

BOJIDAR ALEXIEV, *Folklorni profili na miusulmanski svetsi v Bălgaria*, Akademichno Izdatelstvo "Marin Drinov", Sofia, 2005, 192 p.

The book of Bojidar Alexiev, who is a researcher at the Institute for Folklore, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, brings into attention a heterodox topics: the lives of six Muslim "saints"¹ that belong, by their belief practice as well as by the way the other people have been seen them, to the mystic branches of the Islam, Sufism and Bektashism. The author's choice grounded on two criteria: first, chronological, excepting one of these "saints", Sari Saltük, they have lived in 15th and 16th centuries; and second, geographical, their activity was recorded on an area that includes the territory of Bulgaria. Not less important are the richness and intensity of their image in the rural communities in the Balkans. Thus, their lives became the source of a meaningful and resistant body of folk tradition, which still circulates in southeastern Europe.

In volume introduction, the author places the six "saints" in the main lines of developing the Islam mystic. He follows the bibliography inaugurated at the end of 19th century with Ignatius Goldziher's works. First, author states, these "saints" became visible by an "empirical" criterion, the attribute of *wali/wali* that literally meant "the friend of Allah". Their image enriched later, becoming a model for the lives of the common people by the proofs of their self-sacrifice. Although they had the gift to mediate between the God and the people, they never could substitute the God's will, not even influence it (p.12).

In the wider frame of the Islam theology, these "saints" placed in the Shiism's tradition. In fact, as the author argues, Shiism's main tenants provided the Islam with a strong mystical current, the Sufism. In this sense, a special attention is paid to Ahmed Iesevi († 1166), who gave to the mystic ideas a wide circulation among the Turkish tribes. They deeply incorporated too in the folk beliefs. Iesevi translated into Turkish the esoteric texts of Shiism, which, in spite of the low literacy of the Islamic believers, spread quickly, especially among the Sufi's orders.

Iesevi highlighted the role of the Muslim women in rooting the legends about Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, who was also the founder of Shiism. Due to Iesevi's endeavor, the Muslim women might join the mystic orders and settle the recognized communities in Syria and Egypt in 14th and 15th centuries. The Iesevi's contribution continued in the Bektashi order that Hadji Bektashi Veli († 1270 or 1271) founded. In fact, the author considers Iesevi to be the Hadji Bektashi Veli's mastermind².

The spread of these Islamic currents overlapped in 13th and 14th centuries with the Ottoman expansion. The author made an emphasis on the Bektashim adherence both in the Ottoman Army and in the rural areas that the Ottomans conquered. The marginal status of Bektashim in the Islam had a symbolical correspondence with the place, also marginal, that the peoples from these areas had in the Ottoman society³.

¹ Although speaking about "saints", the book's author does not put the inverted commas. Because the Islam theology does not accept the sacredness in the same way as, for instance, the Christian tradition does, it has to use the commas.

² The fact that Ahmed Iesevi can be identified as the original source for all these innovations is highly debatable. The statement that Hadji Bektash actually "founded" the Bektashi order is debatable too. All this is discussed in the Irene Melikoff's, *Hadji Bektach, un Mythe et ses Avatars*, Brill, Leiden, Boston, Koln, 1998. I thank to Professor Harry Norris, who has read the review and made essential observations, like the reference to the Melikoff's book.

³ It has to point out that Shiism has influenced all the orders in the Balkans. Many of the Sufis in Deliorman belong and belonged to the Babaiyya, which is closely linked to the Bektashim but is detached in some respects from it. Some aspects of Shiism have been absorbed by the "Sunni tariqat" in the Balkans, too. These borrowings mostly relate to the divine status of Ali, the sufferings of Husain, Hurufism and some specific rituals.

The volume introduction, though condensed, provided with an accurate explanatory frame. It follows, in distinct chapters, the presentation of the six Muslim "saints". The first chapter, the longest in the volume (pp. 19–58), is dedicated to Sari Saltük Dede. The earliest mention of Sari Saltük, and the only one which gives reliable information about his personality, can be found in the travel account of the Arab traveler Ibn Battuta⁴. All the other data appeared in sources dating more than a century after the death of the dervish and has a legendary character. What unites all these legends is the idea of Sari Saltük as a pioneer of Islam in the Balkans and in Europe, and as a mediator between Islam and Christians⁵. The author reviews these sources in several topical sections: the name and the origin of Sari Saltük, his images as a saint, a miracle-worker, and a warrior for faith, the epic features of Sari Saltük, his death and the expanse of the saint's cult, his role as a mediator between Christianity and Islam.

The second chapter investigates the folk profile of Ali Koç Baba, whose *türbe* (grave place) is located in Nikopol. The review of the existing data in Ottoman documents allows a definition of the *Sufi* community created by him as a heterodox one. In the ritual practices associated with his *türbe*, the saint performs the function of a mediator who helps believers to gain health, fertility and well-being. The stories about Ali Koç Baba picture him not so much as a saint, but rather as a demon. Mainly the women attach to the beliefs connected with him.

The third chapter presents the folk profile of Othman Baba, one of the most popular and venerated Shiite saints in Bulgaria. The survey is based on the saint's *vilayetname* (sacred biography) unknown to Bulgarian scholars until now, on documents, epigraphic inscriptions, and oral historical legends, collected in Bulgaria and among settlers in Turkey. While biographical information allows considering him not as a warrior, but as a spiritual leader, which would prove the close relationship with the Bektashi doctrine, his life story creates the image of the saint mainly through narratives of his miraculous abilities. However, the means by which his image is shaped in historical legend and in traditional folk culture are very different. The localization of the cult around Othman Baba *türbe* near Haskovo is the main element in this respect.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to Kademli Baba Sultan. Legends present him as a slave and a shepherd named Musa Çoban. The low social status is a characteristic shared by many Muslim saints, such as Sari Saltük, Ali Koç Baba, Bali Efendi, but in the case of Musa Çoban a supplementary attribute, his playing "simple" songs on a reed pipe, is meant to indicate his slave origin as well as his humble shepherd's craft. The *vilayetname* of Demir Baba presents the important role of Kademli Baba Sultan in organizing the wedding of the man and the woman whose union would give birth to Demir. The wedding ceremony brought together the most prominent representatives of the mystic brotherhoods from the Eastern Balkans, and Kademli Baba Sultan was chosen as their leader. The grave place of Kademli Baba Sultan is a highly disputed question. Most probably, it is located in

⁴ The author dates the Ibn Battuta's account "most probably in 1332–1334". This information is confused. Professor Harry Norris states that the year of writing Battuta's account is 1355 (Harry Norris, *Ibn Battuta on Muslims and Christians in the Crimean Peninsula*, in "Iran and the Caucasus. Research Papers from the Caucasian Centre for Iranian Studies, Yerevan", vol. 8.1, Brill, Leiden, 2004, p. 7–14). He adds that the work "was written down by Ibn Juzayy, who may be responsible for confusion in respect to the chronology of the journeys and who may also have inserted passages which are inauthentic" (p. 7, note 3). In fact, the earliest historical reference to Sari Saltük is no longer Ibn Battuta. It is the Arabic work, "Tuffah al-Arwah" by Kamal al-Din Muhammad al-Sarraj al-Rifa'i. The work was completed in 1315, thus pre-dating Ibn Battuta, who could even have known of the work. This discovery was made by Dr Machiel Kiel. In regards to its significance see Kiel's contribution to the collected papers in Gilles Veinstein (ed) *Syncretismes et heresies dans l'Orient seljoukide et ottoman (XIV^e–XVIII^e siècle)*, in "Turcica" Vol IX, Paris, 2005, p. 283–298.

⁵ There is little to suggest that Sari Saltük was a 'mediator between Christianity and Islam'. On the contrary, the source of al-Sarraj, Bahram Shah al-Haydari, describes his master's constant wars against the 'infidels' and his refusal to help 'Christians' who sought his help unless they were converted to Islam as the price for his support.

Stara Zagora region. It is more meaningful yet that his *türbe* was placed in areas where Christians follow Saint Elijah's cult. Thus, the character of Kademli Baba became an example of people living together and of the common cultural inheritance.

The folk profile of Akyazili Baba, as outlined in the fifth chapter, is based on the *vilayetname* of Demir Baba, the legend of Yemini (who was one of the seven most honored poets amongst the *kazalbashi* branch of the *bektashi* order), the travel notes of Evlyia Chelebi and Franz Kanitz, on published and unpublished folklore texts, etc. The interpretation of some motifs is also based on the *vilayetname* of Hadji Bektashi, legends from Asia Minor and texts from the Koran. Special attention is paid to legends about the saint's origin. Bulgarians in the region of his cult, Eastern Bulgaria, associated him with St. Atanas. By means of folk forms like proverbs and imagining Christian saints as bearing the same features as Muslims *evlyias*, they translated the name of Akyazili into that of Atanas.

The sixth chapter, comparable in length with the first one (pp. 146–160), is dedicated to Demir Baba. The substantial literature existing about this Muslim saint is critically reviewed. The chapter's content is divided into four sections: legends about Demir's birth, Demir's extraordinary strength (as wrestler/*pehlivan*), his person as a provider of benefits, and as an embodiment of fairness and truth. In the oral and written legends, Demir is characterized mainly as an *evliya* (saint) chosen by God, as a personality having supernatural qualities. He had the ability to move heavy weights or be transformed into a doe, a wolf or a bee, and he could be simultaneously present in several places. This type of legends presents Demir as a master of the natural laws. In addition, they represent thus a clear example of the interactions between a religious and mystic doctrine and the aspiration of a human community to construct its collective identity, to understand natural laws and to find answers to the eternal questions of life.

The conclusion of the volume, with Summary in English (p. 176–191), contains a generalization of the themes and motifs, which build up the folk profiles of the saints venerated by the heterodox Muslims in Bulgaria. One theme centers on God's anthropomorphic appearance and on the possibility of unity between spirit and matter. A second group of motifs presents issues on the control over desires and passions, about the internal structuring of the individual and society, and about the relationship with "the others". As a whole, it could be considered a statement that the vitality, continuity and popularity of saints' figures in the folklore of heterodox Muslims in Bulgaria are generated by the significance of their respective roles.

Stelu Șerban

Istoriceski Muzej – Tutrakan, *Tutrakanskata epopeja i vojnata na severnija front. 1916–1918 g.*, Tutrakan, 2006, 483 p.

Rendre hommage à la mémoire des combattants disparus sur le champ de bataille, pour leur patrie, représente un devoir saint pour chaque nation qui se respecte son passé. C'est donc dans le besoin d'honorer les héros qu'on doit chercher la motivation explicite de l'élaboration du volume considéré. L'ouvrage *Tutrakanskata epopeja i vojnata na severnija front. 1916–1918 g.* représente seulement une partie des nombreuses cérémonies et événements organisés, en 2006, pour célébrer les neuf décennies écoulées depuis les combats sanglants en Dobroudja, pendant les opérations militaires de la Grande Guerre. Un comité national d'initiative, sous le haut patronage du président bulgare, Gheorghi Parvanov, a été créé pour coordonner ces cérémonies commémoratives. Qui plus est, ont été menés des travaux de restauration des plus importants cimetières militaires de Bulgarie, celui de Tutrakan, où reposent dans l'éternité des soldats bulgares, roumains, russes, allemands et turcs, tombés sur le champ de bataille en automne 1916. Les manifestations dédiées à l'épopée de Tutrakan ont été complétées par une conférence internationale dont le succès a été garanti par la participation des chercheurs, muséographes et historiens militaires de Bulgarie, de Roumanie, de Russie et des Etats-Unis. Ainsi, au nom de la vérité historique, l'objectif a été de présenter, de débattre et de commenter