



## SOME NEW FACTS ON THE EXISTENCE AND LITERARY ACTIVITIES OF THE BEKTASHI ORDER IN 19<sup>TH</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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

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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 be however supposed that the particular Bektashi dervish order which has played an important role in the islamization 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 Džemal 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 Husrev-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 *cönk*-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 19<sup>th</sup> century, concludes correctly that *Bosnevi* was

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their contemporary. Ergun's assumption confirms also a so far unknown *gazel*<sup>1</sup> in which *Bosnevi*, in a sarcastic-satirical way describes the political circumstances of the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 na'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 (20<sup>th</sup> 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 mah-imatem 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<sup>2</sup>

*Bu dahîBosnevi Fahri der medh-i mürşid Nari Baba*  
Again *Fahri* the Bosnian in praise of his sheikh *Nari Baba*<sup>3</sup>

*Nutk-îFahri Bosnevi*  
The words of *Fahri* the Bosnian<sup>4</sup>

*Koşma-i Bosnevi Fahri*  
A poem of *Fahri* the Bosnian<sup>5</sup>

~ *smimiz Abdullah mahlasın Fahri*  
*Fena mülkinde müdam kîmîlînfakrî*  
My name is *Abdullah*, they call me *Fahri*  
I had chosen a life in poverty in the kingdom of non-existence<sup>6</sup>

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 hezar dü sad heşt penc-i cedid heman*  
*Şir-i Hak cümlemize yardım ede şah-îmerdan*  
The new 1285 year is here.

Let the God's lion and King of the brave (*Ali*) help us all<sup>7</sup>

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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 *Muhammed Ali*.

*Muhammed Alidir kâkların başı*  
*Anları bilmeyen nicolur işi*  
*Bosnevi aktığı gözünden yaşı*  
*Akanla aktıran 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 secde ederler*  
*Taş yerine baş koyarlar*  
*Koyamazsın demedim 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 *Yazid*, whom the Shi'i 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 *mürîd* (disciple) and Deity and even the incarnation of God.

*Mürşidin nazarı Hak nazarıdır*  
*Mürşidin didarı Hak didarıdır*  
The sheik's look is the look of God,  
The sheik's face is the face of God.<sup>8</sup>

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*Fahri* praises in several poems his sheikh *Yusuf Nari Baba* and *Bosnevi* his sheikh *Hızır Baba*. About the identity of these two personalities at the moment I have no information.

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

*Makam-ıvahdetten düştüm yabana*

*Peymane yollarıgeçtim de geldim*

*Arifin esrariaçmam na-dana*

*Ariflerin sırrınıiseçtim de geldim*

I fell down from the place of God's Unity.

I passed the way of the full cup and reached the goal.

I cannot reveal the secret of the wise to an ignorant.

I chose the mystery of the wise and finally arrived.

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".<sup>9</sup>

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 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) a sharply Turkish bias and incorporated the elements of folk religion and superstition of the Anatolian Turks, with which the islamized Slavs could not identify themselves. Moreover, folk mysticism has never been a Bosnian characteristic. The members of mystical

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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 *Hızır Baba* as well as the poor *Salahuddin Baba* from the first lines of this paper.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 46 b.

<sup>3</sup> Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 46 b.

<sup>4</sup> Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 47 a.

<sup>5</sup> Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 47 a.

<sup>6</sup> Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 47 a.

<sup>7</sup> Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 90 a.

<sup>8</sup> Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 47 a.

<sup>9</sup> Narodna biblioteka Sarajevo, MS 344, f. 46 b.

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

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Obično se smatra da beктаšijski derviški red nije djelovao na prostorima Bosne i Hercegovine. Autor obrađuje do sada neobjavljen izvor (rukopis na turskom jeziku iz Narodne biblioteke u Sarajevu) koji nedvojbeno svjedoči o aktivnostima reda u Bosni i to, što je zanimljivo, krajem 19. i

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početkom 20. stoljeća kada je red formalno već bio ukinut. U spomenutom rukopisu nalaze se stihovi dvojice bektašijskih pjesnika po imenu Bosnevi i Fahri (podrijetlom vjerovatno iz Sarajeva) koji su ovdje ocijenjeni kao umjetnički prosječni, ali društveno iznimno zanimljivi likovi. Bektašijsko 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 bektašijski duh pjesnika i teološka doktrina tog mističnoga reda. Rad baca nešto više svjetla na povijest bektašijskog 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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In islamistischen Fachkreisen geht man gemeinhin von der Annahme aus, dass der Derwisch-Orden der Bektaschija-Mönche auf dem Gebiet des heutigen Bosnien und Herzegowina nicht vertreten war. Der Verfasser dieses Aufsatzes berichtet von seiner Arbeit an einer bisher nicht veröffentlichten Quelle (einer in Türkisch verfassten und in der Nationalbibliothek in Sarajevo vorliegenden Handschrift), die unzweifelbar auf die Existenz dieses Ordens in Bosnien schließen lässt. Interessant ist, dass seine Tätigkeit in das Ende des 19. und den Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts fiel, als der Orden formal bereits aufgelöst war. Die erwähnte Handschrift enthält die Verse zweier Dichter aus den Reihen des Bektaschija-Ordens namens Bosnevi und Fahri (vermutlich aus Sarajevo gebürtig), die in künstlerischer Hinsicht als mittelmäßig einzustufen sind, die gesellschaftlich jedoch äußerst interessant sind. Diese Werke der Bektaschija-Dichtung enthalten Elemente einer sozialen und politischen Satire sowie Beispiele extrem esoterischer Lehren, die von marginalen islamischen Glaubensgruppen vertreten werden. Der Verfasser führt Verse in türkischer Urfassung und natürlich in der Übersetzung an, um den Geist der Bektaschija-Dichtung sowie der theologischen Doktrin dieses mystischen Ordens zu veranschaulichen. Die vorliegende Arbeit trägt zu einer besseren Kenntnis der Geschichte des Bektaschija-Ordens bei und erhellt im weiteren Sinne die Geschichte Bosnien und Herzegowinas in der Zeit der osmanischen Vorherrschaft sowie die Kulturgeschichte dieses Landes.