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The Emergence of the Pomaks in the Ottoman Sources and Etymology of the Term Pomak

(Abstract)

Pomaks, a Bulgarian speaking community based on a religious identity emerged as a result of Islamization process which occurred among the local Slavic people in the regions of Loveč, the Rhodope Mountains, Western Thrace and Macedonia during the Ottoman period in the 15th–18th centuries. It is stated in the literature that the term Pomak was first used in Bulgarian sources in 1812, in British sources in 1833 and in French sources in 1840 to identify Bulgarian speaking Muslims living in the Loveč region. In this study, after examining the process of Islamization, the terms used to define Pomaks, and appearing of the term in the international literature, based on some new and unused Ottoman sources I will show that the term Pomak used by the Ottomans earlier than previously assumed. According to my findings, the Pomak term was first used in Ottoman sources in the 17th century regarding statesmen that were of Pomak origin. But as a separate community Pomaks emerged for the first time in Ottoman sources during the 1806–1812 Russo-Ottoman War. State Chronicler Şanizade Mehmed Atallah Efendi recorded that around 10–14.000 soldiers were recruited from among the Loveč Pomaks and also described them as a military element, in 1809. Besides, Ottoman documents reveal that during this war, the Pomaks ambushed and defeated the Russian troops entering the Balkan Mountains and played an active role in defending the Loveč region in general. However, Ottoman documents also indicate that some apostate Pomaks together with volunteer Bulgarians joined the

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Russian army and attacked to Loveč in 1811 January. The earliest record defining the Bulgarian speaking Muslims in the Rhodope Mountains as Pomaks in Ottoman sources, was dated 1833. In addition, after looking at the views about the origin and identity of the Pomaks among the Bulgarian intellectuals and western circles in the 1860s–1870s, I will also be examining the etymology of the term Pomak in view of the Ottoman sources which support the thesis that term Pomak come from the Bulgarian word pomagači (helpers).

Keywords: Pomaks; Muslim Bulgarians; Ottomans; Islamization; Etymology