SOME NEW FACTS ON THE EXISTENCE AND LITERARY ACTIVITIES OF THE BEKTASHI ORDER IN 19TH CENTURY BOSNIA

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It is generally assumed that the Bektashi dervish order has never been active on the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The author deals with a so far unknown source (a manuscript in Turkish from the National Library in Sarajevo) which undoubtedly proves an activity of the order in Bosnia even in the late 19th and early 20th centuries i.e. when the order was formally dissolved. In the mentioned manuscript there are some verses belonging to two Bektashi poets, Bosnevi and Fahri (probably from Sarajevo) evaluated as literary average but socially rather interesting personalities. Their poetry reveals elements of social and political satire as well as examples of the traditional extreme esoteric teachings of marginal groups in Islam. The author offers their verses which reflect the Bektashi spirit and the theological doctrine of the brotherhood, both in Turkish original and translation. The article sheds some light on the history of the Bektashi order, history of Bosnia-Herzegovina under Ottoman dominance as well as cultural history of Bosnia.

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Almost no survey of religious life of South Slavic lands in the time of Ottoman domination fails to depict Bosnia as a fortress of Islamic orthodoxy where there was not too much place for more considerable deviations from the mainstream of the
dominant theological concept. It is also generally assumed that the mystical congregations with Shi’i bias like Bektashi and Rufa’i have never won legitimacy in Bosnia and their most northern strong point has been found in the area of Kosovo and Vardar Macedonia.

It could however be supposed that the particular Bektashi dervish order which has played an important role in the Islamicization of the Balkans and followed the wave of Ottoman conquest (according to some opinions even had preceded it) in its propaganda activities did not bypass the Bosnian territory. Concrete evidence is however rare and unreliable. Thus not always reliable Evliya Çelebi in his Seyahatname mentions a Bektashi tekke located in the vicinity of today’s Čajniče in Eastern Bosnia (Evliya Çelebi, 1984, 669-670). Turkish researcher Murat Sertoğlu maintains that such a tekke existed also in Banja Luka, but gives neither the source nor more precise data (Sertoğlu, 1969, 317). The first evidence of the existence of organised Bektashism in Bosnian territory and even of the presence of a Bektashi convent in Sarajevo comes from Đemal Čehajić’s dissertation “The Dervish Orders in the Yugoslav Lands” (Čehajić, 1986, 169). The sicill (court register) No. 81 (f. 4) from the sicill-collection of Gazi Huseyin-beg Library in Sarajevo contains a request dated 1844 in which a certain Salahuddin Baba, a Bektashi sheikh from the tekke in Golobrdica-mahalle, asks for an increase of his miserable salary. Čehajić could not find enough material for more exact information, but correctly concludes that, judging by the lack of facts about the tekke, its life and activity had to be short.

My recent researches in the manuscript holdings of the libraries in Sarajevo, Berlin and Istanbul bring some more light to this question. Of particular interest is the MS 344 from the National Library (Narodna biblioteka) in Sarajevo which probably disappeared in the destruction of the library in the Fall of 1992 and whose copy I have. The manuscript written at the beginning of our century in the çink-form in not too nice a handwriting, and full of errors, contains verses of several Bektashi poets, among others two of Bosnian origin: Bosnevi and Fahri.

Of the Bektashi poet Bosnevi, whose poetical pseudonym does not allow any suspicion about his descent, the scholarly circles knew since the appearance of Sadettin Nüzhet Ergun’s book “Bektashi Poets” (Ergun, 1930, 238-239) where some of Bosnevi’s verses were included. Bosnevi has taken a prominent position also in the later anthologies of Bektashi poetry, but neither Ergun nor anybody after him could offer any information about the poet’s identity. Ergun, on the basis of an aşklar destanı in which Bosnevi mentions several Bektashi poets from the 19th century, concludes correctly that Bosnevi was
their contemporary. Ergun's assumption confirms also a so far unknown gazel1 in which Bosnevi, in a sarcastic-satirical way describes the political circumstances of the middle of the 19th century, particularly the humiliating position of the Ottoman Empire. It seems that Bosnevi was not an especially prolific poet. The insignificant number of his poetical works stands in discord with their frequent appearance in the Bektashi-mecmu’as (poetry collections).

As far as Fahri, the other Bosnian Bektashi poet is concerned, his personality was even a bigger puzzle for the historians of Ottoman literature. He was also discovered by Ergun who published Fahri’s nā’t-i Ali (praise of Ali). However he could say nothing about the poet. That the state of research has not changed until nowadays is confirmed also by the last edition of the “Encyclopaedia of Turkish Language and Literature” where by Fahri’s name stands: A Bektashi poet (20th C). No information about his life (Türk Dili Ve Edebiyatı Ansiklopedisi, 1979).

Thanks to the mentioned manuscript from Sarajevo I can offer some new information about the poet. Now we can with confidence state that Fahri was a Bosnian from Sarajevo. His proper name was Abdullah. This is supported by some headings and a verse from the manuscript:

_Bende-i Nari Abdullah Fahri gazel der muh-immat en est be-mesken-i Saray Bosna_
A gazel of Abdullah Fahri, the servant of Nari, in the month of mourning (Muharram), in the city of Sarajevo^2_

_Bu dahı Bosnevi Fahri der medi-i mürşid Nari Baba_
Again Fahri the Bosnian in praise of his sheikh Nari Baba^3_

_Nutk-i Fahri Bosnevi_
The words of Fahri the Bosnian^4_

_Koşma-i Bosnevi Fahri_
A poem of Fahri the Bosnian^5_

“smimiz Abdullah mahlas in Fahri_
_Fena miükinde mümam kImfilifi Fahri_
My name is Abdullah, they call me Fahri_
I had chosen a life in poverty in the kingdom of non-existence^6_

The mentioned poem from Ergun’s book is to be found also in the manuscript from Sarajevo, which proves that the same poet is in question. Thanks to a verse written on the occasion of the Nevruz 1285 h. (1907) we find out the time of the poet’s life.

_Sal-i hezār dū sad heşt penc-i cedīd henan_
Şir-i Hak cümlemize yardım ede şah-şimerdan_
The new 1285 year is here.
Let the God’s lion and King of the brave (Ali) help us all^7_
The overwhelming majority of the poetry of both poets is composed in the syllabic hece meter. It is also obvious that the verses were not primarily intended for reading or recitation but for collective singing (nefes) in the tekke. The language of the verses is poor in Arabic and Persian loan-words, which is a common characteristic of Bektashi poetry in general. The exception are a few gazels in aruz where the meter dictated the use of foreign vocabulary. Also thematically the verses of Bosnevi and Fahri do not differ from verses of other Bektashi poets. In regard to the subject they could be classified in four categories. The first, most favourite theme is eulogy of the fourth caliph and first Shi'i imam Ali. His name in verses is very often joined with the name of the prophet in the construction Muhammad Ali.

Muhammed Alidir kîklarîn bışi
Anlarîbîlmeyen nicolur işi
Bosnevi aklîvêştünden yäşi
Akanla aklîn Alidir Ali.

Muhammed Ali is head of the Forty Saints
What will happen with those who do not understand?
Bosnevi sheds tears from his eyes
Ali is the one who made them flow.

In the praise of Ali Bosnevi goes so far as his deification:

Ali ismi Allah derler
Yüzüne secede ederler
Tıq yerine bış koşarlar
Koyamazsî nemedim mi

Ali is called by God’s name
Prayers are performed before His face
Heads are placed instead of stones
You could not do the same, could you?

To this group verses could be also added whose subject is the eulogy of the Twelve Imams. For that purpose strophic poetic forms are usually used in the way that one stanza is devoted to each imam. More space belongs to Hasan and Husain and here room is often found for a curse on the Omayyad caliph Yezid, whom the Shi‘it tradition imputes the responsibility for their death.

The second favourite subject is the praise of the sheikh. The Bektashis, like the members of the other mystical congregations, attach particular importance to the obedience to the sheikh, without whose spiritual guidance it is impossible to escape from the humiliation of belonging to the world. The sheikh is the mediator between the mürid (disciple) and Deity and even the incarnation of God.

Müридîn nazarsî Hak nazarsîr
Müридîn didarî Hak didarîr

The sheik’s look is the look of God,
The sheik’s face is the face of God. 8
Fahri praises in several poems his sheikh Yusuf Nari Baba and Bosnevi his sheikh Hız Baba. About the identity of these two personalities at the moment I have no information.

The third category constitutes the verses which explain the Bektash mystery i.e. the Bektashi scheme of the emanation of the phenomenal world from the spiritual into the material and vice versa.

The last, fourth group, makes up the verses which praise dervish life, most usually in the form of advice and invitation to entering the order.

One poem by Bosnevi could not be put in any of the four categories. This is the mentioned satire on contemporary political circumstances, which stands in opposition to the general tone of Bosnevi’s poetical work as well as the proclaimed lack of interest in worldly affairs.

The verses of Bosnevi and Fahri could not be considered as too original even if observed in the narrow frame of Ottoman poetics. I think that I am not unfair to both poets when I assume that their poetry is less literary work per se and more a historical document about the spiritual life of Bosnia’s past. They should be regarded as poetical evidence which adds one more colour to the Bosnian religious mélange. The poetry of both poets is part of a rather late wave of the Bektashi propaganda activities whose centre probably was Sarajevo. Sarajevo’s poet Fahri alludes to dervishes from all sides coming together in the tekke in the month of Muharram and his sheikh is a “king of the kings in Bosnia”.

Earlier traces of the Bektashi order in Bosnia I could not find. Obviously the Bektashi propaganda in Bosnia was not too fruitful. In my opinion there are more substantial causes for this. The main factor in spreading Bektashism in the Balkans in the 15th and 16th centuries were the Turkoman immigrants. Bektashism has always had (with the exception of the Bektashi role in the national emancipation of the Albanians in the late 19th and early 20th centuries) a sharply Turkish bias and incorporated the elements of folk religion and superstition of the Anatolian Turks, with which the Islamicized Slavs could not identify themselves. Moreover, folk mysticism has never been a Bosnian characteristic. The members of mystical
orders in Bosnia, in particular *Mawlawi* and *Naqshbandi*, were significantly the representatives of the intellectual and economic city elite. The religion of the crude people, especially in the country, was practised either in frames of the orthodox piety or in the different forms of Cryptochristianity.

Hasluck in his work "Bektashi Studies" (Hasluck, 2000, 36) asserts that there was no more Bektashi *tekke* in Bosnia after 1903 and that in the last years of their activity the duty of sheikh was carried out by a guest sheikh from Albania. I suppose that there is to be a search for the origin of the mentioned sheikhs *Nari Baba* and *Hzr Baba* as well as the poor *Salahuddin Baba* from the first lines of this paper.

**NOTES**

1 Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 38 a; Gazi Husrev-begova biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 3049, f. 177 b; Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Ms. or. oct. 2617, f. 11 b.
2 Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 46 b.
3 Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 46 b.
4 Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 47 a.
5 Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 47 a.
6 Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 47 a.
7 Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 90 a.
8 Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 47 a.
9 Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 46 b.

**LITERATURE**

*Türk Dili Ve Edebiyat Ansiklopedisi* (1979), Istanbul.

Neke nove činjenice o postojanju i književnoj aktivnosti bektasijskog reda u Bosni u 19. stoljeću

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početkom 20. stoljeća kada je red formalno već bio ukinut. U spomenutom rukopisu nalaze se stihovi dvojice bektasijkih pjesnika po imenu Bosnevi i Fahri (podrijetlom vjerovalo iz Sarajeva) koji su ovdje ocijenjeni kao umjetnički prosječni, ali društveno iznimno zanimljivi likovi. Bektasijko pjesništvo koje zastupaju pokazuje elemente socijalne i političke satire, kao i primjere tradicionalnog ekstremno ezoteričkoga učenja marginalnih skupina u islamu. Autor u turskom originalu i prijevodu donosi njihove stihove, u kojima se apsolutno zrcali bektasijski duh pjesnika i teološka doktrina tog mističnoga reda. Rad baca nešto više svjetla na povijest bektasijskog reda, povijest BiH u vrijeme osmanske vlasti te na kulturnu povijest Bosne.

Neue Fakten über die Existenz und literarische Tätigkeit des Bektaschija-Ordens im 19. Jahrhundert

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