Chapter 3

Dervishes as Founders of Bosnian Towns

The character of medieval Bosnia, a country consisting of small settlements, villages and a few fortified towns, was quite different from the one it acquired by the end of the 16th century – that of a province of the Ottoman Empire, with fully established Ottoman-type local authorities, economic and social organisation, and towns developed on the Anatolian/Middle Eastern model. This was due to the rapid process of urbanisation which Bosnia underwent in the first periods of Ottoman rule. Nedim Filipović sees three phases in the development of Bosnian towns under the Ottomans: the first was the phase of the establishment and strengthening of Ottoman rule during which the old medieval Bosnian towns remained almost completely unchanged; the second phase followed the stabilisation of Ottoman rule and witnessed the beginning of the transformation of the old towns into Ottoman administrative, economic, and religious centres; the third phase was the longest one and was characterised by the flourishing of the developed and already ‘orientalised’ Bosnian towns.1

This process of development cannot, however, be applied to all Bosnian towns which have existed since the Ottoman period, since many of them were founded by the Ottomans in places which had previously not contained any towns, and in some cases, any settlements at all. Before a settlement in Ottoman Bosnia could qualify as a town (kasaba) it had to have a religious institution, a Muslim community (cemaat), and a market-place. That is why the urban development of most Bosnian towns, or indeed their formation, more or less always followed the same pattern: first, a religious institution would be founded, then, around this religious institution would develop mahalles (residential areas), a market-place would follow, if there had not been one there already, and a town would thus be formed.

One scholar who has given some attention to the role played by dervishes in the process of urban development in Bosnia is Adem Handžić.2 According to Handžić, this process had two components: “the dervish component” and “the state and orthodox component.”3 Within the first, the formation of towns

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1 See Filipović, Neki novi podaci. On Ottoman city in general, see, for instance, Irene Bierman, Rifai‘at Abou-El-Haj and Donald Preziosi, eds., The Ottoman City and Its Parts: Urban Structure and Social Order, New York, 1991.

2 Handžić, A, O ulozi derviša. There are a few others who briefly mention it – see: Šiljak, Derviši i tekije, Zlatar, Zlatno doba Sarajeva.

3 Handžić, A, O ulozi derviša, p. 92.
would start with the building of a *tekke*, while within the second – which might follow on from the first or arise independently of it – it would start with the building of a state-sponsored mosque and other public buildings and amenities. Handžić further emphasises that the dervish component was the earlier, the state one coming later and very often building upon the former: in most cases there would be a *tekke* built first, and then, later, other buildings, including state-sponsored mosques, would be built in its vicinity.

Today’s capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, is the most important example both of a town which was founded under Ottoman rule and of a town whose formation began with “the dervish component,” that is, with the building of a *tekke*. Apart from the village, there were three basic types of settlements in medieval Bosnia: the smallest one was an open settlement or ‘*trg*’; the second, called a ‘*varosh*’, was also an open settlement, but larger than a ‘*trg*’, usually the suburbia of a fortified town, and therefore enjoying some of the privileges of town status; the third and most important one was a fortified town or ‘*grad*’. Before the arrival of the Ottomans, the area of today’s Sarajevo belonged to the medieval province (župa) of Vrhbosna, which is why, for many years, it was commonly assumed that there had been a fortified town (*grad*) with the same name – Vrhbosna – which developed into Sarajevo. Thus, in

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6 ‘*Trg*’ – in medieval terms, a small open settlement usually formed around a market-place. Most such settlements differed very little from villages, but some were bigger and, although lacking town status, functioned as such in areas where this was necessitated by the lack of towns proper. These latter thus probably corresponded to the so-called market-towns (*mezzo-varosh*) of medieval Hungary, open settlements ranking between the village and the town whose burghers were legally serfs, but which nevertheless served the function of towns, especially in the vast regions of the Great Hungarian Plain almost completely devoid of towns proper. For more on market-towns and their place in the feudal system see Lásló Gerevich, ed., *Towns in Medieval Hungary*, Budapest, 1990, especially András Kubinyi, “Urbanisation in the East-Central part of Medieval Hungary.” In contemporary Bosnian ‘*trg*’ means ‘a square’, a term obviously related to the verb ‘*trgovati*’ – to trade and the noun ‘*trgovina*’ – trade, which suggests that originally it denoted an open space where trading was carried out (a market-place) and later came to mean a square in general.
7 ‘*Grad*’ – the generic Slavonic term (sometimes ‘*hrad*’) used for medieval settlements, usually, but not necessarily, with full town status (i.e. the equivalent of free royal towns in Western Europe, although without a charter), consisting of a fortified settlement on a hill with suburbia underneath. For more information on Slavonic medieval settlements, and ‘*grad*’ in particular see Martin Gojda, *The Ancient Slavs: Settlement and Society*, The Rhind Lectures 1989–90, Edinburgh, 1991, especially Ch. 3: Early medieval castles – hillforts – and their role in the state-forming process in Bohemia. In modern Bosnian, ‘*grad*’ is the only term for both ‘town’ and ‘city’.