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RECEPTION OF JOHN V.A. FINE JR.'S *THE BOSNIAN CHURCH: A NEW INTERPRETATION:* INTERESTING SLEEVE OF A NEVER ENDING HISTORIOGRAPHICAL DEBATE*

Abstract. Historiography about the medieval Bosnian Church is a vast and complicated labyrinth, with many different sections and subsections regarding its teachings, where authors are least likely to find a compromise, or some common ground. Very often, the ruling ideologies have intertwined their interests and influences in this field of medieval study, causing the emergence of very intense emotions in wider circles of population. One remarkable episode in history of research and study of the Bosnian Church is the occurrence of medievalist from United States of America, John V.A. Fine Jr., who arrived in Bosnia and Yugoslavia at the peak of the Cold War. Fine proved to be a very meticulous researcher, who produced a book under the title: *The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation. A Study of the Bosnian Church and its Place in State and Society from the 13th to the 15th Centuries* which immediately caused disturbance and wide range of reactions. With his aligning with the historiographical stream which doesn't see the Bosnian Church as a dualistic heretical institution, rather a monastic community independent from both of the big churches of the time, Fine gave additional fuel to this theory, a theory somewhat weakened in that period as its main protagonist Jaroslav Šidak had a change of mind. The main goal of this paper is to study the immediate reactions on Fine's thesis, in forms of reviews of his book, as well its influence in the subsequent decades of the historiographical studies of the Bosnian Church.

Keywords: Bosnian Church, John V.A. Fine Jr., heresy, medieval Bosnia, historiography

Attitude towards history in general, and medieval studies in particular in Socialist Yugoslavia does not even closely resemble the attitude in the most of countries on the east side of the Iron Curtain. The pressure by the State and the Party rarely affected the work of historians and their writings¹. As an argument for

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¹ S. KOREN, *Politika povijesti u Jugoslaviji (1945–1960)*, Zagreb 2012, p. 118; B. JANKOVIĆ, *Mijenjanje sebe same. Preobrazbe hrvatske historiografije kasnog socijalizma*, Zagreb 2016, p. 20.

this theory there are some contemporary testimonies by historians of that time, as well as assessments from independent foreign scholars². However, despite the mentioned relaxed atmosphere in the historical studies, and generally good relations that Yugoslavia had with the Western political centres, the sudden arrival of the American scholar John V.A. Fine Jr. in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the task of researching for his thesis regarding the history of the Bosnian Church, most definitely caused some commotion. Suspicions regarding his possible spying duties inevitably had to arise, and even survived to the modern period in some irrelevant literature. However, as far as we can conclude from later writings from Fine Jr., during his stay in Bosnia and Yugoslavia, he did not experience anything but a traditional hospitality of the people he worked with.

John Van Antwerp Fine Jr., was born on 9. September 1939 in Williamstown, Berkshire County, Massachusetts, U.S.A., in the family of renowned historian of ancient period John Van Antwerp Fine Sr., Professor of Greek History in the Classics Department of Princeton University and Elizabeth Bunting Fine, also a classicist who taught Latin and Greek in a private school³. He graduated at Harvard University, and earned his PhD at the University of Michigan in 1968 where he taught until the retirement. Fine's most important publications include two volumes on early and late medieval Balkans, a synthesis on Bosnian overall history that he wrote with his former student Robert Donia, and book about pre-modern history of Croatia⁴. However, his definitely most important and most famous book is the one with which we will deal in this paper, dedicated to the Bosnian Church, one of the most prominent features of Bosnian medieval history. Originally, *The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation. A Study of the Bosnian Church and its Place in State and Society form the 13th to the 15th Centuries* was published in 1975, and then translated (unfortunately, very poorly) to Bosnian 30 years later, while its second edition on English was published in 2007⁵. Beside these books Fine

² Cf. the testimony of a leading Yugoslavian medievalist in: С. БИРКОВИЋ, *О историографију и методологију*, Београд 2007, p. 208–209. Also cf. the reply of John V.A. Fine on one nationalist writing where it is claimed that a ruling ideology actually buried medieval studies in socialist Yugoslavia: J. FINE JR., *Letters-Lettres*, ERH 2.2, 1995, p. 281.

³ These biographical data are taken from a booklet published on the occasion of a *tribute and symposium in honor of John V.A. Fine Jr., professor of history*, organized at University of Michigan on September 29, 2007.

⁴ J. FINE JR., *The Early Medieval Balkans. A Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century*, Ann Arbor 1983; IDEM, *The Late Medieval Balkans. A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*, Ann Arbor 1987; IDEM, *When Ethnicity did not Matter in the Balkans. A Study of Identity in Pre-Nationalist Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia in Medieval and Early-Modern Periods*, Ann Arbor 2006; IDEM, R. DONIA, *Bosnia and Hercegovina. A Tradition Betrayed*, London 1994.

⁵ J. FINE JR., *The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation. A Study of the Bosnian Church and its Place in State and Society form the 13th to the 15th Centuries*, New York–London 1975; IDEM, *Bosanska crkva: novo tumačenje. Studija o Bosanskoj crkvi, njenom mjestu u državi i društvu od 13. do 15. stoljeća*,

contributed to the historiography about medieval Bosnia with several scientific articles which did not have nearly as significant impact as the *New Interpretation*⁶.

In order to fully understand the significance of this book for this paper, and its place in the historiography about Bosnian Church, it is essential primarily to understand the development of this branch of medieval studies in Bosnia, and then to overview the reactions on Fine's books and its influence on modern historiography.

Short review of historiography about the Bosnian Church

One of the most prominent features in medieval Bosnia studies is an overwhelming lack of the domestic sources, especially those not linked with high political affairs, or with everyday economic and diplomatic relations with Dubrovnik/Ragusa. Centuries after the collapse of the Bosnian Kingdom in 1463 were very unfriendly to the medieval legacy, as thousands of these documents and charters perished without a trace.

That fact in particular, the lack of information on customs and teachings of krstjani from Bosnia, combined with a constantly intense political situation in the modern-day South-Eastern Europe, resulted with very heterogeneous theories in historiography, very often irreconcilably in conflict with one another.

These historiographical debates began with the very first book dedicated to the Bosnian Church, published in 1867 when Božidar Petranović, a lawyer and secretary of the Orthodox diocese in Šibenik, wrote his book *Bogomils, the Bosnian Church and krstjani. An Historical Treatise* inside which he lays the foundation

trans. T. PRAŠTALO, Sarajevo 2005; IDEM, *The Bosnian Church. Its Place in State and Society from the Thirteenth to the Fifteenth Centuries*, London 2007.

⁶ Four of these articles are about the Bosnian Church and were published before the book, or soon after its publication: J. FINE JR., *Aristodios and Rastudije. A Re-examination of the Question*, GIBH 16, 1965, p. 223–229; IDEM, *Улога босанске цркве у јавном животу средњовековне Босне*, GIBH 19, 1970–1971, p. 19–29; IDEM, *Zaključci mojih posljednjih istraživanja o pitanju Bosanske crkve*, [in:] *Bogomislam in the Balkans in the Light of the Latest Research*, ed. Lj. LAPE, A. BENAC, S. ĆIRKOVIĆ, Skopje 1982, p. 127–133; IDEM, *Mid-Fifteenth Century Sources on the Bosnian Church: their Problems and Significance*, MHu 12, 1984, p. 17–31. One additional paper is dedicated to another religious topic from medieval period: IDEM, *Mysteries about the Newly Discovered Srebrenica-Visoko Bishopric in Bosnia (1434–1441)*, EEQ 8, 1974, p. 29–43. The remaining articles are devoted to more themes from political history: IDEM, *Was the Bosnian Banate Subjected to Hungary in the Second Half of the Thirteenth Century?*, EEQ 3, 1969, p. 167–177; IDEM, *Новооткривени извор о приликама у Босни 1400. године*, GIBH 38, 1987, p. 107–109; IDEM, *The Medieval and Ottoman Roots of Modern Bosnian Society*, [in:] *The Muslims of Bosnia – Herzegovina. Their Historic Development from the Middle Ages to the Dissolution of Yugoslavia*, ed. M. PINSON, Cambridge 1994, p. 1–21; IDEM, *A Tale of Three Fortresses. Controversies Surrounding the Turkish Conquest of Smederevo, of an Unnamed Fortress at the Junction of the Sava and Bosna, and of Bobovac*, [in:] *Peace and War in Byzantium. Essays in Honor of George T. Dennis, S.J.*, ed. T.S. MILLER, J.W. NESBITT, Washington 1995, p. 181–196.

of the historiographical theory linking the Bosnian Church with the Serbian Orthodox Confession⁷. This provoked a reaction from Franjo Rački, a famous Croatian historian and catholic priest, who researched the issue of heresy in Bosnia for some time, compelling him to publish his analyses as soon as possible. This happened two years later, in 1869, when his three-part article *Bogomils and Patarens* was published in a magazine *Rad* by the Yugoslavian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb⁸. There, on more than 250 pages, he formulated his views on Bosnian heresy, linking it with other heretical movements in Europe, like Cathars in France, patarens in Italy and bogomils in Bulgaria, promoting the Bosnian krstjani as a missing link between those dualistic heretics. This way, two “main standpoints” were created, and in the following decades the historians from Croatia (like Ferdo Šišić, Ćiro Truhelka and others) followed the Rački framework, while those from Serbia (like Glušac or Tomić) accepted the Petranović approach, even further radicalizing it. Only at the eve of the Second World War, a third option emerged. A young historian from Croatia, Jaroslav Šidak, in his PhD thesis “The Question of the Bosnian Church in our historiography, from Petranović to Glušac” with the subtitle “A contribution to the solution of the so-called Bogomil question”, through meticulous critique of the previous writings, promoted his view on the Bosnian Church. He saw this institution and its members not as dualistic heretics, or as a branch of Eastern Orthodoxy, but as a schismatic unreformed organization which didn’t have theological but structural differences with the Roman Church⁹. This way a third and final substantial historiographical framework regarding the teachings of Bosnian Church had emerged.

After World War II, especially after the establishment of University of Sarajevo and the Academy of Science and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1950s, an era of intense historiographical production about the Bosnian Church had begun. Many authors researched and published their findings, classifying themselves among one of the three main historiographical branches, sometimes with their own nuances which created somewhat different opinions on different subtopics. It is interesting to notice several important changes. The Petranović’s branch almost disappeared with only a few slightly important followers after the WWII; Inside the Rački’s frame, most important contributors were the famous Serbian medievalist Sima Ćirković, and his student Pejo Ćošković who formed a special historiographical thesis called “syncretic theory” with which he advocated that the Bosnian Church was formed by joining the parts of the Bosnian chapter which remained behind after the dislocation of the diocese, with the local heretical community;

⁷ Б. ПЕТРАНОВИЋ, *Богомили. Црква босанска и крстјани. Историчка расправа*, Задар 1867.

⁸ F. RAČKI, *Bogomili i Patareni*, RJAZU 7, 1869, p. 86–179, RJAZU 8, 1869, p. 121–187, RJAZU 10, 1870, p. 160–263; IDEM, *Bogomili i Patareni*, Zagreb 1870; IDEM, *Bogomili i Patareni*, Beograd 1931, p. 335–599; IDEM, *Bogomili i Patareni*, Zagreb 2003.

⁹ J. ŠIDAK, *Problem ‘bosanske crkve’ u našoj historiografiji od Petranovića do Gluša (Prilog rješenju t. zv. Bogumilskog pitanja)*, RJAZU 259, 1937, p. 37–182.

In the meantime out of the blue, Šidak decided to change his opinion, and shifted himself among the followers of Rački – a decision which was never adequately explained by Šidak. However, his historiographical branch didn't collapse, quite the opposite, it continued to develop and to attract new researchers (the main protagonist of our lecture being one of them). After the bloody dissolution of the Yugoslavia, and terrible wars that had been waged in these areas, medieval science continued to develop in different areas, but very rarely did young researchers choose the Bosnian Church as a subject of their work¹⁰.

This was a very brief sketch of the labyrinth which John V.A. Fine Jr. decided to enter when he arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the first time in the late 1960s and early 1970s. We can only imagine what sort of turbulence the arrival of an American historian at the peak of the Cold War caused in a socialist state which, to be honest, wasn't truly behind the Iron Curtain, although under deep influence of Marxist ideology. From the "Acknowledgements" in Fine's book we can see that he was warmly welcomed in Bosnia and Yugoslavia, and didn't have any obstacles in his research.

One episode from the time when Fine was in Bosnia for his research is of particular importance. The predominant ideology of the Yugoslav socialist society and its approach to the past was very closely linked to the branch of historiographical theories regarding the teaching of the Bosnian Church as heretic which is confirmed by the following testimony of Marianne Wenzel, another foreign researcher of Bosnian medieval past:

When I was a student, one evening in the 1960s I sat drinking loza on the floor of the studio of the artists Mile Ćorović and Mladen Kolobarić on the Sweet Corner in Sarajevo where I often went to paint. This studio was then part of the Workers' University, but is now a restaurant. John Fine was there, in course of collecting material for his important book *The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation* (New York and London, 1975). Both John Fine and I thought at that time, we were researching Bogomil culture – tombstones and the Bosnian Church. «Tell me», asked John Fine, «Have you found anything Bogomil about the stećci!» «No», I said honestly, «Not a trace. How about the Bosnian Church? Have you found Bogomilism there?» «No», said John «Nothing in the Bosnian Church was provable as Bogomil! And I've been hunting a long time». Together, then and there, we decided between us, there was nothing at all in Bosnian culture that was Bogomil, in spite of all we had been told to believe. The next day I went to see my mentor in the National Museum, Dr. Alojz Benac, who had inspired and encouraged the production of my book about stećci, Ukrašni motivi na stećcima,

¹⁰ There are several authors who track and analyze everything that has been published about the Bosnian Church. On this way a special section of medieval bibliography was created. These are those overviews: J. ŠIDAK, *Pitanje 'Crkve bosanske' u novijoj literaturi*, GIBH 5, 1953, p. 139–160; IDEM, *Današnje stanje pitanja 'Crkve bosanske' u historijskoj nauci*, HZb 7, 1954, p. 129–142; IDEM, *Problem heretičke 'Crkve bosanske' u najnovijoj historiografiji (1962–75)*, HZb 27–28, 1974–1975, p. 139–182; P. ČOŠKOVIĆ, *Četvrt stoljeća historiografije o Crkvi bosanskoj*, [in:] *Istorijska nauka o Bosni i Hercegovini u razdoblju 1990–2000*, ed. E. REDŽIĆ, Sarajevo 2003, p. 31–54; DŽ. DAUTOVIĆ, *Crkva bosanska: moderni historiografski tokovi, rasprave i kontroverze (2005–2015)*, HTra 15, 2015, p. 127–160.

allowing me help from the members of his staff, Vljako Palavestra, Nada Miletić and Đuro Basler – the last of which, now deceased, was always a devoted follower of the Bogomilian ideal. «Dr. Benac», I said, «There is something I have to tell you. Last night I conferred with John Fine, who is doing his thesis on the Bosnian Church. We concluded between us, there is nothing we can find that is Bogomil either on stećci, or about the Bosnian Church. I don't think Bogomils made stećci. I don't think they ever were here». «I know that», he said. «I have always known that. But it is not something I can say. You can say it, and I will help you».¹¹

Receptions of *A New Interpretation*

Reception of *The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation* can be divided in three main types. First the reviews published immediately after the publication of the book, then the deeper evaluations of his hypothesis in the writings of eminent scholars and ultimately the current perception which his books enjoy in modern historiography.

I managed to identify nine reviews of this book, published in the period from 1976 to 1979. They have several similar issues: most of them were written by scholars of Yugoslav origin, but none of them were specialists in Bosnian medieval history, or in fact medievalist from Yugoslavia. How can we explain the silence of Yugoslavian or Bosnian medievalists? Well, the first explanation must be the language barrier – at that time Russian and French were taught in schools, with English being quite exotic. The culture of book-reviewing also wasn't very widespread in Yugoslav magazines of that time, and finally the fact that Fine enjoyed very fine relations with the most of Yugoslav medievalists, so they perhaps felt some sort of collegiality which inhibited possible critique.

One of the earliest reviews was that of Paul Mojzes, professor of Religious studies at Rosemont College in his review published in "Church History" in 1976, who presented very short, mostly informative, but also highly commendable evaluation. Fine was characterized as rare example of *expert knowledge of a Balkan state by a person of non-Balkan origin*. The review was closed with the sentence: *I expect the book to become the classic work on the Bosnian Church and recommend it to all libraries as well as Eastern European and medieval historians*¹². However, his predictions that *any general medieval church history which is to be written from now on will have to take most seriously this new interpretation of the history of the church in Bosnia from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century*, proved to be too optimistic since this region remains blind spot in the most of the modern-day published synthesis regarding the medieval church history¹³.

¹¹ M. WENZEL, *Bosnian Style on Tombstones and Metal*, Sarajevo 1999, p. 165–166.

¹² P. MOJZES, [rec.:] *The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation*. By JOHN V.A. FINE, JR... – ChH 45, 1976, p. 251–252.

¹³ For example, J. Fine has not been cited, nor the Bosnian case was closely researched in: F.D. LOGAN, *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages*, London–New York 2002; C. HOFFMAN BERMAN,

Even though Bariša Krekić, a Serbian medievalist and lecturer at the UCLA, was part of the process of making this book¹⁴, his review, published at the "Slavic Review" in 1977, was mostly restrained and with huge reservation towards Fine's conclusions. He did describe the book as a welcome and useful addition to the debate about the Bosnian Church, especially regarding the introduction of considerable amount of anthropological material, but the main thesis of the nature of teachings of the Bosnian Church was evaluated as questionable, while Fine's attitude towards the sources was shown as speculative¹⁵. Krekić himself was not a specialist in medieval Bosnian history¹⁶, but he obviously belonged to that historiographical stream which was linking krstjani from Bosnia with the dualistic heretical movements.

In "Canadian Slavonic Papers" from 1978¹⁷, a Bosnian born emigrant from Yugoslavia and anthropologist from the University of Calgary, Vladimir Markotić, notorious for his contributions to cryptozoology and search for Bigfoot¹⁸, wrote a quite unfavorable review of *The Bosnian Church*. Being loyal to the idea that krstjani belonged to the dualistic network, he concluded that Fine, inside his book, *does not shake even for one moment the idea that the Bosnian Church was dualistic*. However, he did pay homage to Fine's criticism of the writings of Dominik Mandić.

The review published in "The Catholic Historical Review" by historian of the modern period Joseph Wieczynski was also short, with basic information, with one very interesting account. He stated: *Scholars who are not specialists in Bosnian history will find much to like and admire in this study [...] For the specialist in Bosnian religious history, here is a mine of material for disagreement and debate. It is safe to say, however, that no serious scholar will remain unaffected by what Professor Fine has done*¹⁹. Very similar is a review of Frank Wozniak where it is stated: *In the end, however, what Professor Fine has produced in this extremely convincing analysis of the Bosnian Church is more than a new interpretation of the intricate religious*

Medieval Religion. New Approaches, New York–London 2005; J.H. LYNCH, P.C. ADAMO, *The Medieval Church. A Brief History*, London–New York 2014.

¹⁴ At least, according to J. Fine in "Acknowledgements" of his book: [...] *Professors Edward Keenan and especially Barisa Krekic whose careful reading spared me from a variety of embarrassing errors*. J. FINE, *The Bosnian Church*..., p. ii.

¹⁵ B. KREKIĆ, [rec.:] *The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation*... – SRev 36, 1977, p. 147–148.

¹⁶ A great expert on medieval Dubrovnik (Ragusa) and Adriatic region, Krekić wrote only four articles linked with medieval Bosnia, which did not caused a great attention in domestic historiographies: B. KREKIĆ, *Prilog istoriji mletačko-balkanske trgovine druge polovine XIV veka*, GFNS 2, 1957, p. 11–19; IDEM, *Mleci i unutrašnjost Balkana u četrnaestom veku*, ZPBI 21, 1982, p. 143–158; IDEM, *Dva priloga bosanskoj istoriji prve polovine petnaestog vijeka*, GIBH 37, 1986, p. 129–142; IDEM, *Ćirkulacija informacija između Dubrovnika i Bosne u prvoj polovini XV vijeka*, GIBH 39, 1988, p. 50–56.

¹⁷ V. MARKOTIĆ, [rec.:] *The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation*. JOHN V.A. FINE, Jr... – CSP 20, 1978, p. 125–126.

¹⁸ Cf. <https://searcharchives.ucalgary.ca/index.php/dr-vladimir-markotic-fonds> [15 IV 2022].

¹⁹ J.L. WIECZYNSKI, [rec.:] *The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation*... – CHR 64, 1978, p. 306–307.

*problems of Bosnia in the later Middle Ages. He has given us a thorough discussion of the political history of medieval Bosnia and Hercegovina, a political history which is intricate in itself but the explanation of which serves as a further important contribution of this work*²⁰.

Theologian Josip Horak in "Journal of Church and State", wrote a quite positive review stating that the book was excellent, and an enormous contribution to the topic, clear of burdens of either nationalistic or religious partiality so characteristic for domestic scholars. The only critique in this short review refers to Fine's statement that the Bosnian Church did not attempt to establish close ties with the peasant population (p. 387). Of course, the reviewer himself made, for that time, a frequent mistake – linking the medieval Bosnian tombstones *stećci* exclusively with the members and believers of the Bosnian confession²¹. Vasko Simoniti, a historian of the period 16th–18th Centuries, and a current Minister of Culture of Slovenia (since 2020) in review published in Slovenian magazine "Zgodovinski časopis", wasn't too impressed with Fine's arguments, mostly with his description of Bosnia as a backward and uneducated country, and instead of Fine's book, he recommended another publication from the same year *Studije o "Crkvi bosanskoj" i bogumilstvu* by Jaroslav Šidak²². George P. Majeska, Professor of Russian and Byzantine History at the University of Maryland, considers Fine's book [...] *an extremely lucid study of a confusing historical Phenomenon*. He is also the only author who emphasized the political role of the Hungarian kingdom in the process of dealing with heresy in Bosnia²³.

Apart from these reviews, one stands out as an exception though it can barely be designated as a review, more as a profound analysis of Fine's thesis with all the features of a paper. It is a text of Srećko M. Džaja, a historian of Bosnian origin, with a German work address, who is one of the renowned modern researchers of Bosnian heresy. This text was initially published in 1978/1979 in German and in domestic language and then, after the publication of the second edition of the Fine's book it appeared again as a shorter version in German in 2008²⁴. In these reviews, most importantly, Džaja discards Fine's interpretation of the writings

²⁰ F.E. WOZNIAK, [rec.:] *John V.A. Fine Jr., The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation...* – BS 20, 1979, p. 185–187.

²¹ J. HORAK, [rec.:] *The Bosnian Church, A New Interpretation...* – JCSt 21, 1979, p. 583–584.

²² V. SIMONITI, [rec.:] *John V.A. Fine, Jr., The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation...* – ZČ 33, 1979, p. 190–191.

²³ G.P. MAJESKA, [rec.:] *John V.A. Fine, Jr. The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation...* – AHR 82, 1977, p. 346–347.

²⁴ S.M. DŽAJA, [rec.:] *Noch eine fragliche Interpretation der bosnischen mittelalterlichen Konfessionsgeschichte*, MZBa 1, 1978, p. 247–254; IDEM, *Fineova interpretacija bosanske srednjovjekovne konfesionalne povijesti*, [in:] *Povijesno-teološki simpozij u povodu 500. obljetnice smrti bosanske kraljice Katarine*, ed. J. TURČINOVIĆ, Sarajevo 1979, p. 52–59; IDEM, [rec.:] *John Fine, The Bosnian Church...* – SF 67, 2008, p. 431–435.

of Mauro Orbini, chronicler from the beginning of 17th Century, one of main arguments for the existence of two different religious groups in medieval Bosnia²⁵. Later, Džaja acknowledges Fine's explanation of the political situation in medieval Bosnia as mostly successful but overly based on Serbian interpretations. Fine's interpretation of Bosnian medieval peasantry he considers one-sided and based on the ethnological material from later centuries, after massive migrations caused by the Ottoman conquest. Džaja also noticed one factual mistake in Fine's translation of a very important source from Dubrovnik – when allegedly Bosnians referred to their monks as patarens, while the correct translation shows a different meaning. In conclusion, Džaja states that Fine's interpretation represents a distinctly sociopolitical interpretation of the Bosnian confessional history, and as such it indirectly manifests all the limitations of such approach.

Probably the main authority for the history of the Bosnian Church in the second half of the 20th Century – Croatian historian Jaroslav Šidak also gave his insight on Fine's thesis. It should be noted that *A New Interpretation* was published in the same year as previously mentioned Šidak's collection of previously published articles, named *Studies on the Bosnian Church and Bogomilism*²⁶. So, *A New interpretation* was a subject in a subsequently published article titled *Heretical Bosnian Church*, published in 1977²⁷. Šidak was also critical of Fine's methodology. Applying some sociological methods, which themselves should be a subject of a discussion, he refuted a common opinion of close connections between krstjani and the goals of nobility and state power. For him, Fine's methodological treatment of sources and results of previous research cannot always be evaluated as flawless. The main positive feature of Fine's book according to Šidak was that, with his exhaustive knowledge of Yugoslav literature, Fine would bring the problem of medieval Bosnian history much closer to the Anglo-American audience. At one point, Šidak stated that with his concept Fine actually *returned to the original thesis of the author of these lines*. We already stressed the significance that this apostasy by J. Šidak had in the second part of his career regarding the teachings of the Bosnian Church. He himself justified that move with some, very vague explanations

²⁵ M. Orbini presumed that in medieval Bosnia existed two groups of heretics, patarens and manichaeans, who lived next to each other. M. ORBINI, *Il regno degli Slavi hoggi corrottamente detti Schiavoni historia*, Pesaro 1601, p. 354: *Il sudetto Frate Pellegrino fù fatto Vescouo di Bosna dopò hauer conuertiti i Patarini heretici: de' quali vn'altra forte era in Bosna, chiamati Manichei*. J. Fine liked M. Orbini's idea of two different religious groups, although not their identification: *It is clear that Orbini did not clearly differentiate between the two movements and at times attributed to one what should have been attributed to the other. Yet his general idea does provide a means for resolving our dilemma. In fact, it is the only solution that does not require the discarding or ignoring of a large number of sources. Thus the possibility that Bosnia contained both a dualist heresy and a schismatic non-dualist Bosnian Church is seriously examined in this study*. J. FINE, *The Bosnian Church...*, p. 3–4.

²⁶ J. ŠIDAK, *Studije o "Crkvi bosanskoj" i bogumilstvu*, Zagreb 1975.

²⁷ IDEM, *Heretička "Crkva bosanska"*, Slo 27, 1977, p. 149–184.

involving the writings of a French historian Antoine Dondaine and his arguments. However, Šidak never cordially defended the thesis of the heretical nature of Bosnian krstjani the way he defended his original thesis.

Switching back to the evaluations of *A New Interpretation* among historians we arrive to the next one by Sima Ćirković which was, among the majority of historians researching the Bosnian medieval period, including John Fine himself, considered as the most important medievalist. Fine was very close with Ćirković, a lecturer at the University of Belgrade, learning mostly from him a lot of details about the political and religious history of medieval Bosnia. Even in a previously mentioned review by Srećko Džaja, Fine is criticized that his view of the Bosnian Middle Ages is too closely linked with the view by Ćirković. Inside his very influential chapter titled “Bosnian Church in the Bosnian state”, from 1987, Ćirković commends Fine’s analysis of a highly interesting manuscript called Batal’s gospel, which contained the list of the previous religious leaders of the Bosnian krstjani community. Fine was, along with Alexander Solovjev, one of first authors who tried to find historical data on those men mentioned on that list. However, Ćirković did not share Fine’s reservation toward the originality of one Bosnian charters, specifically one issued by the nobleman Juraj Vojsalić to his subordinates, the family of Radivojevići in 1434, where the Franciscans were mentioned as the moral guarantors of the contents of the charter, the role previously reserved for the members of the Bosnian Church. This evaluation was extended with a critique of one of the main features of Fine’s hypothesis – the one suggesting weakness of influence by the Bosnian Church on the political life of the Bosnian state²⁸.

I already stated that the main follower of Ćirković’s view on the teaching of the Bosnian Church was his student Pejo Ćošković, who defended his PhD thesis “The Bosnian Church in the 15th Century” in 1988, but published only in 2005, due to the outbreak of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He regarded Fine as the most ardent defender of the catholic origin and canonical teachings of the Bosnian Church. He repeated the already listed critiques regarding the sociological methods used in *A New Interpretation*. Ćošković didn’t have a problem to emphasize the positive sides of Fine’s analyses as well, such as the very well conducted research regarding the role of krstjani in diplomatic missions for Bosnian noblemen²⁹.

Major importance of *A New Interpretation* was its power to bring the Bosnian Church and Bosnian medieval history to the front of the medievalist scene of the world, where knowledge about medieval Bosnia was generally very limited³⁰. Without going into a detailed review of Fine’s reception in world historiography,

²⁸ S. ĆIRKOVIĆ, *Bosanska crkva u bosanskoj državi*, [in:] *Prilozi za istoriju Bosne i Hercegovine I. Društvo i privreda srednjovjekovne bosanske države*, ed. E. REĐIĆ, Sarajevo 1987, p. 223–227.

²⁹ P. ČOŠKOVIĆ, *Crkva bosanska u XV. stoljeću*, Sarajevo 2005, p. 68.

³⁰ A blame for that situation lies on the bourden of domestic authors who in a previous decades rarely published on some of the world languages. Cf. DŽ. DAUTOVIĆ, *Novi prilozi poznavanju vjerskih prilika srednjovjekovne Bosne u inostranoj historiografiji*, Bfr 48, 2018, p. 203–212.

which would fall outside the scope of this paper, we can conclude that, the reception in those circles was also polarized, with an overwhelming majority of authors disagreeing with Fine's conclusions. For example, in his chapter in *The New Cambridge Medieval Studies* vol. V, Bernard Hamilton used Fine even more often than the book by Franjo Šanjek³¹, but in his thoughts on Bosnian heresy he was much closer to the latter one³². On the other hand, Fine and his theories were of enormous value for the analyses of young German medievalist Manuel Lorenz, for his very interesting paper *Bogomilen, Katharer und bosnische 'Christen'. Der Transfer dualistischer Häresien zwischen Orient und Okzident*³³.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, I will try to summarize main features of John V.A. Fine Jr's hypothesis, with the current state of medieval science regarding the Bosnian Church.

- 1) Bosnian Church was an institution which existed in medieval Bosnia from the middle of the 13th Century, until the Ottoman conquests in third quarter of 15th Century. – Fine was indeed one of the first historians who correctly stated that the Bosnian Church was created around the half of the 13th Century. In the previous decades, krstjani existed in Bosnia, but solely as a monastic community.

³¹ F. Šanjek's book also had a great impact on the foreign authors who wrote about the Bosnian Church, since it is published in French: F. ŠANJEK, *Les Chrétiens bosniaques et le mouvement cathare, XIF–XV^e siècles*, Paris 1976. This author was one of the main protagonists of Rački's theory about teachings of the Bosnian Church and its connections with the western heretical movements. J. Fine was not impressed a lot with this book. In his review: J. FINE JR., [rec.:] *Franjo Šanjek, Les Chrétiens bosniaques...* – S 53, 1978, p. 414–416 he stated: *Beyond a basic disagreement over the theology of the church – and it should be stressed that to date far more scholars have accepted the position Šanjek takes than the various variant versions produced by myself and others – I have serious reservations about Šanjek's book. [...] Šanjek never produces a consecutive history of the church or any aspect of it. Although he comments on the role of the church in the state and on the relations between it and the nobility, these important issues are covered superficially [...] Šanjek has a tendency to illustrate points rather than to prove them and frequently generalizes from one or two examples. [...] I do not criticize Šanjek for coming to a dualist conclusion; fine scholars (such as Babić, Ćirković, Kniewald, and Šidak) have come to the same conclusion after weighing the evidence. Šanjek, however, fails to see the contradictions in the sources as a serious problem, requiring an attempt at reconciling the conflicting information.*

³² B. HAMILTON, *The Albigensian Crusade and Heresy*, [in:] *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. V, ed. D. ABULAFIA, Cambridge 1999, p. 164–180. Similar disagreement can be found in: J. HAMILTON, B. HAMILTON, Y. STOYANOV, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c. 650 – c. 1450*, Manchester–New York 1998, p. 47, 51, 52; Y.P. STOYANOV, *The Other God. Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy*, Yale 2000.

³³ M. LORENZ, *Bogomilen, Katharer und bosnische "Christen". Der Transfer dualistischer Häresien zwischen Orient und Okzident (11.–13. jh.)*, [in:] *Vermitteln – Übersetzen – Begegnen. Transferphänomene im europäischen Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit. Interdisziplinäre Annäherungen*, ed. B.J. NEMES, A. RABUS, Göttingen 2011, p. 87–136.

It is unfortunate that he didn't firmly connect this process with the transfer of the Bosnian bishopric to the territory of the Hungarian kings³⁴. Modern medieval science usually moves the date of creation of the Bosnian Church a little bit further – at the 1270s – 1280s³⁵. Regarding the end of its existence, it must be corrected that Ottomans didn't have anything with that – actually, Bosnian king Stephen Tomaš in 1459 ordered the termination of its activity³⁶. In the following years members of the Bosnian Church managed to preserve their existence, as well as their followers, and we can trace them through the Ottoman lists of taxpayers almost to the beginning of the 17th Century³⁷.

- 2) Bosnian Church wasn't a part of heretical dualistic movements, neither a part of Eastern Orthodox Church, but an independent organization.
- 3) The ingenious idea of the existence of two separate religious groups in medieval Bosnia – Theory that the Bosnian Church was in its nature a schismatic and not a heretic organization, while simultaneously in Bosnia another group of heretics existed which were the bearers of dualistic heresy, was very original, and seemingly acceptable conclusion given the information from the sources. However, it didn't have a solid proof foundation, and today it is mostly rejected in historiography.
- 4) Bosnian medieval society was uneducated and predominantly peasant, so it didn't have any theologians, or need for a deep understanding of faith. – This is one of the most problematic statements. First of all, without any necessity, the peasant society was linked with the religious institution. I am not sure whether anyone marked, to illustrate the point, English medieval bishops as uneducated because of the fact that medieval English society was also predominantly rural, as were many other societies in that period. Secondly, the Bosnian bishops before the 12th Century were of Cyrillo-Methodian tradition, therefore even though maybe they didn't know the Latin language, it cannot be said that they were illiterate. With such characterization, the author fell into the same trap as anti-heretical agitators which he criticizes in the book.
- 5) The Bosnian Church didn't play an important role in the medieval Bosnian state. – As we could see, this statement was disputed almost immediately after the publication of *A New Interpretation*. Failure to spot the significance of the

³⁴ About that process see: D. LOVRENOVIĆ, *Translatio sedis i uspostava novog konfesionalnog identiteta u srednjovjekovnoj Bosni – I*, [in:] *Franjevački samostan u Gučoj Gori*, ed. V. VALJAN, Guča Gora–Sarajevo 2010, p. 113–125; DŽ. DAUTOVIĆ, *Regio nullius dioecesis: kako je Bosna ostala bez biskupije? Procesi i posljedice*, [in:] *Prijelomne godine bosanskohercegovačke prošlosti (I)*, ed. S. BEŠLIJA, Sarajevo 2021, p. 75–92.

³⁵ S. ĆIRKOVIĆ, *Bosanska crkva...*, p. 210.

³⁶ P. ČOŠKOVIĆ, *Tomašev progon sljedbenika Crkve bosanske 1459.*, [in:] *Migracije i Bosna i Hercegovina*, Sarajevo 1990, p. 43–48.

³⁷ Cf. *Opširni popis Bosanskog sandžaka iz 1604. godine*, vol. I–IV, Sarajevo 2000.

Bosnian Church for the medieval Bosnian State really is the main, and maybe the only drastically wrong conception of Fine's hypothesis. During the Middle Ages the cooperation between secular and religious authorities was of inestimable importance for the proper function of the legal norms and interrelations between the crown and nobility, and so on. We have several sources that indicate that the spiritual leader of the Bosnian Church, an official with the rank of djed, was at the same time also a supreme judicial authority³⁸.

- 6) The Bosnian Church was a monastery organization. – This statement is impossible to dispute, albeit some authors in recent publications are trying to do just that. Of course, the Bosnian Church was built from the monastery organization of Bosnian krstjani, and prominent members of that community also were the members of the hierarchy of the Bosnian Church.
- 7) A very successful spread of Islam in Bosnia was the result of disappearance of some strong Christian religious organization in that area. – This is very important conclusion that shows how Fine did understand the complexity of the Bosnian religious mixture. It would be even better if he identified two main reasons for that situation: the transfer of the Bosnian bishopric to the Đakovo around 1250, and the termination of the Bosnian Church by king Tomaš in 1459.
- 8) Medieval Bosnian tombstones – called stećci are not exclusively used by the members of the Bosnian Church and their devotees. – With this conclusion Fine was way ahead of other historians, and only the recent analyses of the importance of these tombstones for the cultural history of medieval Bosnia, conducted by Dubravko Lovrenović, offer definite proof that an inter-confessional nature was one of the main features of stećci³⁹.

At very end, I have to say that the book *The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation* by John V.A. Fine Jr., represents one very particular example of all the problems that historian encounters while researching this topic. Fine's book deviates significantly from the usual historiographical standpoints among the Yugoslavian and post-Yugoslavian historians. True, we can classify it as one branch of the Old Šidak's frame, but it is so different from others that we can freely name it as Fine's historiographical theory. Among everything that was written about medieval Bosnia from foreign historians, Fine's contributions are by far of superior quality and I am hoping that *A New Interpretation* will get at least a new translation, of better quality, in Bosnian language.

³⁸ P. ČOŠKOVIĆ, *Ogledanje krivnje u srednjovjekovnoj bosanskoj državi*, [in:] *Bogišić i kultura sjećanja*, ed. J. KREGAR, Zagreb 2011, p. 338–356.

³⁹ D. LOVRENOVIĆ, *Stećci. Bosansko i humsko mramorje srednjeg vijeka*, Zagreb 2013, p. 315–360; DŽ. DAUTOVIĆ, *Crkva bosanska i stećci*, HMI 6, 2020, p. 11–44.

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