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Sheikh Sinan of Srebrenik

Beside the local mosque in Upper Srebrenik, the settlement in the vicinity of the renowned Srebrenik Fortress, lies the mausoleum of Sheikh Sinan. Unlike the fortress, which boasts mentions in historical sources even before the Ottoman conquest, and particularly in the Ottoman ones after its definitive fall under the Ottoman rule in the year 1520, the figure of Sheikh Sinan is rather an obscure one, of whom nothing would be known if not for the local tradition. In 1965, this tradition was recorded by Milenko S. Filipović. It is said that Sheikh Sinan came to Srebrenik from Buda after the year 1690, i.e. after the Ottomans had lost Hungary. M. Filipović, further on, states the tale of "Pobra," i.e. Sinan's blood brother, a Christian native to Žabari who converted to Islam and who, after death, was buried beside Sinan, and the tale of the beginnings of Sheikh Sinan's waqf and his karamat. We are able to provide some reliable information as concerns this dervish Sheikh, on the basis of his biography written by Muniri Belgradi, a Sheikh Sinan's contemporary, mufti, and teacher, in his work *Silsiletü l-muqarribîn ve menâqibu l-mütteqîn*.

Muniri Belgradi (his real name being Ibrahim B. Iskender) is a famous Ottoman author from this area. His biography, as well as the information on his works, provided Hazim Šabanović based on his own research and the works of earlier researchers. Muniri was native to Bosnia, and Šabanović states that, after having graduated in Istanbul, he obtained the position of mufti in Belgrade. He was, likewise, a teacher at the Mehmed-pasha Jahjapašić Madrasah. The exact date of Muniri's death has not been determined, but it happened sometime after 1617 and before the year 1635. After death, he was buried in the harem of Mehmed-pasha Jahjapašić Mosque. In presenting the work *Silsiletü l-muqarribîn*, Šabanović emphasized its importance and the need for its publishing (there is a transcript of this work in the Sulejmanija Library in Istanbul). Nathalie Clayer, a renowned researcher of the history of dervish orders on the Balkans, abundantly used this Muniri's work, and it remains of interest to her to this day.

That being all on this source, we shall now interpret Muniri's claims throughout pages 118a-119b, as they contain the biography of Sheikh Sinan: "This noble decedent had been Merkez-effendi's khalifa before coming to the backwater town of Srebrenik, located near Tuzla. There he settled and lived, practicing his tariqa. Although of modest possessions, he built a masjid and, having lived an exemplary life, reached the old age of some 80 to 90 years. However, despite reaching such an old age and being known for his exemplary and noble life, the qadi of Srebrenik instructed him to labour as per the orders of Sanjak-bey. The imperial commissioner, overseeing the works in

progress, was Vildan-zade-effendi, the son of my teacher Vildan-effendi. When Vildan-zade saw Sinan at the worksite, out of consideration for and affection towards devout believers inherited from his father, he cried out: 'Effendi, what are you doing here?,' and asked him to explain his situation. The sheikh did so and Vildan-zade pledged that he will have him exempt from the service; however, the qadi did not accede to Vildan-zade's demand. Sinan, then, desired for the qadi to be replaced with another and be removed from this world; he wanted the qadi assailed by masons and dead that very night, as he was to remain at the worksite (the rest of this page and the pages 118b and 119a deal with the issue of qadi corruption in general and not before the page 119b does Muniri continue to talk about Sinan). At the moment of the qadi's death, Sinan distanced himself from the place for he thought it best, and as he walked home God's wisdom filled him with awe. After this, Vildan-zade-effendi had Sinan be awarded with a small salary of several silver coins from the treasury. At this time, Sinan went to Belgrade on some business where he acquainted himself with several individuals and Emir-effendi, who did him honour. In nobleness, righteousness, and with prayers for salvation, in the year 1010 Sinan moved to the hereafter; may God have mercy upon his soul."

This information enables us to, to an extent, shed some light on the figure of Sheikh Sinan and Muniri's claims will be expounded on in the lines to follow. Let us proceed from the end where Muniri states that Sinan died in the year 1010 of the Hijra, corresponding to the year 1601, or 1602. If it is known that he had lived some 80 to 90 years, then he had to be born between the years 1510 and 1520. Muniri writes that Sinan came to and settled in Srebrenik i.e. he chose Srebrenik for his home (Muniri uses the verb *tevettün etmek* which has that exact meaning). Muniri then states that Sinan had been Merkez-effendi's khalifa. Merkez-effendi was a renowned sheikh of the Sunbuliye, one of the offshoots of the Halveti order of dervishes. He (Merkez-effendi) was also a murid of the renowned dervish sheikh Sunbul Sinan-effendi who was the founder of this offshoot of the Halveti order. After the death of Sunbul Sinan-effendi in the year 1529 up until his own death in 1552, Merkez-effendi led Koca Mustafa-pasha's Tekke, which was located in Istanbul and served as the centre of this offshoot. So, Sinan had to, before coming to Srebrenik, have spent some time in Istanbul, in this tekke, where he was instructed by Merkez-effendi, from whom he likewise received his khalifate, in the rules and the teachings of the offshoot; subsequently, he left for Bosnia. Now we better understand Sinan's tariqa; he was a member of the Halveti order of dervishes or, more precisely, its Sunbuliye offshoot.

If we tried to answer the question why Sinan-effendi came to Srebrenik, the most plausible answer would be for the expansion of the order; however, we need to keep in mind the fact that dervish orders, particularly the Halveti during the 16th and the 17th century, had played a significant role in the Ottoman state. They were present during the conquest of new territories, the consolidation of power, and the process of islamization in the newly conquered regions; they had influence over the political and religious life. Therefore, it can be assumed that Sheikh Sinan's scope of activity, besides bolstering the ranks of the Halveti adherents, likewise encompassed work on the expansion of Islam. It should be noted that significant masses of Vlachs who had settled in this area largely accepted Islam. It is very likely that Sinan had kept close ties with state officials in this area and, according to Muniri, with other dervishes, as is the practice within the dervish orders. Muniri's account claims that Sinan had built

a masjid in Srebrenik, but does not mention that he had likewise left a waqf, of which we know. That Sheikh Sinan would designate his waqf for the masjid so that it could be maintained is quite understandable.

The Bosnia and Herzegovina waqf census of 1913 contained information on Sheikh Sinan's waqf showing that part of his income accounted for the salary of the muezzin and that of the imam of the mosque in Upper Srebrenik. His waqf certainly came into existence during the final decades of the 16th century, and according to the census of 1913, it encompassed land in Srebrenik and Babunovići. The waqf, we presume, could have come into existence in two ways: a) by virtue of the merits and the reputation of Sheikh Sinan, as he could have been rewarded with a deed of gift by the Sultan, one that turns land into his private property and that land, as such, could be waqfed; b) through the efforts and advocacy of an eminent state official, for it is known that Ottoman dignitaries supported the expansion of this offshoot of the Halveti, and in that case this waqf would have come into existence on their initiative.

In conclusion, it remains to be said that the tradition as concerns Sheikh Sinan's arrival from Hungary, after the year 1690, is not accurate. It is true he came to Srebrenik, indeed, but certainly not from Hungary at that time. If one is to take into account that the adherents of this offshoot of the Halveti were particularly present in Western Anatolia and Rumelia, it can be assumed that Sinan is also native to these parts. This, naturally, is but a presumption for nothing can be claimed of his origins at the time. However, the tale pertaining to his blood-brother "Pobra" as preserved in the tradition can be safely dismissed.

"Turbe šeh-Sinan babe i Pobrin grob u Srebrniku," from *Articles and Study Materials for the Cultural History of East Bosnia*, Book VI, pp. 151-155, Tuzla: Museum of East Bosnia. Published in in 1965.

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