



Cult of Saint Sava and preservation of identity of Serbs in Bosnia during Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian administrations

Original scientific article

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The paper will elaborate on the cult of Saint Sava and its scope in Bosnia during the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian administrations. The cult of Saint Sava was widely spread among the Serbian people in Bosnia during the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian administrations. Such a great influence of the cult of Saint Sava in Bosnia is not accidental, if one takes into account the number of Serbian Orthodox people in Bosnia at that time. The affiliation of Serbs to the Orthodox faith and the Serbian Orthodox Church in Bosnia is unquestionable throughout history, and national and religious affiliations were especially expressed during the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian administrations and the struggle to preserve national and religious identity. Migrations of the Serbian people also contributed to the spread of the cult to a significant extent, and wherever they migrated during the centuries of foreign rule, they carried with them the memory of the holy lineage of the Nemanjić dynasty, and the cult of Saint Sava, which at the beginning spread as a church cult, and later as a people's cult. Therefore, it can be concluded that during the period of foreign rule, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian, there was no person in Bosnia who did not know about the medieval dynasty of Nemanjić and Saint Sava.

Key words:

Serbs, Bosnia, cult of Saint Sava, Orthodox faith, Serbian church

Култ Светог Саве и очување идентитета Срба у Босни за вријеме османске и аустроугарске управе

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Аутор у тексту обрађује култ Светог Саве и његове размјере у Босни за вријеме османске и аустроугарске управе. Сваки човек са рођењем добија идентитет који је недвосмислено повезан са историјом. Прошлост има велику улогу у процесу одрастања и сазријевања човека и обликовању његових етничких ставова и погледа. Срби су захваљујући континуираном чувању светосавља успјешно премостили све историјске недаће и трагедије, праћене губитком своје државности, јер је црква Светог Саве сачувала сјећање на прошлост српског народа и тако омогућила обнову српске државности. Култ Светог Саве је имао широке размјере код српског народа у Босни за вријеме османске и аустроугарске управе. Тако велик утицај култа Светог Саве у Босни није случајан, ако се узме у обзир бројност српског православног народа у Босни, у том времену. Припадност Срба православној вјери и српској православној цркви у Босни неупитна је кроз цијелу историју, а нарочито је национална и вјерска припадност изражена у току османске и аустроугарске управе и борбе за очување националног и вјерског идентитета. Ширењу култа у значајној мјери доприносиле су и миграције српског народа, и гдје год он да је мигрирао у вијековима стране власти са собом је носио сјећање на светородну лозу Немањића и култ Светог Саве, који се прво ширио као црквени култ, а касније и као народни култ. С тога, може се закључити, како у периоду стране

власти, османске и аустроугарске, у Босни није постојао човек који није знао за средњовијековну династију Немањића и Светог Саву. Јачање светосавског култа и ширење косовског циклуса међу Србима много је допринијело отпору исламизацији и унијаћењу у Босни. Величина култа Светог Саве код Срба оставила је дубок траг на свим пољима, од цркве, народних обичаја, преко личних имена до топономастике. Бројни локални топоними на територијама које су насељавали или насељавају Срби везани су за личност Светог Саве. Такође, ту су и храмови посвећени Светом Сави. Улога народног вјеровања и народног предања, одржаног усменим предањем кроз вијекове власти страних поробљивача може да се схвати кад се има у виду стање (не)писмености код српског свештенства и народа, јер да није било усменог народног вјеровања и народног предања које је прелазило с нараштаја на нараштај велико је питање да ли би се српска народност и припадност светосављу одржали. С тога, можемо закључити да су захваљујући јединству српске православне цркве и њеном неуморном раду на очувању националног и вјерског идентитета, Срби у Босни остали вјерни православној вјери, српској народности и путу Светог Саве.

Кључне ријечи:

Срби, Босна, култ Светог Саве, православна вјера, српска црква

At birth, each person receives an identity¹ that is unequivocally linked to history². Therefore, the past plays a significant role in the process of growing up and maturing of a person and shaping his/her ethnic standpoints and views. As a result of the continuous safeguarding of the cult of Saint Sava, the Serbs successfully overcame all historical adversities and tragedies, accompanied by the loss of their statehood, because the Church of Saint Sava preserved the memory of the past of the Serbian people and thus enabled the restoration of Serbian statehood (Ašković, 2019, pp. 95–96). The cult of Saint Sava, which developed among the Serbian people, had a great influence on the preservation of the religious and national identities of the Serbian people throughout history³, especially during the difficult times of the Ottoman and later Austro-Hungarian occupation regimes: “And the martyrdom of Saint Sava after his death, the burning of relics, had a deep impact on our national soul and our national morale. The scattered dust of the saint excited the

¹ Identification is the key process for the constitution of identity, because through identification: “the social group conveys models and selection criteria to individuals, on the basis of which they place themselves in the social milieu and develop a sense of belonging to a certain group, collective, class or nation.” (Bazić, 2009, p. 22)

² When it comes to the connection between the past and national identity, the following stand out as the most important characteristics of national identity, whether it is viewed from a political or ethnic point of view: “common myths, official or literary language, mass culture, common territory or common state, common history, common ancestors, national consciousness, common religion and common national symbols.” (Bazić, 2009, p. 49)

³ The attention should be paid here to the opinion of archpriest Stevan M. Dimitrijević, who wrote in one of his texts: “The nationalization of religion, so characteristic of the Eastern Church, transferred to our tribal life with the first Christianity, tolerating the old customary cult of it, deeply embedded in the soul of the people, developed especially on our land, in the preserved Slavic soul of our ancestors, and created a spiritual force of special values. Saint Sava did not even name the newly acquired independent church and church headship after the capital city or, in general, after its seat, as is the rule and practice of the Church, but—the Serbian Church, and himself—the First Archbishop of Serbia. Baptized in this way, the Serbian Church, professing pure Orthodoxy, guarding and defending it from both internal irregularities and external attacks, became more and more national, and so did its clergy, both higher and lower.” (Dimitrijević, 1929, pp. 81–82)

spirits and warned consciences (...) This significantly strengthened faith in God's justice, and Sava's sainthood gained importance. His name becomes an even greater reminder of the glorious past, one who awakens national consciousness and hopes for a better future. The character of the people becomes stronger, idealism more elevated, and morals more strict (...) Thus, through all changes and events of history in the past centuries, Saint Sava had an undiminished influence on the soul of the Serbian people, he guarded their conscience and strengthened their moral feelings." (Vešović, 1939, pp. 10–11)

After the restoration of the Patriarchate of Peć in 1557, the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church imbued the daily life of the Serbian people. The Church was at the forefront of the struggle for the preservation of Orthodoxy and the Serbian name, which were threatened by the strengthening of Islamization and the pressure of unification. The Serbian people were suspicious of foreign cultural influences, which significantly helped the Serbian church in its unequal struggle (Samardžić, 1994b, pp. 119, 129; Branković, 2020a, p. 62; Bazić, 2009, p. 209). Also, a significant factor was the spiritual connection of the Serbian people to the cult of Saint Sava and the holy lineage of the Nemanjić dynasty (Samardžić, 1994a, p. 12; Branković, 2020a, p. 62; Bazić, 2009, pp. 192, 208–209). The process of spiritual integration of the Orthodox Serbs in Bosnia began with the restoration of the Patriarchate of Peć, and in such a social, political, and religious structure, the Serbs increasingly began to look at Bosnia as a geographical rather than a historical concept (Mikić, 1995, pp. 62–63; Branković, 2020a, p. 62).

Roman Catholic priest Benedikt Kuripešić wrote about the number of Orthodox Serbs in Bosnia in the first half of the 16th century. Among other things, he wrote that: "in the mentioned Kingdom of Bosnia, we found three nations and three religions (...) Second are the Serbs (Surffen), whom they call Vlachs (Wallachen), and we call them Zigen (Čiči, Čiči) or Martolos (...) belonging to the Saint Paul faith (...)" (Kuripešić, 2006, pp. 25–26). Pasko Vasa-Effendi, in the second half of the 19th century, in his work *Bosnia and Herzegovina during the mission of Dževdet-Effendi*, writes about the number of Orthodox Christians in Bosnia before the arrival of the Ottomans, among other things, the following: "The establishment of the dioceses of Salona and Syrmia, which were built in the beginning of the church, proves the age of the Christian religion in Bosnia. But, since it was decided (...) that this country would be part of the Eastern Empire, the faith of its people, naturally, endured the influence of the Photian Schism. Bela II, the King of Hungary, tried in vain to return it to the principles of the Roman Church. He was only half successful in this because the inhabitants of southern Bosnia offered him stubborn resistance; only the people of the north, closer to Catholic Hungary, preserved their adherence to the Latin Church." (Pasko, 2011, pp. 14–15).

The process of Islamization led to major ethno-religious, ethnobiological, and ethno-demographic consequences, because the awareness of ethnic origin was suppressed among the Islamized population, and the awareness of belonging to

the Islamic world was developed (Vasić, 2005, p. 82; Branković, 2020a, p. 62). In the ideological sense, the Ottoman Empire: “was a state, which in its thinking and feeling was based on the Islamic bipolar image of the world, where the state understood itself as Dār al-Islām (the world of Islam) and was considered ideologically obligated to fight and conquer the non-Islamic world”, and in such an understanding of the state, the Ottomans accepted the position that the newly conquered non-Muslim nations: “After the conquest (...) had to (...) integrate internally and politically.” (Džaja, 1992, p. 111). Due to the increasing pressure of the Ottomans to accept Islam as a new religion, the importance of the Serbian Church in preserving the religious identity of the Serbs in Bosnia became greater and greater, because the Church, making enormous efforts to preserve the religious identity in Bosnia, succeeded in getting the Serbian people to accept the heritage of the medieval state of Nemanjić, to keep it as a confirmation of its existence (Samardžić, 2006, p. CXIX; Branković, 2020b, p. 222). The Church continued its earlier educational and cultural activity, in a narrow and limited scope, but sufficiently broad and large that, because of its efforts, commitment, and work in the field, the Serbian people under Turkish rule could emerge as a political factor (Đurđev, Vasić, 2005, p. 141).

The restored Patriarchate of Peć became the guardian of the tradition of the Nemanjić Serbian ruling dynasty because it is known that even in the Middle Ages the Nemanjić cultural pattern also developed west of the Drina (Ekmečić, 2008, p. 54; Čubrilović, 1992, p. 89; Ćirković, 1964, p. 50; Letić, 2018, p. 409; Bataković et al., 2002, p. 112). Because of the Serbian Church, the Serbian people in Bosnia knew about the Serbian holy lineage of the Nemanjić dynasty (Ekmečić, 2008, p. 136). Through the person of Saint Sava, the past, present, and future were simultaneously imbued by the Serbian people in Bosnia, because in the person of Saint Sava: “(...) all times came together, centuries were connected, human destinies crossed paths, generations (...) spoke.” (Bigović, 2000, p. 231). The cult of Saint Sava was so widespread among the Serbian people that it surpassed the cults of all other Christian saints, and: “in addition to the cult that the Serbian Orthodox Church owed to Saint Sava as its founder (...), another special cult developed, a national cult, full of non-church, and even non-Christian, elements, and Saint Sava became, in the full sense of the term, *a national saint*” (Filipović, 1936, p. 32).

The church cult was older than the national cult (Branković, 2020a, p. 63; Filipović, 1936, p. 32). In the early days, the church and dynasty cults crossed the borders of the Nemanjić state and the Serbian Church towards the west: “so the rulers from the secondary Nemanjić lineage from our western regions began to consider Saint Sava to be their protector, which could already be in connection with the earlier national cult, which was strongest in the area around the Mileševo monastery.” (Filipović, 1936, p. 32). This means that the thought of Saint Sava and his ideas were spreading wherever the Serbs spread and settled, which proved to be particularly significant at the time after the collapse of the Serbian medieval states and the arrival of the Ottoman enslaver when in the darkness of slavery, the

endowments were Serbian guidance (Slijepčević, 2011, pp. 14–15; Mikić, 1995, pp. 63–64). One of the examples of the expansion of the Saint Sava cult is the example of its expansion to Bosnia and Lika, where Serb immigrants from eastern Herzegovina brought the cult with them (Branković, 2020a, p. 63; Filipović, 1936, p. 37).

Awareness of the Saint Sava throne and the church organization he founded became particularly significant during the centuries of Ottoman rule in Serbian states. His work resonated with the Serbian people under the Ottomans like an echo, because the cult of Saint Sava and the throne of Peć were the basic pillars of church ideology or geographically expressed pastoral care. Ever since the restoration of the Patriarchate of Peć until its abolishment in 1766, the Serbian Church was the guarantor of the unity of the Serbian people (Branković, 2020a, p. 63). The Patriarchate of Peć was not only a religious but in a certain sense, also a political organization of the Serbian people under the Ottoman occupation (Nilević, 1990, p. 141; Branković, 2020b, p. 230). The strong influence of the cult of Saint Sava in Bosnia under the Ottomans is not accidental if one knows that the Serbian Orthodox Church in Bosnia, after the death of Methodius in 885, was strongly influenced by the archbishopric of Justiniana Prima, firstly through the Serbian Diocese of Raška, later the Archdiocese of Ohrid and the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and then the Serbian Archdiocese of Saint Sava and finally the Patriarchate of Peć, especially after the restoration in 1557 when the Serbian Orthodox Church in Bosnia was under its full jurisdiction (Dučić, 2008, p. 90). After the restoration of the Patriarchate of Peć, many churches and monasteries that were burned down and abandoned in the period between 1463 and 1557 were restored, and the religious and national mission continued in them, the spiritual mission of Saint Sava continued. At that time in Bosnia: “The Spirit of Saint Sava revives and protects everything that is good, sublime, and holy among Serbs; it warms and inspires the Serbian clergy and the Serbian people to preserve their Orthodox faith and the church that he handed over to them as an eternal testament.” (Dučić, 2008, p. 142). At that time, the cult of Saint Sava suppressed other saints, which can be concluded from the fact that in many regions, it was celebrated as a family Patron Saint’s Day, a testament, or as a village Patron Saint’s Day (Filipović, 1936, p. 36). Those who converted to the Orthodox faith and did not previously have a Patron Saint’s Day were the ones who most often took Saint Sava for their Patron Saint’s Day. Also, Saint Sava was highly respected by Muslims, especially in the vicinity of the Mileševa monastery, as well as by Roman Catholics in Dubrovnik and Dalmatia (Filipović, 1936, p. 36–38; Branković, 2020v, p. 156; Slijepčević, 2002, pp. 128–129).

Due to the strength, prevalence, and influence of the cult of Saint Sava among the Serbian people, the Ottomans rightly saw a danger in the further strengthening of the cult among the Serbs, but the solution they chose—to stop it—was a solution that only strengthened and secured the power of the cult, not only among the Serbs in Bosnia but among Serbs in general (Branković, 2020a, pp. 68–69). Vladimir Ćorović describes the decision to burn Saint Sava’s relics as follows: “No matter

what they were generally like, the Turks left God's pleasers, the "good ones", in peace; and when, nevertheless, they decided to burn Sava, that meant that they had some important reasons for it. The cult of that saint, extremely large and constantly nurtured, began to develop and turn into one idea. Sava was the representative of Nemanjić's Serbia, a son of its main creator, and the head of the church that Serbia raised to its highest level. His cult implied the cult of that old Serbia, the old Serbian state, which the oppressed people, under the leadership of their clergy, wanted to resurrect. And it was thought, wrongly, that when Sava's relics were destroyed, as the immediate object of that cult, his cult and the liberating thought he created would be destroyed as well. Sava's cult was, however, so deeply rooted in the people that the burning of his body only gave a new boost to the strengthening of that general respect" (Ćorović, 1934, pp. 117–118).

The hymn to Saint Sava was performed under Ottoman rule in Bosnia for the first time in 1850 in Sarajevo, and later in Banja Luka, and other places throughout Bosnia (Durković-Jakšić, 2011, p. 25). The basic characteristic of the Serbian people as a whole, and therefore also in Bosnia, was and remains, that their community is not only Orthodox but also national (Ašković, 2019, p. 101). The importance of the indivisibility of nationality and religion for the Serbian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina was noticed back in 1858 by Aleksandar Giljferding, who noted on that occasion: "For an Orthodox Serb, they form one indivisible unity: renouncing one's religion would mean, for him, renouncing their nationality" (Giljferding, 1972, p. 120).

After the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy received the mandate to occupy the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878, the Serbs replaced one enslaver with another. Since the beginning of the occupation administration, the Serbian people have been the most vocal in their demands for the establishment of national societies. From the very beginning, the occupation regime took the position of not allowing the establishment, not only of political organizations on a national basis, but also of cultural and economic ones, which was justified by the claim that the entire population in the provinces belonged to one nation (Kraljačić, 2000, pp. 149–150; Branković, 2020, pp. 54–55). However, the Serbs were persistent, and their movement to establish societies with a national character became particularly expressed in 1887 (Pejanović, 1930, p. 5). The first society that Orthodox Serbs were permitted to establish was *the Singing Society* in Tuzla, founded in 1886. *The Krajcer Savings Society of Orthodox Serbian Women* was founded in Sarajevo in 1887 (Pejanović, 1930, pp. 16–17). *Charitable Cooperatives of Serbian Women* have been established since 1900, and the first one was founded in Bosanski Petrovac (Branković, 2002, p. 55). The most significant Serbian educational and cultural society—Serbian Educational and Cultural Society Prosvjeta—was founded in 1902.

Regulating the position of religious communities was one of the most important issues that arose before the occupying authorities. One of the main issues was the organization of the Orthodox Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was consid-

ered that the church hierarchy was the easiest way to influence the parish clergy and the Serbian people in general (Mađar & Papić, 2005, p. 9; Branković, 2021, p. 164; Marjanović, 2001, p. 295; Pijanović, 2020, p. 474). The authorities adopted a hostile attitude towards Serbian confessional schools, which educated children in the Serbian national spirit. The use of the national name in the titles of Serbian cultural and educational institutions was prohibited, and the Cyrillic alphabet was suppressed from daily use among Serbs, which was supposed to contribute to the dulling of the national feeling among the Serbian people (Branković & Milošević, 2016, p. 14). However, the opposite happened. From the very beginning of the occupation and the use of force to control their national name, religion, script, and customs, the Serbs began to resist and to preserve with greater passion what their ancestors had preserved under the Ottoman enslaver. All this led to the beginning of the Serb struggle for church-school autonomy in 1896, which ended with the adoption of *the Decree of the Church-Educational Administration of the Serbian Orthodox Dioceses (Metropolitanates) in Bosnia and Herzegovina* in 1905.

When it comes to the cult of Saint Sava, the Serbs in the Austro-Hungarian period maintained, if not strengthened, this cult in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There are numerous sources from that time that can testify to this. The celebration of Saint Sava began to be practiced throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 (Durković-Jakšić, 2011, p. 25). Celebrations of Saint Sava Day were organized throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina by Serbian societies. These celebrations were of a humanitarian-national nature, with a prepared program that also had an educational role. A special place in the celebrations was given to the Saint Sava sermons, which were an indispensable part of the program. In order for the Serbs, as well as other inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina at that time, to understand the importance of the Saint Sava sermons, Stevo Kaluđerčić explained the origin, development, and importance of preservation of the Saint Sava sermons in the newspaper *Bosnian Fairy (Bosanska vila)*, in an article entitled: *The importance and origin of the Saint Sava sermons for us Serbs*. In that text, among other things, he wrote: “Ever since the old times, since time immemorial, since the Serbs have been known, there have always been “assemblies”, there have been “agreements” and there have been “gatherings”. And are those “assemblies” and those “gatherings” of any importance for us Serbs? In the Serbian states, for the last five hundred years, there were not many temples of God because our grandfathers were not allowed to build them. Even where they were allowed, they could not, because a lot of money was needed for the construction of a church, and the Serbian people were poor (...) There were very few of these temples and the people could not visit them often because one would need a day to walk to them, which is why “assemblies” were established. Every church had a day when the assembly was held, which is actually called “church celebration” or “church temple”. On that day, people from far away would come together, and acquaintances, friends, and relatives would meet there—that is why the assembly became very important for us Serbs (...) The “gathering” is also

important. And that is where relatives and friends met, so they would talk and sing. In this way, unity was maintained, at least among individuals when it did not exist in the whole nation (...) “The Saint Sava sermon” is nothing else but that, the same as assembly and gathering, only in a different form, but mainly the same. At the sermon, speeches are given, songs are sung, and all this was done at the assemblies and gatherings, and from them, the Saint Sava sermon originated. (...) The Saint Sava sermons became the successor of the assemblies and gatherings, so now we need to embrace them properly, protect them, and organize them wherever there are Serbs. With this, we will ensure that the Serbian spirit does not weaken (...) Saint Sava is Serbia’s most deserving husband. He preserved our Serbian name; he affirmed us in the Orthodox faith (...) and we should erect a permanent monument to him. The most lasting monument is “the Saint Sava sermons”, which should be organized on Saint Sava Day in all Serbian places (...) All Serbs in Bosnia should stand up for the Saint Sava sermons, this will awaken the Serbian spirit even more. The Serbs will work together, we will unite spiritually, and we will erect an eternal monument to our enlightener and teacher, Sava, which will last as long as there are Serbs!” (Kaluderčić, 1886, pp. 26–28).

Saint Sava is one of the most represented characters in folklore⁴, cult, and tradition in Bosnia⁵. In the folklore of the Bosnian Krajina, there are many traditions and folk beliefs that were linked to the personality of Saint Sava. There are folk tales, folk songs, folk traditions, and folk prayers related to his personality, and a large number of them were published in various magazines and newspapers that were published on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Austro-Hungarian administration⁶. Folk tales were invented, and most of them were passed down from generation to generation from an earlier period until someone wrote them down and eventually published them (Karanović, 1936, pp. 8–16). Folk traditions were, to a great extent, related to places and regions. For example: “it is a general folk belief and understanding that the Gomionica monastery in Zmijanje is a Nemanjić endowment”, testifies to the strong cult of the holy lineage of the Nemanjić dynasty (Karanović, 1936, pp. 16, 18–19). In addition to the folk belief that the Gomionica monastery is the endowment of the Nemanjić dynasty, the folk belief also connects many other monasteries in Bosnia to Nemanjić endowments⁷. The situation is similar to the area of North-Eastern Bosnia, where folk tales, folk traditions, and folk beliefs related to Saint Sava and his cult are also represented. Based on his own research, Milenko S. Filipović concluded that the church cult and

⁴ The character of Saint Sava in folklore is multi-layered, and in it, in addition to the Christian component, various characters of pagan deities can be recognized (Ilić, 2019, p. 261).

⁵ For more information see: Ćorović, 1927; Karanović, 1936; Filipović, 2008.

⁶ For more information see: Milanović, 1893, p. 187; Vasiljević, 1901, p. 14–15; Sveti Savo u narodnom predanju, 1897, p. 41–42; Sveti Savo u narodnom predanju, 1897, p. 152–153; Sveti Savo u narodnom predanju, 1897, p. 247–248; Sveti Savo u narodnom predanju, 1897, p. 343–344; Sveti Savo i sv. Nikola, 1897, p. 344; Sveti Savo u narodnom predanju, 1898, p. 186–187; Sveti Savo u narodnom predanju, 1899, p. 129–130; Sveti Sava i pop, 1910, p. 359–360.

⁷ For more information see: Ševo, 2002; Mikić, 1995, pp. 62–68.

migrations of the Serbian people are responsible for the expansion and strengthening of the cult of Saint Sava in the area of North-Eastern Bosnia (Filipović, 2008, pp. 260-261). According to his findings, one fact is important in considering the age and strength of the church cult in this area, and that is the painting of Saint Sava in the former monastery church of Lomnica. In his conclusion, Filipović further states: “On the north wall of the church, above the two choir stalls, Saint Simeon (Nemanja) and Saint Sava (...) were painted. The church wall painting in Lomnica was completed in 1608, as evidenced by a record.” (Filipović, 2008, p. 261). All this presents a great indicator of how geographically widespread the cult of Saint Sava was and how rooted it was among the Serbian people throughout Bosnia. The cult spread further from Bosnia to the area of Lika, Banija, and Kordun, and it played a major role in the preservation of the Serbian nationality and the Orthodox faith among the Serbs in that area, which moved further from the Bosnian border.

Đoko Slijepčević was right when he wrote: “There is certainly a lot that is accurate and justified in emphasizing the national and state work of Saint Sava.” He was not only a true patriot but also a completely “new type of patriot”, who uplifted his people through his own tranquilization and effective spirituality. From this form of patriotism, sanctified by the true spirit of Orthodoxy, the one thing was born that united our tribes and gave the Serbian state a higher idea and meaning. When Saint Sava appeared among the people and became a missionary and revivalist, the process of merging and spiritual unification of our tribes was not yet complete.” (Slijepčević, 2002, p. 124). What the cult of Saint Sava meant for the Serbs can best be seen from the role of the Serbian Church during the centuries of foreign rule, when the Serbian Church succeeded in resurrecting and strengthening the Serbian nation as a whole (Branković, 2020a, p. 69). The strengthening of the cult of Saint Sava and the spread of the Kosovo cycle among the Serbs greatly contributed to the resistance to Islamization and unification in Bosnia. The greatness of the cult of Saint Sava among the Serbs left a deep mark in all fields, from the church, folk customs, and personal names to toponymy. Numerous local toponyms in the territories that were inhabited or are now inhabited by Serbs are related to the personality of Saint Sava (Škrivanić, 1977, pp. 367–374). There are also temples dedicated to Saint Sava (Janković, 1997, pp. 345–356). According to our assessment, the best conclusion about the personality of Saint Sava was given by Nikola Radojčić back in 1935, which is still relevant today, and which will certainly be relevant in the future: “When it comes to Saint Sava, as in few cases of great men, one can feel that the essential sign of his greatness is the versatility of his genius and the permanence of his ideas. He had, he has, and he will always have something to say to all admirers and workers on the progress of humanity. The ideas to which he dedicated his life and work are truly eternal” (Radojčić, 1935, p. 49).

The affiliation of Serbs to the Orthodox faith and the Serbian Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina is unquestionable throughout history, and national and religious affiliations were especially expressed during the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian

administrations and the struggle to preserve national and religious identities. The continuity and permanence of the cult of Saint Sava is best reflected in the folk tale in which Saint Sava blesses the mother of Saint Vasilij Ostroški after she gave him water, with the words: “A pure and purest body came from you into this world.” (Jovović, 2020, p. 335).

The role of folk beliefs and folk traditions, maintained by oral tradition through centuries of rule by foreign enslavers, can be understood when one takes into account the state of (il)literacy among the Serbian clergy and people, because if there were no oral folk beliefs and folk traditions passed down from generation to generation, the big question is whether the Serbian nationality and belonging to the cult of Saint Sava would be preserved. Therefore, we can conclude that because of the unity of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its tireless work to preserve national and religious identities, the Serbs in Bosnia remained faithful to the Orthodox faith, the Serbian nation, and the path of Saint Sava.

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