

## THE ORIGIN OF PETAR K. KOSTIĆ, WRITER AND SENATOR FROM PRIZREN\*

"One of the most venerable elders from our southern lands and one of the most agile architects of our educational and cultural oeuvre dating very far back, to the time of the height of enslavement by the Ottomans, died in Skopje on 12 July. Petar Kostić the writer gained prominence with his essays and books on the history of education, the church and the economy of Old Serbia, especially his native Prizren, which would prove important to our still sparse cultural and local historiography,"<sup>63</sup> the *Serbian Literary Gazette* informed the scientific and general public.

Who was Petar K. Kostić and when did he move to Prizren, to take the initiative in the political, educational, cultural and scientific fields in that imperial and metropolitan sec, where Serbs were rallied round their Metropolitan, their Church and School Parish, the Seminary and Teaching College?<sup>64</sup>

In order to portray him in this context, it is necessary to say something about the period in which he lived and worked, about his ancestors, their activities, and his genealogical tree, so as to get a picture of the time when Serbs had had to fight, embrace Islam and disappear in order to safeguard their national identity. Of course, the spreading of Islam in the Balkan part of the Ottoman Empire was not a uniform process. In Kosovo-Metohija, it was present up to 1912.

"The conversion to Islam was gradual. The first to convert were the most highly threatened and the smallest localities... and the last was the most distant, biggest and richest locality of Brod."<sup>65</sup> For this reason, many Serb families in Brod are known to this day in Prizren and Sirinić as Serbian families, which were halved - one offshoot embracing Islam, and the other remaining faithful to Orthodox Christianity. Mentioned in this context are the clans of Lekovac, Čučulovac, Čunkovac, Macinac, Djurdjevac, Trupčevac, Kučkarevac, Prdljevac,

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<sup>63</sup> Српски књижевни гласник (*Serbian Literary Gazette*) од 16.07. 1934.

<sup>64</sup> A Serbian family of gardeners converted to Islam in Prizren on the eve of the Balkan wars.

<sup>65</sup> Лугован М. (1955), *Гора и Ополје – антропогеографска студија (Gora and Opolje - Anthropogeographical Study)*, Београд, стр. 269

Paskinac, Džavdžić, etc.<sup>66</sup> whose names in Christianity are Kostić, Čučurević, Djunković, Djurdjević, Jovanović, Ilić, Stanković, Milenković. They are all related. According to Anče Stojković, the family of Čučulj is closely related to them, and they even visit back and forth.<sup>67</sup>

However, nearly all villages in Gora have retained their language, and some have kept also the traditional customs for church festivals: St George's Day, St. Demetrius' Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Annunciation, St. Panteleimon's Day, St. Tryphon's Day, consecrating boiled wheat on feast days, keeping memorial Saturdays and other customs and observances.<sup>68</sup>

"Goranies have kept also the old funeral custom - observance of Memorial Saturdays four times a year - seven days and forty days after death, six months and a year after death."<sup>69</sup>

At about this time, Albanian thugs started to appear, trying in every way to force the remaining Serbs to convert to Islam, and so triggering migrations. "Every opportunity and excuse was being made to force even the oldest and most influential people in Brod to convert to Islam. The most assiduous in this respect was one Rexhep Pasha of Bican in Ljuma, who lived ca. AD 1770"<sup>70</sup>, as well as one Shaban Hoxha<sup>71</sup>, and many others.

There were also other reasons, which accelerated conversion to Islam. Among others, there were the Phanariote bishops in Prizren and the absence of clergy in Gora.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, many moved from Gora to Prizren, knowing that this was a *vilayet* (provincial) seat and a metropolitan see, where it was easier for a Serb, an Orthodox Christian, to survive.

One of these families, which is well-known to this day, was the family of Petar K. Kostić, writer and senator from Prizren, whose genealogical tree is the most typical of Serb migrations from Brod and other Gora villages under pressure from the threat of Islamisation and Albanian thugs. His origin cannot be traced too far back into the past, because no adequate records could be found. But it is certain how the process of Islamisation unfolded from the time national awareness was awakened in the Serbs. From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when tensions first appeared and the Serbian people were mobilising to offer a more

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., стр. 270.

<sup>67</sup> As testified by Anče Stojković of Prizren, aged 81 years.

<sup>68</sup> Лутовац М. (1955), *Гора и Ополје (Gora and Opolje)*, САНУ, Насеља 35 (*Localities 35*), Географски институт "Јован Цвијих". Посебна издања, књ. 40/ II. **Митрополитске жупе Гора, Ополје и Средска, антропогеографско-етнолошке, демографске, социолошке и културолошке карактеристике** (*Metropolitan Župas of Gora, Opolje and Sredska Anthropogeographical, ethnological, demographic, sociological and culturological characteristics*), Београд, стр.454.

<sup>69</sup> Лутовац М. (1955), *ibid.*, стр. 272.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., стр. 270.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

resolute and powerful resistance, the process of Islamisation in Brod and other Gora villages began to turn more dramatically against the Serbs. This was the beginning of mounting daily pressure on many Serbian families, especially on the proud and honourable family of Lekovac and its head Miloš, man of influence in Brod, round whom rallied many Serbian heads of family. He was a man whose authority was a serious obstacle to the spreading of Islam.

According to a document found in the archives of the Tsar Uroš Folk Art and Culture Society<sup>73</sup> in Prizren, "Brod and its environs were ruled in the Middle Ages by one Prince Pavle. On his death, one Captain Leka, who was an autonomous and independent lord of Gora, succeeded him; it is not clear whether or not he was a blood relation of Prince Pavle. However, it is very likely that Leka was a descendant of this Mediaeval lord, who was an ancestor of Petar K. Kostić. Leka's descendants call themselves Lekovacs and hail from Brod".<sup>74</sup>

Petar Kostić's great-grandfather Miloš, who lived during the rule of Karadjordje Petrović, was killed for refusing to embrace Islam. His death was meant to intimidate those who shared his views. His death saddened, as well as frightened, all Brod. But love for the most prominent inhabitant of Brod and its environs, a respected householder, was stronger than fear. He was buried as befitted his station, according to the full Christian rites.

People of Brod<sup>75</sup> say that Miloš had three sons: Lazar, Arsenije and Anastas. They all lived in harmony, supporting their father and setting an example to the village. But pressure and threats from the converts did their damage.

Petar K. Kostić writes: "In 1821, my father's paternal uncle Anastas converted to Mohammedanism as a trainee in Macedonia, where shepherds from all of Gora wintered with their flocks, as they do to this day. Since he had done so against the wishes of his elder brother Lazar, the latter threatened to deal with him when they returned home. He then, on getting close to home, induced his fellow-shepherds, certainly converts all, to hasten ahead and kill Lazar near Brod".<sup>76</sup> "Lazar's wife Stana escaped to Prizren with her small children: Simo, Janko and Kosta. Kosta was the father of Senator Petar Kostić".<sup>77</sup>

"Since Lazar had been the only person in Brod round whom the remaining Orthodox Christian families had rallied, they too then escaped to Prizren (Jankuličevacs, Toljevacs, Kučkovacs, Čučuljevacs, Štanovacs, etc.). The only one who remained in Brod was my father's aunt Božana, who stayed with her convert husband (Anastas) and her children, for the sake of the latter, whom she

<sup>73</sup> Tsar Uroš Society Archives, Prizren.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> A Brod family respondents who spoke on condition of anonymity.

<sup>76</sup> Костић П. (1934), *Моја аутобиографија (My Autobiography)*, Јужни преглед, Скопје, стр. 259-260.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

could not abandon. She died in 1856, as the last Christian woman in Brod.<sup>78</sup> She would not abandon her faith and convert to Islam, and being a woman, she was allowed to carry her point. She remained a Serb and a Christian to her death, attending church in Brod to the last. When she died, the church was torn down, the rest of the population having converted to Islam. Out of respect for their mother, her sons Stanko - Islamic name Selim, and Gavriilo - Islamic name Halil, would not allow the church to be torn down while she lived. She was buried on Pantelevac Hill, where her grave still stands. Her husband Anastas, who took the name of Jaqub on converting to Islam, renamed their daughters: Kata became Kadima..., while their youngest daughter, who was born after his conversion, was named Aisha.<sup>79</sup>

(A)nastas's sons Selim and Halil (Christian names Stanko and Gavriilo) wished to see converted to their new faith also their paternal cousins, sons of Lazar: Simo, Janko and Kosta, father of Petar Kostić. But they failed. These had removed themselves from the scene, knowing what might happen. They only managed to have Lazar's eldest son Simo shorn by force and so converted to Islam, giving him the name of Hasim. But he, being a Christian by conviction, would never be circumcised or take on other insignia of Islam, and would not even marry, so as not to "beget Turks". He therefore fled to Serbia, where he fought in the wars of 1876 and was killed at Šumatovac. He was the paternal uncle of Senator Petar Kostić. His death, as well as his life, had had a tremendous influence on Petar.

It may justly be said that the history of this Serbian family is a kind of "Mountain Garland", which speaks of the Islamisation and tragedies of the Lekovac family. On the example of this family can be seen how the Islamisation of Serbian families progressed apace from the time of Karadjordje up to the year 1860, and with it the Albanian assimilation of the Serbian population throughout Old Serbia.

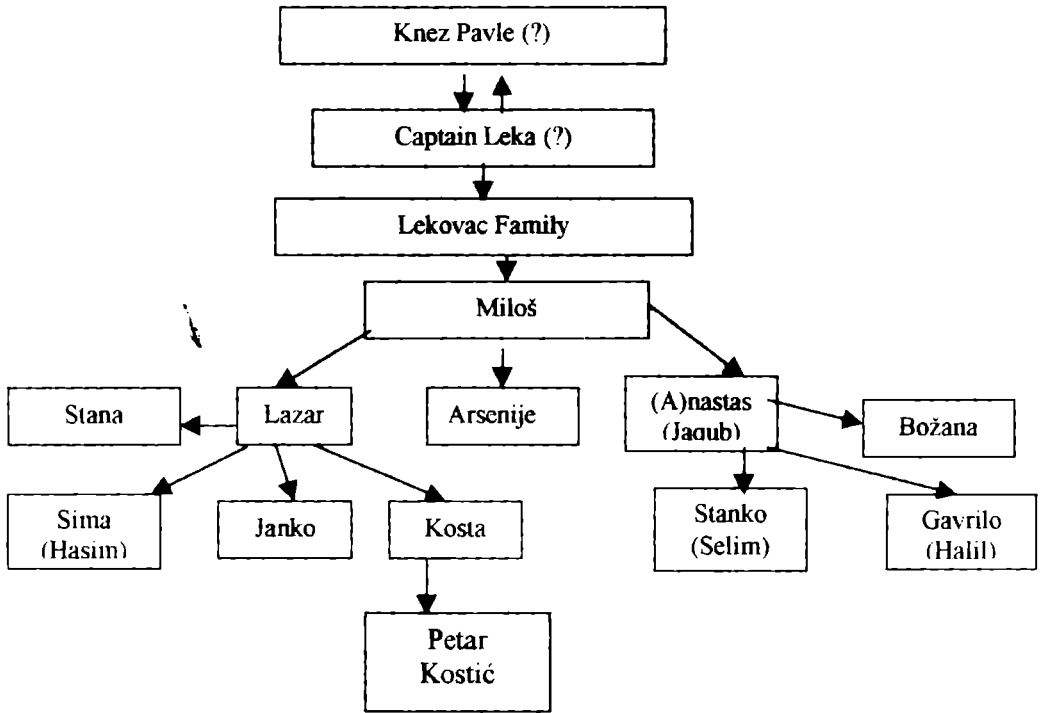
After the murder of Miloš at the time of the First Serbian Uprising, Gora was quickly Islamised, and the process of Turkicization ended ca. 1860. The process of Albanian assimilation of Gorany Serbs had started somewhat earlier.

Miloš, the great-grandfather of Petar Kostić, seeing where religious persecution and forced conversions were tending, stood up against such practices. He was murdered on the orders of Rexhep Pasha, ruler and strongman of Gora, because he had fought to protect the religion of his ancestors. Both sides took casualties at the height of the Islamisation process. Islamised Serbs wanted to Turkicize everybody else. Those who remained Christians resisted

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Костић П. (1933), *Просветно-културни живот православних Срба у Призрену и његовој околини у 19. и на почетку 20. века* (*The Education and Culture of Orthodox Christian Serbs in Prizren and its Environs in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*), Скопје, стр. 174 и 200.

this violence, themselves striving to exterminate the converts. Examples of this kind were in evidence throughout Kosovo-Metohija, which is a separate subject.



Leko's descendants today go by the name Lekovacs. They are to be found among both Christians and Muslims. Both offshoots of the Lekovac family had a highly developed family feeling. There are several Christian Lekovac families in Tetovo and Sirinić<sup>80</sup>, such as the Ljubićs in Štrpce. They all celebrate St. Barbara, and there is a saying that "all Goranians who are not in Gora and celebrate St. Barbara are Lekovacs."

The inscription on the Lekovac family tomb in Prizren, which depicts part of the genealogical tree of the family, indicates that the Lekovacs had ever given forth prominent men, heroes, leaders and headmen, so that it may justly be said of Petar K. Kostić, grandson of Lazar and son of Kosta and Anastasija: "With the death of Petar Kostić, we have lost the doyen of our national activists in Southern Serbia, a man of rare intellectual and moral qualities. He typified a generation and, even more, an epoch."

In his many speeches, P. Kostić gave proof of his greatness and his sense of the historical truth.

<sup>80</sup> Data obtained from the Ljubić family in Štrpce.

The family tree of this prominent Serb illustrates the process and era of Islamisation of Serbs in Gora and the broader southern and Old Serbian regions, and speaks volumes about the ethnic and cultural origins of the Goranians.