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The Mausoleum of Sheikh Sinan-baba and Pobra's Tomb in Srebrenik

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In addition to what I have read about mausoleums and their respective traditions in the works of F. W. Hasluck and Tih. R. Đorđević, I have also seen many mausoleums and recorded numerous traditions in person, and the tradition as concerns a modest mausoleum in Upper Srebrenik is unlike any of the ones I have heard before, hence deeming it appropriate to publish it separately.

In Upper Srebrenik, several hundred metres from the ruins of Old Town Srebrenik, there is a mosque with a cemetery, and few Muslim houses beside the mosque. The place where the mosque lies is called Bekana. As a temple, the mosque does not, in the slightest, differ from any of the other rural mosques throughout Bosnia, except for the fact that a mausoleum had been built beside it. Likewise, the mausoleum itself is rather generic. It is a simple, low-rise, shingle-roofed structure. The tomb within makes no attempt at monumentality, and lies with no ornaments, noteworthy objects, or inscription; it is no different from the tombs gracing the mausoleums of other ordinary sheikhs and walis. Only through conversation with the locals does one find out whose mausoleum it is and, thereby, its significance.

According to the local tradition, Sheikh Sinan-baba or Sinan-effendi was buried in the mausoleum. Before his death, he proclaimed he was not to receive any funeral honours if such honours would not, in turn, be given to his blood brother as well, and the locals acceded to the request. Thus, at the cemetery, several metres from the mausoleum, lies a prominent tomb called Pobra's tomb, one of the great attractions of Srebrenik.

Per tradition, Sheikh Sinan came to Srebrenik from Buda in the year 1690 when multitudes of Ottomans and Muslims, forced to flee Hungary and Slavonia, withdrew and settled in Bosnia, particularly in North East Bosnia, in the Tuzla area. Dr. R. Jeremić, half a century ago, recorded that amongst the refugees from Hungary who had settled in Srebrenik, Ćehajiće, Ledenice, and Lower Mionica, had been Sheikh Sinan effendi who, having fled Buda, had settled in Srebrenik, leaving behind waqfs in Srebrenik and Babunovići. There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the tradition, i.e. that Sinan had come from Buda after the Ottoman withdrawal from Hungary. This claim is supported by the fact that the earliest dated tombstones of that cemetery are not older than the first half of the 18th century.

The tradition further states that Sheikh Sinan had obtained as much land as he could have made rounds of on horseback in a day, but gave it all to the mosque. This estate of his, they say, was located in Srebrenik and Babunovići, and was the size of 528 dunums. Such a tale – that one could obtain as much land as he could have made rounds of on horseback in a day – is nothing out of the ordinary: we encounter it not only in old Europe, but also in the Far East, and in our lands it is rather a familiar thing. The land obtained in such a way could be waqfed, as records exist of several such cases, and the tale of Sinan and his mosque is but another case in point to be added to the list of already known cases.

The sheikh had settled and lived in Šehovina. The peasants began the construction of the mosque; however, they did so at a slightly different location than where the mosque lies today, and the sheikh advised them to re-start. But the peasants would not listen, continuing where they had started. The sheikh was, once, performing the evening prayer at the place where he told the peasants the mosque should have been being constructed. After he finished the prayer, he went to greet the builders, saying unto them at the end: "Work on ye, work!" And in the morning – the mosque was where the sheikh wanted it to be!

The sheikh headed for the emperor to inform him that he will cede his estate to the mosque in Srebrenik. However, the guard did not want to let him through. The sheikh touched the guard with his hand, and the guard fell dead. The emperor, having been briefed, ordered for the sheikh to be let through. After the sheikh expressed his intentions, the emperor said, "When you could have given your estate, I will have the mosque exempt from taxes – that is from me!"

On his way back, the sheikh passed through Muslim villages. He was unable to find lodging for the night, as everyone declined. He, then, stumbled upon the house of an impoverished Christian and asked him whether he could stay for the night. "You can, but we haven't anything to eat," replied the host. The sheikh said that he had supper for both of them. So they dined on the barley bread the sheikh had in his pouch, becoming friends, even blood brothers, on the occasion. They say that this sheikh's friend, Pobra, lived in Žabari, and that he was not only a Christian but a Serb (the village of Žabari is to this day populated by Orthodox Serbs), and they believe he too was a newcomer from Buda.

The sheikh was to be buried after death with all the honours. However, he appreciated and loved his blood-brother, Pobra, so much that he ordained for Pobra to be buried, after death, in the same cemetery. The sheikh also proclaimed that, unless Pobra's tomb received offerings too, he wished them not on his either.

The sheikh died before Pobra did, and was buried in the mausoleum beside the mosque. When Pobra died, although a Christian, he was buried in the same cemetery. His tomb can easily be distinguished from the others even today: it is walled, with relatively high tombstones. Although the tombstones were of Muslim design, all locals claim the decedent was not a Muslim, rather a Christian, Sheikh's friend, even blood-brother at that.

I have heard the tradition as concerns Sheikh Sinan also from the Muslims in the villages of Humci and Nahvioci on Majevica in 1962. According to the tradition from Humci, the sheikh could have been native to Mecca and, for him, Pobra, his blood-brother, even converted to Islam.

Two motifs are expressed in this tradition. The first is, in effect, a theophany: the travels of saints or deities in human form who, along the way, encounter rich, inhospitable, and inhumane people. These decline them lodging for the night, but it so happens that some poor man will take them in. This is a common motif in the tales of many peoples, so is true with ours, just that in the tale of Sheikh Sinan it has been severely simplified. Therefore, this motif will not be discussed any further. It is worth noting, however, that, here, the word is about a pre-Islamic motif that entered the Islamic tradition.

The second motif is that of religious tolerance, salient and nurtured in the tradition. Religious tolerance is a remarkable characteristic of the peoples of the Balkans and there is a myriad of examples of not only proper relations between individuals and groups but also of exceptional friendship between Christians and Muslims. As an example of the latter, the incidence described by Evlija Čelebi in 1660, in Livno, could be presented. In a battle on the Livanjsko field the Ottomans took prisoner of and executed 3330 Christians. However, one of the prisoners had been hidden by his Ottoman blood brother in an effort to save him. When news of this reached Melek Ahmed-pasha, he commanded for both to be brought before him. He had already summoned the executioner for the prisoner. However, the Ottoman implored the pasha not to have the prisoner executed as they have become blood brothers. When the attending heroes of Krajina, the ghazis, explained to the pasha the brotherhood of blood, which was quite common between Christians and Muslims in Krajina, he released them both.

Thus, the friendship between Sinan-baba and his Christian blood brother would have been nothing out of the ordinary. Personally, I believe that we ought to, in this tradition, see the reflection of reality as it once was in the Tuzla area.

I never could determine to which dervish order Sheikh Sinan-baba belonged. There is neither pillar nor dervish turban in his mausoleum, which would have otherwise eased identification. Amongst Muslims in the Tuzla area, as far as I know, there are no dervishes today; if there are, there can be but a few of them and they have no significance. However, in the 18th century, this could have been a little different.

Around the middle of the 18th century, Muslim peasantry was behind several insurrections in the Tuzla area, in the years: 1747, 1748, 1749, and 1754. They rose against moil (the building of fortifications) and high taxes. It is worth noting that sources also call these insurrectionists *poture*. The explanation of F. Spaho as concerns the cause of these insurrections is rather naive; he held that people in positions of power thought their privileges threatened and, in an effort to preserve them, incited the people to revolt. The causes had to run deeper than that. Unfortunately, these insurrections have not been the subject of serious study. It appears that M. Hadžijahić realized the significance of these movements, which were not limited only to Tuzla, as there was also some action in Užice in 1748. He suspects

that *hamzevije* (named after the Sheikh Hamza Orlović, executed in 1573 in Constantinople), who were in fact the same as the Bektashis, took part in these movements.

With these historical facts in mind, the tradition of Sinan-baba gains a new perspective and significance. Sheikh Sinan-baba was a member of a dervish order that preached and practiced religious tolerance, and there were many such orders. The Bektashis were the most fervent ones in this regard; their teachings and customs are imbued with Christian elements to such an extent that the Bektashis in Albania are considered practitioners of a different religion. For example, they are taught that good Bektashis must not differentiate a Muslim from a non-Muslim and that they are spiritual brothers to all men, not just within the order. A Bektashi considers all people his friends. In this, the Bektashis would go as far as to enable even non-Muslims to join their order. It is quite interesting what Haslak had stated, speaking of the geographical prevalence of the Bektashis in Asia Minor. He stops to explain the word *akhi* which is used amongst the Bektashis. It is an Arabic word, the meaning of which is *my brother*; but it also has a special meaning in relation to an important brotherhood, famous in the early 14th century as a fairly widespread league amongst the Seljuqs in Asia Minor, and later as a political blend of importance. Akhi (brother) has been preserved in the title of the Sheikh of the Haji Bektashi tekke, and the Bektashis had, once, at least one offshoot named *rumska* brothers i.e. brothers from Asia Minor. Haslak considers the possibility that, at some point in time, the Bektashis could have assimilated into or perhaps absorbed the Turkish brotherhood.

The most important fact linking Sinan with the Bektashi order is that in the Ottoman times there was a Bektashi tekke in Buda, and Sinan could have been its member before fleeing. Because of their social aspirations, perhaps even primitively socialist ones, some dervish orders have been persecuted since old Turkey. The state had particularly castigated the Bektashi order, which had firm ties to the janissary organization. The order became prohibited after the abolishment of the janissaries in 1826, but it was not destroyed. After the 18th century insurrections in the Tuzla area, it seems the authorities of the Sanjak of Zvornik found more success in the persecution of dervishes as preachers of social reforms and religious tolerance, and as the bearers of some Christian customs, and certain views among Muslims.

In support of such an explanation of Pobra's tomb in Srebrenik is the fact that this is not the only such example in the Tuzla area. I have heard, in Srebrenik even, that something similar took place in the village of Čekanići (likewise in the municipality of Srebrenik). It is said that, in the village, there was a Muslim who did not live to see his friend (blood brother), a Christian living in Maglaj, visit him. Upon arrival, his blood brother died too. They were buried together near the mosque; however, the tomb of the Christian did not have a tombstone. They say, the village was named Čekanići for the Muslim's waiting. I have not been to Čekanići where I would have certainly heard more about it.

The tradition of Sinan-baba and his blood brother is, at any rate, interesting. Perhaps the further recording of such traditions and the study of written sources will allow us to unravel in totality the intricacies of this tradition. I hope that what is presented here along with my notes will serve as an incentive to that end.

"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.

Translated by Bojana Vuković

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