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Sheikh Sinan-Baba and Pobro

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Famous people from Srebrenik's history

Today, we can conclude with sadness that a significant part of Srebrenik's history, in a certain way due to the lack of resources, has been lost forever. However, the situation is even worse when it comes to people who have been very important in past times, and who have certainly positioned themselves deeply in the history of this city. It is precisely from this point of view that special attention has been paid to particular characters that have deeply influenced the past of these areas.

Upon arrival of the Ottomans in these areas, there was a character that has been mentioned in a previous historiography as well. The character that awakened the interest of science in the past is in the folklore about the enlightened character Sheikh Sinan-Baba. Milenko Filipović, the well-known Yugoslav ethnographer, took interest in the folk tradition and explored the subject in the same matter, when it comes to this historical character. His work placed the folk legend in the period after the Vienna War (1683-1699). In essence, it is a folk tradition whose aim is to encourage interfaith tolerance, that is, the folklore is about the great friendship of this enlightened character with Pobro (blood brother) - a Christian from Žabari (Pelagićevo). In addition to Filipović's aforementioned interpretation of this legend, there are certainly other views. We have recently had the opportunity to meet a notable collector of folk traditions from Posavina, Jakov Babić, who, as we learned from the conversation, developed a new theory that actually goes beyond what Filipović has started. Namely, Babić is looking for the second person from the folk story, Pobro, among the members of a Catholic family Pobrić, and considers that the family name of this family has remained as an *amanet* (heritage) from that time.

The above mentioned theories about Sheikh Sinan and his placement in the post-war period, however, has been refuted by Srebrenik orientalist Nedim Zahirović, who, in his work "Sheikh Sinan from Srebrenik", places this enlightened character in the sixteenth century.

Who is Sheikh Sinan-Baba?

Based on the work of "Silsiletii l-muqarribln ve menaqibu l-mutteqin" a Belgrade mufti of that time, Munir Belgradi, regarding his contemporary Sheikh-Sinan we know that "this noble merhum was the caliph of Merkez-effendi and then came to a small Kasaba

(town) Srebrenik located below Tuzla, where he settled and lived in his tariqa (spiritual learning).” We also know that he grew old in Srebrenik and that he was able to build a small *mescit* (a mosque without a minaret) and lived till the old age of 80-90 years staying there in Srebrenik, where he was buried in the harem of the mosque that is today named after him; a *turbe* (mausoleum) was also built next to the mosque.

From this source, we find that Sheikh Sinan was chosen by the Srebrenik qadi in spite of his old age and exemplary and noble life to work on the repair of the Old Town as ordered by Sandžak-bey. Right at the place of performing these tasks, there was a mubašir (emperor’s commissioner) Vildan-zade effendi, the son of Muniri’s teacher Vildan Effendi. When Vildan-zade saw Sinan in this place, considering his affection towards the religious people, and knowing him as a friend of his father he called out, “Effendi, what are you doing here? ” and asked him about his condition. Sheikh explained his situation, and Vildan-zade asked qadi to release sheikh from this service, but qadi refused. Then Sinan wished for another qadi to come to this place and “that this current one be removed from this world in the same way that he is attacked and killed by čarahori (laborers)”

When the qadi was killed, Sinan immediately moved away from that place, for he thought that was for the best, and as he went home he was impressed by God’s wisdom. After this, Vildan-zade ef. had made it clear that Sinan would receive a few silver coins from the state treasury (bejtul- mal). At that time, Sinan was in Belgrade for some work, where he met with some individuals and with the Emir-effendi who showed him honor and respect.

“In the nobility, and honour, and with the prayers for salvation in the other world, Sinan died in 1010, may Allah have mercy for him.”

So, by analyzing this source, we have to agree with a few conclusions reached by Nedim Zahirović regarding the following: Sheik Sinan died in 1010 according to Hegira, which corresponds to 1601 or 1602. If we take the fact that Sheikh Sinan lived 80-90 years, then it can be concluded that Sheikh Sinan was born between 1510 and 1520. If we go back to the earlier history of Srebrenik, or the end of Srebrenik banate, it can be concluded that the arrival of this sheikh coincides with the first years of the Ottoman rule in this region, i.e. with the occurrence of a new cultural-civilization and religious aspect of Islam.

However, before we say more about the first years of Ottoman rule over this area, we would like to draw on some other undeniable conclusions that Zahirović had made. First of all, we have to mention the fact that Sinan was the caliph of Merkez-effendi, the well-known sunbuli sheikh of a Helvetian tariqa. He (Merkez-ef.) was the mureed (novice) of the well-known Dervish Sheikh Sunbul Sinan-ef., who is also the founder of this Helvetian branch.

Therefore we also know about Sheikh Sinan’s tariqa - he was a Helvetii and belonged to a branch of Sunbuliye.

Certainly, a new question is being asked: What is the role of Sunbuliye as a branch of the Helvetian dervish order in the Ottoman Empire, and thus also in Bosnia? It is

known that this Dervish order was one of the privileged within the Ottoman Empire and that it often had that missionary role, that is, the role of spreading Islamic learning in the newly-conquered regions of the Ottoman Empire. In this way, we can safely note that one of the main tasks that Sheikh Sinan had in Srebrenik was the missionary role in spreading Islam in this area, and that this role was above sheikh's task of acquiring new supporters for the Helvetian tariqa.

The Role of Sheik-Sinan in Srebenik

Sheikh Sinan, as we have already stated, had a spiritual and enlightenment role in adopting Islam in this area. Certainly, this educated man and an expert in Islamic theology, with his arrival in these areas, played one of the dominant roles in spreading Islam. This is best confirmed by the fact that the area of Varoš Srebrenik with its boroughs and streets is one of the areas with the greatest intensity of acceptance of Islam.

We mentioned earlier the first census from 1533 and the relationship between the Christian and the Muslim population. However, according to the census of 1548, the ratio of the Muslim population is even more noticeable, so there are 42 Muslim houses in Srebrenik Varoš with 29 unmarried Muslims, and 16 non-Muslim houses with two unmarried men. At the same time, there were 23 Muslim houses in Begov Konak, where there was an unmarried Muslim as well, while there were no Christians in this borough.

What is to be noted based on these data is that about a dozen Christian houses disappear within fifteen years, while the number of Muslim houses grows, especially in the borough Begov Konak, which is certainly closer to Sheikh Sinan's mescit where this divine figure has a somewhat more important role. Now with certainty, after these analyses, we have found that the key role in spreading Islam in Srebrenik has this, we will dare say - missionary. Certainly we cannot fail to notice that the mentioned transition to Islam in the period between the two census in 1533 and 1548 was even more noticeable in the Srebrenik nahia area, where the influence of this divine figure or its followers was very present.

Who is Pobro?

In this paper we want to try to figure out who Pobro is, following the legend about Sheikh-Sinan and Pobro.

Immediately at the beginning of this story we have to look at a part of the legend that says he is a Christian. Of course, that part of the paper rejects the conclusions reached by Milenko Filipović, who says that Pobro is a Christian from Žabari (or Pelagićevo). Filipović clearly states that upon coming back from Istanbul - Constantinople, Sheikh Sinan, going through Pelagićevo, seeks help from the Christian from that village. If we were to use modern ways of traveling, then it would make sense that Žabari (Pelagićevo) would be on the way from Istanbul. However, if we adapt to the travel routes from the past where long journeys took place across the shortest sections, then it is concluded that there is no talk about the possibility that this man passed through Žabari or through the area of Posavina.

We hope that the above conclusions have denied the earlier thesis about a Christian from Žabari, but we still did not succeed in explaining who Pobro was.

For the explanation of this issue, it is necessary to know at what kind of an environment does Sheikh Sinan come to when he comes to Srebrenik. Certainly, at the very beginning he comes to an environment in which there are very few people of Islamic faith. Likewise, we must draw attention to the fact that in these first years people formally accepted Islam, and that they still remained close to their earlier religious traditions and that they were trying to improve their status in society by the formal act. So, Shaykh Sinan comes to the place that has just gotten under the Ottoman rule, and in which the remains of old times are very present.

As we have already noted, Sheikh Sinan plays a very important role in getting the local population to adopt Islam. However, the question arises whether these people should forget their tradition, their many centuries of existence in these areas that their ancestors paid with a lot of blood. How to justify to their children the fact that they were born as Christians and lived as Muslims? Of course, this is possible by creating a legend that could justify the facts mentioned. So we come to the conclusion that Pobro is not a stranger, but that there are people who accepted Islam, but people who were not able to break with their past and their ancestors so easily.

This legend was a good way for local people to show their gratitude to the most prominent character for their acceptance of Islam, but at the same time to develop feelings of coexistence as a truly irrefutable existential necessity of the Bosnian society, simultaneously linking the legend to their everyday life. So, Pobro is one of the individuals from such a Srebrenik region, which may have been closest to Sheikh, but he is by no means a separate individual located in the harem of the mentioned mosque.

In this way, the local inhabitants, alongside the deep memories of a stranger named Sheikh Sinan, who came from Anatolia or some of the other areas of Rumelia would certainly like to express gratitude to the man who led them into their religious life in the past and who recognized certain similarities within the new faith and thus made a decisive influence on his neighbors in accepting the new faith.

As time went by and Islamic – Oriental culture was more emphasized, folk traditions no longer needed a real story, which was quite difficult to explain to younger generations. For this reason, in the folk tradition Pobro turns into a stranger, and at the same time Sheikh Sinan, who is indeed a stranger by birth, is completely identified with the character from the area. However, in the end, we must mention the part of the folk tradition that is attributed to Sheikh-Sinan “when you pass my grave and give sadaqah, leave sadaqah on Pobro’s grave as well,” which clearly transcribes the message that the sheikh, in his humble life, completely sympathized with the social environment that identified him in the above manner.

The Legend of the Three Mausoleums

The mentioned Sheikh-Sinan turbe (mausoleum) is not the only one in the area of Srebrenik municipality. There is also Sheikh-Dedo turbe in Čekanići, and Turbe in

Čančići - which is in the border area of this municipality and Tuzla municipality. There is a tradition for each of these mausoleums, but there is one that brings together all three, namely: "Mausoleums keep safe Srebrenik and its inhabitants during the wars". Of course, it is difficult to believe in legends, but we have to agree with the fact that in this case the legend and the reality partly matched, and that Srebrenik was truly spared in the wars of the last century.

Prevod: Bojana Vuković

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