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# **THE SOCIALIST IMPACT ON THE CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM SHARED ST. NAUM MONASTERY**

**By Evelyn Reuter**

Evelyn Reuter studied Ethnology, Protestant Theology and Southeastern European Studies at the Martin-Luther-Universität at Halle-Wittenberg (2007-2011) and at the Friedrich-Schiller-Universität at Jena (2011-2016). During 2016-2019, she completed her PhD dissertation in Southeastern European Studies at the University of Jena. The title of the dissertation is “The Ambiguity of a Shared Religious Place: An Ethnographic Case Study on the St Naum Monastery in Ohrid (Macedonia).” Her research interests include: Balkans as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious space, religious minorities, Islam in the Balkans, Sufi Orders, culture of remembrance, sharing religious places.

## **Abstract**

Shared religious places may be provocative phenomena—for the members of the sharing communities as well as for uninvolved observers. An increasing number of research literature focusing on the contesting character of such places and the consequences for the identities of sharing communities serves as evidence for that thesis. The heads of the theoretical discussion regarding the influence of sharing religious and political identities are the anthropologists, Robert Hayden and Glenn Bowman. Due to the long-lasting Christian-Muslim contacts characterized by peaceful as well as conflicting interaction, both bring examples from Southeastern Europe, especially from the post-Yugoslavian context. It is obvious that the conclusion is based on the historic events they emphasize as significant identity markers. In fact, every historic period with its political system and ideas influences the negotiation of the past and the creation of current religious and political identities. Based on qualitative-empirical fieldwork data and historic findings, this article investigates the socialist impact on the Christian and Muslim contact at the Sveti Naum Monastery in Macedonia, as an example for shared religious places.

## **Introduction**

For approximately 500 years, the Balkans have been part of the Ottoman Empire where Christians and Muslims lived quite peacefully with one another. During that time, Christians and Muslims visited some of religious places. After the collapse of this empire, the

nation-building politics with their border demarcation, influenced the coexistence of religious and ethnic communities. In Yugoslavia, the socialist regime publically depreciated religion. The regime expropriated religious communities, gave their lands to cooperatives, and used former religious buildings as museums and other cultural institutions. Due to their non-religious use in former Yugoslavia, places of interreligious contacts vanished, and the religious ambiguity of these places increased. When Macedonia (as of recently North Macedonia) became an independent state, the religious communities got part of their lands and buildings back.

One such example is the Monastery of Saint Naum, located in the southwestern of Macedonia<sup>1</sup> and south of Lake Ohrid, at the border to Albania. On July 3<sup>rd</sup> every year, a main feast is held at the monastery to venerate and honor Naum, the saint who founded the monastery. The monastery attracts thousands of visitors from Macedonia, Albania, other Balkan countries, and elsewhere. Among the visitors are Christians as well as Muslims. The joint visits of Christians and Muslims to the monastery have been often interpreted as veneration of the saint, while some parts of the Muslim community claim the identity of the Christian Saint Naum and the pre-Ottoman missionary, Sarı Saltuk. The monastery eventually became a tourist destination in Yugoslavia and today, it serves as one of the most famous tourist destinations in Macedonia and in this region.

Knowledge about these Christian-Muslim visits served as the springboard of my research about this phenomenon, because the practice of sharing religious places and rituals seemed strange for me as a Western Protestant. The temporal context of the monastery in particular raised some questions: Who wrote about Muslims visiting the monastery? Do Muslims visit the monastery today? What are the reasons for Muslims to visit it? What do Christians think about Muslims visiting the monastery? How did the national policy of Yugoslavia, Macedonia, and Albania influence the behaviour of Christians and Muslims? Some additional questions that emerged during my field research were: Is it really a monastery? What role does secular life play in negotiating the monastery's significance? These questions can be best summed up in the primary research question for this article: How did the relations between Christians and Muslims change at the Sveti Naum Monastery under the socialist impact during the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

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<sup>1</sup> The state's name was a matter of contention with the neighboring Greece since Macedonia's independence in 1991. On 8 April 1993 *The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* became a member of the United Nations. In summer 2018, the long name dispute with Greece was settled with the bilateral Prespa Agreement resulting in the decision of renaming of Macedonia to North Macedonia. In this article, I will keep the former name, because the data collection was finished prior to the renaming procedure.

First, before I present the historical changes, a brief overview of the spatial theories and its relation to time will be given due to the time and space bond issue. Afterwards, I will outline how the interreligious encounters of Christians and Muslims changed from their original foundation to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. To illustrate the historical changes, the Yugoslavian period is to be embedded within the historical periods of the Ottoman Empire and the post-socialist Macedonia. Finally, I will discuss the results in the more recent context of ethnic and religious conflicts and interfaith dialogue.

The information on events since the Second World War are based partly on qualitative-empirical data collected during an 11-month multi-local field research in approximately 40 cities and villages in Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo from 2016 to 2018. These chosen places were all connected to the monastery and to each other based on the following factors: places which the pilgrims and visitors traditionally came from (especially in the region between Ohrid and Korçë), places with other monasteries and churches dedicated to Saint Naum (all over Macedonia), and places of the Bektashi community that are said to identify Naum with the pre-Ottoman Sarı Saltuk (especially in Albania). Based on these factors, the visited sites are considered a network of religious places. The sample included different ethnic and religious groups as well as several positions of characters within the religious hierarchies and international tourists.

### **Spatial Theories on Shared Religious Places and the Relevance of Time as Analytic Category**

The theoretical framework of this study relies on two theoretical approaches, which I combined as the spatial and historical approach. This is due to the two foci of this study: 1) I consider the monastery as a religious place and 2) I consider the changes from the beginning to the end of Yugoslavia as a country. Since 2002, the anthropological and historical research literature on shared religious places has underlined the increasing interest in this subject.<sup>2</sup> Robert Hayden initiated a great discussion with his article “Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans.”<sup>3</sup> Glenn Bowman, among others, commented on Hayden’s ideas and he became the second leader in this

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<sup>2</sup> Manfred Sing, “Introduction. (How) Do We Share the Sacred?,” in *Entangled Religions. Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Religious Contact and Transfer* 9 (April 2019): 11, <http://doi.org/10.13154/er.v9.2019.3-33>.

<sup>3</sup> Robert M. Hayden, “Antagonistic Tolerance. Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans,” *Current Anthropology* 43, no. 2 (April 2002): 205-31.

discourse.<sup>4</sup> Hayden's approach is based on previous studies on the religious contacts in the Ottoman Empire by the historian and archaeologist, Frederick William Hasluck and on Kosovo as a Yugoslavian province by the anthropologist, Ger Duijzings.<sup>5</sup> Arguing against the philosophical concepts of mostly actively understood tolerance, Hayden stated that in the societies he has studied, the majority suppressed minorities. Therefore, a subtle power struggle leads to passive tolerance and avoids an open conflict. This is a cost-reducing strategy by political elites. Bowman criticizes Hayden's theory for his "essentialist conception of identity" and instead argues that "identities at syncretic shrines can function with relative unfixity."<sup>6</sup> For Bowman, shared religious places are no "repositories of core identities," but can be found in "'border zones' where identities are local products rather than extensions of the hegemonic orthodox discourses of state and sect."<sup>7</sup> In these "border zones," contesting interests may be negotiated in open conflicts.

However, they have differing explanations for the behavior of involved actors. It should be noted that they both focus on sharing and its consequences, rather than on what is shared, and do not reflect the spatial terms. The used terms, like shrines or religious sites, and the given examples suggest a physical and geographical understanding of what they call places and spaces. This concept overlooks the symbolic and metaphoric meaning of the terms, place and space. Furthermore, this approach cannot explain the meaning of religious people who are connected with the localities and who are the center of the cult, as in the case at the St. Naum Monastery.

Regarding the research gap between the spatial theories of shared religious places from Hayden and Bowman, I will combine them with Kim Knott's approach. According to Kim Knott, "place is that nexus in space in which social relations occur, which may be material or metaphorical and which is necessarily interconnected (with places) and full of power."<sup>8</sup> This definition enables the investigation of the monastery as the physical and material space in connection with the saint as a metaphorical place. Moreover, Knott's

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<sup>4</sup> Glenn W. Bowmann, "Comment," in *Current Anthropology* 32, no. 2 (April 2002): 219-20.

<sup>5</sup> Frederick William Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929); Gerlachus Duijzings, "Pilgrimage, politics and ethnicity. Joint pilgrimages of Muslims and Christians and conflicts over ambiguous sanctuaries in Yugoslavia and Albania," in *Power and Prayer. Religious and Political Processes in Past and Present*, ed. Mart Bax & Adrianus Koster (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1993), pp. 80-91; Gerlachus Duijzings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), <http://hdl.handle.net/11245/1.393615>.

<sup>6</sup> Bowmann, "Comment," p. 220.

<sup>7</sup> Glenn W. Bowman, "Introduction. Sharing the Sacra," in *Sharing the Sacra. The Politics and Pragmatics of intercommunal Relations around holy Places*, ed. Glenn W. Bowman (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), pp. 1-4.

<sup>8</sup> Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis*. (London and Oakville CT: Equinox, 2005), p. 134.

approach sheds light on the question of why “space, place, and location” are to be investigated within the study of interreligious contacts: Space is “a medium in which religion is situated.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, space is to be looked at to examine “the relationships between religion and its apparently secular context.” Finally, space is “produced by religions, religious groups, and individuals.” One analytical element of Knott’s approach is the supposition of dynamic spaces where relationships of several individual or collective players are negotiated. The collective players may be religious institutions or minorities, political parties, as well as economic organizations. Thus, spatial analysis gives, for instance, information about the spatial praxis of religious people, the production of religious spaces, power relations, and negotiation processes of several religious and political interpretations, as well as territorial claims.

Such spatial definitions can be found in the debate on shared religious places since 2013, started initially by Hayden. Together with the historian, Timothy Walker, Hayden states that “shared religious sites [are] nodes in structures of social interactions between populations that distinguish themselves and each other as different, on religious grounds, through time.”<sup>10</sup> Again focusing on physical locations, they view places as constructions of social acts. Hence, shared religious places are always part of a social network within so-called “religioscapes.” Religioscapes are physical manifestations of religious traditions in time and space, which can be changed due to the mobility and activities of human beings. The changeability of religioscapes implies that they can be charged with (new) meaning or completely forgotten. However, this approach still ignores the symbolic meaning of place and space.

The historical approach to the religious places, which are shared by various actors, is nothing that can be separated from the spatial one. Hayden emphasised time as an important analysis category in 2002.<sup>11</sup> Taking time into account, he pointed out that religious syncretic phenomena are nonsense; they have to be interpreted as a historical snapshot. In his later contributions on religioscapes, time is again a significant aspect to determine the historical transformation of religious spaces and places, and the changing meaning.<sup>12</sup> Knott emphasises time as an important factor of the investigation of religion at spaces and places as well, but she focuses more on the general and constant production process that may avoid the danger

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<sup>9</sup> Knott, *Location of Religion*, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Robert M. Hayden and Timothy D. Walker, “Intersecting Religioscapes: A Comparative Approach to Trajectories of Change, Scale, and Competitive Sharing of Religious Spaces,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81, no. 2, (April 2013): 407f.

<sup>11</sup> Hayden, „Antagonistic Tolerance,” p. 207.

<sup>12</sup> Hayden and Walker, “Intersecting Religioscapes,” pp. 401.

of essentialism.<sup>13</sup>

### **Interreligious Activities and Relations at the St Naum Monastery...**

With respect to the outlined theoretical background of space and time, the socialist impact on the shared Christian and Muslim St. Naum Monastery has to be presented within a broader historical context to figure out continuations and disruptions of this religious contact. Thus, three main periods are to be considered to show how the perception of the monastery changed over time and how the various kinds of visitors behaved: 1) the Ottoman Empire as the starting point of interreligious encounter, 2) the changes during Yugoslavia, and 3) the changes since the beginning of the 1990s in post-socialist Macedonia.

#### ***... during the Ottoman Empire***

Any Christian-Muslim encounter at the St. Naum Monastery is hardly possible before the Ottomans conquered this region at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The monastery itself was founded between the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, in the Middle Ages, the monastery became a pilgrimage center for the people living between Ohrid and Korçë, due to its location and distance from several cities in the region.

While Ohrid was conquered, the town of Korçë was founded at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century as a new administrative center.<sup>14</sup> However, in Ohrid, the Muslim population grew slowly and Korçë was surrounded mostly by Christian houses. One of the first references that Muslims were interested in the Sveti Naum Monastery is connected with its reconstruction after its destruction at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century due to unknown reasons.<sup>15</sup> Historical documents show the involvement of Ottoman officials in the reconstruction process. For example, the erection of the cupola above the grave's chapel, which was painted in 1806, was only possible with the order of Ali Pasha, the ruler of the south Albanian city Tepelenë.<sup>16</sup> Neither the cupola nor the frescoes are influenced by the Ottoman style, rather they are of

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<sup>13</sup> Knott, *Location of Religion*, pp. 4f.

<sup>14</sup> Machiel Kiel, "Okhri," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (8 Ned-Sam), ed. Clifford Edmund Bosworth, et al., (Leiden: Brill, 1993), pp. 164-166; Michael Kiel, "Korča," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (5 Khe-Mahi), ed. Clifford Edmund Bosworth, et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), pp. 264-266.

<sup>15</sup> Cvetan Grozdanov, *Sveti Naum Ohridski* [Saint Naum of Ohrid] (Skopje: Matica, 2015), p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> Naum Celakoski, "Letopis–1000 godini Sv. Naum Ohridski [Chronicle – 1000 Years St Naum of Ohrid]," in *Zbornik na naučni trudovi od naučnata sredba "1100 godini od smrti na Sv. Naum Ohridski*, ed. Lenče Andonovska (Bitola: Kiro Dandaro, 2010), p. 47.

neo- and post-Byzantine character.<sup>17</sup> Only the shape of the windows resembles Ottoman architecture. Furthermore, the well next to the church was financed by an Ottoman official named Ismail Bey in 1818 and the *kiosk*, a kind of columned hall, was by the ruler of Ohrid, Celadin Bey, as a recreation place for himself and his wife.<sup>18</sup> Another proof for the Ottomans' connection to this place is a yearbook entry of an accident in 1875: Ottomans who stayed in the monastery's accommodations from February 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> did not take care of their fireplace well enough.<sup>19</sup> A spark set the whole complex on fire and everything was destroyed except the church and the veranda of the community from Voskopojë, a former town close to Korçë. The activities of influential Ottomans lead to the suggestion that even less influential Muslim subjects visited the monastery for reasons of recreation or healing, as Naum is purported to be a saint, wonderworker, and healer for all who are looking for divine help and salvation— independent of their religious belonging.

The behavior of the Ottomans, the reconstruction support, and the use of accommodation and place of recreation, can be interpreted as respect for the saint. Another interpretation of the Ottomans' behavior is that they showed respect to this religious place, which is surrounded by fascinating nature. Thus, the monastery can be identified as a popular destination that even Muslims enjoyed. What else the Ottomans and other Muslims did during their stays at the monastery is not evident.

The fact the Muslims visited the monastery even after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, during the time of demarcation, was noted by Frederick William Hasluck, who visited the Sveti Naum Monastery in 1914. In his book, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, he reported that not only Sunni but also another Muslim group called Bektashi visited the monastery. In contrast to Sunni Muslims, Bektashi today are often considered a non-conformist Sufi order that also has some Shi'a elements. Hasluck's observations strengthen the suggestions that both Muslim groups visited the monastery not only for leisure time activities and recreation, but for religious interests. He writes that the St. Naum Monastery "is frequented by Bektashi Mohammedans from the surrounding district, who identify the saint with their own Sari Saltik. Even the orthodox Sunni recognize the saint as one of their own, alleging (a) that he lived before the rise of the Bektashi heresy and (b) that

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<sup>17</sup> Grozdanov, *Sveti Naum Ohridski*, p. 76f, 135.

<sup>18</sup> Grozdanov, *Sveti Naum O hridski*, p. 279.

<sup>19</sup> Naum Celakoski, *Starite Pečati i Predanijata za Sveti Naum Ohridski* [The old seals and Sagas about Saint Naum of Ohrid] (Ohrid: Fakultetot za Turizam i ugostitelsto/Institut za istraživanje na turizmot, 2004), pp.18f; Celakoski, "Letopis," p. 53f; Grozdanov, *Sveti Naum Ohridski*, p. 279.



the Christians usurped his tomb.”<sup>20</sup>

In another paragraph, he explains that in regards to the monastery’s abbot, the Bektashi believe that “Sarı Saltik, on a visit to the monastery, had, with the Christian abbot, miraculously crossed the lake to Okhrida on a straw-mat.”<sup>21</sup> These two quotes show that the Sunni Muslims and the Bektashi did not go to the monastery to venerate the Christian saint called Naum, the person who founded the monastery, but for Sarı Saltuk.

According to both groups, Sarı Saltuk was a Muslim missionary, buried in Naum’s grave. According to historical sources, Sarı Saltuk has been a pre-Ottoman figure from the 13<sup>th</sup> century that can be seen easily by Sunnis and Bektashis as their missionary figure, because at that time the denominational boundaries between the two groups were not as strictly divided as they are today.<sup>22</sup> Sarı Saltuk was born in Central Asia, but worked and died in the Dobrudja, which is Rumania today. The legend says that he commanded a coffin be sent to each ruler who wanted to have his corpse—nobody was to know in which one he will be. The number of coffins increased from seven to 40 in several sites. At many of these sites, Sarı Saltuk was identified with Christian saints. It is not known how exactly his cult is spread.<sup>23</sup> It might have been a mission strategy of the Bektashi. So, the idea that the monastery Sveti Naum is one of Sarı Saltuk’s places originally seemed to have been an argument of the Bektashi. Bektashi came to Southern Albania after they had been banned together with the Janissaries in 1826.<sup>24</sup> Another point the quotes made is that the ongoing issue of demarcation did not prohibit Muslims from several traditions to visit the monastery.

### **... in socialist Yugoslavia**

With the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, socialist regimes did not emerge immediately, but kingdoms arose and nation-building processes started based on religious belonging as the main factor and language as its second one. The region around the St. Naum

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<sup>20</sup> Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, p. 70.

<sup>21</sup> Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, p. 583.

<sup>22</sup> Stefan Rohdewald, “Sarı Saltuk im osmanischen Rumelien, der Rus' und Polen-Litauen. Zugänge zu einer transosmanischen religiösen Erinnerungsfigur (14.–20. Jh.) [Sarı Saltuk in Ottoman Rumelia, the Rus' and Poland-Lithuania. Approaches to a Transottoman religious Figure of Remembrance (14<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> century)],” in *Heilig. Transkulturelle Verehrungskulte vom Mittelalter bis in die Gegenwart*, ed. Kerstin Jobst, Dietlind Hüchtker (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2017), pp. 75-77.

<sup>23</sup> Rohdewald, “Sarı Saltuk,” pp. 88-90.

<sup>24</sup> Nathalie Clayer, “Netzwerke muslimischer Bruderschaften in Südosteuropa [Networks of Muslim Brotherhoods in South Eastern Europe],” *Europäische Geschichte Online* (2012): p. 8, <http://ieg-ego.eu/de/threads/europaeische-netzwerke/islamische-netzwerke/nathalie-clayer-netzwerke-muslimischer-bruderschaften-in-suedosteuropa>; M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 58-60.

Monastery like the entire Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo remained part of the Ottoman Empire until the Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913. With respect to these events, the most significant question in this area was the border demarcation. In these demarcation processes, the belonging of the monastery was a controversial issue between Albania and Yugoslavia from 1912 until 1925.<sup>25</sup> The problem was a phrase in the international border demarcation committee, which stated that the region “from Lin [a city in today’s Albania] to St. Naum” is part of Albania.<sup>26</sup> Of course, the politicians of Yugoslavia understood it exclusively, while Albanian politicians interpreted it inclusively. The solution for this issue was finally reached in 1925; after Ahmed Zogu seized the power in Albania with the help of Yugoslavia, he surrendered the monastery to his supporters which the ambassadors of both countries accepted in a meeting. The abovementioned observation of Hasluck in 1914 occurred before the solution. Thus, due to the uncertain border situation, it is no wonder that even people from Albania and members of different Muslim groups still frequented the monastery like they had done in the Ottoman Empire.

The largest decrease in the history of visiting the monastery by different ethno-nationalities and religious groups happened in 1948. In that year, Albania closed the borders and turned away politically from Yugoslavia.<sup>27</sup> Only after the Second World War in 1945, the ministry of the interior decided to open the border crossing at Saint Naum for the holiday on July 3<sup>rd</sup> to facilitate visits for people from the Albanian site.<sup>28</sup> One reason for this might be due to the decline of visitors from the local population at the monastery, which was influenced by the military presence and the border crossing procedure requiring passports. Until then, people could go freely to the monastery and there were no bigger changes.

However, in the broader political context, Albania had already started to relativize the role of religion for the identity issue of Albanians,<sup>29</sup> while in Yugoslavia only the issue of the

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<sup>25</sup> Grozdanov, *Sveti Naum Ohridski*, pp. 287-290.

<sup>26</sup> Milčo Balevski, *Balkanskite politički priliki i diplomatskite bitki za manastirov Sveti Naum* [The Balkan political circumstances and the diplomatic struggles for the monastery Saint Naum] (Skopje: Makedonska Kniga, 1984), pp. 125-132, 186-189; Kaliopi Naska, *Shën Naumi dhe diplomacia e kohës. Trajtesë dhe dokumente* [Saint Naum and the diplomacy of the time. Comments and documents] (Tiranë: Kristalina-KH, 2012), pp. xv-xxiii.

<sup>27</sup> Egin Ceka, “Atheismus und Religionspolitik in Albanien nach 1944 [Atheism and politics of religion in Albania after 1944],” in *Religion und Kultur im albanischsprachigen Südosteuropa*, ed. Oliver Jens Schmitt (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 221; Daniel Heler, “Albaner in Serbien, Mazedonien und Montenegro [Albanians in Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro],” in *Minderheiten im sozialistischen Jugoslawien. Brüderlichkeit und Eigenheit*, ed. Kateřina Králová, et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016), pp. 357f.

<sup>28</sup> Stojan Risteski, *Čudata na sveti Naum* [The wonders of Saint Naum] (Ohrid: Kaneo, 2009), p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> Valbona Myteveli, *Nationale Identität im Wandel. Erscheinungsformen des albanischen Nationalismus* [Changing national identities. Manifestations of the Albanian nationalism] (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2018), pp. 141-48; Cecilie Endresen, “Status Report Albania 100 Years. Symbolic Nation-Building Completed,”

Muslim minority seemed to be of greater significance.<sup>30</sup> After the Second World War, the former tendencies regarding the role of religion became more apparent in Yugoslavia and Albania. When the communist regimes were established, religion was depreciated. Religion in Albania was completely forbidden after 1967. In Yugoslavia, on the other hand, religion was declared a private issue,<sup>31</sup> but it still had an important nation-building function, especially in Macedonia: for the new constituted nation, the Macedonian Orthodox Church was founded with the support of the political elite and against the interests of the Serbian Orthodox Church.<sup>32</sup> Muslim ethnic minorities still seemed to be a national problem; Yugoslavia had an agreement with Turkey about the emigration of Muslims to Turkey.<sup>33</sup>

In accordance with the socialist anti-religious politics, the regimes in Yugoslavia as well as in Albania expropriated religious communities and they used former religious buildings mainly for cultural purposes or they destroyed the buildings. In 1950, the St. Naum Monastery was expropriated and claimed as a cultural monument under state protection.<sup>34</sup> This was the beginning of turning the monastery into a museum. The population from this region still remembers what that meant: no monks lived there nor were liturgies celebrated. Even candles were not to be lit in the church to protect the old frescoes. Since then, visitors had to pay an entrance fee. Furthermore, the traditional religious perception of the monastery by the local population was ignored when some archaeological investigations started in 1950, which were intensified in 1955, with excavations in and around the monastery's church.<sup>35</sup> The idea was to reconstruct the historical formation of the church by an expert team. However, during my field research, some interlocutors told me their perspectives about these excavations. An older couple from the neighbouring village, Ljubaništa, explained that it was because the state committee searched for gold in Naum's grave.<sup>36</sup> What they found was only the skeleton of Naum. Thus, the old couple who were then teenagers interpreted Naum based on the finding, as a simple human being who healed and helped people. Furthermore, the

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in *Strategies of Symbolic Nation-building in South Eastern Europe*, ed. Pål Kolstø (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 202-204.

<sup>30</sup> Ceka, "Atheismus und Religionspolitik," pp. 220-29.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Bremer, *Kleine Geschichte der Religionen in Jugoslawien. Königreich, Kommunismus, Krieg* [Short history of the religions in Yugoslavia. Kingdom, Communism, War] (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2003), pp. 12, 40-41.

<sup>32</sup> Stella Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 249-86.

<sup>33</sup> Nathalie Clayer and Xavier Bougarel, *Europe's Balkan Muslims. A New History* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), pp. 133f.

<sup>34</sup> Risteski, *Čudata*, p. 21.

<sup>35</sup> Dimče Koco, "Pročuvanja i arheološki ispitivanja na crkvata na manastirov Sv. Naum [Analyses and archaeological Investigations at the church of the monastery St Naum]," *Zbornik 2* (1958): 58f, 65.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Mileva Krstanoska and Nikola Krstanoski at Ljubaništa, Republic of Macedonia on July 8, 2016.

results of the archaeological excavations of the skeleton somehow destroyed the legend of the beating heart of the living saint. Hence, other explanations were given for the heart-beating like sound at the saint's grave: The noise is the pulse of the one who puts his/her own ear on the grave, the sound's origin is a spring under the church, or the sound is an echo of the steps by visitors.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, this perspective is not a general perspective held in the region. Even younger generations still believe that they can hear the heartbeat of the saint at the grave. Furthermore, according to a soldier who worked at the monastery for the saint's holiday on July 3, 2016, the committee found Naum's corpse looking like he was still alive with skin, hair, nails, and a beard.<sup>38</sup>

Shaping the monastery as a museum, as part of a tourist destination, was supported by various activities. The former mayor of Ljubaništa explained the monastery complex was complemented first with a restaurant and later with a military campground in the 1970s.<sup>39</sup> The construction of a road from Ohrid to the monastery and some other innovations such as flowing water, electricity, and the use of telephones connected the remote monastery to the city as well as strengthened the development of the monastery as a Yugoslavian tourist destination. The population of Ljubaništa profited by these changes as well, as it strengthened the connections to Ohrid through family relations, political network, and medical care. Furthermore, as a nationwide tourist destination, the monastery offered jobs and due to some visits by Tito, the monastery became famous in other Yugoslavian republics. On May 25, 1962, Tito paid the place a visit because the annual relay had then started at the St. Naum border crossing.

Although the religious meaning of the monastery was officially suppressed, people still visited it for religious motivations, which mainly took place on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the main holiday of the saint. A man from Bitola in central Macedonia said that he has visited the monastery every year since 1979.<sup>40</sup> When he visited it for the first time, he brought a lamb for the saint to ask him for help to find a wife. When he found one, he visited again and promised to bring another lamb after they have a son. In 2016, along with his wife and two sons, he brought six lambs—one for his wife, one for each of his sons and the other three for the saint's help for some situations where he or his family members had health problems. Furthermore, a Turkish interlocutor from Ohrid, born in the 1950s, witnessed this when he

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<sup>37</sup> Field notes from visit to St Naum Monastery, Republic of Macedonia, July 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with an anonymous informant at St Naum Monastery, Republic of Macedonia, July 6, 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Krste Naumoski at Ljubaništa, Republic of Macedonia, on July 6, 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with an anonymous informant at St Naum Monastery, Republic of Macedonia on July 2, 2016.

was a child visiting the monastery with his family.<sup>41</sup> He once witnessed another man slaughter a sheep as a ritual sacrifice, called *kurban* in the 1960s. The Turkish interlocutor is aware of the legend of Sarı Saltuk but he is not sure whether the *kurban* was for Sarı Saltuk or Naum. He simply noted that today, no one would bring a *kurban* to the area of the monastery. An almost 60-year-old Bektashi from a village near the city of Resen, told me that in his childhood, all people from his village went to the monastery on July 3<sup>rd</sup> and stayed there overnight.<sup>42</sup> For them, it was “like our monastery” (Mac. *kako našiot manastir*). Those who did not attend did not go primarily due to not having enough money for the trip. Due to closed Albanian borders, no one from Albania was able to provide information about this topic at this time, however, the Albanian socialist politics had an influence on their religious behavior, which my field research data demonstrates. Finally, the religious use of the monastery with its traditions, which were kept alive during the socialist period as it became a tourist attraction, might have helped with the monastery’s return in the 1980s. At that time, the state rented the church building to the Macedonian Orthodox Church for the July 3<sup>rd</sup> holiday of the saint.<sup>43</sup>

### **... in post-socialist Macedonia until today**

The last geopolitical changes that influenced the perception and the shape of the monastery happened in the 1990s when Macedonia became an independent and sovereign state, and the communist regime in Albania collapsed and the borders were opened again. The problem of the borders between Macedonia and Albania could not be discussed during the disintegration process, as the St. Naum Monastery was undoubtedly located within the borders of Macedonia. After the declaration of the independence of Macedonia, the religious communities received part of their lands and buildings back. Since then, the religious communities are building new churches, monasteries, mosques, and *tekkes* as a sign of religious revival. The current abbot Nektarij explained in an interview that in March 1991, the monastery was returned to the Macedonian Orthodox Church.<sup>44</sup> This legal act increased the Christian presence at the monastery because of the strong nation-building character of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, whose autocephaly is still not recognized by other Orthodox churches. However, in September 1990, the abbot moved to the monastery as its sole monk.

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Ejup Salih at Ohrid, Republic of Macedonia, on June 9, 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Anonymous informant at Dolna Bela Crkva, Republic of Macedonia, on January 10, 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Risteski, *Čudata*, p. 24.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with otec Nektarij at St Naum Monastery, Republic of Macedonia on July 7, 2016.

Since then, most of the activities in the monastery complex are under control of the church—the festivities, construction, and the souvenir shops.<sup>45</sup>

The monastery complex is still a tourist destination with some features that involve the post-social heritage, even in and around the church. Visitors still have to pay an entrance fee and candles still should not be lit in the church.<sup>46</sup> The fate of their church employee shows how the socialist impact was negotiated with the Christian heritage from the Middle Ages: the church employee was the last museum employee and is now selling tickets, religious souvenirs and devotionals, as well as taking care of the church, reading texts in the liturgy, and so on.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, parts of the area that was built during the socialist time are active today, like the restaurant and the hotel. Each is managed by one of the sons of the church employee.<sup>48</sup>

What about the visitors and their (religious) motivations? The visitors came from Macedonia, other Balkan countries, Western Europe, Asia, Africa, and so on. Christian visitors mainly hail from the Balkans or their religious-motivated descendants from abroad.<sup>49</sup> They go to the monastery, light the candles in front of the church, and put their ear on the tomb to listen to the saint's heartbeat. They leave some money, carry lambs around the church and make wishes. They believe that St. Naum is a "living saint" who fulfills wishes and performs wonders.<sup>50</sup> In their view, religious belonging does not matter to the saint. Since they know that Muslims do not have saints who can help, they welcome Muslims who ask the saint for help and salvation. Only a few of my Christian interlocutors have heard about the Sarı Saltuk narrative.<sup>51</sup> Most of them denied the idea that the grave in the church is not Naum's.

One can still find Muslim visitors at the monastery, but their motivations and perspectives are not as homogeneous as the Christians' seem to be. One of the biggest Muslim groups for the saint's holiday consists of traditional Sunni families from Albania coming for fun (Alb. *për qejf*).<sup>52</sup> The annual fair (Alb. *panair*/Mac. *panağur*) is a part of the festivities and seems to be a more important attraction than the veneration of the saint. The merchants at the annual fair are both Christians and Muslims coming from several places in

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<sup>45</sup> Field notes from visit to St Naum Monastery, Republic of Macedonia, July 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Dobrila Krstanoska, Facebook message to author, January 27, 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Field notes from visit to St Naum Monastery, Republic of Macedonia, July 2016.

<sup>50</sup> E.g. interview with Mimoza Aliloska at St Naum Monastery, Republic of Macedonia, July 1, 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Field notes from visit to St Naum Monastery and Ohrid, Republic of Macedonia, July 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Field notes from visit to St Naum Monastery, Republic of Macedonia, July 2, 2016.

Macedonia to sell various things such as clothing, toys, sweets, tools, and so on. Against the backdrop of this fair, religious motivations seem to have disappeared. Sunnis from Macedonia visit the monastery rarely and only the Turkish ones know the Sarı Saltuk narrative.

Within the group of Bektashi, the knowledge and importance to identify Sarı Saltuk with St. Naum depends on where they come from. The Bektashi from Macedonia still remember that the St. Naum Monastery used to be called a place of Sarı Saltuk, but they rarely visit it. One of the reasons is that only few of them are located near the monastery in the village of Resen. Other Bektashi communities in Macedonia live in the area between Bitola and Prilep, as well as in Western Macedonia, in the cities of Kičevo, Gostivar, and Tetovo. The former Bektashi leader of Yugoslavia who had a residence in Gjakovë (Kosovo), was unaware of the claim that the St. Naum Monastery was also the tomb of Sarı Saltuk.<sup>53</sup> He wondered during our interview why his colleagues in Macedonia did not inform him about this claim. The Bektashi in Albania almost forgot that their ancestors visited the St. Naum Monastery as Sarı Saltuk's place. In addition to the fact that the border was closed leading to their inability to continue the tradition, there are two additional places they claim as Sarı Saltuk's places. Baba Mumin Lama from Gjakovë mentioned that one is a cave in Krujë, a small town near the capital Tiranë, where they could also go during the communist period, although it was forbidden and risky. The second one is on the Greek isle of Korfu, in the church of St. Spiridon. This place was no easier to reach for the Bektashis from Korçë, but it is close to South Albania where the majority of the Albanian Bektashi live. In the Bektashi so-called World Center in Tiranë, the exhibition on Bektashism lists the city of Ohrid as one of Sarı Saltuk's places without properly locating or naming St. Naum's Monastery in this context.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, nowadays, the relations between Christians and Muslims, especially Sunnis, declined due to the education of imams. Still, during the Yugoslavian time, it was possible that imams did not study in *medreses* or at the university, but rather under one of the imams in their cities or villages.<sup>55</sup> Members of the first generations who finished their secondary school in Skopje and studied abroad in Sarajevo, Turkey, or Egypt comment that the old educational systems tended to support local traditions, which cannot be proven by "real" Islamic theology and praxis. Examples of such traditions are, for example, the use of

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Mumin Lama at Gjakovë, Republic of Kosovo, on Feb. 19, 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Fieldnotes from visit to museum in Bektashi World Center in Tiranë, May 10, 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Anonymous informant at Tetovo, October 22, 2016.

amulets, praying for someone else, or writing a Quranic verse on a sheet of paper which should be put in water before drinking it. The newly-educated imam generations learned that it is forbidden to pray to anyone else but God. Thus, they explain that going to Christian places where saints are venerated shall be avoided. An Albanian from Ohrid proved this by a personal story: he always went to the monastery due to his health problems and he felt better after the visits, which he attributed to the power of St. Naum.<sup>56</sup> Since he prays five times per day in the mosque, he stopped going to St. Naum's Monastery because the imam told him to go to a doctor to deal with his health problems.

In short, the reasons for the decline of Muslims attending the monastery may be due to its distance from their homes. Furthermore, there are some socio-political reasons in regard to the situation of the Muslims: during Yugoslavia, a large number of Muslims, especially Turks, left Macedonia. Moreover, since the beginning of the 1990s, the Balkan Muslims intensified their relations with other Muslim countries. Some imams who studied abroad came back impressed by other Islamic cultures, recognizing a, more or less, non-conformist Islamic tradition in their homes. Thus, the theological arguments also influenced the decline of a Muslim presence at the monastery and thus reduced another possibility of religious encounter.

### **Conclusion: Tourist Impact on the Monastery in Socialist Times**

The case study shows that historical developments have shaped the perception of the monastery through discourses and activities. Several political systems functioning over time were the framework for the Christian-Muslim contacts at the monastery. During the Ottoman Empire, the monastery was obviously visited independently of ethnic, linguistic, and religious borders. It was used by Christians and Muslims due to religious interests and for accommodation, which for sure was connected to some leisure time activities. This changed with the border demarcation after the Balkan wars. Latter factors impacting the decline of interreligious contacts was the closing of the Albanian border, the suppression of religions by socialist politics, and the emigrations of ethnic minorities of the Muslim community from Yugoslavia to Turkey. Thus, the number of Muslims who potentially frequented the monastery automatically declined. One of the consequences is the stronger perception of the Christian identity of the monastery. However, the socialist regimes' intention to reduce the number of visitors who visited it for religious reasons was not successful at the St. Naum Monastery.

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<sup>56</sup> Anonymous informant at Ohrid, January 19, 2017.



The main socialist impact on the Christian-Muslim shared St. Naum Monastery was the emphasis of its tourist character, which was already the case during the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, relations between Christians and Muslims at the St. Naum Monastery are rarely religiously connoted nowadays. Due to the non-religious use of the monastery in the former Yugoslavia, the ambiguity of the monastery increased. Beside the general decline of Muslims at the Christian place, even the Muslim narrative of Sari Saltuk lost its significance and thus is a less important reason for visiting the monastery. Other than the tourist and religious character, the monastery also has an economic and political dimension. Other facets of the place are less official, like the healing function of the saint and the monastery.

However, in the broader national and political context, religious communities as ethnic groups, became more strongly separated politically. At the same time, religion matters less than it does now prior to the communist regime, as often proclaimed by the religious virtuosi and believers. The decline of religious significance appears in everyday life and the knowledge of religion. Religion seemed to have become more a part of the cultural tradition, rather than a spiritual need. Thus, the interreligious encounter, which has a long tradition, seems to be no longer needed. With respect to the current ethnic conflict situation in Macedonia, this might be a false conclusion because religions have not only a separate character, but peace-building potential.<sup>57</sup> The current line of the ethnic conflict between Orthodox Macedonians and Sunni Albanians tends to include other ethnic groups in Macedonia due to their religious belonging. Religious encounter and especially conscious religious dialogue can help to reduce stereotypes and guard against misunderstandings for a more peaceful multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Thus, the socialist impact on the monastery is also a negative contribution to the interreligious and interethnic coexistence. At the same time, this is only the case for Macedonia, but not for Albania, where the socialist time led to an official interreligious harmony among the population. However, as religion does not play a significant role in Albania, this harmony is rather superficial.

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<sup>57</sup> Martin Rötting, *Religion in Bewegung. Dialog-Typen und Prozess im interreligiösen Lernen* [Religions on the move. Dialogue types and process in interfaith learning] (Berlin: LIT Verlag Münster, 2011), p. 54.

## Interviews

Interview with an anonymous informant at St Naum Monastery, Republic of Macedonia on July 2, 2016.

Interview with an anonymous informant at St Naum Monastery, Republic of Macedonia, July 6, 2016.

Interview with Ejup Salih at Ohrid, Republic of Macedonia, on June 9, 2016.

Interview with Mileva Krstanoska and Nikola Krstjanoski at Ljubaništa, Republic of Macedonia on July 8, 2016.

Interview with Mimoza Aliloska at St Naum Monastery, Republic of Macedonia, July 1, 2016. Interview with Krste Naumoski at Ljubaništa, Republic of Macedonia, on July 6, 2016.

Interview with Mumin Lama at Gjakovë, Republic of Kosovo, on Feb. 19, 2017.

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