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**Salim Kadri Kerimi, PRESPANSKITE TURCI – ISTORISKO
- DEMOGRAFSKA STUDIJA (THE TURKS OF PRESPA – A
HISTORICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY),
Skopje 2024, 404 p.**

At the end of 2024, a new book by the author Salim Kadri Kerimi was published, titled: „The Turks of Prespa – A Historical and Demographic Study“. The book explores various historical and demographic aspects of the Turkish population in the Prespa region of Macedonia, focusing on their origins, demographic changes, migrations, and cultural characteristics. This book represents the first scholarly research on the Turkish population in the specified region of Macedonia, written in Macedonian or any other language, examining their „fate“ in the past and present¹.

As noted in the preface of this study, according to statistical data from the Ottoman period, the presence of Turks in Prespa dates back to the 16th century, while certain indications suggest that the Turkish population in Prespa may have existed as early as the 15th century. Nevertheless, during the 19th and 20th centuries, this population in Prespa was often denied or misrepresented. Some described them as Mohammedans or Pomaks of Bulgarian origin (Vasil Kanchov, Dimitar Gadzhanov, Georgi Traychev, J. Ivanov), others as „brothers of our (Serbian) blood“ (Jovan Hadži - Vasilević), some as „Mohammedan/ Islamized Christian population“ (Johann Georg von Hahn, Victor Bérard), others as „Turkified Albanians“ (Qerim Lita), or as „Islamized Macedonian population“ (Włodzimierz Pianka).

However, according to the assessment of Salim Kadri Kerimi, the real situation on the ground was quite different. The existence of a Turkish population in the town of Resen and the villages of Kozjak, Gorna Bela Crkva, Carev Dvor, Drmeni and Lavci, both in the past and today, has been affirmed

¹ According to official statistical data, Turks in the Prespa region of the Republic of Macedonia are the second-largest ethnic community after the Macedonians. In addition to Macedonians and Turks, Albanians, Egyptians, Vlachs, and members of other smaller ethnic communities have also lived together in Resen and Prespa for centuries.

by the Turks themselves, as well as by numerous relevant facts, which are thoroughly presented in this study.

The book spans 404 pages and is divided into three separate chapters. Before the first chapter begins, the book includes acknowledgments, a preface (in Macedonian, Turkish, and English), introductory notes, and preliminary findings, where the author Kerimi shares his personal motivations and desire to write a study focused on local history. At the end of the book, the author presents his concluding insights and evaluations, the reviews of the two reviewers, lists of photographs, tables, abbreviations, and references used in the study.

The reviewers of this work are historian Prof. Dr. Borče Ilievski and geographer MA Fejzulla Abdullai. According to B. Ilievski, „The study ‘The Turks of Prespa – A Historical and Demographic Study’ is a historical work primarily focused on the demographic characteristics of the Prespa region, examining the number, structure, and especially the migrations

of the Turkish population, as well as other residents of the area.” Meanwhile, F. Abdullai remarks, „In completing this work, the author Salim Kadri Kerimi has made every effort to address the central theme of the study with utmost objectivity and scientific methodology. He applied analytical - synthetic, comparative, and statistical methods, along with an extensive range of literature (from numerous domestic and foreign authors) and relevant archival materials, enabling him to achieve the most accurate scientific insights and conclusions, which is indeed his ultimate goal.” Both reviewers agree that Kerimi’s work, written in a clear, readable, and chronologically organized style, will be a valuable resource not only for professional historians and demographers but also for enthusiasts of historical science and the past.

Chapter One. The author describes the natural and socio-geographical features of the Prespa region, allowing readers to understand its location and



the natural - geographical characteristics of the area where the population, central to this study, resides. Kerimi presents a wealth of sources and records from various domestic and foreign historians, diplomats, ethnographers, anthropologists, and publicists related to the history and demography of Prespa. The value of this study lies not only in citing numerous sources and literature but also in the polemical nature of the text, where the author comments on and compares the proposed records and literature with his scientific findings and perspectives. While showing necessary respect for their work, Kerimi critically analyzes and challenges their findings and assessments regarding the Turkish population of Prespa.

Chapter Two. This chapter delves extensively into the beginnings of the Turkish presence in the Balkans, including in the territory of present - day North Macedonia and specifically the Prespa region. Among other aspects, the author briefly outlines the relationship of both Yugoslav states toward this population. The demographic characteristics of the Turkish population in Prespa is analyzed based on their place of residence, starting with the town of Resen and then addressing the five aforementioned rural settlements. Here, Kerimi provides a detailed analysis of official population censuses and explores issues related to determining the ethnic identity of the recorded population. He also addresses two specific topics concerning the region's population: coexistence and mixed marriages between members of the Turkish and Albanian communities. These factors have, among other things, led to the gradual „voluntary“ assimilation of some Turks in Prespa. All numerical data, primarily concerning the Turkish population of Prespa, are presented graphically in separate tables. This chapter, like the others, also includes numerous photographs, making the text more engaging for readers.

Chapter Three. In the third chapter, the author Kerimi addresses the migratory movements of the Turkish population from the Prespa region over an extended period. He begins by treating the emigration of Turks and other Muslim populations from Yugoslavia/ Macedonia, including Prespa, to Turkey after the World War II. To illustrate the extent of this migration, the book includes a list of individuals who applied to renounce their Yugoslav citizenship between 1953 and mid-1957 to emigrate to Turkey². Economic migrations are divided into three periods: a) during the Ottoman period, b) between the two world wars, and c) after World War II. In the first period, migrants were often seasonal workers (*gurbetçii*) traveling to Istanbul, Izmir, and other cities in the Ottoman Empire. In the second period, Argentina and the USA became preferred destinations for Prespa's labor migrants. Kerimi highlights several names of individuals from Prespa, including some of his

² Given the fact that the announcements for submitting requests to renounce Yugoslav/Macedonian citizenship for the purpose of emigrating to Turkey listed only some family members, and considering that emigration continued in the following decade, the total number of emigrants from Resen and Prespa to Turkey was significantly higher than the numbers stated in the lists.

relatives, neighbors, and fellow villagers, who migrated to Argentina and, to a lesser extent, the USA during the 1920s. The third period of migration, after World War II, is described in greater detail. Initially, emigration was restricted and extremely difficult. Later, in the early 1960s, when leaving the country was legalized, many people from Prespa, including members of the Turkish community, began emigrating—first individually and then with their families. Their primary destinations were Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Sweden and Norway), followed by other European countries, the USA, Canada, and Australia.

This chapter also includes testimonials from 15 individuals—migrants from Prespa living in Denmark, Sweden, the USA, and Macedonia. These testimonies provide insights into their experiences as migrants and add an emotional and human dimension to the study, making it more interactive. By dedicating this work to his ancestors and all the labor migrants from this region and including these testimonials, Kerimi humanizes the historical narrative. He systematically explains the causes and consequences of migration in this chapter.

In conclusion, it can be stated that Salim Kadri Kerimi's study is not merely an academic work but also a cultural heritage. The author demonstrates academic rigor and personal dedication, making the book a valuable contribution to Macedonian historiography. With a few minor refinements, this work could serve as a definitive reference for the history of Prespa and the Balkans. In other words, „The Turks of Prespa – A Historical and Demographic Study” by Salim Kadri Kerimi is a significant contribution to the study of the demographic, cultural, and historical aspects of the Turkish population in the Prespa region. The book addresses an entirely unexplored subject—the history of the Turkish community in Prespa, which has long been misinterpreted or entirely ignored. This makes the book especially important for historians, sociologists and younger generations of the Turkish diaspora across Europe and the world. Thanks to his excellent knowledge of Turkish, Macedonian, Albanian, Serbian, Bulgarian, and English and his few decades of diplomatic experience, Salim Kadri Kerimi managed to collect and utilize archival materials and other sources from Macedonia and several other countries. These resources support his research and, for the first time, present readers with concrete facts, particularly regarding the continuous presence of the Turkish ethnic community in the Prespa region of Macedonia from the 15th century to the present. Through this Kerimi has created an important monography that will become essential literature for all researchers and others interested in this subject matter.