

## Hasluck *Redux*: Contemporary Sharing of Shrines in Macedonia

Glen BOWMAN, University of Kent

### Introduction

In the 1980s, while engaged in field research on Christian use of holy sites in the Jerusalem and Bethlehem districts of Israel and the Israeli-Occupied Territories, I became intrigued with a scattering of sites which Muslim and Christian Palestinians alike either gathered together at on the occasion of holy days or visited, alone or in small groups, in pursuit of healings or blessings. In researching such occasions and their settings, I not only came across the inspiring work of the Palestinian ethnographer and folklorist Taufik Canaan (1882-1964) who, in his seminal *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, wrote of practices and beliefs 'common to both Mohammedans and Christians among the Palestinian peasantry' (Canaan 1927: iv), but as well that of F. W. Hasluck who, in *Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans* (1929), described a rich range of inter-communal interaction around religious sites throughout the Balkans and beyond to the far edges of what had been the Ottoman Empire. My research, published as 'Nationalizing the sacred: shrines and shifting identities in the Israeli-occupied territories' in 1993 (and recently updated for the Lebanese journal *Chronos* [2007]), focussed on Palestinian material, but later fieldwork in Former Yugoslavia, as well as an engagement in *Current Anthropology* with Robert Hayden on the issue of 'sharing' (Bowman 2002), rekindled my interest in the 'sharing' of religious sites and pushed me to consider it in a comparative framework. That research is ongoing, and <sup>will</sup> ~~should~~ appear ~~in the spring of 2008~~ in a book to be called *On Common Ground: the Practice and Politics of 'Mixed Shrines' in Israel/Palestine and Macedonia (FYROM)*, but here I'd like to return to some of Hasluck's themes around Muslim-Christian interaction, testing them in the current Balkan situation and suggesting some reconceptualisations of their theoretical framing.

Hasluck -- seemingly [not unlike Hayden] -- appears to presume an historical trajectory aimed towards the extirpation of sharing; his final work, in which he analyses the sharing of holy sites, is entitled 'Transferences from Christianity to Islam and Vice Versa' (Hasluck 2000: 57-132). Hayden, in his 'Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans' (2002), argues that 'sharing' is no more than a temporary forestalling of the <sup>effacement</sup> obliteration of the other's presence and is better characterised as 'a pragmatic adaptation to a situation in which repression of the other group's practices may not

be possible' (Hayden 2002: 219). Hasluck's apparently parallel conception of sharing as merely a moment in a movement towards separation or conversion can, however, be seen as quite distinct from Hayden's when contextualised within Hasluck's attack on Sir William Ramsay's 'survivalism' (see Shankland 2004: 18-23). Ramsay had argued a radical a-historicism, contending that 'in many cases the attachment of religious veneration to particular localities in Asia Minor has continued through all changes in the dominant religion of the country' (Ramsay 1906: 167, cited in Shankland 2004, 19). Hasluck responded passionately to this perspective which, as Shankland points out, 'requires successive cultures to be frozen out of almost any possibility of social creativity by their predecessors, who have somehow imbued the landscape, and their culture, with permanent sacred meaning' (Shankland 2004: 20). Hasluck, throughout the ethnographically rich study of all sorts of religious shrines -- from urban churches to rural springs, argued that

'while Islam in Turkey can be proved in many instances to have succeeded to a material inheritance from Christendom, a corresponding "spiritual" inheritance is seldom proved and generally unprovable. In the few cases where it can be authenticated, the inherited sanctity seems due less to any vague awe attaching to particular localities than to the desire to continue / the practical benefits, especially healing, derived from the cult of the dead....The traditions of Moslem shrines are mortal likewise....' (Hasluck 2000: 129 and 132).

Hasluck, in other words, is discursively positioned by his argument with Ramsay to focus on the interface between Muslim and Christian engagements with shrines and to stress, at that interface, the signs of rupture and appropriation. Nonetheless, and this is what drew me to his work in the first place, his text itself is full of fascinating moments of Muslim-Christian interaction which belies any sense of antagonism and, in fact, suggests that on the level of popular culture there was considerable amity.

The research I describe in the following was provoked both by my antipathetic response to Hayden's concept of the incommensurability of cultures and by my desire to expand upon the moments of apparent amity I'd seen in Hasluck's work as well as in my observations at Mar Elyas, Bir es-Sayideh, and elsewhere in the Bethlehem District of Palestine. Although it was quite clear to me that 'sharing' was tenuous, and quite susceptible to influences <sup>A</sup> operating on those who visited shrines { both from respective religious hierarchies and from the encompassing political contexts (see, for instance, Duijzings 1993

and 2000), it seemed important to focus on those actions and beliefs which sustained communication and collaboration between cultures rather than simply stressing the forces which disrupt community. As, however, the following reports demonstrate, inter-communal community is very much at risk in the current climate of cultural and national essentialisms. Nonetheless it is important to stress its possibility and, in so doing, to work against those forces which provoke and legitimate antagonistic intolerance.

### **Field Agenda**

By the time of my first formal Macedonian fieldwork in April 2006 I had programmatically abandoned the term 'shared' in the delineation of shrines and replaced it with 'mixed'. I could not abandon the term 'shrine' (by which I meant a place associated with a divinity, sacred figure, or relic, usually protected or signified by some sort of edifice) without extending the matter to be examined to absurd dimensions, but 'shared' already seemed too strongly to connote an amity which I might be wrong to presuppose. I knew that what I had seen in Palestine in the mid-eighties -- where strong indications of Muslim-Christian amicability seemed to reflect not only consciousness of the common *habitus* of the two interpenetrating communities but as well a solidarity in the face of Israeli occupation -- had been eroded over the following twenty years by the Israeli state's, the Palestinian Authority's, and the religious leaderships' divisive policies (whether intentionally or inadvertently -- see Bowman 2007). While I knew that Macedonia, like Palestine, had a mixed Muslim-Christian population which used, often at the same times, the same holy places, I also knew that it was also very different in having a dissimilar confessional demography, a 'national minority' (Albanian-speaking Muslims) which had recently engaged in a nationalist uprising, and a government which had only recently retreated from being aggressively pro-Orthodox in practice and policy. I could not presuppose sharing, but knew, from an earlier exploratory visit (July 2005) that Muslims came to Orthodox sites and, at least in one case, Orthodox Christians worshipped at a disused mosque. Mixing at a shrine, whether or not at the same times, would do as a term to designate the use by two or more communities of the same site without too far presupposing the character, and extent, of that 'sharing'.

Within Macedonia I chose to look at three sites, two in Western Macedonia and one in the Northeast. The first, *Sveti Nikola* (Saint Nicholas), is a tiny Macedonian Orthodox church on the outskirts of Makedonski Brod, a rural municipality of approximately 6000 inhabitants (all

Christian). What designated the church for selection was the presence *within* the church of a *turbe* (tomb) of a *Bektashi* saint, *Hadir Bābā*, which was visited by *Bektashi* and members of other Sufi orders as well as by Macedonian-Albanian Sunni Muslims from not only neighbouring mixed villages but also from more distant sites. The second site is *Sveta Bogorodica Precista* (Immaculate Mother of God) outside of Kicevo (a mixed city in a region with a profoundly mixed Muslim-Christian population). *Sveta Bogorodica* is a large active Orthodox monastery whose spectacular 19<sup>th</sup> century church contains within it a well over which is a pierced stone through which both Muslim and Christian visitors crawl prior to taking away water from the well. Finally, the *Husamedin Pasha* mosque is an empty early 16<sup>th</sup> century mosque overlooking the city of Stip, a city with a Orthodox majority which nonetheless contains significant populations of Sufi *Roma* as well as Macedonian-speaking Sunni Muslims. The mosque contains within its grounds a *Halveti* Sufi *turbe* where *Ashura* celebrations are carried out by the town's Sunni and *Halveti* Muslims, but the mosque itself is opened on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August for a priest-led celebration of the Orthodox feast of the Prophet Elijah. The three sites, respectively, represent a popular mixed shrine with evidence of both Christian and Muslim objects of reverence, a Christian church in which Muslims and Christians alike engage in rituals which appear to be markedly Christian, and a Muslim place of worship which Christians and Muslims both seek to expropriate, ritually and physically, as their own. The three distinct sites allow for observations of what at least formally seem to be 'mixing of practices', 'sharing of practices', and 'antagonistic tolerance'. I hope to be able, in the following three scenarios, to suggest aspects of Orthodox Christian relations to Muslims with whom they meet -- face to face or through evidence of their frequentation of the sites -- at or around mixed holy places.

### ***First Scenario: Sveti Nikola***

*Sveti Nikola* is a small Orthodox church hidden within a grove of trees overlooking the town of Makedonski Brod. One approaches up a long flight of stone steps which carries the visitor from the old Ottoman period houses at the base of the hill, past concrete communist period housing blocs, to a gateway flanked on the left by a niche containing a simple painting of St. Nicholas -- worn around the mouth from continuously being touched -- and surmounted (at least on our initial approach) by an eight inch high cross surrounded by simple iron scrollwork. The church itself is a small square building (six and a half metres on each side) with an apse on the <sup>southern</sup> south wall which, from the difference in roofing materials, <sup>is clearly</sup> appears a later addition. There is no cross on the roof of the church, although a small indented cross is

worked into plaster above the narrow window of the apse. The interior of the church is simple, with a stone slab floor covered with a multitude of diverse and overlapping pieces of carpet. The wooden *iconostasis* is covered with pictures of saints, apparently locally done. On the right of the church, running parallel to the <sup>eastern</sup> south wall, is a flat-topped platform approximately two meters long by three quarters of a meter wide raised about forty centimetres above the floor level and covered with multiple layers of cloth (the top covering green with a gold piece beneath it). Closer observation shows that, particularly in the vicinity of this platform, the carpets and the pictures on and leaning against the wall are Muslim and represent Mecca, Ali and Hussein, and moments of what is in effect Shi'a history.

There are two ways to approach the *Sveti Nikola* church and its function as a mixed shrine. The first is to look at its history. This is not something that can easily be done from the shrine, or even the town, itself. Local Christians, asked about the shrine, related stories of how an old bearded man 'in the past' saved the townspeople from plague by having them kill an ox, cut its hide into strips, link them together, and mark out as much land as could be contained within the resultant rope for dedication to a monastery. People, when asked, often said that the old man -- *Sveti Nikola* -- is buried beneath the raised platform within the church.

Visiting Muslims told exactly the same story except that in their version the old man was *Hadir Bābā*, a *Bektashi* saint, who is buried within the *turbe* (tomb) in the church. Other stories told of the local *pasha* who, during the Ottoman period, found as he attempted to build his house at the bottom of the hill that each evening everything erected during the day collapsed. He then dreamed -- depending on who was telling the story -- of either the Christian or the *Bektashi* saint who told him to build either a monastery or a *tekke* (Sufi monastery) on the hill above. When he did he was able to complete his house, which still stands at the foot of the stairs. Makedonski Brod today is completely Christian and local people, talking in and around the church, speak as though it has always been. A local historian, formerly a communist and still a secularist, speaking in town (not at the church) told us however that until the early twentieth century Balkan wars Makedonski Brod had been a hub of Ottoman administration known as *Tekkiya* because of the *Bektashi* monastery built above the town. This version of history, suggesting that the *Sveti Nikola* church is in fact the *turbe* of the founder of the *Bektashi tekke*, is supported by an archaeological note in a Skopje museum newsletter asserting that 'on that place today can only be seen the *turbe*, in which, according to the stories of the local population, was buried the founder of the *tekke*,

*Haydar Bābā* (Stojanovski 1979: 53). Other conversations in the town -- *not* on the grounds of *Sveti Nikola* -- brought up mention of the 1994 consecration of the building as a church by the local bishop and the removal, 'sometime a while ago', of a triangular frame which had for years sat on top of the tomb of Saint Nicholas (see below for images of the 'platform' in the church and traditional Sufi tombs). From this approach it seems evident that *Sveti Nikola* church was, at one time, the central feature -- the founder's tomb -- of a *Bektashi* monastery and that it, in the wake of the flight of 'Turks' from the town after the Balkan Wars and through the long period of post-1945 state disapprobation of formal religion, had sat -- 'disenfranchised' -- above the town, approached by different communities who remembered it in different ways until, in the nationalistic fervour following the collapse of Yugoslavia and the formation of 'Orthodox' Macedonia, the church expropriated it.

The diachronic analytic suggests an inexorable movement towards expropriation of the site by one of the communities which currently seem to 'share' it. Another way of examining *Sveti Nikola* is to look synchronically at the relations taking place at the present time within the shrine, and that perspective, while not denying the trajectory indicated by the historical view, offers insights into forms of interaction between communities around a mixed site which a 'teleological' interpretation would render invisible. I would like here to offer two vignettes which respectively indicate the symbiosis involved in 'sharing' a shrine and some of the forces which work to dissolve that.

Dragina is the Orthodox caretaker of the *Sveti Nikola* shrine and, as she is getting old, she is assisted in keeping the place clean and functional by her son Boge, who works as a schoolteacher in the town, as well as by a number of men who make up the 'Church Committee'. On the fifth of May, the day preceding the Orthodox Feast of St. George, Dragina, Boge, and those with time to help prepare the church for the 'pilgrimage' to the site that local people will enact for the feast. Preparation involves rendering the site much less like a mosque and more like an Orthodox church, and thus the carpets are taken up from the floor and the various Muslim images and objects are hidden from the view of visitors<sup>1</sup>. Green 'Muslim' ox tallow candles and the Muslim prayer beads [*sibhah*] which visitors step through

<sup>1</sup> Initially these objects and images were 'hidden' behind the *iconostasis* on the floor of the apse but I noticed, in the period leading up to the feast day, that someone (perhaps a *Bektashi* visitor) had subsequently hung them on the eastern wall of the apse amidst the icons surrounding the altar (and had placed the green ninety-nine beaded *sibhah* on the altar). These remained there until the town priest (who had seemingly ignored them whilst in the apse on the previous day), coming to the church on the morning of the feast day to perform the liturgy, removed them and returned them to the floor where the pictures were placed face in against the wall.

for blessings (~~similar to those at Sveta Bogorodica~~) are removed from the 'tomb' of St. Nicholas and replaced with white 'Christian' candles and a smaller rosary. The site, thus 'Christianised', is ready for the hundreds of visitors, all but a few Orthodox, who visit that evening and throughout the following day. At dawn on the seventh, however, Dragina and Boge are busy in the church 'returning' the site to its normal syncretic state. Carpets are carefully relaid and intense discussion takes place around where exactly the image of Ali with his sword, *Zulfiqar*, should be placed and how the cloth partially covering it should be arranged.

Prayer rugs are laid around the *turbe*, the Muslim prayer beads are replaced, and <sup>or</sup> tallow candles are lit because 'they' are coming and must be made to feel at home. There is, of course, an issue of economics involved in this; 'the others' leave generous gifts and, Dragina says, 'we benefit from it'. Nonetheless the affection she shows for visitors and the easy generosity with which she and others, including the priest, give red 'St. George' eggs to and fill the water bottles of Muslim visitors belies a purely economic reading. Women Muslims ask Dragina to pass the prayer beads over them for blessings and, when a respected Sufi *derwish* from Kicevo comes to the shrine (praying with his wife in the direction of the *iconostasis* rather than towards the *turbe*), Dragina -- concerned about her son's continuing failure to find a wife -- asks the man to pass the beads over Boge so as to read his fortune.

Whereas the description above suggests an easy sharing of the site, and an institutional and personal openness by Orthodox keepers towards the presence of Muslim 'others', the following suggests ways that, ~~without the intervention of 'higher' powers,~~ that sharing might disintegrate. When we visited *Sveti Nikola* a week before St. George's Day, the gate to the grounds of the church was surmounted by a small metal cross surrounded by ornamental scrollwork. While interviewing people who were gathered in the grounds I asked about the absence of a cross on the roof of the church itself. One man responded rather aggressively 'I'll show you the cross' and left the grounds, returning twenty minutes later with a six foot high bright golden anodised aluminium cross. This, it turned out, was a gift he, a *Gasterbeiter* returned to his hometown for a vacation, was presenting to the church<sup>2</sup>. A week later the small cross over the gate had been angle-ground off and laid aside while the gold cross had been welded in its place, overwhelming the entryway and the icon of Saint Nicholas (see illustration).

<sup>2</sup> Another wealthier economic migrant, who returned from Australia annually with his family for summer vacations, had given the town a ten meter high cross to be mounted, like those now being erected all over Macedonia, on the mountain above the town.

On the day following Saint George's Day an Albanian speaking man and his wife came to *Sveti Nikola* to pray at the *turbe*, leave gifts, and take water from the shrine. They were clearly uncomfortable and while the woman left quickly, returning down the stairway to their car, the man stayed behind and insisted on speaking to me, as a foreigner, about the 'insult' of the cross over the gateway. He told me that the site is a Muslim holy place and that local people have no right to erect that cross over a place which has 'been Muslim for centuries'. I asked him what form of Islam he followed and he responded 'it doesn't matter; I am a Muslim'. Elizabetha Koneska<sup>my friend was at it</sup> and I asked him to speak to the members of the Church Committee who were gathered nearby about the problem, and he went to them, politely commending whomever had been generous enough to make a gift to the shrine, but suggesting that person should, if he wanted to make a present, instead have helped to pay for a better road to the place:

this cross separates us; no Muslims will feel comfortable coming to this big and historical place which we used to come to visit. We have been here for years and have felt good to come here, but this is a barrier to us...How would you feel if I came to your church, to your home, and put a minaret there? I will never put a mosque in a church.

The men responded apologetically, saying that they understood the problem and that they would talk with the man who paid for the cross who they claimed was not around at the time (he was in fact a member of the group addressed). After the man left the group was clearly discomfited, acknowledging that there was a problem but seeming uncertain how to address it.

### ***Second Scenario: Sveta Bogorodica Precista***

There is no doubt that *Sveta Bogorodica Precista* is an Orthodox monastery but this does not prevent a continuous flow of Muslims -- Sufi and Sunni alike (the Albanian speaking man discussed above claimed to be a frequent visitor) -- from coming into its church and circumnavigating its icon dense interior before crawling three times through the small passageway beneath the icons of Mary and Jesus, and collecting water from the well beneath it to take back to their homes. Muslim visitors to *Sveti Nikola* will occasionally speak of coming to the shrine for healing, but generally they claim to come to give respect to the saint or because they have forged a bond with, or been called to visit, *Hadir Bābā* in a dream. Muslims and Christians who come to *Sveta Bogorodica* come explicitly for healing; the



shrine, or perhaps the well water, is renowned for inducing fertility in the sterile, returning sanity to the mad, straightening bent limbs, and the other thaumaturgic like. Even the *imam* in the central mosque of nearby Kicevo sends members of his congregation to *Sveta Bogorodica* when he feels they are afflicted by 'Christian demons' who can only be driven out by beneficent Christian powers.

Whereas at *Sveti Nikola* Muslim visitors carry out Muslim forms of worship<sup>3</sup> around a *turbe* they see as being not of St. Nicholas but of *Hadir Bābā*, in *Sveta Bogorodica* Muslim visitors appear to carry out the same sorts of ritual activities as do the many Christian visitors to the site. Like Christians, Muslims will light candles and approach the icons throughout the interior of the church, particularly those lining the *iconostasis*, and will leave before them small gifts (sometimes money, often towels or new, packaged articles of clothing such as socks or shirts). Then, as do the Christians, they go to the rear left of the church where an 'East-Friday' icon, associated with Jesus's healing of the paralytic at the Pools of Siloam (*John* 5: 8-10) surmounts an artificial hole through a wall. On the left of the icon is hung a long string of cross-inscribed beads (the Mother Superior claims they were left here by a Russian predecessor) which are passed over supplicants three times before they crawl, again three times, through the hole in the direction of the west wall of the church. Having done this they collect themselves, or have given to them, water which has been drawn from the well below which they first splash on their faces three times and then take to their homes where they drink it or give it to others who are ill (when the water runs out the sickness returns, and people come back for more). Some visitors, Muslim or Christian, will decide to stay in the monastery where they do work to support the church and are healed by that residence (an old room near the gate to the monastery was used in the past for holding mad persons who were thought to be healed by that incarceration).

Closer observation of Muslim visitors, as well as interviews with them, reveal that although they appear to follow the same practices of approach and deportment as do Christians, they succeed, by holding back from Christian groups while moving through the church, in masking small but significant differences. In approaching icons they do not kiss them, they do not cross themselves, and, in praying, they silently mouth Muslim prayers and hold their hands open and palm up rather than clasped in Christian praying mode.

<sup>3</sup> There is, however, little uniformity in the Muslim practices; some bow in praying towards the *iconostasis* of the church, others bow towards the *turbe* from its 'foot', while others perform *zikir* (a devotional choral chanting of Islamic texts) with persons kneeling at each corner of the platform. Most Muslim visitors, like most Christians, will circle the *turbe* between one and three times.

Nonetheless they have no hesitation in acknowledging that the powers they here approach are Christian; this is a healing place that is known to work and therefore when one is ill or needful of help it is one of the pre-eminent places to approach (many of those we interviewed -- Muslim and Christian alike -- said that they had visited several places, both Muslim and Christian, in search of cures, fertility, etc.). There is here an intriguing practical logic operative; people visiting sites whose powers are renowned as efficacious (particularly for healing) will, at those sites, carry out the rituals appropriate to those powers as far as is possible without explicitly violating the dictates of their own religions (Muslims, for instance, will not cross themselves). Knowing that certain visits and the rituals involved therein have worked for neighbours of other religions, they mimic those activities as far as possible without 'self-harming' in the hope that such copying will reproduce the same effects for them, despite confessional differences. This is not a syncretism insofar as identities are not transformed, but it is a sharing. It is also a sharing acknowledged and legitimated (perhaps because they know people will do it regardless of whether or not they approve) by religious leaders, like the *imam* of the Kicevo mosque, who themselves would never think of entering the holy places of another religion.

At a nearby Orthodox Church we were told by the priest that many local Muslims (the local population is half Orthodox and half Muslim) came to the church not only for holy water and to ask for blessings but also, to provide specific examples, when a Christian man has converted to marry a Muslim woman but nonetheless wants their child baptised<sup>4</sup> or when Muslims want priest-blessed icons to keep in their houses. The priest prays over Muslims with a special prayer -- that designated in the prayer books for the unbaptized -- and instead of laying his cope over their heads raises it in front of them. This 'space' for the unbaptised, and the non-Orthodox, is interestingly paralleled in the legendry and architecture of *Sveta Bogorodica Prechista*. The Mother Superior of the monastery told us that 'in the past' the Superior of the monastery and a *pasha* were discussing the respective righteousness of Christianity and Islam. They decided to test whose faith was the right one by filling two glasses with water and dropping them some five metres off of a balcony, whereupon the glass of the pasha broke, while that of the Superior remained intact, and its water did not spill. The pasha consequently decided to donate 120 hectares of land in the vicinity of ~~Brod~~ to the monastery and the Superior, in appreciation, promised he would build a part of the church

<sup>4</sup> The priest indicated that by church law both parents must be baptized but that they baptize such children anyway 'so as not to damage the marriage community of the couple'.

especially for Muslim use<sup>5</sup>. Although the current Superior stressed that the narthex was not 'intended' for Muslims, she stressed that it is the part of the church 'they can come to'. It is not clear what the Superior meant by this insofar as it was clear from brief observation that Muslims frequented the whole of the church, but this part of the church, like the analogous part of the prayer book, was evidently deemed 'appropriate' to those who were neither Orthodox nor Christian. The 'sharing' occurring in the church is, however, vulnerable precisely because of that space which is designated as open to the other. While we never heard this from any of the Muslims we interviewed at *Sveta Bogorodica*, one of the nuns -- a novice recently graduated from university in Skopje -- stressed vehemently that 'Muslims' claimed that that part of the church belonged to them and that they were organising to 'steal' it from the church. She, when asked for water by Muslim visitors, would tell them either that there was none or that they could get it themselves from a fountain outside.

### *Third Scenario: Husamedin Pasha Mosque*

While, in the previous two scenarios, we have observed forms of mixing and forms of sharing, both potentially threatened by tendencies towards fission, in the case of the *Husamedin Pasha* we observe a site in which there is no mixing and all that is shared is the same site at different times.

The mosque, now fairly derelict, is an early sixteenth century 'central' mosque which was seriously damaged during the Balkan Wars yet functioned as a mosque for the minority Muslim population until 1945 when it was closed. At that time the local *Halveti* Sufi community, an order quite close to Orthodox Sunni Islam, began to celebrate the feast of *Ashura* in the grounds of the mosque where a *turbe* (that of *Medin Bābā*) stands. In 1953 the mosque was restored as a secular building and used as a gallery space for the Stīp Museum. In 1956 that closed, and the mosque has generally been unused since that time although for a while the 'Children's Embassy', a Macedonian NGO established in 1992, held events in and around the building. At the same time, allegedly because of the intervention of the nationalist Christian Democratic VMRO (Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) government, access to the mosque was given to the local Orthodox Church which began celebrating the Feast of the Prophet Elijah *inside* the mosque. This celebration, based on the idea -- for which there is no firm evidence -- that the original mosque was built over an

<sup>5</sup> Whether there was truth to the legend, or whether the legend was generated to explain the architectural anomaly, the narthex at the western end of the church is undecorated and the only part of the church not ornamented with splendid frescoes.

Orthodox Church, involves the use of the inside of the mosque for both a liturgy with icons set in the *mihrab* and a subsequent communal meal. Christians also light candles and inscribe crosses on the exterior front of the mosque throughout the year. Until recently even local *Halveti* Muslims referred to the mosque as 'St. Elijah's Church', although it is not clear as yet how old that practice is.

Recently the Islamic community, strengthened by substantial financial contributions coming into it from diasporic Stip Muslims in Turkey as well as other Islamic sources, has been revitalised, not only restoring the only operative mosque in the town but also building an Islamic school. A number of the people who had participated in the *Ashura* celebrations within the *Husamedin Pasha* mosque have been discussing the desirability of restoring it as the central mosque, have gained access to a document issued by the *Macedonian Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments* announcing that the mosque is a protected monument (which they interpret as announcing the mosque belongs to them as the appropriate cultural minority), and have stopped calling it St. Elijah's church and begun referring to it as the *Husamedin Pasha* mosque. One man we interviewed in April 2006, active in this movement, told us that the Christian celebrations as they were currently being carried out were 'inappropriate for a place of worship'. The year before he and a friend had walked by and, afraid to enter the mosque, had seen through the door 'Christians eating and drinking *rakia* (a distilled fruit alcohol) around a table they'd set up in the middle'. He nonetheless asserted that when the mosque is turned back to what it should be he 'will share it with Christians on the day they want to use it'.

We spoke as well with a priest from the Church of Saint Nikola, the town's main church, who told us that *Sveti Elia* (the mosque) was built over the foundations of a destroyed church as is evidenced from the cruciform shape of the mosque (the mosque cannot, even by the most violent stretch of imagination, be seen as cruciform; it is square and is, according to a cultural survey, 'typical of early 16<sup>th</sup> century Osmanli sacral architecture' [Heritage 2005: 170]). The priest told us that

according to the ground-plan, this is a church, but when the Osmanli Turks came, they turned it into a mosque. The foundation is still a church. We want to make it a church again, but from Skopje they would not give us permission. Otherwise, it would have been a church by now. Now we don't know what it is any longer: neither one nor the other. We want it to be a church, and we will make it a church. We are asking for a permission to dig inside and see what will be revealed, but they know

it is a church in the foundations, and that's why they deny us the permission. It will be a church. Why should it be a mosque? They have one already.

For him the mosque is no more than an historical excrescence occluding access to the real holy site which lies beneath it<sup>6</sup>, and the worship that takes place there in effect proceeds as though the Muslim intervention were invisible:

during the ceremony a prayer is sung, a bread *panagia* [*prosphora* or loaf of bread stamped with a sacred image raised during the liturgy] is raised in the air, and everything takes place inside....Outside the anointment takes place, and on the second day, in the morning, a liturgy is sung in the church.

The Orthodox priesthood, powerful in Stip, will, when (*if*) it convinces the government to allow it to carry out the archaeological survey which will, in its eyes, legitimate its 'restoration' of the church, tear the *Husamedin Pasha* mosque down and build over it 'a new and more beautiful ancient church'<sup>7</sup>.

In February 2006 members of the Macedonian *Roma* community, for the most part *Halveti* Sufis, had unofficially been allowed temporary access to the mosque during preparations for the *Ashura* feast at the *turbe* of *Medin Bābā*. These Muslims, who as a community had not had access to the mosque since its closure in 1945, removed accreted rubble from the mosque (leaving the Orthodox ritual materials, including icons of Elijah, in place in the niche in which they were stored between feasts), swept and washed it, and laid carpets on the floor. They then, with members of the Islamic Religious Community of Stip they had notified by mobile telephone, held a *namaz* (prayer) inside the mosque after which the official delegation Sunnis left and the *Halveti* had their *Ashura* feast inside. At that time the key to the mosque, which was normally held by the curator of the Stip Museum, went missing.

<sup>6</sup> Insofar as Islam historically follows Christianity and, in Islamic thought, corrects and clarifies Christian interpretation of revelation, Muslims are able to attend Christian sites which, although manifesting an imperfectly understood divine revelation, are nonetheless informed by revelation. For Christians Islam is a heresy or deviancy, and attendance at a Muslim site is effectively blasphemous. As Hasluck points out, therefore, 'a mosque, unless it has been (or is thought to have been) a church is rarely, if ever, taken over as a church by the Orthodox' (Hasluck 2000: 104).

<sup>7</sup> I refer here to a story told me by a UN peacekeeper who recalled a Serb militiaman who, when berated for taking part in the destruction of 'the beautiful and ancient Old City' of one of the Bosnian towns, responded 'but we will build a new and more beautiful ancient Old City in its place' (Bowman 1994: 159)

Little was thought of this until the eve of the feast of the Prophet Elijah (2 August 2006) when, as local Christians gathered for the two day celebrations and began setting up their booths for selling food stuffs and candles in the grounds, it was discovered that a second lock was now welded to the doors of the mosque. Late in the afternoon, as the priests from the Church of St. Nikola arrived to prepare the interior of the mosque for the *panagia* and the saint's day liturgy, it was realised that no one present had the key for the second lock and that, in fact, it had been mounted by the Islamic Religious Community organisation which, when contacted, refused to remove it, claiming that the site was a mosque and theirs. Amidst muted muttering and assertions that the site had been used for the feast since time immemorial, the *panagia* and the anointing were held on the portico while local people leaned candles against the doors and piled small gifts of cloth and flowers in front of it. On the following morning the priests did not come to say a liturgy, and through the day locals came, prayed before the locked door, and left angry.

### ***Conclusion: Multiconfessionalism and Mixing in Orthodox Contexts***

In the three cases set out above I've attended to the boundaries between Orthodox Christians and their Muslim neighbours, and have considered the ways in which -- in a multi-confessional society -- these boundaries are variously reinforced, opened, and transgressed. I would emphasise the multi-confessional context here insofar as in Macedonia -- as in Palestine and in contradistinction to Greece -- the close proximity of communities which are not Orthodox strongly influences the ways in which Orthodox Christians and Orthodox institutions deal with heterodoxy. Not only will lay persons here, used to interacting in various contexts with others who are not of their religious persuasion, be less prone to xenophobia (in the literal sense of 'fear of strangers or foreigners') but also religious authorities will find it more difficult to impose conceptions of ritual purity on sites traversed by the beliefs and practices of heterogeneous peoples. This is not to say, of course, that moves towards expelling alterity and homogenising shrines and communities are not being made at present and will not be made in the future; the fate of much of the rest of what is now 'Former' Yugoslavia, as well as that of early twentieth century Greece and Turkey (Clark 2006), testifies to the fragility of inter-communalism. Nonetheless, it is important to observe and note, in situations where inter-communal mixing continues to occur, the ways in which such mixing takes place and the structures of belief and practice which support such interaction.

I want in concluding to focus on the ways in which lay Macedonian Orthodox Christians and their clergy relate to the presence of Muslims in shrines they consider their own. There is, of course, the straightforward response of denial and exclusion evinced towards Muslims at the *Husamedin Pasha* mosque by the Orthodox priest of Stip. His attitude, which may or may not be echoed in those of Stip lay-persons, is theologically correct; Muslims are, as I mentioned above, doctrinally defined as followers of a false prophet and are thus, in ontological terms, either heretical or null entities. In the religious context of the '*Sveti Elia* church', the works of Muslims are effectively obliterated, both in the imaginary (the mosque counterfactually 'is a church') and in the attempts to block access of Muslims to the interior of the *Husamedin Pasha* mosque. There is, furthermore, a *sur*-text. The second of August is not only the feast of the Prophet Elijah in the Orthodox calendar; it is also the anniversary of the *Ilinden Uprising* of 1903 during which the *Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation* orchestrated a revolt against the Ottoman state which, though rapidly crushed, resulted in the establishment of provisional governments in three localities and the declaration of the *Krushevo Republic*, an icon of subsequent Yugoslav and then Macedonian nationalism (see Brown 2003: 1-21 and *passim* and Poulton 2000: 48-62). The Christian occupation of the semi-ruined mosque and the displacement of its Muslim users here replays the religio-nationalist victory of *Orthodox* Macedonians over Muslim oppressors. It is this resonance which, one suspects, not only prompted the 1992 appropriation of the *Husamedin Pasha* mosque by the Orthodox Church -- supported by a Macedonian nationalist government -- but also leads the priest to believe, perhaps rightly, that in time the current government will abandon its concessionary attitudes to the Muslim Macedonian population and allow the full erasure of that emblem of a past Muslim sovereignty over a Christian population. The only response allowed the Muslim community in the face of such positioning by the Orthodox is the attempt to reappropriate the site as exclusively its own. This makes the *Husamedin Pasha* a tinderbox threatening serious violence between not only Muslims and Christians in Stip but also potentially further afield. The fact that the Islamic Religious Community in Stip last summer invited Arben Xhaferi, the leader of the Democratic Party of Albanians, to visit the town and address the issue of the *Husamedin Pasha* mosque suggests the potential of this confrontation for Muslim-Christian relations in Macedonia; Stip's Muslims, after all, are neither Albanian nor Sunni.

The second possible response is that shown by both the abbess of the *Sveta Bogorodica Prechista* monastery and the priests of the nearby Orthodox church. Whereas for the Stip priest the mosque has to become -- in both space and time -- fully Christian, for the

abbess of the monastery and the priests of the church Christians and Muslims can coexist separately -- performing parallel rituals -- in contiguous spaces within the holy places. The *narthex*, which in early Christian church architecture is the part of the church to which the catechumens and the unbaptised (those literally not part of the congregation) were restricted, becomes 'the place' for Muslims just as a general prayer for the unbaptised substitutes for the particular daily prayers said over Orthodox Christians and the priest's cope is raised before Muslims rather than laid over their heads. These diacritical settings and gestures are observed more in discourse than in practice, however; the abbess, who claims Muslims restrict their attentions to the *narthex* of the church, knows from observation that they circulate throughout it just as the priests, who claim that Muslims and Christians are addressed with different prayers, will nonetheless baptise the child of a Orthodox man who has converted to Islam to marry a Muslim woman<sup>8</sup>.

The Orthodox theology of the icon, so central to belief and practice, provides a means of understanding this seeming contradiction. For the Orthodox, Adam and Eve's original sin of being devoted to the world rather than to its creator created a breach between the fallen world and the divine. This breach can be bridged by various *sacra*, among which the icon is pre-eminent but which include as well the liturgy and the churches in which icons are displayed and liturgies performed<sup>9</sup>. Fundamental to relations with these *sacra* is belief. As numerous interviewees have made clear to me over my years of working with Orthodox communities, an unbeliever looking *at* an icon will see nothing more than a pattern made up from pigment on wood while a believer looking *into* an icon will see the saint looking back at him or her (Bowman 1991: pp. 103-104 and 108-112). Muslims in this sense do not participate in the same world as Christians when they move through a church, approach the icons, and carry out seemingly identical rituals; the Orthodox Christian here stands at the gates of paradise looking in while the Muslim remains enmeshed in the corporeality of the world. This 'inclusive exclusion' does not prevent Orthodox hierophants from appreciating and benefiting from the presence of Muslims in their holy sites; the abbess of *Sveta*

<sup>8</sup> Renée Hirshcon, a scholar of Greece, and I have discussed whether or not Orthodox priests would baptize Muslims. The Kicevo instance, like a case in Beit Sahour of a Muslim chicken vendor who had an ill child baptized in 'Khadr, leads me to believe that while in mixed communities religious officiants may find ways of allowing for exceptions the ecclesiastical rules in homogeneous communities will be far more strictly observed.

<sup>9</sup> "[T]he icon's first and foremost liturgical function is making contact between the worshipper and the world of grace.... the icon is an indispensable part of the liturgy which in its turn functions as an 'icon' revealing the divine presence to the faithful and uniting the celestial and terrestrial church" (Galavaris 1981: 5, see also Ouspensky 1978).



*Bogorodica* spoke at length of how she had come to love the Muslims, appreciating their honesty as well as their dedication to and generosity towards the monastery. These virtues were, however, very much of this world, and the abbess' appreciation of them was neighbourly and pragmatic; when it came to 'the final things' the Muslims and Christians did not, in any way, occupy the same places.

Orthodox Orthodoxy seems to be far more situational at *Sveti Nikola*. The preparation of the shrine for the feast of St. George is certainly indicative of this tendency to render a shared space 'properly Christian' for feasts, but perhaps more telling is the anomalous hanging -- in the wake of that cleaning -- of *Bektashi* devotional pictures (of Ali and of the tombs of Sufi holy men) around and above the altar behind the *iconostasis* (in the holiest domain of the church) and the placing of the Muslim rosary on the altar. Despite the frequent presence of the priest and of members of the Church Committee in the apse in the twenty four hours between the time I noticed the placement of these objects and the commencement of the feast day liturgy, they were not removed until that liturgy -- which is believed to transform the space behind the *iconostasis* into an icon of paradise -- commenced. Such situational sanctification was duplicated by visiting *Bektashi* and *Halveti bābās* who would, before inviting those accompanying them into the shrine to perform prayers, ask everyone to leave the building, close the door, and carry out an [unobserved] preparatory ritual. While such oscillation between sacred and secular moments serves to keep the Christian liturgy free of the Muslim elements which crowded around it in this mixed shrine, the boundary between Christian and Muslim practice seems far less prophylactic on the popular level. Orthodox Christians, observing Sufi visitors circumnambulating the *turbe* for blessings, themselves followed the practice even while believing they were asking a blessing from *Sveti Nikola* rather than *Hadir Bābā*. Muslims visiting the shrine seemed as likely to pray toward the *iconostasis*, as Christians did, than toward the *turbe* of *Hadir Bābā*. Charles Stewart, in his fascinating study of the *exotika* of popular belief on the Greek island of Naxos (Stewart 1991), shows the way that 'doctrinal religion draw[s] upon local concepts and transpos[es] these into its own more literate terms' (Ibid: 244) but also demonstrates how islanders, in formulating responses to local afflictions and dilemmas, draw elements from Orthodox Christianity and reshape these into popular beliefs, representations, and practices suited to their particular needs and situations. Stewart points out that on Naxos both doctrinal and

popular religion appear profoundly 'Greek':

consistencies between doctrinal and local religion are perhaps to be expected in a culture such as the Greek, where Orthodox tradition has been elaborated over the centuries by Church fathers, many of whom were themselves members of a Greek-speaking society and who were reared in culturally Greek local communities (Ibid).

The Naxosians use Orthodox forms and elements in elaborating their spells and superstitions because these are available in everyday life; Macedonians, in working their cures and prognostications, use both Christian and Muslim material for the same reason. In Macedonia, where a multiplicity of communities jostle in everyday life and occasionally meet around sites variously deemed holy, locals will draw practices of approaching 'powers' from those they perceive as being successful in their approaches to those figures<sup>10</sup>. In mixed communities and mixed shrines those emulated will not only be priests and other Christians but also, when 'orthodox' approaches have proved ineffectual, Muslims. Dragina, growing old and -- despite her prayers -- watching her son remain unmarried, was not uncomfortable asking a renowned Sufi *dervish* to do for Boge what she had witnessed and heard of him doing for many others. Here Orthodox Christianity engages with the heterodox and we distinctly see sharing, but whether we will be allowed to see it for much longer is a difficult question.

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<sup>10</sup> Mauss, in his work on 'body techniques', discusses the central role in enculturation of 'prestigious imitation': 'the child, the adult, imitates actions which have/succeeded and which he has seen successfully performed by people in whom he has confidence and who have authority over him' (Mauss 1979: 101). 'Confidence' and 'authority' will not necessarily, in a rural post-socialist community, be vested in the Orthodox clergy.

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