

**CHRISTIAN *Hajjis* IN NINETEENTH CENTURY  
JERUSALEM,**

**OR A TRADITION DIVIDED**

*An NCEEER Working Paper by*

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## Executive Summary

There are few religious phenomena better studied than the Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The abundance and complexity of the available studies on this subject, however, should not be mistaken for comprehensiveness. Existing scholarship traditionally privileges Western Christian pilgrims. To the extent that Eastern Orthodox pilgrims are studied at all, they are approached primarily through Russian sources. The unspoken assumption seems to be that, if you know what Russians do in Jerusalem and why, you have learned everything there is to know about Orthodox pilgrimages to the Holy Land. We find perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this assumption in comparative studies of pilgrimage: the few that consider the Eastern Orthodox pilgrimage tradition (Bowman 1991, 1995; Hummel & Hummel 1995) address it exclusively in terms of Russian pilgrims.

Such an approach leaves the Christians of the Ottoman Empire and their pilgrimages to Ottoman Jerusalem completely out of sight. Significantly, such an assumption falls back into familiar nineteenth-century patterns: not only the Russian imperial rhetoric of the “Orthodox Commonwealth,” but also the peculiar myopia of Western pilgrim narratives that renders all Orthodox pilgrims in the Holy Land as “Russian.”

In an attempt to address these issues and partially correct the flaws they present, I have chosen as protagonists for my study Eastern Orthodox pilgrims to Jerusalem who came from the heart of the Balkan peninsula—the European outpost of the Ottoman empire during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In a non-Arabic context, the use of the term *hajji* for a Christian pilgrim is emphatically marked, suggesting a special cultural significance for its appropriation—a significance which this article aims to unpack and interpret in its historical context.

## **Introduction**

There are few religious phenomena better studied than the Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> The abundance and complexity of the available studies on this subject, however, should not be mistaken for comprehensiveness. Existing scholarship traditionally privileges Western Christian pilgrims.<sup>2</sup> To the extent that Eastern Orthodox pilgrims are studied at all, they are approached primarily through Russian sources.<sup>3</sup> The unspoken assumption seems to be that, if you know what Russians do in Jerusalem and why, you have learned everything there is to know about Orthodox pilgrimages to the Holy Land. We find perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this assumption in comparative studies of pilgrimage: the few that consider the Eastern Orthodox pilgrimage tradition (Bowman 1991, 1995; Hummel & Hummel 1995) address it exclusively in terms of Russian pilgrims.

Such an approach leaves the Christians of the Ottoman Empire and their pilgrimages to Ottoman Jerusalem<sup>4</sup> completely out of sight. Significantly, such an assumption falls back into familiar nineteenth-century patterns: not only the Russian imperial rhetoric of the “Orthodox Commonwealth,” but also the peculiar myopia of Western pilgrim narratives that renders all Orthodox pilgrims in the Holy Land as “Russian.”<sup>5</sup> The omission is no small matter, since the

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive bibliography, see Purvis 1988-1991, and Davidson and Dunn-Wood 1993.

<sup>2</sup> The term “palmer,” from Latin *palmaris*, is used in Western European languages specifically for pilgrims to the Holy Land, who carried on their way back palm-leaves or palm-branches as a distinctive sign. The term was adopted also in Eastern Slavic languages (Russian, Byelorussian, and Ukrainian *palomnik*) but, notably for my purposes in this study, it never grew roots among the Balkan Orthodox Slavs; see Moskovich 2003: 10. Hereafter, I will use the term “palmer” as synonymous to “Christian pilgrim to Jerusalem,” and apply it, according to the name, to both Western European and Russian travelers.

<sup>3</sup> See, among others, Stavrou 1963, Volkoff 1972, Seemann 1976, Romanov 1995, and Zhitenev 2007, as well as the excellent bibliographical tool of Stavrou and Weisensel 1986.

<sup>4</sup> Jerusalem was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1517 until 1917, with a brief interruption between 1831 and 1840, when it was temporarily taken over by the newly independent ruler of Egypt, Ibrahim Pasha.

<sup>5</sup> The myth of an “Orthodox Commonwealth”—a brotherhood of faith that united for centuries Russia and the so-called Orthodox East (*pravoslavnyi Vostok*)—was successfully promoted by the official rhetoric of the Romanovs during the last century of their rule. Much to the benefit of Russia’s political ambitions in the Balkans and Syria-Palestine, this homogenous construct covered over real and significant areas of discord and discontinuities that separated Orthodox

Ottoman *rum millet* united for over four centuries the largest—and historically oldest—body of Eastern Orthodox communities under circumstances that profoundly affected their religious traditions.<sup>6</sup> No less significantly, these Christians visited Jerusalem as Ottoman subjects, traveling exclusively across Ottoman territory and not as foreigners coming from abroad, as did both Russian Orthodox and Western Christian pilgrims.

By neglecting this representative body of Eastern Christians in pilgrim studies, we eclipse major distinctions between Christian pilgrim practices developed within and outside the “Abode of Islam.” Furthermore, we deflect attention from studying Orthodox and Muslim pilgrims together and asking how their coexistence in religiously mixed societies may have affected the traditional patterns of sacred travels in their respective cultures. Put in another way, by presenting the tradition of Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land as much more homogenous than it actually is, we cover over both significant gaps in our academic knowledge and significant prejudices in our current academic practices.

In an attempt to address these issues and partially correct the flaws they present, I have chosen as protagonists for my study Eastern Orthodox pilgrims to Jerusalem who came from the heart of the Balkan peninsula—the European outpost of the Ottoman empire during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>7</sup> One distinctive characteristic of these Balkan pilgrims is that they called themselves *hajjis*, appropriating a Muslim honorific traditionally reserved for pilgrims to Mecca. It is important to underline that such application of the term is very different from its routine use

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peoples not only across the Russian/Ottoman divide, but also within each of the two empires, and rendered their distinct identities practically invisible to the foreign eye. As a result, many Western nineteenth-century narratives of the Holy Land treated all Orthodox pilgrims to Jerusalem as “Russian”; see Kane 2005: 60.

<sup>6</sup> For an introduction to the diversity and inner complexities of this part of the Ottoman population, which by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century comprised about a third of the Empire’s subjects, see Clogg 1982.

<sup>7</sup> In Ottoman context, the home territory of this pilgrim group is usually referred to as Rumelia (“The land of *Rum*, or the Byzantines). This term is used loosely in the meaning of ‘the European portion of the Empire’, and more narrowly as an Ottoman province with shifting boundaries that consistently encompassed present-day Bulgaria, the Republic of Macedonia, and parts of Greece.

by the Arab-speaking Eastern Christians of Syria-Palestine (the Melchites) who, since the Muslim conquest of their territories in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, had adopted Arabic as their ritual language. In a non-Arabic context, the use of the term *hajji* for a Christian pilgrim is emphatically marked, suggesting a special cultural significance for its appropriation—a significance which this article aims to unpack and interpret in its historical context.

### The Title *Hajji*

Abundant Greek and Slavonic sources, dated from the 15<sup>th</sup> through the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, document the consistent use of the Muslim title *hajji* for Eastern Orthodox pilgrims to the Holy Land. All contemporary Balkan languages that were spoken by Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire register this expanded meaning of the Turkish term *hacı* (from Persian حجّاح; Arabic لِحْجِيّ, usually transliterated as *hajji*) to designate a Christian pilgrim to Jerusalem, in addition to its traditional use as a Muslim honorific (Gr. *hatzis*, Bulg. *hadzhiia*, Serb. and Bosn. *hadžija*, Mac. *adžija*, Alb. *haxhi*; Romanian *hagiu*).<sup>8</sup> Only Croatian—a language without an “Ottoman memory”—uses the term exclusively in its original Muslim meaning (Moskovich 2003: 9), thus indirectly pointing to the Ottoman origin of this practice. Christian *hajjis* to Jerusalem are mentioned in pilgrim registers and travel guides (*proskinitaria*), in the marginal notes of codices from Palestine and Sinai, as well as in a variety of travel testimonies, and their names are preserved on tombstones, in donor inscriptions, and on pilgrim mementos and souvenirs.

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<sup>8</sup> Following the rules of Arabic usage, the term is used both as a common name and—in a contracted form—as a pre-nominal title. Since all the quotations from primary sources in this article are translations from Bulgarian, I use in them the Bulgarian nouns *khadzhiia* (masc. sing.), *khadzhiika* (fem. sing.), *khadzhiu* (pl.), and the titles *khadzhi* (both masc. and fem. address). In the article, except when referring to these passages, I will use the forms *hajji* (sing.) and *hajjis* (pl.) generalized in English usage as the representative forms of the term. All translations of passages quoted below are mine, unless otherwise noted.

Most strikingly, this Muslim honorific is often attributed to members of Orthodox monastic communities and the clergy. Thus the Hilandar Monastery's register from 1527 mentions the Serbian monk Gavriła, the *hajji*, and the Greek hegumenos *hajji* Christodoulos; and a note in a Slavonic Psalter written in the Zograph Monastery in 1666 states that the prior of Zograph, the monk-priest Miletii, was "a pilgrim [*poklonnik*] to Jerusalem, or as we say, a *hajji*" (Ivanov 1970: 254). This last evidence is particularly telling, as it documents that, in the second half of the seventeenth century, a monastic Athonite community used a Muslim honorific *for one of their own*.<sup>9</sup>

Later sources reveal an abundant use of this title for monks and priests up and down the hierarchical ladder. Nikola Nachov (1990: 103-4) mentions the prominent Karlovo merchant *hajji* Ivan who, after the plague of 1837, went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem with his mother and three brothers. His brother Totio remained in Jerusalem as a monk under the name *hajji* Simeon and later became an Archimandrite, supervising all Greek monasteries on Mt. Sinai. Other high-profile clergy who proudly wore the title include *Hajji* Gerasim (d. 1761), Archimandrite in the Hilandar Monastery and donor of the *Pokrovski Tower* in the Zograph Monastery in Mt. Athos, and *Hajji* Pavel Bozhigrobski (c. 1828-1871), who served as a *protosingelos* (a monastic priest, one step below Archimandrite) directly under Patriarch Cyril II of Jerusalem and became, as an Archimandrite, the abbot of the Lesnovo Monastery in Kratovo (1867-70).

Perhaps the most distinguished in the *hajji* cohort, however, is *Hajji* Partenii of the Zograph Monastery (c. 1820-1875), who was elevated to the rank of Archimandrite of the Russian Church in 1842, while studying at the Moscow Theological Academy, and later became

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<sup>9</sup> Notably, the standard Orthodox title for a pilgrim, *poklon'nik*, a Slavonic translation of the Greek *proskinitis*, from the verb *proskineo*, "fall down in worship" (the same verb designates the proper veneration of icons, as stipulated by the Council of Nicea from 787), is used here as a generic term for any kind of pilgrimage, while the most sacred and representative form of Orthodox sacred travel, the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, is designated by a Muslim honorific. I

a bishop of the Kukush Metropolitanate in the late 1840s, before reaching the highest rank in the Orthodox hierarchy below a Patriarch, when he was consecrated as the Metropolitan of Nishava (1869-72)<sup>10</sup>. Evidently, the Christian *hajjis* ran the whole gamut of monastic figures within the Orthodox establishment. By the nineteenth century, the practice of high-echelon ecclesiastics boasting the *hajji* title was so familiar, that it was successfully put to use even by con artists.<sup>11</sup>

This Christian appropriation of the Muslim title under the Ottomans may resemble at first blush a typical colonial reflex: an attempt to translate outstanding status within a minority group into the idiom of a dominant culture.<sup>12</sup> The way this term is used among the Christian monastics and the clergy, however, suggests a level of interiorization that goes beyond such linguistic camouflage. Clearly, the title *hajji* in the marginal note from Mt. Athos is not meant for foreign consumption. It is presented there as an inner monastic term attributed by monks to their most distinguished brothers. Similar insight can be drawn also by the routine use of the title in conjunction with Christian ecclesiastic titles of distinction, as in *Hajji Archimandrite Pavel Bozhigrobski*, or *Hajji Partenii Zografski*, the *Metropolitan* of Nishava—cases of double honorific indexing that also point to cross-religious hybridization rather than mere cultural mimicry.

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am grateful to F. E. Peters for drawing my attention to this example.

<sup>10</sup> About Partenii Zografskii, see Tomov 1936; about Pavel Bozhigrobski, see Pop Stoilov 1917; see also Pop Stoilov 1922 for entries about both of them; data about *hajji* Gerasim is available in Todorov 2002.

<sup>11</sup> The Bulgarian merchant Pandeli Kisimov (1832-1905), himself a *hajji* who wrote a valuable narrative of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, mentions in his memoirs an adventurer who robbed monasteries around the Balkans under the alias of *Hajji Archimandrite Mitrofan*; see Kisimov 1879: 19.

<sup>12</sup> An eloquent example of trans-cultural translation of status is Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), one of the most prominent Muslim modernists on the Indian subcontinent during British rule. When, during a visit to London in 1869, he was awarded the title Companion of the Star of India by the Queen, he began to title himself “Sir,” thus making explicit in a foreign cultural idiom his outstanding status in his Islamic community, where the title Sayyid is the marker of the greatest Muslim honor—a direct descendent of the Prophet Mohammad.

## Muslim Hajjis

The Arabic term *hajji* is derived from a well-known Islamic rite: the ritual pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), which all Muslims are obliged to perform at least once in a lifetime, provided their finances and health allow it. Unlike Christian pilgrimages, this ritual journey is divinely decreed (Quran 2: 196) as one of “the five pillars of Islam.”<sup>13</sup> Those who actually perform the rite thus earn exemplary status in Muslim society, having asserted their religious identity in an exceptional way. The title *hajji*—now permanently affixed to their names—functions as their badge of honor.

Several aspects of the Hajj are particularly relevant for my study. I will examine them at some length below, as a way of establishing a more comprehensive Islamic framework of reference for my discussion of the Christian *hajjis*.

The Hajj is an obligation for every Muslim and its fulfillment is rigidly regulated. It is a journey of *absolute* fixity (Peters 1994: xxi): it is calendrically tied to the eighth, ninth, and tenth days of the last month of the Muslim year (the lunar pilgrim month, Dhu al-Hijja), and consists of a sequence of ritual acts that should be performed only in the order, manner, and timing in which they are prescribed. Upon entering Mecca, the pilgrims perform the *tawaf*, the sevenfold counter-clockwise circumambulation of the Ka’ba, followed by seven “runnings” between a place at the southeast corner of the Haram, called Safa, and another place not far removed, called Marwa.

Then, on the eighth of Dhu al-Hijja, the Hajj proper begins with a trip to the plain of Arafat, eleven miles away from Mecca, where the pilgrims spend the following day from noon

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<sup>13</sup> About the Quranic origins of the hajj as a central Islamic ritual, see Peters 1994: 3-59. A general overview of the rite is Coleman & Elsner 1995: 52-73. For the essence of this sacred journey as the backdrop of the Ottoman hajj, see Faroqhi 1990: 13-31. Carol Delaney offers a valuable analysis of modern Turkish practices related to this quintessential Muslim journey in Delaney 1990: 513-30.

until sunset “standing” in front of God. The next day culminates in the stoning of Satan, the casting of seven pebbles at a stone pillar near the village of Mina, five miles away from Mecca. At Mina, the hajj is completed with a ritual animal sacrifice, the *id al-adha*, celebrated simultaneously by the entire Muslim community worldwide.<sup>14</sup> Any violation of this scenario renders the hajj invalid. If any of these rituals are delayed, the journey does not count as Hajj, only as *umra* (visitation, or the Lesser Hajj)<sup>15</sup>. The Great Hajj thus calls not only for devotion and commitment, but also for discipline of intent and utmost precision of execution.

The Ka’ba (“the House,” as the Quran often calls it) has significance in Muslim culture that far outweighs the importance of any relic in Christianity. It is the perfect “object of religious longing” (Coleman & Eisler 1995: 63), which pilgrims strive to kiss, as did once the Prophet, and around which they circumambulate repeatedly at various stages of the ritual process in imitation of the angels who circle the throne of Allah. It also marks the direction for prayer, the *qibla*. The daily call to prayer, *ezan*, beckons Muslims not only *to pray* but also *to Mecca*, making them literally “turn toward” it (Delaney 1990: 516) as to an ideal horizon of their lives and their spiritual commitments. The Ka’ba thus emerges as a powerful Islamic symbol of “conversion”—a conversion that every member of the *umma* (the Islamic community of faith) embodies five times a day, every day, and all life long. And, since the rhythm of the prayer calls permeates so aggressively all daily rhythms within an Islamic community, Mecca—with the

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<sup>14</sup> The visit to Mecca is based on Mohammad’s own pilgrimage to Mecca, as well as on Abraham’s sojourn there, Abraham’s prayer and standing at Arafat, his animal sacrifice at Mina in place of Ishmael, and his temptation by Satan as reflected in the ritual stoning of the three “Satan” by the hajjis (Quran 22:27). My summary is based on Peters 2003, 2: 180-183.

<sup>15</sup> The Muslim requirement for performing all parts of the hajj on schedule is especially rigorous. Suraiya Faroqhi (1994: 2) notes: “The pilgrimage caravan traveled at a greater or lesser speed according to the amount of time left until the prayer meeting on the plateau of Arafat. For, if that was missed, the entire pilgrimage was invalid, and the pilgrims’ efforts wasted.” Compare also the following telling exclamation from Evlia Çelebi’s *hajji* narrative, “Thank God, [the Basra pilgrims] were able to perform their pilgrimage: If they had arrived but a short time later [to the site of Arafat], it would have been invalid,” Çelebi 1896-1938, 9: 702.

Ka'ba nested in it—functions as a chief Muslim coordinate in *time*, as well as space.<sup>16</sup>

Completing the hajj is deemed an extraordinary religious achievement. The hajj as a religious obligation is divinely prescribed in the Quran (2: 196) as one of the “five pillars of Islam,” yet unlike the other four, it is a single and singular act, performed once in a lifetime. As such, it aims to affirm individual faith in a unique, exceptional manner. Anthropologist Carol Delaney writes:

“For many Muslims, to make the *hajj* is to touch the foundation of faith and to drink of the wellspring that sustains and gives it meaning. The spiritual meaning is symbolized concretely: pilgrims touch or kiss the Black Stone nested in the Ka'ba and drink from the well of Zemzem that sustained Hagar and Ismail in the desert” (Delaney 1990: 515).

No less significantly, the Hajj is a ritual of radical renewal.<sup>17</sup> The renewal of the pilgrims' individual spiritual commitments—their focused meditation on the might and mercy of Allah, and their denial of the devil during the stoning at Arafat (Faroqhi 1994: 1)—is marked, at the completion of the hajj, by their state of renewed purity of spirit, since it is believed that all their sins have been wiped away. F. E. Peters quotes a notable passage from *The Book of the Increasing and Eternal Happiness*, which the Ottoman publicist Muhammad Arif al-Munir wrote in 1900 in support of the much-disputed project of building a railroad from Damascus to Medina:

Some of the advantages of the pilgrimage which relate to the next world may be found in what al-Bazzar and others have handed down about the Prophet... who said, “The pilgrim intercedes for four hundred of his relatives and *is as sinless as on the day his mother gave birth to him*.”...Between one Umra [visitation] and another, *all sins are redeemed*, while the reward for the blessed Hajj is nothing short of Paradise (Peters 1994: xxi, italics mine).

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<sup>16</sup> Note also that Mecca is *kapali*, closed to those who do not belong; and *kutsal*—sacred and holy, requiring spiritual and physical ritual cleanliness from those who enter it. In that sense, the Holy Sepulcher is a radically different sacred site, one that is open to all and demands no regimented cleanliness from those who enter it.

<sup>17</sup> This aspect of the Hajj resonates with the very essence of Delaney's Islam, which sees itself as a *renewal* of the one true faith given in the beginning to Abraham, and as a result has a recursiveness built into it, “a desire to return, restore, recall, and rebuild,” as Delaney puts it, 1990: 516.

Though the hajj is prescribed as obligatory to those who are physically and financially able to afford it, very few Muslims perform it even today. During the classical Ottoman period, the *hajjis* constituted no more than six percent of the Muslims in the Empire, and the numbers presumably dropped in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Faroqhi 1992). The trip, under Ottoman rule was perilous, arduous, often excruciatingly long and no less painfully costly, despite the complex system of religious endowments with which the Ottoman Muslim society was festooned to make the visit to Mecca affordable to the poor. All these factors made the hajj an ideal attainable to few, and rendered its completion an even more significant achievement.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that those who have successfully completed the hajj acquire a higher social status in their home communities, one that accords them significant honor and prestige in the eyes of their fellow Muslims. This “achieved status” is directly signified by the title *hajji*, now permanently attached to their names. The Hajj thus emerges as a mechanism for social mobility in a Muslim society. Delaney’s material, based on her fieldwork in Anatolian villages in the 1980s, is particularly explicit in this respect:

Upon their return, [the pilgrims] have changed in status. Forever after they will be known as *hajji* (Turkish *hacı*), and treated with deference and respect. Even those who think the trip to Mecca is a waste of money that could be put to better use show public respect to the *hajjis*. For a man, being a *hajji* represents a new stage in life, and his changed status is evinced by a number of outward signs. He can now legitimately let his beard grow, as he was required to do as he entered the holy precinct of Mecca. A beard signifies a kind of sanctified status conferred by age and wisdom...Male *hajjis*, having been elevated to a more spiritual status, no longer permit women to shake or even kiss their hands, as is customary...Their life’s journey accomplished, these men can now sit out their days with their friends, usually within the precincts of the village mosque, where women do not go. At home they can expect to be waited on, as they expect to be waited on by houris [“pure and splendid companions”] in Paradise. They seem to desire to transform their own space back home into an image of Mecca or the “other world” (Delaney 1990: 520).

Even though Delaney's material draws from contemporary sources of a limited geographic range, it reflects a much more encompassing Islamic tradition of differentiating the *hajjis* as a distinct status group through interrelated concepts and patterns of social mobility. Some of the facts published by Suraiya Faroqhi (1992) offer further insight. According to her data, circumstances other than completion of the *hajj* could mark a person as a *hajji* in the Ottoman Empire. First, people used to give the title as a proper name to their children, driven by the hope that it would bring each *Hajji* the good fortune of one day becoming a *hajji* indeed (Faroqhi 1992: 312).

Furthermore, according to the popular belief registered in numerous Anatolian sources from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, a pilgrimage to certain local shrines could make a person “half a *hajji*.”<sup>18</sup> Finally, the title gained currency also as an index of special respect—for age and experience—that had nothing to do with pilgrimages of any kind. This last usage was evidently so widespread in nineteenth-century Ottoman Turkish that it even made its way into James Redhouse's Turkish-English dictionary.<sup>19</sup> All these uses of the term illustrate further the exceptional cathexis attached to this title in Ottoman society, and the underlying belief in the unique blessing (Arabic *barakah*, Turkish *bereket*) associated with the *hajj* and the *hajjis*.

Similar conclusions may be drawn from studies of Muslim pilgrimage paintings, the earliest known case of which dates from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century in Egypt.<sup>20</sup> This rare form of Muslim iconic art consists of murals that combine formulaic inscriptions with iconic

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<sup>18</sup> See Tanyu 1967. It is worth noting that, during the late Ottoman period, Eastern Orthodox peoples in the Balkans considered a “half *hajji*” a pilgrim to Mt. Athos.

<sup>19</sup> See Redhouse 1921: 750, where the word *haci* is glossed in the following way: “A title of respect, sometimes addressed to strangers.”

<sup>20</sup> See Campo 1987; cf. Canova 1975 and Michot 1978. The earliest mention of such paintings, according to Juan Campo, is from a late 16<sup>th</sup>-century memoir of a Turkish official in Egypt, who also offers a valuable description of its social function: “Those who pass through that street will know for sure that the owner of that house has gone on a

representations of the Holy Land (the Ka'ba in Mecca, the Mosque in Medina) and the pilgrims' travels (Fig. 1). The murals are placed on the walls of pilgrims' homes in areas directly accessible to the public: on the façade, around the entrance or threshold, and in the reception room, that is, on the liminal spaces dividing the private from the public sphere. Although religious law does not endorse this practice, it is widespread in Muslim territories along the Mediterranean shore, from Libya to Syria-Palestine, with Egypt as its center.<sup>21</sup>

At the most obvious level, these pilgrim murals are “announcements” (*'ilanat*) that one or more people from a given household have successfully fulfilled their obligation of the Hajj. The murals thus memorialize the personal accomplishment of the Muslim pilgrims who have returned from Mecca, making public their *hajji* status not merely across space, within their home community, but also across time for generations to come. It is significant also that the epigraphic formula publicizes the names of the new *hajjis* in a most prestigious company—directly next to the names of God and the Prophet (Campo 1987: 296). In a manner of speaking, it celebrates publicly the pilgrims' rise above the anonymity of their obscure existence through the Hajj, their “making a name” for themselves that they can now pass on to their children (notably, the title of a male *hajji* becomes part of the family name and is thus inherited: put in Weberian terms, the “achieved” status becomes “ascribed” for the next generations, Weber 1967).

By making a public announcement of the *hajji* title, the mural also foregrounds the transformational aspect of the Hajj ritual: the transfer of blessing from the Holy Land home, through the physical mediation of the pilgrim who is now purified and personally blessed. “This pilgrim, as we know from the formulae employed in the murals,” Campo emphasizes, “*becomes*

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pilgrimage that year” (Ali 1975: 33). They are noted abundantly in later sources; see, for example sources cited by Michot 1978: 19, n. 2.

*a special person—as he was on the day of his birth—free of sin and deserving of heaven.* His new status is indicated by the honorable title now attached to his name: *Hajji*.<sup>22</sup> The mural therefore points to the creation of a new sacred locus—right within the domestic space of the returned pilgrim, whose home has been transformed into a sui generis “shrine” of the Holy Land. It is in this sense, I believe, that we are to understand Campo’s claim that the Hajj, as a quest for authenticity and self-distinction, acquires “an essential aspect of its significance through appropriation at the local level, at home” (Campo 1987: 286).

The elaborate arrival rituals upon the *hajjis*’ return have a similar function of recognizing publicly their new status, while reasserting the essential connection between the pilgrims’ achievement and their home communities. The celebratory greeting of the caravan’s return back to Cairo was a particularly imposing ritual in Ottoman society, replete with military music, firework displays, and elaborate ceremonials.<sup>23</sup> Yet, for towns big and small, central or remotely peripheral in the Empire, the annual return of the pilgrims was always a major event, celebrated by lavish processions and festivities that, according to Faroqhi (1994: 4), became so exuberant at times that the authorities had to issue prohibitions. The ceremonial greeting of the *hajjis*, as Faroqhi argues further, testifies to the shared belief that the pilgrims bring home something valuable to the communities, something worthy of celebration.

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<sup>21</sup> Campo (1987: 288-9) mentions historic evidence suggesting a similar Coptic practice of home decoration for their own (Christian) pilgrims to Jerusalem, although he contends that such practices are no longer current among the Christian population of the region.

<sup>22</sup> See Campo 1987: 295; emphasis mine. Campo also reports that the title *hajji*, apparently because of its high symbolic value, has been subject to abuse in modern Egyptian society: “Egyptian politicians who have never been to the Hijaz use the appellation *as a vote getting ploy*. Anwar al-Sadat, Egypt’s late ‘believing president,’ reportedly went by the assumed name ‘Hajj Muhammad Nur al-Din’ as a young adult, without having performed the pilgrimage” (1987: 296, n. 9; emphasis mine).

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed description of the festivities in Cairo, see Faroqhi 1994: 38-40. Cairo was the place of departure and return for one of the three largest pilgrim caravans to Mecca in the Ottoman Empire (the other two left from Damascus and Baghdad, respectively), see Peters 1994: 144; specifically for the Cairo caravan, see pp. 167-72.

Drawing from materials published by Delaney and others, we may suggest that the value of the *hajjis'* gift to their neighbors is derived from the typical Muslim fusion of two categories: respect (Turkish *hürmet*) and blessing (Turkish *bereket*), the conviction that personal piety has social advantages not only for the individual but for the community as a whole. Incidentally, the related notion of *sevap* ('merit'), the blessing that brings its own reward, is the motivational power behind the system of religious endowments (Arabic *wakf*, Turkish *vakıf*) that, among other things, makes the hajj financially accessible to the lower classes, thus additionally reinforcing the bonds between the *hajjis* and the religious communities back home.

Despite the salient emphasis on status in both the Hajj rituals and the social performance of the *hajjis* at home, the impact of *hajji* status on Ottoman processes of social mobility appears to be rather limited. Faroqhi has demonstrated convincingly that the ordinary townsmen in the peripheral Ottoman provinces of Anatolia and Rumelia showed a much more intense fascination with the *hajj* than the educated elite and the high-level administrative officials of the Empire. While performing the *hajj* has always been considered by Muslim societies a unique achievement, being an exceptional affirmation of a person's faith and spiritual commitment, it did not appear to have had a direct connection to social and political power in Ottoman society. As Faroqhi contends, "it was not recognized as part of an official career,"—many high-level officials never performed the Hajj, and even those who did, like Evliya Çelebi, did not necessarily display their title in a prominent fashion. This asymmetry suggests that, for Ottoman Muslims, the title *hajji*, however prestigious spiritually, had no political caché. That is why it was valued more by those to whom the real machinery of power in the Empire remained completely out of reach.

The lack of a direct connection between *hajji* status and political power in the Empire may have something to do with the fact that, in the Ottoman context, being a *hajji* was not a reliable index of wealth. Since Islamic societies make the hajj accessible to the needy through a variety of religious endowments, *hajji* status is not in itself directly linked to high economic status. The rich may have traveled luxuriously to Mecca, but the poor could tag along as well, third-class. This inherent social heterogeneity of the *hajji* group makes the title itself ambiguous in political negotiations; hence it is relatively irrelevant as political capital.

Significantly for my discussion, however, it is precisely the provincial context of Rumelia—removed both physically and symbolically from the imperial center and focused, as it was, on symbolic rather than actual power—which constituted the immediate Muslim context of our Christian *hajjis*. And, as I will presently demonstrate, these local Muslim interpretations of the hajj not only informed the Christian investment into *hajji* status, but ultimately prompted the entrepreneurial elite of the Ottoman Christian communities to reassess its potential for impacting directly the distribution of economic and political power.

### The Christian *Hajjis* in their Ottoman Context

As I pointed out earlier, the way the *hajji* title was embraced and employed by the Orthodox clergy suggests by itself that, in the Ottoman context, some fundamental aspects of the Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem must have undergone a process of creative cross-religious hybridization. The analysis of the ritual practices involved in the actual pilgrimages confirms this provisional assumption.

The Christian “hajj” to Jerusalem (or *hacılık*, as it is still referred to in the Balkans, using the Turkish term for the Hajj) emerges from the available sources as a ritual distinct from both

other Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and the Muslim Ottoman Hajj, although it creatively combines elements of both. Its most striking feature is the salient emphasis on status. Concerns with status dominate the ritual complex to such a degree that it resembles, as a result, less a religious ritual of spiritual transformation than a civic ceremony of the type Bourdieu (1999: 117-26) calls “rite of institution.”

The essence of the rite is the “social imposition” of the *hajji* title—of a new “name,” a new “social essence,” which is ritually celebrated by the pilgrims’ home community upon the travelers’ return. Such a shift of emphasis transforms an important element of the Muslim hajj ritual—the celebration of the *hajjis*’ return—into the core of the rite, thus translating the actual pilgrim center from the Holy Land (Victor Turner’s “center out there”<sup>24</sup>) right back into the pilgrim’s home.

Substantiating this claim requires a detailed analysis of the Christian hajj against the dual backdrop of Muslim Ottoman and Russian Orthodox pilgrim practices and their discursive justifications. Such an analysis, however, requires a much larger scope than is allotted for this working paper. For the purposes of the current discussion, therefore, I will restrict myself to making some general observations and preliminary conclusions about the similarities between the Muslim and the Christian hajj, drawn from an ongoing comprehensive analysis.

The sources on which this analysis is based are primarily nineteenth-century documents and travel narratives, dating from the *Tanzimat* period of Ottoman reforms that led to significant changes in the lives of the Empire’s non-Muslim subjects (Shaw & Shaw 1977). Some of these changes, I will argue, directly affected Christian pilgrim practices, bringing to full fruition processes that transformed the *hajji* group into a distinct pilgrim type. Since Serbia and Romania

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<sup>24</sup> Turner 1972-73; for an analysis of Mecca as the “place out there”-goal of the Hajj, see Delaney 1990.

achieved independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1817 and 1820, respectively, and Greece was granted complete political autonomy in 1830, the Bulgarians and the Macedonians remained the chief representatives of the *rum millet* in the European part of the Ottoman Empire for the better part of this transformative century. That is why the material for my analysis is drawn primarily from sources of Bulgarian and Macedonian provenance.

In accord with the Muslim practice of the Hajj, there is a visible tendency in the behavior of the Orthodox *hajjis* to fix the pilgrimage to Jerusalem both as a seasonal ritual tied to the liturgical Holy Week, and as a prescribed sequence of ritual “obligations.” Mikhail Madzharov,<sup>25</sup> a Bulgarian journalist and politician, who went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem as a teenager in 1868-69, is most explicit, presenting the “obligations” as strictly as if they constituted a bureaucratic procedure that demands certification at each step:

“At that time, people considered *khadzhi* only those who, after having bathed in the river Jordan, received a certificate from the Patriarchate, and bought a “Little Jerusalem” icon, were present at the Church of the Resurrection on Easter and saw with their own eyes the *nur* [Holy Fire] that comes out of the Tomb and from which pilgrims light up their paschal candles” (Madzharov 1986: 86).

This passage reveals striking parallels between the Muslim and Eastern Orthodox *hajj*. First, both journeys are fixed in time: while the *hajj* proper is restricted to three days of the last month in the Muslim year, its Christian equivalent is tied to the liturgical Holy Week. Granted, Western Christian and Russian Orthodox pilgrims to Jerusalem also traditionally aim to complete their trip by attending Easter services at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Unlike the Christian

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<sup>25</sup> Madzharov (1854-1944) was a prominent Bulgarian politician, diplomat, and journalist, a key figure in the Unification of Bulgaria in 1895, and one of the best-educated men of his time. Born into the family of a rich Bulgarian merchant from the prosperous town of Koprivshtitsa in the foothills of the Balkan mountains, Madzharov was only fourteen when he went to Jerusalem as a pilgrim with his father, mother, and his father’s business-partner, Palaveev. His extensive memoir of this experience, published sixty years later in independent Bulgaria, is perhaps the most reflective and self-reflective pilgrim account of its kind. Replete with historical and ethnographic details about a broad array of pilgrim practices from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and equipped with the dual vision of a person removed from the immediate agenda, prejudices, and preoccupations of the events he narrates, his narrative offers a particularly rich

*hajjis*, however, they do not consider their pilgrimage invalid if they are unable to do so.<sup>26</sup> Second, both pilgrimages are bipartite and have a double ritual locus in the Holy Land. The Muslim hajj is oriented both toward the circumambulation of the Ka’ba in Mecca and the “standing” at Arafat. In a similar manner, the Christian hajj complements the witnessing of the *nur* at the Holy Sepulcher on Easter Saturday with a “second baptism” in the river Jordan. In each case, both components are deemed mandatory, so much so that failure to perform the “side trips”—to Arafat or to Jordan—cancels out the entire ritual. This rigidity again presents the Christian “hajj” as distinct from other Christian practices in the Holy Land where, traditionally, more freedom is allowed in mapping out and planning the itinerary.<sup>27</sup>

The choice of the two main “obligations” also sets the Orthodox hajj apart from other Christian pilgrimages to Jerusalem. While the entire process of Holy Land pilgrimage is traditionally summarized in the Eastern Orthodox discourse by the formula “to bow down [*proskineo*] to the Holy Sepulcher,” and the Balkan *hajjis* under analysis here usually refer to their pilgrimages as “going to *Bozhi Grob* (literally ‘God’s Tomb’), Madzharov’s algorithm for becoming a *hajji* includes no veneration of this most sacred site in the Holy Land. It is true that being present at the Tomb on Pascha is stipulated as necessary, but without any reference to participation in the Easter liturgy or any other liturgical celebrations during the Holy Week. Instead, both Madzharov’s “proviso” and his own description of the Easter celebrations (as well as many a *hajji* narrative) focus on the Descent of the Holy Fire. Being present at the Tomb

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panorama of the Christian *hajji* phenomenon. All these qualities present it as an invaluable source for my current discussion.

<sup>26</sup> This tendency toward fixity is particularly uncharacteristic of Christian pilgrimages. As noted by Limor, unlike the Jewish pilgrimage to Jerusalem (and, more significantly for our purposes, unlike the Muslim Hajj to Mecca), “Christian pilgrimage is not a religious commandment and there are no set rules for its performance. It began as a spontaneous act of individuals or groups of Christians who felt the need to come close to the Holy” (Limor 2006: 327).

<sup>27</sup> Aprilov even claims that the future *hajjis* plan their journeys in such a way as to reach Jerusalem on Holy Saturday, when the *nur* descends from heaven (Giurova & Danova 1986: 130). This precision of intent directly parallels the

seems to be necessary chiefly as a condition for witnessing the *nur*, rather than as a significant ritual component of the pilgrimage in its own right.

The emphasis on the *nur* is even more surprising given the dubious status of the Ceremony of the Lights that takes place at the Tomb during the afternoon of the Holy Saturday. This miraculous event, officiated annually by the Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem, has dazzled the senses and astonished the mind of Christians and Muslims alike for many centuries, appealing to many and appalling even more. Significantly, both Western and Russian Orthodox Christians have repeatedly voiced out accusations of fraud and deception. Henry Maundrell, the chaplain of the Aleppo factory of the English Levant Company, who came to Jerusalem in 1696, witnessed the miracle firsthand on April 3<sup>rd</sup> that year and considered the spectacle insane. “The Latins take great deal of pains to expose this ceremony as a most shameful imposture and a scandal to the Christian religion,” he remarks, “but the Greeks and Armenians pin their faith upon it and make their pilgrimages chiefly upon this motive” (Peters 1986: 524).

Stephen Graham, a British convert to Eastern Orthodoxy who visited the Holy Land with Russian pilgrims in the early twentieth century, documents the official reservations of the Russian Church about the ritual and its marginalization in the Russian pilgrim practices proper:

The receiving of the Sacred Fire is not primarily an object of Russian pilgrimage. For the Greeks and the Orthodox Arabs and Syrians it is the crown of the pilgrimage, but the Russians are often advised by their priests to regard the ceremony as unimportant. It certainly is not biblical; it is not an emblem of Christ’s life upon the world. It is something accidental and additional, a heritage of paganism, and a monument of superstition. (Graham 1913: 284)

Most strikingly, perhaps, Bishop Porfirii Uspenskii, the head of the first Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem (1848-1854), directly claims in his Diaries that the ritual is a staged

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synchronization of all caravans’ itineraries so that they can reach Arafat precisely before sunset on the eighth day of Dhu al-Hijja, when the Hajj proper begins; for a dramatic description of the latter, see the account of Ali Bey 1816: 65-7.

deception and constitutes no miracle at all.<sup>28</sup>

One of the plausible explanations for privileging the *nur* may be found in the general tendency of the Christian *hajj* toward calendrical fixity, since witnessing the annual Descent of the Holy Fire ties the pilgrimage to both the Holy Week and the Holy Sepulcher much more explicitly than the liturgical celebrations would.<sup>29</sup> The spectacular nature of the ceremony—and especially the Muslim fascination with it, which is a matter of public record—must have been an important factor as well.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the Islamic reign over Jerusalem, the city’s highest Muslim officials attended and supervised the ceremony, and numerous followers of Mohammad took direct part in the festivities. Graham reports that he witnessed many Muslims eager to light their candles and lamps from the *nur*, and concludes: “Every Jerusalem Moslem believes in the Holy Fire—it is the angel of his home; he lights the fire of his hearth from it and believes that it gives him fortune” (Graham 1913: 285).

We may argue also that both the fixity and the spectacular nature of the event, witnessed as it was by Muslims in the Empire, helped construct the experience of the Christian *hajj* as an extraordinary, exceptional achievement—a crucial component in reshaping it as comparable to its Muslim prototype. This aspect of the experience is further enhanced by the belief in the miraculous properties of the Holy Fire during the initial half hour after its annual descent: it does not burn, it cleanses from sin, and any object singed with it acquires special powers. The belief in

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<sup>28</sup> “A hierodeacon who penetrated into the shrine of the Tomb at the time when, as everyone believes, the holy fire descends, saw with horror that the fire was ignited from a mere icon-lamp that never went out, and thus the holy fire was no miracle. He himself told me about this today.” (Uspenskii 1894, 1: 671). Cf. also his report as to how the fire was lit from a lamp hidden behind a movable marble icon of the Resurrection that is situated next to the Holy Grave (Uspenskii 1896, 3: 300).

<sup>29</sup> It is worth remembering that, liturgically speaking, every day is an Orthodox Easter in the Holy Sepulcher, since at the daily liturgy on the Holy Grave all year long there is but one Gospel reading: the Easter reading (John 1: 1-17). The Descent of the Holy Fire, by contrast, is a unique ritual that happens only once a year on Holy Saturday. For the daily liturgy at the Holy Sepulcher, see Kavelin 2008: 57.

<sup>30</sup> For revealing first-hand accounts, see Peters 1985: 261, 263.

these properties of the *nur* makes the direct experience of it a truly transformative event. Contact with the Holy Fire cleanses the would-be *hajjis* of sins and thus contributes to their radical renewal, which alone makes possible the pilgrims' new social function as channels of blessing.

It is significant to emphasize that the witnessing of the *nur* shares this regenerative potential with the ritual immersion in the River Jordan. The two central ritual events in the Christian hajj thus emerge as functionally equivalent and as mutually reinforcing in their effect of radical renewal. Conceived of as a "second baptism," the immersion in the Jordan is believed to wipe the spiritual slate of the pilgrims clean, just like the sacrament of Holy Baptism. It thus grants cradle Christians the advantage of the Christian *neophytes* in the early Church who, as is well known, tended to delay Baptism until their deathbed, so that they could present themselves to their Creator without sin.

The other two rubrics in Madzharov's algorithm—buying the Patriarchal certificate and the icon "Little Jerusalem—may be described as satisfying specific demands for certification of the two rituals already performed. The emphasis on status in the Christian hajj motivates strictly codified procedures for granting the title *hajji* and requires reliable channels for its public verification. The overt tendency toward bureaucratizing the ritual process—a tendency already visible in the very format of Madzharov's "proviso"—relates directly to the need to make the *hajji* name legitimate to people who have not witnessed directly the pilgrims' personal achievement. The two documents purchased in the Holy Land serve the purpose of such legitimization (cf. Bourdieu 1999: 119). This social gesture is no less crucial than the proud display of diplomas in offices of practicing physicians today. For without a public recognition of the title, the pilgrim's status achieved in Jerusalem has as much social power as the skills of a surgeon without a medical degree.

The Patriarchal “absolution certificates,” or *synchorochartion* (which among the Balkan Slavs is often referred to as an “indulgence”), releases a person from their penance for sins that they have confessed to a priest during the sacrament of Confession. In that sense, they are identical in function to the Russian absolution prayer (*razreshitel’naia molitva*), which is read and then placed in the hand of the deceased as part of the Orthodox rite for burial.<sup>31</sup> For example, a copy of such a *synchorochartion*, issued by Jerusalem Patriarch Avraam in 1776, certifies that

our spiritual child [say the name] is forgiven everything in which he, as a man, has sinned and angered God, in word, deed, or thought, voluntary or involuntary, and in all of his senses; if he is under a father’s or mother’s oath, if he is excommunicated by a bishop or a priest, or if, as a human, he has fallen under his own condemnation or given an oath and broken it, or is bound by any other transgression and has confessed those to his spiritual fathers and taken to heart the penance they assigned him, and is zealously applying himself to follow it. We loose and free him from all these sins and bonds, by the all-powerful authority and grace of the all-holy and life-giving Spirit; and if, because of forgetfulness, he has failed to confess anything, may it also be forgiven him.<sup>32</sup>

Significantly, as with both the Russian certificate and the Western indulgences, absolution is placed in direct connection to the sacrament of Confession and the Eucharist, even though the Patriarchal certificate explicitly includes sins that are not confessed “because of forgetfulness.” The major difference with the absolution “letter” for the deceased is that the pilgrim certificate is operative while the person is still alive. If indeed, as I am inclined to assume, given the available sources, a Russian-style absolution prayer for the deceased was not practiced among the Eastern Christians of the Ottoman Empire, this certificate acquires a much

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<sup>31</sup> *Nastol’naia kniga sviashchennosluzhitelia* 1983: 484; see also Kavelin (2008: 51) who explicitly equates the two practices, while tacitly pointing to the similarities between the Jerusalem certificates and the Catholic indulgences. The Russian practice of the absolution prayer is apparently an old one, since the Russian chronographs testify that such a certificate was placed in the hands of St. Alexander Nevskii at his funeral in 1263; see details in Danova 1979.

<sup>32</sup> Bulgarski Istoricheski Arkhiv, file 40, the family Archive of *khadzhi* Tosho Tsenov; the entire text of the document is published in a Bulgarian translation by Giurova & Danova 1985: 331.

greater desirability for them, emerging as a unique tool in their striving for salvation.<sup>33</sup>

What is even more relevant for our discussion is the fact that the Balkan Christian pilgrims treated these patriarchal documents directly as *hajji* certificates: as documentary proof that they had indeed been in the Holy Land and, therefore, earned the right to be called *hajjis*. The “fine print” of the document was often beside the point, and its theological subtleties usually escaped the *hajjis* and their neighbors. It was generally understood that the document was bought for “the remission of sins,” not for release from penance, and the pilgrims were believed (as they believed themselves) to have *all* their sins forgiven. We find the most direct evidence in Madzharov again: “Pilgrimage [to Jerusalem] was valued then as true asceticism (*podvizhnichestvo*). Many believed that the sins of [the pilgrims]—if they had such—were forgiven not only by the Patriarch of Jerusalem but by God Himself” (Gurova & Danova 1985: 37).

The second “certificate” is a Jerusalem *proskinitarion* or canvas icon of the type “Topography of Palestine,” usually called in the Balkans “Little Jerusalem” (Bulg. *ierusalimche*). This peculiar icon type, which emerged in Melchite icon-workshops near Jerusalem probably no later than the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is in essence an illustrated colored map of the Holy Sites. The panoramic canvas recreates the Holy City and its environs in numerous individual segments—visual plot-elements of essential Old and New Testament narratives. These images are compositionally organized around a large panel depicting the interior of the Anastasis Church, with representations of the Crucifixion and Resurrection flanking the compositionally central

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<sup>33</sup> According to *The Confession of Faith*, a document issued by the Constantinople Council of 1722, all the four most holy Patriarchs of the Orthodox Church, of Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem, had the privilege of issuing absolution certificates, abolishing some serious ecclesiastical penalty, such as excommunication; see I. Karmiris 1988: 2, 867-8. Yet the Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem apparently had the sole privilege of granting such certificates to pilgrims, and even of selling them through traveling monks (*taksidiotai*) as formularies to be filled out outside of the Holy Land, often without any connection to a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

image of the central pilgrim event: the Descent of the Holy Fire (Fig. 2).<sup>34</sup>

This expensive icon (its price on the Jerusalem market could go up to 1200 piastras, depending on the size and quality of the canvas), constitutes the most privileged pilgrim souvenir and the most prestigious *hajji* status symbol, while also directly indexing the status itself by providing a visual representation of the *hajji*'s achievement.<sup>35</sup> It usually features a medallion (or, in another idiom, a certification rubric) situated under the representation of the Holy Sepulcher, where the pilgrim's name and new title are prominently inscribed in a short formula commemorating the successful completion of the "*hajj*."

The wealthiest *hajjis* bought several such icons and donated some to the local churches back home. The biggest one, however, was reserved for the *hajji* house, where it was prominently displayed in the guest room. Madzharov (1985: 94) recalls how the Jerusalem icon was framed on the wall of his parents' reception room, covered with a curtain that opened only on big holidays to present it to visitors, who came to admire its beauty and light candles in front of it. The Jerusalem icon thus constituted a sacred center back home, around which the *hajji* (and the *hajji* family) created a domestic sanctuary of the Holy Land.<sup>36</sup> Much like the Muslim pilgrim house murals, these "icon-certificates" served as visible proofs of the *hajjis*' new status and as signs of the collective blessing that resulted from their pilgrimages.

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<sup>34</sup> I am familiar with over 28 such icons, all of them on the territory of Bulgaria, the oldest dating from 1806, and the most recent from 1907. The canvases range in size from 40 x 24 in to 106 x 128 in. The largest *proskinitarion* on record is part of the permanent collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Plovdiv (Fig. 2 above). It dates from 1886 and is a remarkable exemplar of its kind, boasting 115 compositions and 565 individual figures. For details about the history of the family, see Semerdzhieva 2008. More generally about this particular icon type, see Piatnitskii 2005, Deluga 2005; Nagy 2006; Moskova 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Madzharov directly claims that the Jerusalem icon was "one of the proofs that its owner is a *hajji*" (1986: 86).

<sup>36</sup> Nikola Nachov describes such a sanctuary in the home of *kbadzhi* Todor Ivanov from Kalofer, known to his neighbors as *kbadzhi* Paro: a big Jerusalem icon dominated the main room. A candle singed with the Holy Fire hung on each side of the icon and on the icon shelf stood a big red Easter egg, a gift from the Easter service at the Holy Sepulcher (Nachov 1990: 362). The entire sanctuary thus consisted of *hajji* souvenirs infused with Holy Land blessing.

The most striking similarity between the Muslim and the Christian hajj concerns their shared treatment as explicit rites of passage, where the change of the pilgrims' social status was marked by the voluntary change of their names to include the honorific *hajji*. All Balkan sources agree on the paramount importance of the title received. Vasil Aprilov captures the transformation eloquently:

After [a man] completes his pilgrimage, which costs him a year of his life and several thousand rubles, the *khadzhiia* returns home as if a different man...His name almost disappears—everywhere people call him *khadzhi*. In church, at meetings, and at feasts (Bulgarians love those very much!), he is the person of honor. Respected by everyone, he is second only to the clergy and any older *khadzhiia* in the community. (Giurova & Danova 1986: 130)

Todor Panchev offers a vivid picture of the respect people in Koprivshitsa accorded his uncle *khadzhi* Gero.<sup>37</sup> “[He] was a much needed counselor, helper, judge, something like a notary public: he wrote notes for them, divided their inheritances, made contracts for them, stopped complaints. Everyone ran to Grandpa *Hajji* (*diado khadzhiia*) for everything” (Panchev 1905: 165).

The emphasis on status and social recognition, which saliently oriented the Christian *hajj* toward the pilgrims' home communities, translated into particularly elaborate arrival rituals that have comparable function to the arrival celebrations of the Muslim *hajjis*. Mikhail Madzharov narrates how, when he and his co-pilgrims approached Koprivshitsa on they way back home, they stopped to change into new “*hajji*” clothes. From there, they continued on foot, so that they could greet the people who had come to meet them.

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<sup>37</sup> *Khadzhi* Gero Dobrovich Mushek was the father of Naiden *khadzhi* Gerov, a Russian diplomat and a prominent figure in the Bulgarian political life after 1878, who is best known as the author of the first dictionary of the Bulgarian language. *Khadzhi* Gero himself was immortalized in Liuben Karavelov's novella *Bulgari ot staro vreme* (Bulgarians from the Olden Days), where one of the two central characters, *khadzhi* Gencho, is based directly on the teacher Gero Mushek, whom Karavelov knew since boyhood.

“We walked in a big crowd that grew constantly. Although I have never participated in the festivities when a prince or a tsar have been received in my hometown, I do not believe that more people were present on those occasions than during our solemn entry into Koprivshitsa that spring of 1869! Eyewitnesses claim that not a single person—man or woman—failed to get out at least as far as the main street and greet the new *hajjis*. There were even several sick women who were placed out on carpets by their gates so that they, too, could see what was happening in the street.

Priests from both churches, all clad in festive garb, and young boys with crosses and icons waited for us at the end of town. They greeted us with the hymn ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’ and with songs sung by the reader and the young singers. We walked toward the old church of the Theotokos, first the priests and the singers, and we after them. All along the way, crowds of people greeted us by bowing their heads down, some with the sign of the cross, and some were even crying at the sight of this imposing procession. At the church, there was a prayer service for the health and longevity of the pilgrims who had just returned from the Life-Giving Tomb of Our Lord. The church was filled to the brim. All eyes were fixed on us.” (Madzharov 1986: 93)<sup>38</sup>

This colorful picture describes an authentic rite of institution, that “veritable act of social magic,” which Bourdieu (1999: 118-9) defines as producing, in a very public and spectacular manner, discontinuity (distinction, status, social recognition) out of a preexisting continuity. The pilgrims, who until only recently, have been just the same as their fellow townsmen, are now ceremoniously produced—with *everyone’s* participation—as distinct from everyone else because, as Madzharov puts it in his *Memoirs* (1968: 252), “they had stepped where Jesus had walked, had immersed themselves in the river Jordan, crossed the great sea.” In the same passage, he recalls also that people were eager to kiss the *hajjis’* hands, even the hands of the women and the children (the “little hajjis”), a gesture that caused him—then only fourteen—great embarrassment. This detail is particularly telling, since it documents a blatant ritual

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<sup>38</sup> Peter Avramov, a merchant from Kalofer who went to Jerusalem in 1858, describes his arrival in a similar scene in his *Memoirs*: “All the priests of Kalofer had gathered under the walnut tree at the end of town, dressed in their best garb, with crosses, gospels and icons in their hands, with litanies and—an endless multitude of people. They accompanied me with church hymns. The bells of all the churches were ringing incessantly...The procession took me to the church of St. Athanasius, where we had a prayer service, and then the priests walked me home.” (Avramov 1906: 28-9)

violation of traditional hierarchies. As such it exemplifies Bourdieu's claim that every rite of institution involves "a solemn *transgression*...conducted in a lawful and extra-ordinary way" (1999: 118; emphasis mine).

Many sources overtly compare the *hajji* title to an aristocratic distinction. Petko Slaveikov contends that, in the second half of the nineteenth century, *khadzhiia* was still "like an aristocratic title for the Bulgarians," because, by becoming a *hajji*, "one entered the homegrown, self-appointed Bulgarian aristocracy" (Slaveikov 1959: 58). Both Ivan Dobovski and Stoian Tabakov claim it the Bulgarian equivalent of "Baronet,"<sup>39</sup> and Tabakov further qualifies it as "an eloquent testimony of prosperity and piety" (2, 1924: 172).

In a long meditation upon the social functions of the title, Mikhail Madzharov points to an important characteristic that is, once again, borrowed from the Muslim framework: the title becomes part of the family name and is thus subject to inheritance by male heirs.<sup>40</sup> *Hajji* status can thus be transformed in Christian context from "attained" to "ascribed," a particularly important quality in the colonial context of the Ottoman *rum millet*, where ascribed meritorious status was a rarity. The titles *khadzhiia* and *khadzhiika*, Madzharov offers,

"did not only testify to the accomplishment of a holy feat; they were also signs of nobility. The word *khadzhiia* is Turkish, borrowed from the Turks, but it had developed a peculiar meaning in Bulgarian. A *khadzhiia* should not be poor, or else his title would make him a laughingstock. And, since inheritance passed only to boys, those who went to Jerusalem took along only their male children...The titles *khadzhiia* and *khadzhiika* were something like the English "Sir" and "Lady."

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<sup>39</sup> "Being a *khadzhi* was in the past a very honorable thing [...], as what they call a baronet in Europe." (Dobovski, see Shishmanov 1, 1965: 304); "*khadzhiia* [was] something as a Bulgarian Baronet in those times" (Tabakov 2, 1924: 418).

<sup>40</sup> Thus Dimitur, the son of *khadzhi* Ivan, would be named Dimitur *khadzhi* Ivanov, and his entire family would be known subsequently as *Khadzhiivanovi* (the *khadzhi* Ivanovs). If Dimitur becomes a *hajji* himself, he would be titled twice, both before his first and last names: *khadzhi* Dimitur *khadzhi* Ivanov.

<sup>41</sup> The continuation of this passage is particularly significant for the gender politics concerning the Christian hajj, which I will discuss elsewhere: "At that time, people said, 'If a girl marries well, let her husband take her to *khadzhiuluk*,' but it is unseemly for a *khadzhiika* to walk in rags. The titles *khadzhiia* and *khadzhiika* were something like the English "Sir" and "Lady." If the man was *khadzhiia* but the woman had not done the *khadzhiuluk*, she got the title through her husband, for

The prestige of the title was deemed so significant, some parents even brought along their young children to Jerusalem in the hope of giving them a name that would improve their “life chances.” *Khadzhi* Nikola of Sliven went on the Christian *hajj* in 1842 with three of his sons. The youngest, Dimitur, who would grow up to become one of the legendary heroes in the Bulgarian struggle for national emancipation, was only two years old when he became a “little *hajji*” (*khadzhiiche*).

Even more extreme is the case of *khadzhi* Mina Pashov, who was born in Jerusalem on January 18, 1837, while his parents were there on a pilgrimage. Mina Pashov was the son of a prominent merchant in Sliven, *khadzhi* Ianko Pashov, who had offices in Istanbul and the Crimea. The parents evidently arrived in Jerusalem several months earlier than the regular pilgrimage would demand, timing their trip in such a way that their baby was born a *hajji*, was baptized in the Holy Land, and was present in the Holy City for the Descent of the Holy Fire, all during the first year of his life.

Luckier still, his birthday happened to fall on the Feast of Theophany (according to the Julian calendar still in use among the Bulgarian Orthodox at the time), a day of great festivities in the Holy Land, which was taken as another blessed sign that “the boy would become a ‘big man’” (*goliam chovek*). It became a self-fulfilling prophecy, since *khadzhi* Mina inherited the successful business of his father and then went on to become a key player in the struggle for an independent Bulgarian Church, ending his life in Russia as a close associate of the imperial family, a great philanthropist, and one of the richest men in the country (at the time of his death the Russian government reportedly owed him the enormous debt of over two-and-a-half million

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example *khadzhi* Mikhalitsa, *khadzhi* Ivanitsa, *khadzhi* Petrovitsa [where the name is derived from the husband’s name, Milhal, Ivan, Petur, with the added suffix -itsa]; if she had been to Jerusalem, she received her own title, *khadzhi* Mariia, *khadzhi* Ekaterina, *khadzhi* Stefaniia, etc. If, however, only the woman had been to Jerusalem, and the husband had not,

rubles).<sup>42</sup>

Since the Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem during the Ottoman period was completely self-sponsored, the title *hajji* was by itself also an index of wealth, legitimating in spiritual terms an already established economic prosperity. This function rendered the title even more prestigious in the Christian context than it has ever been in its original Islamic use. “Because the Christians are oppressed by the Turks, they try to win their respect and so they struggle by all means [to earn the title *khadzhi*],” reports Vasil Aprilov, one of the more vocal opponents of the practice, who sees it chiefly as a self-serving business enterprise.

As soon as a Bulgarian makes a name for himself, as soon as he can set aside—through frugality or miserliness—enough money, he turns all his thoughts to the dream of Jerusalem: “I want to go to the Holy Sepulcher,” says he. (Giurova & Danova 1986: 130)

Numerous available sources suggest that well-to-do Bulgarians in the nineteenth century thought of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem in terms of a *valuable investment*, a motivation for performing the Christian *hajj* that sets it apart both from Muslim and from other Christian pilgrim practices.<sup>43</sup> Petur Tsonchev (1929: 603-4) narrates how the prominent Gabrovo merchant Khristo Rachkov had a single dream in his heart of hearts, shared by every man in the city who boasted some wealth: the dream of becoming a *hajji*. He fulfilled this dream in 1803 and, when he returned from the Holy Land, “already a *khadzhiia*, he had elevated himself one more step in the good society. He was now respected not only by the Bulgarians, but by the Turks as well, ‘from the youngest to the most elderly.’” According to Stoian Tabakov (2, 1924: 189), every Bulgarian in the late Ottoman period) who had savings of more than 20,000 piasters

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he had no right to the title. It was considered embarrassing for men who were not *khadzhi* themselves to marry a *khadzhiika*” (Madharov 1986: 36-7).

<sup>42</sup> For details, see Tabakov, 2: 469-73.

<sup>43</sup> The three chief motivations behind the Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem have traditionally been piety, penance, and the desire to die in the Holy Land; see Limor 2006: 341-2.

went to Jerusalem to become a *hajji*.

While many of these prosperous men were pulled to Jerusalem by the allure of the *hajji* title itself, many articulated the value of the status achieved in overtly economic terms. “Most insistent about going to Jerusalem and acquiring the title *khadzhiia* was Palaveev [the partner of my father],” recalls Madzharov.

“To the spiritual arguments he added one worldly consideration: the title helps you to do business with strangers. The Arabs in Cairo know nothing of my land and my people, he said, but once they hear the name *khadzhiia*, they will look at me with respect. This title is a passport, so to speak; it opens doors for you.” (Madzharov 1986: 40)

And, in his *Memoirs*, he adds that Palaveev “considered the title *khadzhiia* very beneficial to business in Egypt,” (Madzharov 1968: 167) claiming that this advantage by itself was worth spending “several hundred napoleons” (equivalent to several thousand piastras). In other words, the title *hajji*, while being an index of wealth, was also thought of as having itself an entrepreneurial function: it could increase one’s chances to share directly in return on economic capital. Spending money on the Christian *hajj* was thus seen as a solid business investment that could lead to increased wealth, making the rich not merely respectable in the eyes of their neighbors, but also, in the end, considerably richer.

The career of *Khadzhi* Dobri, the father of Ivan Dobrovski, one of the pioneers of Bulgarian journalism, is a good case in point. As a young man, Dobri opened a shop as a hatter (*kalpkci*) in the Sliven but, although he was good at his craft, business was only middling. He had a friend, *khadzhi* Georgi, who advised him that the way to success passed through becoming a *hajji*. Only with that title, *hajji* Georgi insisted, could Dobri marry in good society, and Georgi had already chosen for him a bride from the richest neighborhood in town. Dobri had his doubts initially. He thought the idea of going to Jerusalem a rather costly investment, not to mention a

risky one. Yet he eventually followed his friend's advice and it all turned out exactly as Georgi had predicted. Dobri married the rich woman, and his business took off, making him eventually one of the most prosperous men in his guild. *Khadzhi* Dobri's ascent up the ladder of good society is an excellent example of converting physical into social mobility. His investment proved to be much more than a single transfer of economic capital into honor and prestige (or what Bourdieu terms "*symbolic capital*"); once equipped with social recognition as a *hajji*, he then invested his status back into his business, turning a hefty economic profit for the rest of his life.

An even more striking deviation from the familiar Muslim and Christian patterns, however, is the connection between *hajji* status and political power. This potential became especially visible in the years after the famous imperial edicts of reform, the *Hatt-ı Şerif* (1832) and *Hatt-ı Hümayun* (1856), introduced legal opportunities for non-Muslim subjects in the Empire to participate in local political institutions. Aprilov offers again a valuable testimony:

Since the Turkish government allows mayors to be elected from among the Christians for their internal governing, the choice often falls on these honorable citizens [the *hajjis*], either because of their own intrigues or those of their supporters. If they are greedy, they now see an opportunity for wealth and fame. (Giurova & Danova 1986: 130-1)

Several sources explicitly point to the potent synergy between the *hajji* status and political power, by asserting that the titles *çorbacı*<sup>44</sup> and *hacı* were practically interchangeable in the Bulgarian society during the Tanzimat era. "Every *chorbadzhiia* was also a *hadzhiia*," axiomatically claims Petko Slaveikov (Giurova & Danova 1986: 228), and Liuben Karavelov echoes him by stating "First a *chorbadzhiia* has to become a *hadzhiia*, because without this title he cannot become well-known...A *chorbadzhiia* can more easily realize his undertakings if,

while still young, he goes on *khadzhiuk* and becomes a *hadzhiia*.” (Karavelov 1973).

We may conclude that, if in its original Muslim contexts, the status of a *hajji* was not directly linked either to wealth or to power, in its Christian context it ended up being linked to both, thus transforming in the process the pilgrimage to Jerusalem into an important mechanism for upward social mobility.

### Some Conclusions

The Christian *hajj* emerges from my analysis as a hybrid religious phenomenon, the result of continual Muslim-Christian coexistence in a society where Christians have been for centuries a political as well as religious minority, subjected to the rule of an Islamic elite. The analysis has clearly defined parameters that necessarily limit the scope of its claims. My material presents the Christian *hajj* as a distinctly Ottoman phenomenon that had gained momentum by the eighteenth century, yet reached its most mature and representative forms during the Tanzimat period. Geographically, my interest is restricted to the Balkan periphery of the Empire where the Christian population was most compact and where, by the Tanzimat era, individuals—particularly from among the merchant class—had accumulated enough economic capital to be able to invest in their own social promotion. While this Ottoman/Balkan frame shapes many of my conclusions about the Christian *hajjis* as locally specific, my analysis nevertheless illuminates similar forms of religious hybridization in confessionally mixed societies, including Christian pilgrimage scenarios that emerged in other parts of the Islamic world.

The actors in my study, the Balkan pilgrims to Ottoman Jerusalem who call themselves *hajjis*, appear at first glance a rather motley group, mixing monks and merchants, wives and

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<sup>44</sup> The Turkish title *çorbacı*, from which the Bulgarian noun *çorbadžhiia* is derived, though originally designating a military rank, was used in the late Ottoman Empire to designate, rather loosely, non-Muslim representatives to various levels of

widows, with children at various stages of their lives—from infants to young adults. Yet they were all self-sponsored pilgrims, which is to say, they were all people of means; and they all flocked to Jerusalem in the hope not so much of achieving salvation and spiritual renewal as of improving their life chances within an Islamic society where the title *hajji* itself was valuable symbolic capital. The Christian *hajjis* thus embody a creative fusion of Muslim and Christian ritual components with strategies for coping with political subjection by people from another faith. By grafting Islamic spiritual ideals and practices onto their Eastern Orthodox tradition, these men and women attempted to circumnavigate—even explode—the limitations of their status as a religious minority.

The Christian hajj, I offer, was cultivated by Ottoman Christians as a mechanism for upward social mobility, a particularly important tool in the absence of both well-preserved native systems for ascribing positive status and of institutions accessible to members of the *rum millet* that could facilitate the realization of their social ambitions.

To put it another way, the Christian *hajjis* reinterpreted the pilgrimage to the Holy Land as a religious field where physical mobility could be converted directly into social mobility, thus putting a distinctly Islamic spin on a long-standing Christian practice. To be sure, such a reinterpretation had a practical impact on social dynamics within the late Ottoman state. It also significantly transformed existing Christian patterns of holy travels, creating a visible divide between Eastern Orthodox pilgrims to Jerusalem within and outside the Ottoman Empire.

By demonstrating how significantly Muslim-Christian coexistence affected Orthodox pilgrim practices, my study places on the map a significant divide within the Orthodox pilgrimage tradition which current scholarship tends to mask or obliterate. Balkan Christian pilgrims to Ottoman Jerusalem and Muslim pilgrims to Mecca from across the Ottoman Empire

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regional administrative councils.

inhabited a world whose intrinsic unity has been obscured by arbitrary boundaries imposed in postwar area studies.

These same boundaries also encourage us to think of Russian and Balkan Eastern Christians as part of an identical pilgrim network, even though they were driven to Jerusalem by circumstances and interests that had hardly anything in common. My analysis unmasks the profoundly territorialized ways in which we still theorize dynamism and encourages scholars across disciplines to rethink their maps and narratives of sacred travels in ways that acknowledge cross-religious experience as an important factor for religious transformation.

Exploring together for the first time Christian and Muslim pilgrimages under the Ottomans also addresses a bigger question: How do ordinary people in multi-religious societies interact with one another and affect each others' daily lives? This issue has deep political relevance today, when the search for workable patterns of coexistence and compatibility between Christians and Muslims is an imperative concern. Emerging studies of inter-religious cooperation, however, tend to focus on interfaith dialogue at the level of elites and institutions, neglecting productive "everyday" forms of religious exchange and the historical lessons they offer. My work illuminates precisely the ways religious difference has been and can be used not to justify violence but to enrich devotional practices and inform peaceful strategies for interfaith competition and collaboration.

The *hajji* lens allows us to rethink Muslim-Christian interaction during the last centuries of Ottoman domination in the Balkans not merely in the traditional terms of conflict and confrontation, but also in terms of creative competition and productive cultural transfer. Such a shift of perspective is particularly significant as a corrective to national narratives that feed religious animosity. Much of the politics, scholarship, and the everyday fictions by which Balkan

peoples live are rooted in religious hatred, so much so that the region has emerged as a political emblem of religious hatred “gone too far.” I hope not only to reorient popular perceptions and images of the “Turkish yoke,” but also, in doing so, to propose alternative paradigms of religious co-existence in the Balkans for the benefit of those agents, such as local and foreign politicians, who shape ideological discourses about the religion. Thus, correcting our images of the past gives us the power of changing the future.

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