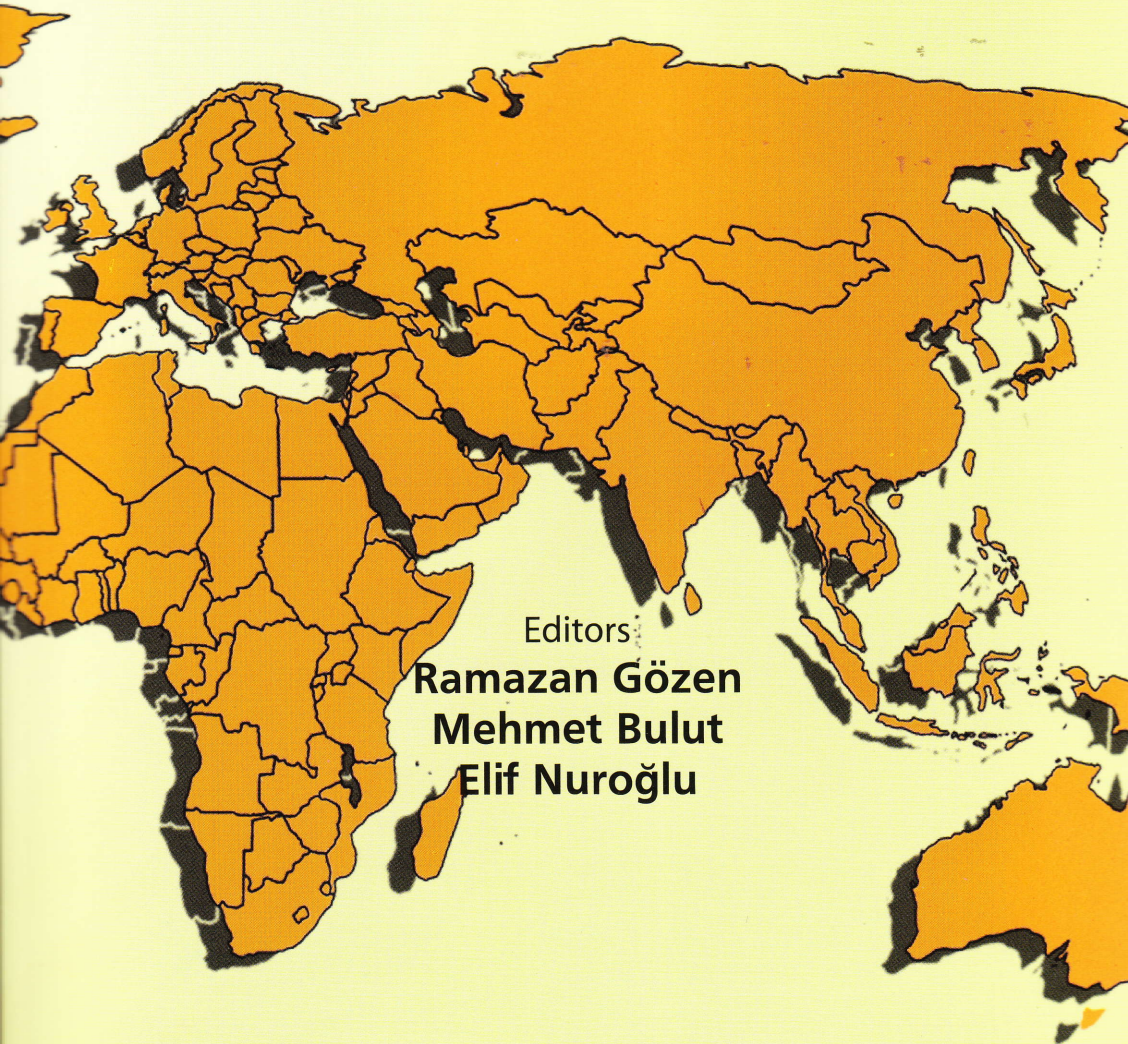


EAST-WEST RELATIONS

TURKISH AND BOSNIAN PERSPECTIVES



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BOSNIAN FRONTIER OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Bülent ARI

For better understanding the history of Bosnia, the history of the frontiers (*uc*) in the Ottoman Empire should be examined. The general characteristics of the frontiers are also valid for Bosnia.

For Ottoman conquests in the Balkans, frontier (*uc*) organization had been established. Immediate function of this organization was to confront the enemy attacks. Second function was to organize continuous attacks towards the enemy territories to diminish their logistics. When these lands were to be conquered by the regular Ottoman army, it would be easy to defeat the enemy, which was already loosened by the oppression of the frontier attacks.

Conquest of the Balkans

Ottoman conquests in the Balkans were realized from 1352 (first foothold in the Gallipoli) till 1402 (Timur victory in Ankara battle) within half a century, in stages. Certain factors facilitated the Ottoman conquests in the Balkans. Most important factor was the constitution of the Balkan states by feudal lords and minor dynasties. Ottomans benefited from the ongoing competition between these local dynasties, and continuously forwarded. At first instance Ottomans were allies, then protectors, and finally controlled them.

Actually, Hungary and Venice were also trying to benefit from this political separation. However, their hegemony meant hegemony of Catholicism, and Balkan people were strongly against it.

Under the command of prince Murad, there were a series of Ottoman conquests in the Balkans. After the capture of Adrianople, between 1362-1389, Murad I invaded most of the Balkan lands south of the Danube. Most of the local dynasties were vassals of him. Their reactionary battle to get rid of the Ottomans in 1389 at Kosovo had no result. The conquests of Bayezid I in the Balkans also caused a crusader, but it was also resulted with Ottoman victory in 1396 at Nicopolis.

Nevertheless, during the period of Interregnum (1402-1413) the actual political power passed into the hands of the frontier *begs*, and consequently, Ottoman center of gravity shifted into the Balkans. Ottoman princes, claiming throne were expecting the support of the frontier *begs*. This situation was to be changed after the central administration of Fatih Mehmed.

Frontiers and Frontier Begs

The frontier *begs* played important role in the domestic and foreign policy of the Ottoman state between 1360-1453. Ottoman troops along the frontiers were organized under the administration of certain dynastic families. These frontier lines were:

1. Right hand: Along lower Danube to Wallachia.
2. Left hand: To Macedonia.
3. Central Line: To Sofia and Belgrade under the rule of a *beglerbegi* / viceroy

When the Ottoman conquests moved further and normal Ottoman administration settled, the frontier organization and the frontier *begs* were transferred into a further region. As the conquests furthered, right hand was moved to Balkan Mountains to Danube, left hand moved from Thrace to Macedonia, and later to Albania and Bosnia, and at the center line from Philipopolis to Sofia and Niš. On the road to Bosnia, first frontier center was Skopje. İshak Beg was the frontier *beg*. With the conquests, Skopje remained background, and Sarajevo was the next frontier, *uc*. When conquests made in northern line, Banja Luka became the last frontier center, and Sarajevo became a great city.

These frontier cities have risen as the centers of the Ottoman culture. For instance, Gümülcine, Séres, and Skopje were the first frontier cities. Bosnia was conquered afterwards. Then artisans moved from Anatolia and settled at Skopje. It has become a real Anatolian city. Bosnia was also a small town. After the Ottoman conquest, it has also developed and has become an Ottoman-Turkish center. Under the attacks of Ishak Beg, Venetian colonies had to pay tribute. The ultimate goal of the Ottomans was to kick off the Venetians from the eastern shores of Adriatic Sea.

Bosnian Frontier

After this general information, let's have a quick look at the Bosnian frontier (*uc*) organization. It should be remembered that these frontier lines were organized as *Sancakbeğliği*. But they were quite different than the interior regions. Both Evrenos Ghazi, Mihaloğlu and İshak beg were assigned in the form of a dynasty. For instance, in Bosnia, after İshak Beg, İsa Beg was ruling the Bosnian frontier like a prince. Since Bosnia was far from the Ottoman capital, he carried out independent foreign relations with Hungary and Venice.

Bosnia developed rapidly under the rule of İsa beg, and has become a typical Islamic city. This was the root of the future autonomy of Bosnia within the Ottoman decentralized state system.

The *timar* regime was also different in the frontiers. The frontier *beg* allocated *timar* and *zeamets* to his own men. In this manner, annual revenue of İsa beg was 700 000 *akças*. This is average revenue of a *beglerbegi* / viceroy in the Ottoman Empire. Through this regime, in future a class emerged, called *kapetan*, and they ruled Bosnia as an autonomous country. That is to say, from the beginning, Bosnia was a distinctive frontier center.

To strengthen Bosnia, attacks were being organized towards Croatia, Hungary and Venetian colonies. In the early XVII century, the positions were appointed for life. Most of the *zaims* in Hungary were Bosnians. They were so powerful in the neighboring regions.

Economic Rise of Bosnia

There was a growth in the traffic between western Balkans and Italy. Dubrovnik, Albania and Bosnia benefited from this increasing volume of trade. Avlona was both a naval base and a transit center. Salt and grain were transferred to Dubrovnik, and re-exported to Bosnia and Serbia.

In 1462 Bosnia was a small town. Next year, Bosnia was conquered and annexed to Ottoman lands. Between 1520-1540, it gained importance and in 1580, Bosnia has become a *beglerbegilik* (viceroy), composed of Bosnia Herzegovina, Slovenia, and certain territories of Dalmatia. Center of the *beglerbegilik* was moved to Banja Luka. At this date, Bosnia was the biggest commercial center of western Balkans with its population of 40 000. It was an important stop over Bursa-Istanbul-Adrianople and Adriatic. Merchants of Belgrade, Sofia, Skopje, and nearby cities were also trading with Bosnia. For goods imported from the East, two *bedestans* (covered bazaar) were constructed into the city.

Before the Ottoman rule, Bosnian merchants were systematically expelled from transit trade by the Raguzan merchants. Ottomans protected Bosnian and Turkish merchants in the Adriatic trade. Through this protection, they began to settle in Ancona and even in Venice. In 1621, they were trading in excellent *fondaco dei Turchi* in Venice.

After the Lepanto battle, Ottomans succeeded to remove Venice from the Holy League in 1573, and Ottoman-Venetian trade developed. Bosnian merchants were active in this commercial traffic. With the Ottoman support, Venice transmitted Split into a transit center. The connection of Bosnia with this port was advantageous and their commercial importance has risen. Bosnian merchants were rivals of Ragusa. At the end of the XVI century, they replaced Raguzan merchants in Belgrade, Pokyjoljeve, and Novibazar. In mid XVII century, leather and wax export was completely in the hands of the Bosnians.

Kapetans

Bosnians held the administration as a dynasty for along time. When the central administration was loose in the XVIII century, they established an autonomous administration. Jucherau de Saint Denis describes Bosnia as an independent republic. They were controlling the governor, appointed by the central administration. In this period, *kapetans* also controlled the lands. *Kapetans* controlled the state lands into their own property. However, they were in need of labor force. They called the Serbian peasants. They aggravated the lands as serfs. This is the basis of the Serbian-Bosnian historical hatred. When Serbians became independent, after the collapse of Yugoslavia, they wished to crush Bosnians. It was a reflection of historical lord-serf conflict. The ultimate development is the emergence of the Bosnian state as an independent entity. This is also the final stage of the autonomous ruling system of Ishak beg.