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Article

Witness and Testimonies: A Diachronic Perspective on the History of the Bosnian Muslims

Rusmir Mahmutćehajić*

In his essay, "Witness and Testimonies: A Diachronic Perspective on the History of the Bosnian Muslims," Rusmir Mahmutćehajić explores and deconstructs ideological abuses of some of the most important terms in the Muslim intellectual tradition. The terms 'witness' and 'witnessing', 'opener' and 'opening' are of key significance for understanding and reasoning for Muslim sacred tradition. Distorted, narrowed and reductive forms of these terms have been taken by antimuslim ideologists as material within their own constructions. In deconstructing the ideological abuse of these terms, Mahmutćehajić applies new knowledge from his experience in Scriptural Reasoning. Terms from the cultural history of Bosnia are used as study cases.

Bosnian tombstones, whether in the form of the house-shaped mediaeval stećci, crosses or Muslim spear-shaped nišans, reflect different expressions of the same teachings: that God is one, that His messengers were sent to people for the sake of realization and redemption, and that all things return to God so that each of us may be rightly judged for

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our use of the debt incurred as a result of the act of creation. It is incumbent on their heirs and those who study them to discern the unity they affirm behind the differences of form and in the teachings and rituals associated with them.

The *stećci*, as mediaeval tombstones specific to and so symbolic of Bosnia's spiritual history, the last of which were made centuries ago and which have been subject to constant destruction and damage since, remain a standing invitation to attempt to decipher the perennial language of the Other in His different manifestations. Disagreements over their name are the clearest indication of our limited human ability to see the One behind the multiplicity of forms in which He is manifested.

The noun *stećak* (pl. *stećci*) denotes the Bosnian tombstones located in the regions that constituted or were under the influence of the mediaeval Bosnian state (Bešlagić 2004:185–86). In western Bosnia they are often called *mašeti* or *mašeta* (ibid.:180), while in the eastern regions of the country they are also known as Greek gravestones (ibid.).¹ The epitaphs they bear refer to them as *bilig* or *kam*. According to Petar Skok, the term *bilig* was adopted in Avar times and comes from the northern Turkic language (1971–1974:150). The Persian word *nišan*, which means much the same as *bilig*, is also used to denote a Muslim gravestone (ibid.:520). Another word for a tombstone is the Arabic *shāhid* (Muftić 2008:764).

These three names for *stećci*—*mašeta*, Greek gravestone and *bilig*—are of particular importance for an understanding of their relationship with the Muslim testimony to the oneness of God and the messengerhood of Muhammad in the entire Bosnian religious tradition. This is openly or covertly denied in the construction of Bosnia's history. The continuity of its Muslim content over time is repudiated and represented as having been forcibly imposed or as alien. In the view of this construct of a history of discontinuity, the Muslim presence has nothing to do with what they define as “pre-Muslim.” This is a key factor in every anti-Muslim ideology.

It is a well known fact that old Muslim burial grounds are often found alongside *stećci* as their extension in time.² The oldest of these burial grounds around Bosnia are usually called *šehit* cemeteries (from *shahid*) or *šehitluci*, as in, for example, the saying that “many shahid's graves in the village of Sebin are from the time of the *fet*” [conquest, Ar. *fath*].³ The number of such burial grounds and the fact they are so often located alongside *stećci*, together with the prevailing interpretation of the term *shahid*, raises the question of the true meaning of the words *mašeta* and *šehiti* when applied to a Bosnian burial ground in which the dead lie beneath tombstones of different forms.

The name *mašet* is undoubtedly the most widespread vernacular name for these Bosnian gravestones. It means the same as *stećak*, but is also applied to *nišan* tombstones.⁴ The word *mašet* also features in folk songs:

Do mašeta doru dogonio

Po kamenu čordom udario

I duboko biše zafatio.⁵

Po mašetu čordom udario.⁶

More than a century ago, in 1891, Ćiro Truhelka suggested that the Bosnian word *mašet* derives from the Turkish *mešet*, meaning the grave of a hero killed for his faith (1891:368–387, 369).⁷ He saw nothing in this suggestive face that might contribute to a deeper understanding of the continuity between the *stećak* and the *nišan*, though it becomes clear as soon as their relationship is seen in the context of the semantic field denoted in Arabic by the trilateral root *sh-h-d*. Without considering this semantic field in its entirety, it is impossible to speak of the Muslim intellectual heritage or of the history of the Bosnian Muslims.

There is a long history of understanding the terms *šehit*, *mašet* and *fet* against an almost exclusively anti-Muslim view of history: a *šehit* is a fallen Muslim soldier whose enemies are the Christians, and *fet* is the conquest or occupation of a Christian country. These are key features of the definition of the Muslim, often equated with the “Turk,” as the absolute enemy of the Christian.⁸ It follows from this that all *shahids*’ burial grounds in Bosnia are seen as monuments to Muslim violence and Christian suffering, an inverted view that is central to the construction of the historical image of Bosnia and its Muslims. A close study of the relationship and close connection between burial grounds with *stećci* and those with *nišans* on the one hand and the original meanings of the terms *šehit*, *mašet* and *fet* on the other makes it clear that these imposed meanings are untenable.

The first condition of being a Muslim is to bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His messenger. Nothing can replace the primacy of this testimony; everything else that is Muslim derives from it as from a living spring. In Arabic, the testimony is expressed in the words *ashhadu an lā ilāha illāllāh wa ashhadu anna muḥammadan rasūlullāh*. Whosoever acknowledges the primacy of this testimony is a *shahīd* or *shāhid*, both of which mean witness. That which the *shahīd* or *shāhid* utters is the *shahāda*, or testimony. Though expressed here in Arabic, it is important to note that there is no language or time in which another, different form of the same testimony cannot be found; for the truth of the One and the messengerhood of the perfect man belong to all times and to all people, and thus to all languages.

To the question about the Messenger that every other prophet and sage has always known about, whom God announces to the prophet Moses in the Torah,⁹ of whom Jesus son of Mary speaks in the Gospel as the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth and the Holy Spirit¹⁰ who was awaited in his day but who is neither he, the Messiah, nor the prophet John, nor the prophet Elias,¹¹ the witness responds with the shahada, the testimony that this, the original prophet who is also the seal of the prophets, was made manifest in the person of the historical Muhammad, the son of Abdullah and Amina, who was born in Bekka in 570 AD. His historical manifestation is but a sign of his metahistorical nature and of the principle of all creation, the primal messenger who, according to the Muslim testimony, is the reason and purpose of all things.

For such witnesses to the Praised One (*Muhammad*), the reasons for their testimony are in all things, for he is the firstness and lastness of creation. There is nothing in the metaphysical, cosmological, anthropological or psychological components of human knowledge that, in the Muslim belief, has no reason for bearing witness to Muhammad as perfect and therefore paragon humanity in relation to God as the All-praised (*al-hamīd*). This perfect humanity concerns every one of us for all time, and thus concerns all things, for it defines us in our reason and purpose for being in this world.

No human achievement brings to an end the journey towards the One. Wherever we may be, the perfection of Muhammad remains our higher potential, and thus our reason for following it on the ascent or return to the One. Whatever state we reach, we never attain our ultimate potential, but it is the only goal that justifies life as a journey towards absolute meaning. The more aware we are of our perfect goal, the greater our reasons for humility and generosity. It is in these virtues that we realize our liberation from the illusion of everything in the world around us and in our inner self.

Without the truth as the principle of all things, the traditional perspective in its literal meaning is impossible. The totality of existence is the manifestation or externalization of the truth. One could therefore say that both this totality and all its individual manifestations are created or shown with the truth (Qur'an, 6:73).¹² Everything that is created with the truth is concentrated or internalized within us, and both our inner self and the world around us reveal the truth. Wherever we are, this manifestation remains clear. The vault of the heavens and the expanses of the earth, and all that lies between them, bear witness to it. As such, we can bear witness to it, conceal it, or ascribe to it something other than the truth. Whatever it may be, testimony is the centre of humanity.

To bear witness to the truth requires being living, willing, powerful, knowing, speaking, hearing and seeing; but though necessary, this is not sufficient. Testimony is a

possibility that includes its own opposite. Witnesses may suppress, deny or distort the representation of what they know. The perennial human question concerns the testimony to that which is the truth of our origins and purpose, of what gives meaning to life, will, power, knowledge, speech, hearing and seeing at every moment, in the full reality of the “now.” Both possibilities are within human nature—testifying to the truth, or concealing it. Bearing witness enables us to find and maintain ourselves in the truth of our createdness. Concealing the truth or uttering falsehoods distances us from our own nature. God’s speech revealed to and through Muhammad points to this perennial meaning of the testimony:

And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves, “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes, we testify”—lest you should say on the day of resurrection, “As for us, we were heedless of this”, or lest you say, “Our fathers were idolaters aforetime, and we were seed after them. What, wilt Thou then destroy us for the deeds of the vain-doers?”
(Q.:7:172–73)

This mystical speech concerning our testifying to God’s lordship and our servitude is at the heart of the cosmic covenant in which belief is the relationship between ourselves and God as believers, as God says in the Recitation: “We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it; and man carried it. Surely he is sinful, very foolish” (Q.:33:72). Belief is the knowledge of the beloved and the love of the known. With our covenant of trust, we stand out from the totality of existence; our path remains open in both directions, towards plenitude, and towards nullity. Everything can be above and below our inner self in the constant possibility of realizing itself in the Self.

Little knowledge connects us with God as the absolute, and always does so through the love for That of Which we know little, but for Which we can have infinite love. The love of That of Which we know little thus unceasingly increases us in knowledge on the journey towards the goal that nothing can confine or limit. Every actor in the cosmic covenant joins us on that journey, as God says: “Hast thou not seen how to God bow all who are in the heavens and all who are in the earth, the sun and the moon, the stars and the mountains, the trees and the beasts, and many of mankind?” (Q.:22:18). The difference between all in the heavens and all in the earth on the one hand and us humans on the other is in two wills—everything but humankind refuses to have any will but the will of God, but we accept that we may have God’s will as our own.

Presented in this way, our testimony to ourselves as the servants of the Lord denotes the relationship between the created and the Creator, the debtor and the One to whom we are indebted. The Lord Creator to Whom we are indebted manifests His oneness through His most beautiful names. The totality of existence, the heavens, the earth and all that lies between them exteriorizes those names in the way in which they are spread far and wide, while we internalize them by concentrating them. By discovering the names in our original nature, we discover ourselves as witnesses of our Lord. We have no knowledge of ourselves without knowing our Lord, nor knowledge of the Lord without knowing ourselves.

Witnesses are Muslims, the people of peace, for they are in a relationship with God as Peace (*al-salām*) through being at and in peace, through reconciliation to the will of God. The words submission and reconciliation correspond to the Arabic verbal noun *islam*. Muhammad, as the servant and messenger of God, is the perfect exemplar of this mode of being, and is thus the reason and purpose of all humanity. The first prerequisite for being in peace is the testimony or *shahāda*. No other requirement is valid without this, for its absence means that everything in the totality of existence and of knowledge of them is without its principle.

Since Muhammad is the first manifestation of God, he is present in everything, and each one of us, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, has him within us as our perennially higher potential towards which we are directed by our original nature. All his manifestations are signs of perfection as the reason and purpose of human creation. We can bear witness to him in an infinite number of ways, but every one of these is but a dialect of the one and only, perennial manifestation of God: God is the first bestower, and His entire creation is a recipient; once His bestowal has been received, it may be given. This giving and receiving is the constant, perfect manifestation of God as One.

In Muhammad, the universal man, his feminine or receptive aspect, as the first of all that is manifest, and his donative or masculine aspect, as the seal, converge. The way in which we shape that testimony is indivisible from our freedom or trust in relation to God as the Believer (*al-mu'min*). Seen through the lens of historical communities, some of those ways are seemingly irreconcilable, since it appears that one testimony denies another.

Jews, as a community with twenty-six revealed books, the Torah as the first and Malachi as the twenty-sixth, and the many others associated with or derived from them in an uninterrupted course of transmission, recognize and bear witness to the Messenger whose coming among their brothers God announces through the prophet Moses, and also

recognize the Messiah who will be raised from the descendants of the prophet David. What they do not admit, however, that this prophet who is foretold to them is the Praised One to whom Muslims bear witness in the person of Muhammad born in Bekka, nor do they admit that Jesus son of Mary, to whom Christians and Muslims bear witness, is the Messiah whom they await. Muslims bear witness that the Messiah whom the Christians recognize is indeed the one to whom the Virgin Mary gave birth, and whom God later raised up that he might come again.

Christians, as a people of twenty-seven revealed books, the first of which is the Gospel according to Matthew and the last is Revelations, with which an uninterrupted course of tradition is associated, recognize and bear witness to God's announcement to the prophet Moses of a Messenger who is neither John nor Elias, nor the Awaited One about whom the priests and Levites ask the prophet John during the time of Jesus.¹³ They recognize and bear witness to Jesus's promise of the Paraclete. But for the Christians, the historical Praised One to whom Muslims bear witness is not the Paraclete whom they recognize as foretold by Jesus. For Christians, the Prophet Muhammad is neither the prophet of Moses's foretelling nor the Paraclete.

For Muslims, the Jewish and Christian books, all fifty-three of them, are evidence for their testimony to the Prophet Muhammad. In essence, all these are also Muslim books. Over the centuries Muslims have said that the number of these books that precede the Recitation corresponds to the numerical value of the sacred name *Ahmad* by which Jesus son of Mary, in the language of the Qur'an, foretells and bears witness to the Praised One (Q.:61:6). Since the revelations are in different languages, the Arabic names *Ahmad* and *Muhammad* are present, and hence translatable, in all languages, and Muslims seek and find them in the books of all God's messengers.¹⁴

When it is said in Bosnia that *stećci* are *mašeta* and the *nišans* alongside them are *šehitski* (the Bosnian adjective from the noun *šehit/shahīd*), there is no compelling reason for not assuming that this is the reflection of a fateful duality in the testimony to the Praised One as the messenger of God of which the warrant, in the belief of these witnesses, is in everything, including the Torah and the Gospel and the entire sacred heritage associated with them. Jesus the Messiah says to the people listening to him: "For had ye believed Mōses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"¹⁵

God says to the prophet Moses: "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."¹⁶ In the same book, and hence with the same

cruciality, we find: “And there arose not a prophet since in Is’rael like unto Mōses, whom the Lord knew face to face.”¹⁷ Jesus the Messiah is of the children of Israel—born and raised in Israel of the generation of David. When he says that the prophet Moses wrote of him, this is true for all his witnesses.

But it cannot be true that the prophet Jesus is similar to the prophet Moses, for it is said through Moses that there has never been one like him in Israel. Jesus son of Mary says of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Truth, whom he foretells as the one who will come from the Lord after he has gone: “He will testify of me.”¹⁸ In Muslim belief, this prophet like unto Moses and raised up from among the brethren of the Israelites—which means from the Ismailites—is the Praised One whose name, in the language of the Qur’an, is *Ahmad*. This prophet bears firm witness to Jesus the Messiah and his mother, the Virgin Mary. Thus the prophet Moses “writes” of Jesus through Muhammad, who says: “I am most close to Jesus, son of Mary, among the whole of mankind in this worldly life and the next life” (Muslim n.d.:4:1260–61).

There is no prophet other than John who bore witness to Jesus knowing him by name and addressing him as such. But John, too, was from Israel. As a result, the only prophet who is not an Israelite, and who bears witness to the prophet Jesus, knowing about him and about what was revealed to him, is Muhammad.¹⁹ Thus Moses “writes” about Jesus, bearing witness to Muhammad as one similar to him and as from the brethren of the Israelites. Witnesses to Muhammad are thus also witnesses to Jesus the Messiah and to the prophet Moses.

The generally accepted prayer that follows *tarāwīh* prayers²⁰—*rabbanā āmannā bimā anzalta wattba’nā al-rasūla faktubnā ma’a-shshāhidīn* (Q.:3:53), meaning “Lord, we believe in that Thou hast sent down, and we follow the Messenger. Inscribe us therefore with those who bear witness”—also attests to the indivisibility of the Messiah and Muhammad in the testimony of Bosnian Muslims. These words are said aloud by the muezzin on completion of the prayer and as an introduction to congregation prayer. During this prayer, all who are present in the mosques of Bosnia—men and women, old and young—raise their arms and said aloud “Amin” after each section of the prayer spoken by the leader.²¹

According to the Recitation, with these introductory prayers, Jesus’s helpers, disciples and emissaries conclude their response to him. The Recitation says of this: “And when Jesus perceived their concealing, he said, ‘Who will be my helpers unto God?’ The Apostles said, ‘We will be helpers of God; we believe in God; witness thou that we are people of the Peace.’” (Q.:3:52)²² The connection with Jesus the Messiah and his disciples is thus at the heart of the congregation and testimony of Bosnian Muslims. In

their belief, the Muslim testimony is inseparable from the testimony of the Christians as their spiritual and native forebears and as believing brothers at all times.

Being a person of peace (*muslim*) is a necessary but not sufficient condition for being a believer (*mu'min*). The first is the willed potential of the individual, leading to a state of the self in which the will of the Self is revealed, as is plain to see from God's speech through Muhammad in the Recitation:

That is the Book, wherein is no doubt, a guidance to the conscious who believe in the Unseen, and perform the prayer, and expend of that We have provided them; who believe in what has been sent down to thee and what has been sent down before thee, and have faith in the Hereafter. (Q.:49:14)

Like Muslims, both Christians and Jews can be believers. As the Recitation tells us, where God says through Muhammad: "Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and the Christians, and those Sabceans, whoso believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness—their wage awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow" (Q.:2:62).

Belief is a state in the heart or the deepest centre of humanity. It eludes human will, for it is absolute certainty, as God says through Muhammad in the Recitation: "God knows what is in your hearts" (Q.:33:51). Muhammad says of all human hearts that they are like one of the two fingers of the All-merciful and that He turns them where He will (Muslim s.a.:4:1397). All of us are concentrated in that one heart as our supreme, greatest and finest potential. Those who are conscious of that original oneness in will, love, knowledge and beauty²³ are brothers, as God says: "The believers indeed are brothers; so set things right between your two brothers, and fear God; haply so you will find mercy" (Q.:49:10). Those who surrender, therefore, who seek to attain the bond with God as the Believer and Beautiful at every moment, every human circumstances, heritage and experience, everywhere and at all times, are their own treasure.

Witnesses to the oneness of God and the messengerhood of Muhammad discover in themselves and in all things, including the traditions of their spiritual and their native forebears, evidence of the Praised One as the origin and seal of the prophets, the warner and the encourager, mercy and light. In recognizing him, Muslims also bear witness to the Book that God revealed to him: "That is the Book, wherein is no doubt, a guidance to the godfearing who believe in the Unseen, and perform the prayer, and expend of that We have provided them; who believe in what has been sent down before thee, and have faith in the Hereafter" (Q.:2:2–4).

In testifying to what Muhammad receives as the Book, and to what other messengers have received as books before him, the people of peace responds to God Who says, speaking of the pre-existence to all messengers about the Praised One: “Bear witness so, and I shall be with you among the witnesses” (Q.:3:81). An indivisible element of this testimony is the willingness to endure, sacrifice and suffer with and for his sake. This willingness is justified by the conviction that following him as the finest exemplar redeems the follower. The testimony is the manifestation of the oneness of God and the messengerhood of Muhammad.

According to the Revelation sent down by God to Muhammad, God and the angels, prophets and believers are witnesses. God says in the Recitation of his knowledge of all human deeds, as receiving and giving: “God bears witness to that He has sent down to thee; He has sent it down with His knowledge; and the angels also bear witness; and God suffices for a witness” (Q.:4:166). And He says of the prophets and believers as witnesses: “We appointed you a midmost nation that you might be witnesses to the people, and that the Messenger might be a witness to you” (Q.:2:143).

Arent J. Wensinck’s studies of the meaning of the terms “witness” and “testimony” in the Jewish, Eastern Christian and Muslim heritage in the light of their twin meanings—the original meaning of witness and the derived meaning of martyr, lead him to conclude:

The twofold use of the term *shahīd* discussed above, proves to be a reflex of the use of the term *mártys* (*mártyr*) in the New Testament on the one hand, and in the old Christian literature on the other. The latter uses the word in its technical sense, whereas the former—just as the Kor’ān does—applies it to God as a witness of the deeds of men,²⁴ to Christ and the apostles as God’s witnesses.²⁵ It is to be observed, that this Christian terminology goes back to the Old Testament, where it is again God who is a witness of the deeds of men,²⁶ and the pious who are God’s witnesses.²⁷ So the use of the word in the Kor’ān appears to be identical with that in the New Testament; and the latter appears to be dependent upon the Old Testament.²⁸

The supreme degree of that testimony is martyrdom for the sake of God and Muhammad. All those who persist in their testimony to the death—whether they die or are killed—are witnesses. The testimony is thus the element of Muslim being as a whole that is most present. Every call to prayer includes it. Muslims repeat it countless times throughout their lives, moment by moment and day by day, with the desire that they breathe their last

breath with the *shahāda*, with the testimony that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His messenger.

Bearing witness to the oneness of God as the All-praised is indivisible from bearing witness to His messenger, Muhammad, who is a man and the servant of God. The Praised One to whom Muslims bear witness is both the origin and seal of the prophets. They seek and find him in all things within themselves and in the world about them. There is nothing in the seen or the unseen worlds, nothing in the outer horizons or the inner self, that does not offer signs of the truth of his messengerhood and his redemptive warnings to humankind. He is the witness and seal for all prophets and good people at all times, and they for him.

The noun *šehit* is the Bosnian version of the Arabic *shahīd*, which features in the Recitation with its primary meaning of “witness,” and only later as “martyr.” A similar semantic shift from witness to martyr can be found in the Greek *mártys* and the Syriac *sāhdā* (Goldziher 1971: 2:350–51). Witness is thus the relationship between the person bearing witness and God as Witness. In the case of the peoples or communities of the Book, their individual members are witnesses in relation to the original Revealer of the Book. The entire community of the people of peace is called upon in the name of God to bear witness for the person, whereas the Messenger is a witness in the name of God for all people (Q.:22:78).

Since every community is bound by its book (Q.:45: 28), which determines its testimony, God orders Muhammad to say to the people: “People of the Book, why do you conceal the signs of God? Surely God is witness of the things you do” (Q.:3:98). The books that have been sent down differ, and may be accepted or rejected. The prerequisite for the people of peace (*muslim*) to be believers (*mu'min*) is to accept the revealed books.

The best known of the books that God reveals through His prophets are the Torah, the Psalms and the Gospel. As a result, God’s address to the “people of the Book” refers to all of them: Jews as the people of the Torah, Christians as the people of the Gospel, and Muslims as the people of the Recitation (the Qur’an). These books set forth the key measures that determine the limits of human responsibility. They are thus the watershed between our wrongdoings or merits, which meet with punishment or reward.

Being at peace and believing means that the self is connected with God as Peace and as the Believer through submission and belief. The self thus discovers or realizes itself in its original potential or nature. The opposite of that original potential, or of being created on the sublimest heights, is obscurity, concealment and isolation. None of these states is beyond the presence of two wills, one Divine, the other human. The human will

turns either to obscurity, concealment and isolation, or to their opposite—illumination, exposure and openness. When we remove the veils and obstacles in our inner self and bear witness to God, the messenger and the return, our relationship as witness with God as Witness is open. It is a relationship that encompasses everything in the world around us and in our inner selves.

The noun *mašet* might correspond in origin to the Arabic noun of place *mashhad*, derived from the verb *shahida*, “to testify,” “to be present in,” and hence “to be a shahid,” “to be a martyr.” Ignaz Goldziher connects and compares these two meanings, the latter derived from the former, with features of Eastern Christianity.²⁹ The noun *mashhad* denotes any sacred or sacrosanct place where there is a structure that defines it, though this is not essential.

A *mashhad* or *mašet* is often the grave of an earlier prophet, righteous person or predecessor of Muhammad—of people who knew of him as human perfection, and aspired to it in their original nature, in conformity with their knowledge, circumstances and the times in which they lived. However little that knowledge of theirs might have been, they were never without it. Their successors could see it as clearly foreshadowing their testimony in which they realized the expectations of their forebears.

Obedience to God and the Messenger leads to the assembly in bliss of all prophets, righteous people, witnesses and the sincere (Q.:4:69). The connection with these people and the preservation of their memory is spoken of in the Recitation: “In their stories is surely a lesson to men possessed of minds; it is not a tale forged, but a confirmation of what is before it, and distinguishing of every thing, and a guidance, and a mercy to a people who believe” (Q.:12:111).

The reference to these burial grounds as Greek may be seen as the Bosnian Church’s demarcating itself in relation to the Serbian version of the Greek or old Eastern rite, as well as its differentiation from Roman Catholicism.³⁰ Both the Bosnian and the Serbian Christian heritage belong to the eastern Rite; they are Greek, but have been transmitted in the Slavonic translation of Cyril and Methodius.³¹ When this translation was ritually adapted to the Rascian or Serbian, and thereby became associated with the ruling Serbian dynasty, the Bosnian remained, in a sense, more Greek.³² This may explain the fact that Bosnia’s ecclesiastical books are more directly related to earlier versions than to the Rascian, and are almost entirely independent of them.³³

The noun *fet* is the Bosnian version of the Arabic *fath*, with which the Hebrew *pātah*, the Aramaic and Syriac *petah* and the Ethiopian *fatha* are cognate. In each case, the corresponding verb means “to open,” to “unfetter,” “to release.” According to the revelations in the Recitation, this opening relates primarily to the gates of heaven, the

passage into the garden or into hell, which is the differentiation of the self from its original, redemptive heights to its uttermost depths. Our redemption and realization is the ascent by the open path to the One (Q.:6:44, 7:40, 15:14, 23:77, 38:50, 39:71, 39:73, 54:11, 78:19).

The notion of “opening” belongs to the Qur’anic semantic fields, all of which are shaped by the crucial, central position of the name “God” in all of them. Opening thus denotes the relationship between ourselves as open with God as the Opener (*al-fattāh*). This opening means eradicating from the self that which separates it from God, which conceals and isolates it. God orders Muhammad to say: “Our Lord will bring us together, then make opening between us by the truth. He is the Opener, All-knowing” (Q.:34:26).

Those who are open or openers (*al-fātiḥ*) are in a relationship with God as the Opener (*al-fattāh*). Being an opener attests to what we have received from God as the Opener; we are openers, because we have been opened. This is comparable with being peace-makers: we can be so because we have first become peaceable or submissive as recipients of peace from God as Peace.

Opening (*al-fāth*) is the relation between the open person and God as the Opener. The key sign of that relationship is the holy recitation or writ—the chapter known as the “Opener” (*sūra al-fātiḥa*), the first sura of the Recitation (the *Qur’an*). It is also known as the Opening of the Book, the Mother of the Book, the Sura of Praise and the Essence of the Recitation.³⁴ It has seven signs or verses, and is thus also referred to in the Recitation as the Seven oft-repeated Verses (Q.:15: 87).

Second only to the testimony by which we affirm ourselves as witnesses to the oneness of God and the messengerhood of Muhammad is the “Opener” as the most often repeated text in the life of the people of peace. They teach it to their children as early as possible, and is repeated throughout life in each cycle of prayer and on many other occasions in daily life.

For any person of peace, who is in a relationship with God as Peace through reconciliation with His will, the Qur’an is the key linguistic source of study. There is nothing in the life of the Muslim that shapes the self more than those two words—testimony (*shahāda*) and opening (*al-fāth*). The nouns witness (*shahīd*) and opener (*fātiḥ*) are thus inseparable from our relationship with God, since His names, the Witness (*al-shāhid*) and the Opener (*al-fattāh*), denote the rational affiliation to the community of Muhammad. Every member of that community, living or dead, may properly be called a witness and opener, a *shahīd* and *fātiḥ*.

Qur'an is a verbal noun denoting “incessant recitation,” “teaching,” or the missive that is constantly being recited and heard, over and over again. This Recitation is spoken by God through Muhammad as His messenger, and we recite it by listening and repeating, writing and reading, seeing and remembering it. The response of the people of peace to God’s teachings through Muhammad is: “We hear, and obey. Our Lord, grant us Thy forgiveness; unto Thee is the homecoming” (Q.:2:285). It is fair to say that there is no path to God without human perfection or Muhammad, and that ignorance of the Recitation is ignorance of him as Messenger.

The moulding of the human self is by means of opening (*al-fāth*) in our relationship with God as the Opener (*al-fattāh*). This is the perennial centre of everything that is Muslim or to do with finding peace in the will of God. The opening or liberation by which one becomes open or free for the supreme human potential concerns us as individuals, and consequently concerns the whole of humankind. No historical, political or ideological construct can either deny or substitute for the centrality and cruciality of this openness of the individual self to God as the Opener.

In many anti-Muslim constructs of history, distorted meanings are imposed on these terms and their semantic fields, and many Muslims, ignorant of the reasons and purpose of this imposition, have themselves adopted and passed on these meanings. The consequence is that they cannot recognize the anti-Muslim ideologies that have deprived them of their foundations. Teleologically speaking, God is the foundation of all things. When His presence is excluded, and ideological teleology is confined to this world, people can be deprived of their historical foundations, as the precursor to denying, excluding, persecuting and killing them. Whenever someone deprives others of their foundation, it should be recognized as an incitement to crimes against them.

In the village of Babunovići in Srebrenik Municipality, in the environs of which there are many *šehitluks*, is the oldest mosque in the region, in the part of the village known as Šehovina. Here, when the imam descends from the mimber on Fridays, and the two mandatory cycles of prayer have been completed, all the worshippers stand up, and listen to the muezzin saying aloud these words: “Help from God and a nigh victory. Give thou good tidings to the believers!” (Q.:61:13).³⁵

NOTES

1. In some cases both terms, Greek burial ground and *mašeta*, are used for the same burial ground and its stećci. (See Anđelić 1975:216, 218). Skok (1971–74:381) suggests that the noun *mašet* could derive from the Italian *masseto*, a view shared by

Bešlagić (2004:180). It is a simple matter to demonstrate the untenability of this speculation. There are no traces of this word along the eastern Adriatic coast, from Istria to Albania in the south, but it is commonly used in western Bosnia to denote both *stećci* and the place where they stand (See, for example, Bešlagić 1954:11, 35). Pašić (2009:500–505) considers the appearances of this name, re-examines the existing hypotheses concerning its origins, and concludes that it could be of Gothic origin, and that it perhaps reached Bosnia under Arian influence. The origins of the name and the ways in which it entered the Bosnian language need further investigation. Simple solutions are both challenging and seductive. Of note here is the Aramaic noun *maštit*, meaning “basis,” “foundation,” “foundation stone.”

2. See, for example: Ćorović (1956:145). Mak Dizdar writes in his notes to the poem “Pravednik”: “Legend has it that *good people*, killed in battle against all the evils of their time, lie buried beneath the old gravestones of mediaeval Bosnian necropolises. Wherever there are *stećci* that are cared for and looked after, the town will not fall. In times of summer drought, the tombstones are visited with prayers for rain. As a child, the author of these lines visited the Nekuk and Radimlja necropolises near Stolac along with a group of people praying for rain. The women scraped at some of the *stećci*, made of soft *miljevina* limestone, believing that the dust they scraped from them could heal various diseases” (Dizdar 1999:192). At both these sites where the Muslims of Stolac went to pray for rain, there are old *nišans* alongside the *stećci*. When Dizdar says “Radimlja,” the meaning of the name is wider than its present use, which refers only to the necropolis by the River Radimlja; he means the necropolis or harem at Gorica, where the people of Stolac used to come to pray for rain. The necropolises at Nekuk and Gorica are also known to the people of Stolac as *šehiti*.
3. Srpska Kraljevska Akademija (1928:43:498,557), quoted in Musulin (1959–62:17:526).
4. Local people call the famous *nišan* of Omeraga Bašić near Glamoč, which is 4.35m in height, Bašić’s *mašet* (Mujezinović, 1974, 1977, and 1982:3:138–39).
5. Jukić and Hercegovac (1858:457). The English translation is as follows: “He urged his *dun* to the tombstone and struck at the stone with his scimitar, biting deep.”
6. Ibid.:458. The English translation is as follows: “he struck at the tombstone with his scimitar.”
7. Abdulah Škaljić writes that the noun *mašet* derives from the Turkish *meşhed*, or in common speech *meşat*, from the Arabic *māshhād* (1973:448). The use of the term *mešatluk* to mean burial ground features three times in Bašeskija’s *Ljetopis*: (1) an

m/s of the *Ljetopis* (fol. 31a, line 17) gives an account of gunpowder blown up in a *mešatluk* (Mustafa 1968:211), a passage that is missing from Mujezinović's translation; (2) it is related that the bier bearing the body of a particularly great man was carried to the *mešatluk* by six to eight men (ibid.:398); and (3) there is a reference to some deceased persons being taken to the *mešatluk* (ibid.:400). The m/s of Bašeskija's *Ljetopis* is in the Gazi Husrev-bey Library in Sarajevo (see Nametak 1998:279–80). It is clear if one simply consults a Turkish dictionary that this Bosnian word and its Turkish forms are of Semitic origin. The following are the forms associated with the word *mašet* and its meanings in Turkish: *meşhed*, pl. *meşâhid*: (1) a place where people assemble, especially if for the performance of a special sacred rite; (2) a field of battle, a battle; (3) a place of martyrdom; (4) a funeral assembly; (5) the aspect of a person; *muşhed*, fem. *muşhede*: (1) made or called to be a witness, or to see an act or state; (2) martyred; *muşhid*, fem. *muşhide*: (1) who calls or produces a witness or evidence; (2) who makes another see and become aware of anything; (3) who attains to puberty; *meşhûd*, fem. *meşhûde*, pl. fem. *meşhûdât*: witnessed, seen (Redhouse 2006:1872); *meşhet*: (1) şehit düşülen yer, meaning “a place where a shahid fell;” (2) şehidin gömüldüğü yer, meaning “a place where a shahid is buried” (Akalin, et.al. 2005:1379); *maşatlık*: müslüman olmayanların, özellikle Yahudilerin mezarlığı, meaning “a burial ground where non-Muslims are buried, especially Jews” (ibid.:1352). Kerima Filan, who teaches Turkish at the Faculty of the Humanities in Sarajevo, is of the view that the word *mešatluk* can be read as *mašetluk*, *maşatluk* and *mešetluk*. According to Professor Filan, the etymology of the word is absolutely clear. The shift from the original Arabic *māshhād* to the Turkish arises from the customary loss of the consonant “h” in a medial position, since no such consonant exists in Turkish, and the transformation from a voiced to an unvoiced consonant at the end of the word, a feature of the Turkish language.

8. For more on the figure of the Muslim as the enemy of the Christian, see Tolan (2002); Zirojević (1998:107–113); and Dukić (2004).
9. See Deuteronomy 18:18.
10. See John 14–16. Equating Jesus' prophecy with the expectation of the coming of the Praised One (*Muhammad*, *Ahmad*) is inseparable from the Muslim testimony to the oneness of God and the messengerhood of Muhammad (see Ishaq (1980:104); for the meaning of the name *Paraclete* in the Gospel according to John, see also Knohl (2000:68–71).

11. See John 1:19–21.
12. References to the Qur'an are referred to by Q.
13. See John 1:19–21.
14. There is a rich tradition of Muslims seeking and finding prophecies of the Praised One in the books of the Bible; for example, Tabari (1922).
15. John 5:46–47.
16. Deuteronomy 18:18.
17. Ibid.:34:10.
18. John 15:26.
19. In response to the question of the Prophet whom God announces through Moses, like him but not of Israel, rabbis refer to the prophet Balaam (see Finkelstein [2001:430]). There is a clear difference between Moses and Balaam, however, a book was sent down to Moses, but not to Balaam (see Numbers 22 et. seq. on Balaam).
20. *Tarāwīh* prayers (Ar., plural of *tarwīha*) are the ritual congregation of Muslims during the month of Ramadan following the night prayer. Everyone takes part—men and women, young and old—as they pray twenty *raka'āt* (cycles) behind the leader, with a pause between each pair or four cycles. The noun *tarāwīh* means “breaks.”
21. This introduction section has for centuries been recited in every Bosnian mosque, but in recent decades it is increasingly being replaced by Qur'an, 2:185: “The month of Ramadan, wherein the Recitation was sent down to be a guidance to the people, and as a clear signs of the Guidance and the Salvation!” The reasons for this are the same as for the omission or deletion of verse 3:37: “Whenever Zachariah went in to her in the Mihrab.” Calligraphic inscriptions of these words from the Qur'an were standard in the mihrabs of old Bosnian mosques, but in recent decades some have even been erased, and in the mihrabs of new mosques they are often replaced by part of verse 2:144: “Turn thy face towards the Holy Mosque.” One could see in this change the ideological influences that attest to the modern loss of awareness of the unbroken course of the Bosnian tradition. The verses that are removed bear ritual and doctrinal witness to the unbroken link between the Muslim heritage and the Christian past, which is incomprehensible to the fundamentalist view of history, in which God is reduced to history and equated with the goal defined and attained by the religious community. The transcendent unity of the different paths to God is thus replaced by the horizontal link between nations and separate teleologies, in which the oneness of God is replaced by the oneness of the nation.

22. The phrase “people of peace” correspondes to the Arabic *muslimun*. It should not be forgotten that in the Gospel, Jesus son of Mary refers to such people. The Greek noun used is *eirenopoioi* (See Matthew 5:9).
23. See Murata and Chittick (1996) for more on the semantic fields in the divine discourse of the Qur’an of the verbal nouns *islam*, or being at peace and finding peace in the will of God; *iman*, or belief, which is loving what one knows and knowing what one loves; *ihsan*, or doing what is beautiful; and *sā’a*, or the present hour.
24. John 5:32, 37; and John 5:9–12; Romans 1:9; Philippians 1:8; and Thess. 2:5.
25. Acts 1:8; Apocalypse 1:5.
26. I Sam. 12:5; Job 16:19, etc.
27. Is. 43:10, 12; 44:8.
28. Wensinck (1941:97).
29. See Goldziher (1971:2:350–51).
30. Mavro Orbini, the late 16th century historian from Dubrovnik, writes of Stjepan II Kotromanić (d. 1353) that he was “true to the Greek rite” (1999:414).
31. For the tradition of Cyril and Methodius and its part in the Bosnian heritage, see Hadžijahić (2004:224 et.seq.).
32. For the adjective “Greek” to denote the rite and canon that is distinct from the Latin, see the entries in Budmani (1887–91:3:397).
33. For more see Jurić-Kappel (2002:75–94).
34. The Arabic versions of these are: *Fātihah al-Kitāb*, *Umm al-Kitāb*, *Sūrat al-Hamd* and *Asās al-Qur’an*.
35. Ibid, 61:13. On 12 March 2010, the writer was told of this custom in the old mosque in Babunović, which is still followed in the new one, by Mehmedalija Hadžić, who has himself taken part in it. The residents of the village are aware of the antiquity of this custom. The present imam of the mosque in Babunovići, Ahmed Mujkić, told the writer that the villagers say the custom has been transmitted from one imam to another; he himself received it from his predecessor, Mustafa Sarajlić, who had it from Mustafa Mujkić, who in turn had it from Ibrahim Sarajlić, to whom it was conveyed by mulla Omer Ferizović, who had it from mulla Meho Ferizović. This is as far back as Ahmed Mujkić knows in the chain of transmission.

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