamed or to different religious communities (most often Jews or Christians). They can be easily distinguished from the other parts of the Koran (long descriptions of the Judgment day, hell and paradise, narratives about the previous profits and the fate of non-believer peoples, etc.) by their laconism and the almost imperative character of their speech.

According to the information they suggest, the texts can be differentiated in three groups. The first includes the passages where the Gospel is presented not as four separate scriptures but as a unique divine message predestinated by God to Jesus and given to the Christians. Therefore by its origin, structure and specifics it stays very close to the Torah and the Koran itself (2:2-4, 2:136, 3:48, 5:110, 29:47, 57:27, 98:4).

One separate group of aets is dedicated to the interrelatedness between the holly books of monotheism. In accordance with the Koranic point of view they are all results of the constant God’s interference in the human history by means of the profits. The ultimate aim of this intervention is to spread of the faith in the only one and truly God as opposed to the false or demonic polytheistic cults. Hence, every one of the books is not only a manifestation of God’s might and will but also part of His entire plan and revelation. In the Koranic texts the Gospel is often considered to be in conformity with this monotheistic progressive time – it is part of the books promised by God to the humanity after the expel of Adam and Eve from the paradise. One of basic aims of these books is to prepare the believers for the “descent” of the last book which in its turn will confirm and carry out the prophecies in the Torah and Gospel (2:38, 2:87, 2:91, 2:97, 3:3-4, 6:92).

The most controversial aspect of the Koranic evidences for the Gospel is the problem of its distortion. Indeed in the Koran Jews are often charged with conscious misrepresentation of the Torah (2:40-42, 2:44, 2:79, 2:95, 5:41-44, etc.) but the critics against the Christians are not so peremptory. Although some aets obviously hint that parts of the Gospel were changed or even concealed from the ordinary followers of the “books” (5:14-15, 3:78) and thus question the validity of the scriptures used by the Christians. They are furthermore criticized because of the dogma of the Trinity and belief that Jesus is “a son of God” – two conceptions that were understood as a kind of idolatry and completely rejected by the Koran (5:72, 5:75, 5:116, 9:31 and etc.).

In the context of similar suggestions the most reasonable question refers to the specifics of the “truly Gospel” according to the Koranic comprehension. Indeed in the suras of the Koran there can be found a big number of evidences concerning Jesus and his ministry. As a whole they repeat well known events and parables from the canonical gospels or correspond to the information of the rich apocryphal literature which gained in the first centuries A. D. a big popularity among the vast Christian masses from the region of the Eastern Mediterranean. However, unlike the Christian scripts, the testimonies of the Koran whose prototype has its origins in earlier

Christian works are subordinated to the view of Jesus' human nature and prophetic character of His mission.

Along with the obvious similarities, some of the Koranic data has no parallels to the canonical or non canonical gospels. Part of the data refers to speeches of Jesus addressed to the Christians in which He denies the idea of the Trinity and reveals Himself only as a prophet sent by God to preach His orders. Others are relevant to the particular Koranic concept about Jesus' death on the cross and his ascension. However, the most important evidences that formed the steadiest Islamic stereotypes and notions of the Gospel are two passages where the Gospel is presented as a divine prediction about the appearance of the last prophet. The first originates from the sura The Elevated Places: "Those who follow the Apostle-Prophet, the Ummi, whom they find written down with them in the Taurat and the Injeel (who) enjoins them good and forbids them evil, and makes lawful to them the good things and makes unlawful to them impure things, and removes from them their burden and the shackles which were upon them" (7:157) This assertion is further developed in the sura The Ranks where words of Jesus himself are cited: "And when Isa son of Marium said: Oh, children of Israel! surely I am the apostle of Allah to you, verifying that which is before me of the Taurat and giving the good news of an Apostle who will come after me, his name being Ahmad, but when he came to them with clear arguments they said: This is clear magic" (61:6). The two aets allow the Koranic information about the Gospel to be regarded not as a simple sum of evidences collected from different orthodox or non-orthodox Christian scriptures but as a separate version of the Gospel whose role and significance in the history of religions and monotheism on one side and for the consolidation of the so called "Orient" on the other is equal to the influence which the four canonical gospels exerted on the "civitas Romana".

Some of the hadises also contain arguments in support of this version. One of the most often discussed hadis in the Islamic literature is the narrative about the encounter between the young Mohamed and the Christian monk Bahira who had identified Mohamed as the last messenger long expected by the Christians years before the beginning of his ministry.

Many Muslim authors in their works have dwelt on this story and regarded it as a confirmation for the existing of the one initial Gospel whose contents remained unchanged in the time of Mohamed and were familiar to his Christian contemporaries.

One series of hadises refuted the suspicions of some Mecca citizens who asserted that the Koran was simply a copy of the Torah and the Gospel, suggested to Mohamed by his Christian friends, and therefore it was not descendent from God. In other hadises the Christians are accused of misunderstanding the Gospel's meaning.

The Koran and the hadises not only created the notion of the "truly Gospel" but also imposed in the Muslim community one constant aspiration for seeking and restoring this Gospel. The next Muslim generations expected to find in it incontestable facts proving their faith. This tendency gradually developed into a separate branch of the Muslim theology (Tebshirat) whose emergence was also provoked by the start of the Christian-Muslim dispute in the 8th century. Almost all Muslim theologians and many historians and philosophers worked in the sphere of Tebshirat or took part in the disputes. However, from the very beginning they had to solve a crucial theological problem: Was it possible to change God's words and if so how and who distorted the previous messages. According to the theses and opinions advanced in respect to this question there are three distinguishable trends in the Tebshirat.

The earliest authors like Buhârî (8th century) and at Tabarî (9th century) and some later Muslim apologists asserted that no person was able to change the holly books and interpreted the term distortion as a misconstruction of the real meaning of the Gospel texts. They concentrated their efforts on several passages of the canonical gospels in which they found allusions to the future ministry of Mohamed. The center of their argumentation was the term "Consoler" from John 14:16, which they identified not with the Holy Spirit but with Mohamed.

Other authors maintained the view that the Christians had concealed the texts predicting the advent of the last prophet but preserved the original character of the other parts.

The most radical thesis was elaborated by Abd al Djabar (10th – 11th century) and Ibn Hazm (10th – 11th century). They insisted that the entire contents of the Gospel had been substituted and hence it could not be used by the believers. In 19th century in one polemic work the Arabian theologian ed-Dimashki who was under the strong influence of this trend wrote that “The Gospel which was glorified in the Koran was the first undistorted Gospel and the Christians who were also glorified were the Christians who submitted to the real Gospel. However, to glorify the distorted Gospel would be equal to rejecting the Koran”(in Işık, H., 486).

Abd al Djabar enlarged the base of the Muslim-Christian dispute with some new blames concerning the early history of Christianity. He ascribed the whole responsibility for the distortion of the Christian teaching and doctrine to Apostle Paul who according to Djabar, in order to baptize the pagan world of the Roman empire changed the initial nature of Christianity and “instead of making Romans Christians made the Christians Romans”(in Брѹс, Ф., 182-183). Subsequently, the Gospel was also distorted in accordance with Paul’s view. Djabar’s opinion was gradually accepted by the representatives of different Islamic groups and today it is a notion widely shared in the Muslim world.

Nonetheless, the fact that the adherents of this thesis did not notice the big number of similarities existing between St. Paul’s doctrine and several key Koranic postulates remained somewhat strange. Some of them refer to Jesus and the Gospel, whereas others concern the principles of the monotheistic faith. For example, in the Koran Jesus is many times called “Messiah”. The Muslim authors working in the field of Tebshirat paid little attention to the origin of this term but the earliest documents where Jesus was proclaimed as the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament were St. Paul’s letters. Here for the first time the Gospel was presented as a unique message by God confirming the Torah and predetermined to Jesus (Romans: 1:1-5, 3:31) – a point of view typical of the Koran. There are obvious parallels between St. Paul’s teaching about Jesus as the second Adam (Romans 5:14, 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 15:45-50) and aet 59 from the sura “The family of Imran” (3:53). Curiously St. Paul was also the first one to introduce the motif of the “distorted

Gospel” into the religious disputes and to condemn its use among the Christians (Galatians 1:6-10).

Probably, the most important similarity is the common emphasis placed upon Abram’s faith by both Apostle Paul and the Koran, which appeared to be the most significant historical source and basis for the both doctrines. The Koranic belief according to which the Muslims are followers of Abram who was the first believer preceding the Jews and Christians (2:135, 3:65-68, 3:95, 4:125, 6:161, 16:120-123) is very close to St. Paul’s idea regarding the Christians as inheritors of the promise which had been given by God to Abram before the appearance of the Torah and its law (Romans 4, Galatians 3:6-9, 10-14) These similarities are some of the most paradoxical moments in the history of the Tebshirat, the most radical view about the Christian Gospel in the next centuries has exerted a strong impact on the ideological rivalry between Islam and Christianity as well as on the processes of modernization of the Muslim societies. However it is interesting to note that sometimes in the disputes with Christians even the followers of the third trend resorted to the St. Paul’s authority. For instance ed-Dimashki, mentioned above, criticized the celibacy among the Christians on the ground of 1 Corinthians 7:9 (in Işık, H., 495) and made parallels between Mohamed’s ascension in heaven and 2 Corinthians 12:2 (in Işık, H., 494)

II. The Tebshirat and the Ottomans

The early Ottomans were part of the last wave of the big migration of Turkic Oguz tribes from Central Asia to Anatolia. Starting at the first half of the 11th century with the rise of Seljuks and their sultanate the “exodus” of the Oguzs for about two centuries brought radical changes to the ethnical, religious and political situation in the former Byzantine “East”. Apart from the linguistic Turkization of vast regions of Anatolia the peninsula became a center of many different Sufi brotherhoods whose doctrines were an amalgam of “orthodox” and “heterodox” Islamic and Christian beliefs sometimes mixed with pagan practices. The most popular heterodox orders from the early periods of the Ottoman empire were Kizilbashs (called in the scientific literature Alevis), Bektashies, Bedredinis. The order of Mevlevi despite of its belonging to the Sunni Islam preached pantheistic ideas. Even

conservative Sunni Orders like Nakshbendiya in some aspects were influenced by the previous religious systems that had been spread in the Near East and Anatolia before the appearance of Islam. Some of these orders built close relations with the dynasties of the Oguz principalities which arose spontaneously in the 13th century and formed the fundament of a peculiar interpretation of the Islam staying much closer to the mysticism and pantheism or to the religious syncretism than to the classical forms of the Islamic confession. In such an environment the significance of the Tebshirat as a product mainly of the Sunni orthodoxy, was restricted and its arguments were reduced to the well known Koranic postulates and formulas.

Grigorij Palama – bishop of Thessalonica and one of the most famous Orthodox theologians from the 14th century gave interesting accounts of the situation in the court of Orhan – the second Ottoman ruler. Palama spent several months among the Ottoman Turks as a captive in the early 14th century. It was there and during that period that he entered into discussion with the Muslim theologians from the encirclement of Orhan. According to the testimonies of Palama's companions they were all Jews converted to Islam and questions which they brought up before the bishop referred to the nature of Jesus, the church attitude to Mohamed and the breaking of Moses' law by the Christians – the problems of circumcision and celebration of Saturday and the place of icons in the Christian cult. The Muslim opponents of Palama built their thesis on the basis of Koranic evidences but none of them broached the subject of “the distorted Gospel” (Палама, Г., Спор с хионами).

Indeed in a separate letter to his congregation in Thessalonica in which Palama gave additional information about his stay among the Turks, he mentioned that during one of the disputes one of the notables of the Muslim community in Nikea asked him about the Gospel prophecies concerning Mohamed and blamed their concealment to the Christians (Палама, Г., Писмо своей церкви). This episode showed that the Ottomans at the early stages of their history were at least partly acquainted with the thesis of the Tebshirat but that was not a crucial factor for their attitude to the Christians world.

The territorial expansion of the Ottoman state was paralleled by the transformation of the Ottoman dynasty from tribe commanders and leaders of a frontier principality into ruler elite of world empire. This evolution was marked by an increasing self-identification of the Ottomans with the Sunni Islam and alienation from the “folk” Islam. The process finished at the time of sultan Selim (1513-1520) who initiated cruel persecutions against the heterodox groups and deprived the last inheritor of the Abasids of the caliph title. However, the significance of the Tebshirat for the high Ottoman culture as well as for the so called “folk Islam” on the Balkans in the 15th and the next the 16th century remained more than limited. In fact in this period there were no Ottoman authors working in the sphere of the Tebshirat and it continued to be the field of activity of Arabian speaking Muslims from the Near East.

The anti-Islamic literature of the Balkan Christians offers reach data on the nature of the Christian-Muslim dispute from the first two centuries of the Ottoman rule. Most of the works had clear polemic character and were written in accordance with the classical rules of the religious disputes – the Muslim theses (the Muslim assertions) were contrasted with the Christian antitheses (the Christian replays). It is remarkable that here motifs relating to the Tebshirat were hardly mentioned. For example, Maxim Grek – a high educated Orthodox author from the 16th century, was puzzled by the fact that the Muslims from his epoch had a profound respect for the Gospel as one of the holly books but at the same time they continuously rejected to accept the church doctrine. Finally, he called all Muslims to return to Christianity because he could not find reasonable explanation of this paradox (Грек, М., с.). It seems that Maxim Grek did not have a sufficient knowledge of the Muslim debates about the Gospel and his “ignorance” was most probably due to the circumstance that the arguments of the Tebshirat were rarely used by the Balkan Muslims themselves.

The reasons for this phenomenon must be sought in the structure of the Ottoman elite during the 15th-17th centuries. In fact, from a confessional point of view it was composed by two different strata. Without any doubt the Muslim group and the Islam were the leading elements in the Ottoman ruling class and formed its cultural patterns and models of

social behavior. At the same time the representatives of former Christians (Orthodox and Armenians) were not only well placed in the dominant group but also, quite often, they occupied key positions in the empire administration and government. In certain periods their number even exceeded those of the original Turks. By origin some of those former Christians were inheritors of old Balkan or Anatolian aristocratic families converted to Islam during the Ottoman conquest on both peninsulas. However, since the second part of 15th century those “first” Muslims were gradually replaced by a “new generation” of Muslims who had been recruited periodically by the Christian subjects of the empire by means of the tax “devshirme”. They have completed the staff of the sultan army (the so called “yenicheries”) or have been drawn in the palace and state administration (the so called “ichoglans”). And even before the crisis of the empire to become visible (in the second half of the 17th century) they had increased into the most powerful Ottoman corporation exerting their strong impact on both political and economical matters. Contrary to some romantic opinions originating from the Balkan historiographies, those Muslims never ceased the contacts with their Christian relatives whereas, on the other side, they managed built close relations with the order of Bektashies. That was a specific form of Islam existing parallel to the official Sunni denomination and recognized or at least accepted by the authorities. Its doctrine and practice united elements taken from both Christianity and Islam and in many aspects appeared to be a result of the folk syncretism between the two religions. The Bektashies established a widely spread network of tekkes in Anatolia and on the Balkans but because of their syncretism they and their followers remained deeply indifferent to the theological disputes and contradictions.

Together with the Muslims, the Ottoman ruling class incorporated many representatives of the Christian population. In the first place it included the high clergy of the Orthodox churches and the Armenian church. In order to prevent an eventual rapprochement and unia between the eastern Christians and Catholics, the Ottomans used a system of the Millets to preserve and actually enlarged the traditional privileges of domestic churches. The rich Christian merchants, especially those populating the quarter Fener in Istanbul, were

another example of a non-Muslim estate being successfully integrated in the Ottoman upper crust, thanks to the well developed clientele relations with the sultan court. It is obvious that such an environment could not possibly initiate intensive debates between Christians and Muslims on the base of the Tebshirat. In fact, the only real religious confrontation from this period was that between the Alevis and the Sunnis but its reasons were more political than religious.

The first complete work in Ottoman language relating to the Tebshirat, was written in the first decade of the 18th century. Its author Ibrahim-i Müteferrika belonged to the influential palace circles and was well acquainted with the history and concepts of that branch of Islamic theology. Müteferrika’s book “Risale-i Islamiyye” continued its third trend while simultaneously exceeding the simple reproduction of the well known theses of the previous Arabian apologists. Müteferrika enriched the ideological arsenal of the Tebshirat with some new historical and linguistic arguments. Searching for prophecies for Mohamed’s ministry he examined not only the Torah and the Gospel but also the other books from the Bible and especially those from the Old Testament. Along with the Koranic testimonies the author included in the text of the initial Gospel several additional stories in which Jesus preceded the appearance of a future prophet whose prototype probably had some connections to the canonical Gospels (Ibrahim-i Müteferrika, s. 65-69). What seems to be the most impressive part deals with St. Paul’s activity, the origin of the different Christian confessions and the Catholic church. Müteferrika’s views are a mixture between real facts and obvious anachronisms but they are important for understanding the character of the Turkish Tebshirat:

“One day (Paul) said to Nazarenes (Christians): “Why do you reject the benefactions of God Almighty and abstain from eating pork and why do you feel disgusted at drinking wine? Swine is fatter than other animals and wine brightens man’s heart and drives away sadness. These things do not instigate people to revolt”. From this day on Nazarenes began to consider swine and wine as blessed.

And again (Paul) said to them: “God Almighty created the sun, the moon and the constellations to rise from the east. So God is to the east and therefore you should direct your

worship to this direction". Some Nazarenes believed that and in their public worships they turn to the east (This allusion refers to the Orthodox to the Orthodox Christians who turn to east during mass).

And again he said to them: "God Almighty, as a sign of respect for Jesus' appearance, execution and death, removed from you the whole suffering of the others. Your sons will deny the circumcision and will be purged with holy water". The Nazarene community accepted this and from that day on they bring their sons to church, dip their crosses in water, call this water holy water and wash their sons with it.

... And again he said to the Nazarenes: "Jesus came to me and cleaned my face and for that reason darkness (blindness) disappeared and my eyes got well. ... So let it be known: The only one who resurrects the dead and gives the blind eyes to see and revives the bird made from clay can be only God (Allah). So Jesus is God (Allah)". That was what he told one tribe and they became followers of this superstition. This tribe was called Jacobites after their leader – Jacob el-Berdeani (The author has in mind the founder of the Syrian Monophysic church Jacob el Baraday (6th century) and his followers).

After that he said to one tribe: "Jesus is a Son of God". This tribe believed him and they began to call themselves Nestorians after the name of their leader Nestor (Patriarch of Constantinople (428-431), adherent of the doctrine of some Antioch theologians who insisted on the human nature of Jesus distinguishing Him from the God Word. According to him Mary had to be called "Θεοδόχος" instead "Θεοτόκος". Nestor's teaching was accepted as an official confession by the Christians from Persia (Mesopotamia) and even today it is the fundament of the Assurian church. (Болотов, А., 175-231).

And he said to another tribe: "Let it be known that Jesus is God and even Mary is God and God Almighty is the Third of the Trinity". One tribe followed these (words) and was called Melkaniyye (The meaning of this passage is not clear. Probably the author tried to render the historical context of aet 116 from the surra "The Dinner Table": "And when Allah will say: O Isa son of Marium! did you say to men, Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah he will say: Glory be to

Thee, it did not befit me that I should say what I had no right to (say); if I had said it, Thou wouldst indeed have known it; Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I do not know what is in Thy mind, surely Thou art the great Knower of the unseen things". (5:116). It seems that this aet concerns some language misunderstandings relating to the Christianity. In Semitic languages and partly in Aramaic the word "spirit" is in feminine gender. As a result, some groups began to identify The Holy Spirit with Mar). All of them (the different Christian groups) started to accuse one another.

However Paul's infidelity sowed the seeds of discords between Nazarenes and subsequently ... his followers recorded his words, added them to the Gospels and called the new book the book of Paul". (Ibrahim-i Müteferrika, 85-86).

The author paid significant attention to the emergence of papacy and its place in the history of Europe. According to Müteferrika it was founded by a man named "Enderayis" who had been preliminary only partly introduced to Christianity by the apostles visiting Roma and "had learned some of the aets in the Gospel". The essence of his sermon can be summarized in four points. "Enderayis" had presented himself as a leader of all apostles, head of the whole church and inheritor of Jesus. He also had called to Roma citizens to make icons of Jesus, Maria and the cross. He had insisted that Christians should do homage to its person and had introduced the practice sins of the Christians to be remised by the clergy. Subsequently his heirs (i.e. the Roma popes) developed the last innovation giving documents for remission against payment. Thanks to that the papacy established a political domination all over Europe (Ibrahim-i Müteferrika, s. 89-91).

For a long time "Risale-I Islamiyye" was not followed by any other serious attempts in the scope of the Tebshirat or other original Ottoman contributions to its theory and for more than a century remained an isolated case in the Ottoman literature. Actually, the book never gained wide currency, which is confirmed by the fact that it was preserved in only one copy (manuscript). Its appearance was a result of more personal than social reasons and must be ascribed to the personality of Ibrahim-i Müteferrika. To some extent his activity could be estimated as a phenomenon in

the cultural history of the empire that marked the beginning of its modernization. By origin he was a Hungarian from the region of Transylvania who was converted to Islam and whose previous confession, according to different sources, was Protestantism (Calvinism) or Unitarism (Necatioğlu, H., s.7-10). In the Ottoman court where he received the title Müteferrika, he tried to convince the sultan authorities of the need for reforms – in his works he recommended the introduction of new, modern forms of government following the European patterns, that might affect the whole political, military and social organization of the empire. Ibrahim-i Müteferrika imposed a new “civil” notion of the West - as a model of the “rationalistic state” that might be examined and cultivated on the Ottoman soil. He also founded the first printing house in Ottoman language in Istanbul and published a large number of books – translated from Western languages and his original works.

Ibrahim-i Müteferrika’ s political ideas had nothing to do with the classical Islamic conceptions of “ehl-i kitab” or “dar al harb” and his return to one of the most traditional trends of the Muslim theology seemed paradoxical. The paradox was explained with Müteferrika’s desire to justify his religious “apostasy” and convergence to Islam. However in “Risale-I Islamiyye” some of the critics against Christianity bear typical Protestant character like those relating to the indulgences or to the church hierarchy, the mass and political domination of the papacy. To a certain degree “Risale-I Islamiyye” appeared to be a product of the European rationalism that began in the 15th century with refutation of “Constitutum Donatio Constantini”, passed through the restriction of the church rights in the epoch of Reformation and finally increased during the Enlightenment in an open distrust towards the fundament of the Christian belief – the gospels and the other books of the Bible. Hence, it was not surprising that against the background of the Christian “Credo quia absurdum” some western Christians of the 18th and the 19th centuries saw in the Islam a rationalistic religion and resorted to the Tebshirat and its most radical trend.

Ibrahim-i Müteferrika’ s activity became also a sign for the beginning of important changes in the structure of the Ottoman elite - the old corporations of former Christians (like yenicherics or ichoglans) were gradually

replaced by the third wave of new Muslims – representatives of European nations who had made a diplomatic or military career for themselves thanks to the westernization of the empire. This process became obvious after the 20s of the 19th century when the yenicherics and their spiritual protectors – Bektashies were terminated and forbidden. At the same time the traditional Christian factor grouped around the Orthodox and Armenian churches lost part of its previous influence and privileges because of the first manifestations of the national movements on the Balkans. The decline of the old elite allowed the Ottoman government to launch a wide campaign for modernization of the state institutions and to employ a big number of foreigners in the administrative services of the empire. This policy pushed back the religious syncretism of the folk Islam and strengthened the positions of the official Sunni Islam to which the new European Muslims also belonged. In this period especially strong was the influence of some Sunni orders like Halveti, Nakshibendi and especially Rufai whose representatives in the sultan court exerted great influence on the policy in the time of Abdul Hamid II. (Александрова, Е., 365-369). That led to the appearance of an enlightened Sunism in which the Tebshirat had an important role. The second part of the 19th and the first decade of 20th century were characterized by the boom of works relating to the problems of the Tebshirat. Some of the authors like Ishak Hoca were in close contacts with the palace, a fact and can be regarded as an element of the entire support given by the official Sunni clergy to the sultan reformists. Simultaneously, the Ottoman followers of Ibrahim-i Müteferrika continued the “rationalistic” motifs introduced by him in the Tebshirat. Some of the works (like these of Hacı Abdi Petrici, Ahmed Midhad Efendi and Abdul Ehad Davud) were written in order to protect the Islam against the criticism Catholics and Protestants who in this period established their missions in the Near East and launched actively religious propaganda among the Muslims. Because of this reason the arguments of the Ottoman authors were drawn from the classical Islamic theology as well as from the modern European anti-clerical ideologies.

Some of the ideas postulated in the later works concerned the problems of modernization, its impact on Islam and its place in the world. Ahmed Midhad Efendi expressed the opinion that only high educated clerics might look into

the difficult matter of the Tebshirat (Midhad, A., s.163-164). He also rejected the accusations against Islam of introducing the faith forcibly and insisted on the need for a translation of the Islamic thesis in the modern European languages in order to refute the popular prejudices of Europeans towards Islam (Midhad, A., s.176-177). In fact Ahmed Midhad Efendi showed himself as a supporter of inter-religious dialog and in his work he maintained the first trend of the Tebshirat. The most of the theses advanced by the other Ottoman authors also gravitated towards this tendency. However the last Ottoman representative of the Tebshirat – the former protestant Abdul Ehad Davud who published his book in 1913, on the eve of the ultimate breakdown of the empire, renewed the motif of the distorted Gospel and even declared that “the Kingdom of heaven” promised in the gospels was Islam. (Necatioğlu, H., 45)

The emergence of the Ottoman school in the Tebshirat as a social phenomenon was a consequence of the processes of modernization and the desire of the Ottoman ruling circles to harmonize the official Islam of the empire with the western notions of “enlightened and rationalistic” society rather than a continuation of the Middle age Arabian Islam. At the same time that was an important stage in the transformation of the enlightened Sunni Islam in its Hanefi variant from a dominant religion of the elite into one of the fundamentals of the Turkish national ideology.

III. The Tebshirat and Turkey

The coup d'état staged by the Young Turk officers in 1908 put the end of the sultan absolutism and limited the interference of the ulema and Sunni orders in the internal policy. Having united around the committee “İttihad ve Tarkki” (“Unity and Progress”), in the beginning, the Young Turks embraced a wide specter of political tendencies and ideas – from inheritors of the New Ottomans to adherents of federalization of the empire or representatives of the Turkish nationalism making its first steps. Gradually, officers in opposition to Abdul Hamid II' regime took control of the committee. They were under the strong impact of the German (Bismarck's) models of ethnonationalism and secularism. In fact the essence of this model included the transformation of the dominant religion into a national one, its complete subordination to the state administration and policy, as well as

immediate suppression of the non-dominant religions and denominations and even persecutions against their followers who were often considered a threat to the national unity. In this respect one of the researchers of the Turanism, noticed that in spite of the “substantial doubt as to the devoutness in Islam of many of the Young Turks” they “continued to engage in the activities of the Sultan's agents – within the Empire as well as among foreign Muslim communities – not infrequently employing Islam as a cover-up for other activities” (Landau, J., 45)

Actually, the notion of the place of Islam in the political conceptions of the Turkish nationalists (Young Turks and later on Kemalists) could be best understood through the works of Ziya Gökalp – the most popular (even nowadays) theoretician of the Turkish national ideology and the modernism related to it. They is also an important document concerning the evolution of the Young Turks' views in respect to religion and its role for the national and state consolidation. In his first articles Gökalp rarely mentioned the name “Turks” and tried to integrate the Ottomanism and Pan Islamism with the national principle: “There is a mental microbe which for one hundred years has been destroying the Ottoman empire – the last hope of the Islamic world. That microbe up to this moment has been an enemy of the Ottomans and has done much harm to Islam. But today it can compensate the damages which it has inflicted and to be made an advantage for Islam. That microbe is the national idea” (Gökalp, Z., *Milliyet ve İslâmiyyet*, 95). Gökalp recognized that the Muslim peoples living up to the political conceptions of Islam underestimated the nationalism and its potential, a fact which subsequently led to their decline. He saw the introduction of the national idea in the Islamic world as the only way possible for saving the Muslims: “Because the national idea is a weapon used for saving the depressed peoples from oppression, now there are no non-Muslim peoples who are under the rule of the Muslims. However, most of the present Muslim peoples are under oppression and yoke. The national idea will not divide the Muslim peoples because they have never oppressed each others” (Gökalp, Z., *Milliyet ve İslâmiyyet*, 99). So, at least in its initial stages the nationalism of the Ottoman intelligentsia had more Pan-Islamic dimensions than narrow ethnical characteristics. Subsequently under

the influence of the language nationalism coming from Europe and the Balkans the role of Islam was reduced to that of the a factor of the national consciousness which had to ensure the spiritual unity of the new national community and even to extend its boundaries: "However, the terms "umma, state and nations" are not completely different in meaning. The connection between umma and nation is like the connection between the general and the particular. Umma embraced all nations sharing a common religion. Besides, the individuals forming one nation are not only those who at present speak the language of this nation but also the ones who will speak that language tomorrow. For instance, despite the fact that today the languages spoken by the Pomaks and Cretan Muslims are Bulgarian and Greek, as a result of the influence of Islam, they will learn Turkish and will abandon their present languages" (Gökalp, Z., Millet ve Vatan, 84).

Ziya Gökalp further developed his ideas in accordance with the Kemalists' ideology and at the end of his life arrived at the conclusion that Islam itself had to be nationalized. In his most famous work "The Principles of Turkism" he insisted on the full elimination of the influence exerted on the Turks by the clerical institutions - including the Caliphate and the Sultanate. According to Gökalp the struggle against the remains of theocracy might affect all sides of social life – legislation, professional organizations, family, education, etc. – "All traces related to clericalism and theocracy, all standards in our laws inimical to freedom, equality and justice must be abolished"(Gökalp, Z., Türkçülüğün Esasları 168). This process will be completed with the "nationalization" of Islam (religious Turkism) that includes translation of all religious practice and books (including the Koran) from Arabian to Turkish and substitution of the Ottoman high clergy with "national" clergymen from Anatolia. (Gökalp, Z., Türkçülüğün Esasları , 170-171).

In the field of policy Kemalists realized those ideas by means of a series of measures aiming at the consolidation of the population of the new Turkish republic around one Turkified form of the Hanefi Sunni Islam and the centralization of the religious affairs under the supervision of the government. For that purpose not only the Caliphate but also all Islamic orders were forbidden and the

management of the religious communities was concentrated in the hands of several state institutions. Kemalists took control of the religious education of the young generations by means of closing down the traditional Islamic schools (medreses) and shifting the responsibility for learning to the secular schools. The government also institutionalized the high religious education and founded a theological faculty in the University of Istanbul that had more laic than clerical character (Berkes, N., 490-491). The faculty had to prepare new clergymen loyal to the republic and its ideology and to revise the non-rationalistic and deconstructive elements in the traditional Islamic theology. Kemalists also initiated the first translation of the Koran and other religious books into Turkish and even imposed the language as the official language of the Islamic worship.

What the Kemalists did was to introduce an East-European model of secularism whose main feature was the complete subordination of religion to the national state. The latter became the main factor for the "modernization" of the religious consciousness and institutions which never received the opportunity for legal, state-independent existence and development. This unequal unity between religion and nation increased in the years after the Second World War in the conception of the "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" that definitely imposed the Sunni Islam and its doctrine as a "national religion".

Under the new conditions the Tebshirat served and even enlarged its social positions and functions. The reasons must be sought in several directions:

On the first place the Tebshirat remained untouched by the disputes for and against "Westernization" and was actually one of the few spheres where the views shared by the adherents of the "national" and "traditional" Islam coincided. It became in this way a leading factor attenuating the contradictions between them. What is more, in order to prove its connection to the "authentic" Islam and its tradition, the modernists paid more attention to the problems of the Tebshirat than to the so called "religious reaction" that directed its efforts mainly against the laicism and modernization in the scope of culture and family relationships.

The Tebshirat also ensured the continuity between the rationalism of the Ottoman

modernism and the aspirations of the Kemalists to reform the Islam in Turkey in conformity with some liberal notions of the modern religion. In different works written in the republican period the Turkish Islam is presented as a final and natural result of a long religious evolution of the Turkic tribes and many authors (including historians and linguists) emphasize on one hypothetical Turkish pre-Islamic monotheism. Probably, as a repercussion of these theories some representatives of the modern Turkish Tebshirat are inclined to enlarge its historical base and to seek prophecies for Mohamed's ministry not only in the Torah and Gospel but also in the writings of Hinduism, Buddhism and Zerdevism – religions categorically rejected by the classical Sunni Islam as pagan but often considered (except for Hinduism) as a part of the spiritual history of the ancient Turks.

An evident distinguishing feature of many national ideologies is the tendency to depict the national communities as bearers of a specific "spirit", supreme truth or faith. Without doubt, the matter of the Tebshirat allows for the different Muslim nationalisms to resort to its postulates in order to strengthen the sense of the national exclusiveness. So, it was not surprising that the national Turkish state allowed translation, creation and publication of a big number of works relating to the problems of the Tebshirat or investigating its history. However the official support of the Tebshirat and especially its third trend is most obvious in the educational system. In the frameworks of the secondary school all students (including Christians and Jews) are introduced to elements of the Tebshirat. For instance, in the textbook of "Religious Culture and Moral" for 10th grade currently used in the Turkish schools, despite the authors' attempt to present the main principles of Islam avoiding any religious confrontation, the following passages can be found: "Some of the divine books sent by God have been completely lost and nothing from them has reached us today. Others of time as a result of well or ill-meant human interference have been changed or distorted in the course and have lost their originality. The divine books sent by God are Psalter, Torah, Gospel and the Holy Koran. The Holy Koran, which is the last book sent by God, was given to Mohamed and was preserved to our days

without any changes, saving its initial contents, form and revelation" (Din Kültürü 56).

In the same textbook some aspects of the Christian faith are criticized as a departure from the true faith: "In the surra "Tevbe" the attempts at ascribing to God a human nature and characteristics like the ones giving birth or being born are rejected as another form of wrong faith. Because when one man is presented as a son of God, even when this man is a prophet, that means that God is made human and man is made God. These assertions are openly criticized in the aet: "the Jews said: that is a son of God. The Christians said that too: Messiah is a son of God" (Din Kültürü 73).

Hence, by means of the print culture and the secular educational system the national Turkish state actively promoted the spread of the Tebshirat among vast strata of its population. At present even the representatives of groups that were traditionally indifferent to the disputes about the "true" Gospel and Torah or shared more tolerant views, are affected more or less by the notion of the "distorted" Gospel. That notion often reflects the pure "laic" problems and puts to the test the capability of the modern elite to initiate and realize the dialog between the separate social, ethnical or religious communities inside and outside Turkey. This last "paradox" in the history of the Tebshirat can be understood only in the context of the specific East European model of secularism marked by the unity of the state and the official religion, an unity that in the first decades of the 20th century grew into an almost religious and irrational belief in the rightness of the national state and its eternal existence.

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