

**PUBLIC LECTURE**  
**“New Christians” between the Adriatic and the Black Sea:  
the Persistence of Religious Otherness among Jewish Converts in Dalmatia and  
Paulician Catholics in Bulgaria (15<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century)**

Dr. Lena Sadovski

11 May 2026, 6 pm

Hall 2, Rectorate

It is with great pleasure to welcome you to the public lecture of Dr. Lena Sadovski (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies) organised by the Faculty of History. The lecture is entitled “New Christians” between the Adriatic and the Black Sea: the Persistence of Religious Otherness among Jewish Converts in Dalmatia and Paulician Catholics in Bulgaria (15<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century). The event will take place on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May at 6 pm at Hall 2 of the main building of the Sofia University.

This lecture addresses religious minorities and interreligious dynamics in the Balkans by studying different groups of “New Christians” in the late medieval and early modern period.

The first case studies the persistence of Jewish otherness in Venetian Dalmatia by taking a look at the fate of the Apulian New Christians in Split. These New Christians (It. *cristiani novelli*, Lat. *christiani novi*) were the descendants of Jews who had converted to Christianity in high medieval Apulia, where they subsequently constituted a third social group alongside the nobility and the citizens. Following growing anti-Jewish repressions in Italy, many of them fled to the Ottoman Empire and Venetian Dalmatia, where they integrated deeply into the local Catholic society. Nevertheless, their religious background could be weaponized during conflicts, as a murder trial from 1577 will illustrate.

The second case addresses the Paulician minority in Ottoman Bulgaria. We will study the attempts of the Catholic missionaries to convert them to Catholicism and enforce correct Catholic beliefs and practices among the “Paulianisti novelli Christiani”, as the sources called them. In doing so, we shall see how the missionaries tried to make sense of ‘schismatic’ or ‘pagan’ rituals such as animal sacrifice, and which course of action they decided to take in view of such ‘blasphemy’.

Drawing on an extensive range of unpublished archival material from Venice, Zadar, Split, the Vatican Apostolic Archive, and the archives of the Congregation *De Propaganda Fide* and the Holy Office (Inquisition), the talk highlights the persistence of religious otherness as well as the contested negotiation of religious belonging in everyday life.

Dr. Lena Sadovski is an APART-GSK-Fellow of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies) with a habilitation project on Catholics in Ottoman Bulgaria, Wallachia and Moldova in the 17th and 18th century. She is also a member of the Young Academy of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

L. Sadovski’s PhD thesis (2023) analysed the social structures of the Dalmatian town Split between Venetian rule and Ottoman menace (1479–1525), funded by a DOC Fellowship of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and conducted at the Institute of Eastern European Studies of the University of Vienna.

After defending her PhD, Dr. L. Sadovski received several fellowships as a: visiting Post-Doc researcher at the Austria Centre Leiden and the Institute for Area Studies of Leiden University (2023); visiting scholar at the Centre for Religious Studies (CERES) at Ruhr-Universität Bochum (2025), and JESH-Fellow at the Centre for Advanced Study Sofia (2025/2026).

Dr. Lena Sadovski is also an ordinary member of the Cluster of Excellence “EurAsian Transformations” at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.