



SERBIAN FOLK NARRATIVES CONCERNING FATE AND THEIR TURKISH PARALLELS

Kaderle İlgili Sırp Halk Anlatmaları ve Türklerdeki Paralelleri

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ABSTRACT

Some of the tales of Serbian folklore cannot fit completely into the pattern of Aarne-Thompson, but can be easily classified after Eberhard-Boratav, which is significant enough. We will pay attention to folk narratives about fate. There is a contamination of tales so characteristic for Serbian and Balkan region (AaTh 735 + 460B + 737B) that we regard it as independent subtype. Comparison with Turkish folklore reveals the influence of some Turkish and Oriental images and ideas about destiny; on the other hand, there are points of strong difference which can even be traces of Indoeuropean heritage in Serbian folklore. From the point of view of the traditional historic-geographical method, there are also some elements of the narratives where Turkish folklore probably was transmitter of Indian tales to Balkans.*

Keywords; Folk Narratives, Fate, Migration

ÖZET

Sırp folklorundaki bazı halk hikâyeleri Aarne-Thompson'un kataloğuna tamamen uymadığı fakat Eberhard-Boratav'un kataloğuna göre kolayca tasnif edilebildiği dikkatte değer bir meseledir. Biz bu makalemizde kaderle ilgili halk anlatmaları üzerinde duracağız. Halk hikâyelerinde Sırbistan ve Balkan bölgesine özgü bir karışıklık söz konusudur (AaTh 735 + 460B + 737B) ki biz, onu ayrı bir alt tip olarak kabul ediyoruz. Türk folkloruyla karşılaştırıldığında, kader hakkındaki bazı Türk ve oryantal imge ve fikirlerinin etkisi ortaya çıkmakla birlikte büyük farklılıklar da mevcuttur; bu farklılıklar Sırp folklorundaki Hint-Avrupa mirasının izleri de olabilir. Geleneksel Tarihi-Coğrafi kuram açısından; bu hikâyelerde, muhtemelen Türk folkloru vasıtasıyla Hint anlatmalarından Balkanlara aktarılmış bazı unsurlar bulunduğu görülmektedir.*

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In spite of centuries long contact between Turks and Serbs, there is still none broad comparative synthetical study dedicated to two peoples folk narratives. There are, of course, articles and minor studies which analyze specific questions, tales, motifs, sometimes searching for element of material culture transposed in folk art, sometimes dedicated to motif migrations; the authors are starting either from folklorist's point of view, or from orientalist's one. As for studies which encompass wider range of problems we can mention, for example, monography about Nasredin Hoca,¹ or German study² 'Oriental and Osman elements in fairy-tales of Balkan Slavs', which, however, pays attention mainly to Turkish lexical fond. But classical historic-geographical method, based on methodology of Finnish school, still awaits to be applied on comparison of two nation's folk tales. One of the reasons is that we still do not have an Index of Serbian folk tales. And such, although traditional, approach can still offer some new insights.

For the present purpose I will leave aside folk tales of Slavic Muslims in Serbia and Bosnia where influences of Turkish tales (and Arabic as well) in structure, style, cultural elements can very easily be discerned, and I will limit my presentation to the tales of Christian Serbs. Mingling of two oral traditions can most clearly be seen in the tales of south of Serbia, part which constitutes specific region in Serbian folklore and among dialects of Serbian language. For example, when one big collection of tales of this region was published in 1988,³ some tales could not be classified after Aarne-Thompson, but they suited into Eberhard-Boratav Index.⁴

For this occasion, special emphasis will be lay upon the types classified under numbers 930-934, both in Aarne-Thompson, and recent revision done by Hans-Jörg Uther, as well as to the comparison with the Turkish tradition, as far as my knowledge allows me to do so, since I am neither Turkish scholar nor connoisseur of Turkish language. Hence, the paper will be limited to the issues of tale types and motifs mostly.

Belief in fate in Serbian folk tradition is archaic and of pre-Christian pagan origin; however, (but) at the same time it is still living and it is widespread among Serbs today. Besides belief in abstract destiny or in good and bad hours, belief (the faith) in three female demons - *sudenice* (fates, parcae, moirai)⁵, who make decision about new born's destiny,

¹ Mirko Brajaktarević, **Nasredin-hodžin problem**, Beograd 1934.; ŠOP, Ivan, **Nasredinove metamorfoze**, Beograd, 1973.

² RESSEL, Svetlana, **Orientalisch-osmanische Elemente im balkanslavischen Volksmärchen**, (Studia slavica et Baltica 2), Münster 1981.

³ Dragutin Đorđević, **Narodne pripovetke i predanja Leskovačke oblasti**, Beograd 1988.

⁴ Antti Aarne,; Stith Thompson, **The Types of the Folktale** (second revision), FF Communications, 184, Helsinki 1961.; Hans Jörg Uther, **The Types of International Folktales. A classification and Bibliography. Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, Part I (Animal Tales, Tales of Magic, Religious Tales, and Realistic Tales, with an Introduction)**, FFC 284, Helsinki 2004.; Wolfgang Eberhard,; Pertev Naili Boratav, **Typen türkischer Volksmärchen**, Wiesbaden 1953.

⁵ There is no belief in such beings among Turkish people, but there can be found very similar belief in goddess of birth, in white garment like sudenice (ABDULLAEYV, A., Mythological

takes special place in folk life and in *Sagen*. Sometimes explained as a result of Greek influence, this type of belief (according to most recent researches) seems to go back to Indoeuropean origin.

Upon this old belief new layers are coming, one of them brought by Turks and Islam expressed in words *kismet* and *nafaka* (*nafaka*, meaning luck, but also what is predestined to man in food and similar, man's wealth). But this believe is in Serbian folklore transformed and fitted into older conceptions. So *nafaka* is not only what is predestined – it is a wealth which can be brought to man and from him, can pass from one person to another, for example, concentrated in some object (glove) or some animal (most commonly dog); person who eats from that animal becomes the bearer of the luck and the wealth of the whole family depends on him/her. This belief is obviously of animistic character. In Macedonian tales, *kismet* becomes even personified. It is believed that every man has his personal luck. In Serbian tales such luck is of feminine character (matching thus with grammatical gender of the noun); in Macedonian folklore personified kismet follows the man, works for him, if kismet does not work (dig on the field, for example) but in its stead he plays music, than man loses his wealth; after the hero beats his kismet, this starts working again. In both cases we have strong animistic colour of the tales, which is in accordance with general Serbian conception of fate and – according to some anthropologists (Bojan Jovanović, for instance) – in accordance with general character of Serbian folk religion.

So, the two terms are coming to local system of belief as result of Oriental influence. I leave to specialists in that field to answer the question I do not feel competent enough to solve – how much in this terms is determined by Islam and how much by Turkish folk religion and folk interpretation of Islam, and which of these entered Serbian folklore. What seems more important to me and what I would like to stress is the role of these beliefs in folk narratives. They not only correspond to usual type of belief about destiny, but they also play a role in developing the narration, belief becomes motif, even character of the tale.

Comparative approach is even more rewarding if we look not at the motifs, but at the types of tales. Important in this sense is one subtype of AT 934 (foretold death) famous in Turkish folklore as legend (*Sage*) of Kiz kulesi. Although AaTh and Uther do not make such difference, it can be classified as subtype of its own (AT 934 A3 Brednich) – it is done so in famous monography by Brednich⁶ and in recent Index of Bulgarian folk tales (934A1 – Daskalova-Perkovska et alii 1994). In Serbian variants of AT 934, death is usually foretold by three fates. But in this subtype there are variations (written fate, old men, calendar book; even soothsayers which are to be found in Turkish tales (Uysal-Walker Archive, nr. 1390, Vol. 46)⁷, and according to some scholars the personage of soothsayer is of Oriental origin⁸.

Image of Alarvady (Albasty) in the Azerbaijan Birth Rites“, **Folk Belief Today**, Tartu 1995, pp.17-22.)

⁶ Rolf-Wilhelm Brednich,, **age**, s. 91.

⁷ **UYSAL-WALKER ARCHIVE** (<http://aton.ttu.edu>)

⁸, Stephan Grudlinski. „Vergleichende Untersuchungen und Charakteristik der Sage vom Findelkind das später Kaiser wird“. **Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie** 36 (1912), s.566.

The main elements - snake and grape – however, can be found in other subtypes, too. Young person dies of snake bite in other subtypes of 934; in AT 930 (Rich man and his son-in-law) the attempt on hero's life is usually done in vineyard.

First variant of this narrative was written down by first Serbian folklorist Vuk Stefanović Karadžić in his dictionary of spoken language (1852). Later variants take not a princess only, but also a prince, for their main characters – some variants being recorded couple of years ago. Besides Balkan Slavic variants, Brednich notes English, Welsh and Latvian tales, which, however differ from variants of this region (snake is not in grape but in wood, etc).

As for Turkish variants, I will mention one less known example of collecting of Istanbul folklore about Kiz kulesi. Serbian diplomat Vladan Đorđević described his trip to Istanbul in *Putničke crte 3 (Carigrad i Bukurešt)/Traveler's croquis 3 (Istanbul and Bucharest)* (1874). He gives two narratives about Kiz kulesi, obviously told by his hosts. As a member of generation influenced by Romanticism he considered it was worthwhile to write not only his impressions but also folk tales he had the opportunity of listening to. First narrative is similar to the above mentioned, the only difference lies in the following detail: snake is hidden in fig, not in grape (which leads Đorđević to conclude that the narrative comes from tradition of Cleopatra's death). In second tale princess is closed in tower again; son of Persian shah sends her flowers, when he heard of her beauty;⁹ snake hidden in flowers bites her and she dies, but shah's son comes and sucks poison from her wound, so she comes to life again –the story concludes with happy end. Perhaps this note can be of interest for Turkish scholars, since it is older than *Folklore de Constantinople* (Folklore of Constantinople), which was published in 1894 by French travelers and folklorists Emile Henry Carnoy (1861-1930) and Jean Nicolaides (1841-1891)¹⁰.

In Turkish tradition it is located in Kiz kulesi in Istanbul, or in modern variant near Mersin (see beforementioned Uysal-Walker); in the same way, in Serbian variants it can be told as simple belief legend, but it can be presented through localizations and historizations, too. There is a variant about Serbian nobleman from the Middle Ages that resembles the *Sagen (Lokalsagen)* about medieval history and nobility¹¹, although the main subject is fate. In one Albanian variant it is about Emperor Constantin's daughter¹². In Croatia¹³ the foretold destiny is not death but it is predestined that princess will make great sin; closed in tower, she comites carnal sin with a dog, and the offspring of this liaison is Attila the Hun.

On the other, hand, the princess is sometimes closed in the tower of glass (in Welsh variant, too). This probably comes from fairy-tales compendium of images. Although glass

⁹ Motif of falling in love by rumor of someone's beauty only, typical of Oriental literature.

¹⁰ A Ozturkmen. "From Constantinople to Istanbul: Two Sources on the Historical Folklore of a City", *Asian Folklore Studies*, 61, 2002, pp. 271-294.

¹¹ Milan Đ. Milićević, *Kneževina Srbija*, Beograd 2005, s.367.

¹² Tihomir Đorđević, *Naš narodni život* VI, Beograd 1932, s. 80.

¹³ Maja Bošković-Stulli, *Zakopano zlato. Hrvatske usmene pripovijetke, predaje i legende iz Istre*, Pula-Rijeka 1986, texts nr. 94, 96, 96.

castles in Serbian folklore are not as prominent as in European, this resembles the typical fairy-tale image. In modern variant¹⁴ it is a castle surrounded by iron, so it is obvious that the presentation of the place, of the asylum, needs some phantastic attribute.

It is possible that ultimate source of this tale type can be older and perhaps of Far Eastern Origin. First recorded variant is to be found in the ancient Egyptian story of doomed prince, although it is just a part of more complex tale.¹⁵ But even more similarities has the story from *Mahabharata* (1, 40, 10, 6-44, 4). King Parikshit offends ascetic and ascetic's son in his turn curses the king. So the king closes himself in the special castle on one pillar; the snake hidden in fruit bites him. I think that this variant in verse we can take as example of oral storytelling, originally about fate, and later replaced by typical Indian conceptions.

In such case, Turkish folklore has the important role of transmitting these variants from East to Balkans and Europe. Even Benfey, in spite of his pioneer enthusiasm, overlooked the significance of this bridge – but I can say here that Benfey's early pupil, Vatroslav Jagić¹⁶, pointed to the Turkish mediation in general sense.

Such role is to be seen in origin of one tale motif, too – about fate written on forehead. Here I would like to make difference between writing the destiny in books (and similar) and writing on the forehead. It can be found in legends about emperor Constantine and foundation of Constantinople, too.¹⁷ As introductory motif it can be found in all before mentioned AaTh types. It is specially prominent in region of southern Serbia and Kosovo, then Macedonia, and sporadically Montenegro; variants from other regions are not so frequent which confirms that main zone of its presence includes parts of region under Turkish influence. But it is not story-motif only, because it is part of living belief about birth in this very region. It is believed that three fates are coming and write either in book or on forehead. Letters can be seen on the skull taken from the grave. Sometimes pen and ink are intentionally left for „sudnice“. It is known to Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks and Albanians; it is believed that birth-mark or any mole, scratch or similar is a sign of writing. Since it is not known to Croats and Slovenians, it is correct to assume that this belief and tale motif belongs to cultural 'balkanism', modeled under Turkish-Oriental influence. The explanation that such belief comes from the junctions on the skull regarded as a writing is perhaps too

¹⁴ Vladimir Bovan, **Narodne pripovetke i umotvorine sa Kosova i Metohije. Studentski zapisi srpskih narodnih umotvorina sa Kosova i Metohije**, Priština 2005, text nr. 27.

¹⁵ Adolf Erman, **Die Literatur der Aegypter**, Leipzig 1923, ss. 209-214. Thompson notices that the story as a whole doesn't have true parallel in oral tradition (Thompson 1946: 274-275); it is perhaps a kind of religious tale (Brunner 1966: 80-82). F. von der Leyen finds prince in tower specific for Balkans, while otherwise it is a princess (Von der Leyen 1975) but, as we saw, there are both kinds of characters in this region's material.

¹⁶ Vatroslav Jagić, **Historija književnosti naroda hrvatskoga i srpskoga. Knjiga prva – staro doba**, Zagreb 1867, ss. 109-110.

¹⁷ Nada Milošević-Đorđević, **Zajednička tematsko-sižejna osnova srpskohrvatskih neistorijskih pesama i prozne tradicije**, Beograd 1971, ss. 120-121. For the motif see Persian variant of **Tuti name**, too.

empirical.¹⁸ My limited knowledge of Turskih tales confirms the presence of this motif – coming from beliefs, too – in different tales, not necessarily about fate¹⁹. It is mentioned in *1001 nights*²⁰ and in contemporary Arabic tales²¹, as in Arabic beliefs and customs²². It is interesting but in Persian tales it is not so prominent (according to the information kindly given by Prof. U. Marzolph).²³ In Armenian mythology goddess of birth writes on forehead, too.

This leads to the conclusion that belief (which entered the narratives as motif) comes from Islamic cultural circle and that Turks introduced it to this region. But, the ultimate origin is older and we have to go more towards east to find its source. It is India again. This belief is still present in Indian birth customs²⁴ and in Indian tales compiled in 19-20th century.²⁵ But we cannot say that belief came to India after coming of Islam. The oldest testimonies in Indian literatures can be found in *Pancatantra* (2, 180) and *Hitopadeša* (1, 19) and version of *Vetalapancavimsati* (12, 19, 156) which entered *Kathasaritsagara*. The Indian origin is accepted by Arabic scholars, too.²⁶ So, once again we see the importance of Turkish folklore as mediator between Far Oriental and Southern European tradition. It is obvious, too, that due to this mediation the oral tales tradition of Balkan people (Serbian included) and Turks can be viewed as a part of the same region – at least at the level of motifs and *sujets*.

Special attention should be payed to one type of tale; it is usually classified as contamination of types 735, 460B, 737B* - the hero after meeting his personified bad luck goes to supernatural being who lives far away to ask for the reason of his misfortune; on his way he meets people with questions for being. The being is in Serbian tales mostly *Usud* –

¹⁸ Олга Седакова, **Балканские мотивы в языке и культуре болгар**, Москва 2007, s.213.

¹⁹ Uysal-Walker story 1497 (Vol.49; see footnote nr.4); 692 (Vol.21); 81 (Vol. 39; 43 (Vol.1); Friedrich Giese, **Türkische Märchen**, Die Märchen der Weltliteratur, Jena, 1925, s.50.

²⁰ M 302.2 - Man 's fate written on his skull – EL-SHAMY, Hasan, **A Motif Index of The Tousand and One Night**, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2006, s.187;Ulrich Marzolph; R. Van Leeuwen, **The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia** Vol.1, Santa Barbara, Denver, Oxford 2004, s.111.

²¹ A 189.7 –, Hasan El-Shamy, **Folk Tales of the Arab World: a guide to motif clasification**, Volume 1, 1995.

²² Hasan El-Shamy, **Religion Among the Folk in Egypt**, Praeger 2008, s. 25.

²³ Although there are some Persian phraseologisms, and mentioning in Omar Hayyam.

²⁴ Monier Monier-Williams, **Brahmanism and Hinduism or Religious Thought and Life in India**, London, 1891, s. 370; БОГИ, БРАХМАНЫ, ЛЮДИ. ЧЕТЫРЕ ТЫСЯЧИ ЛЕТ ИНДУИЗМА, Москва 1969, s. 272.

²⁵ motifs nr. M.302.2, 302.2.1, N.113.2 - Thompson 1957; Thompson, Balys 1958; Cosquin 1922: 136-137.

²⁶ E. Kent, „What 's Written on the Forehead Will Never Fail. Karma, Fate and Headwriting in Indian Folktales“, **Asian Ethnology** 68, 1, 2009, pp.1-26; COHEN-MOR, Dalya, **A Matter of Fate: The Concept of Fate in the Arab World as Reflected in Modern Arabic Literature**, Oxford University Press 2001, ss. 7-8.

the male dispenser of fate, and he changes traveler's bad luck. This contamination comes so often in Serbian and Balkan tradition that it can be classified as specific (regional) type. It can be combined with some other types, for example, there is a variant where Eberhard-Boratav 139 comes as part of this type, too. (and Eberhard-Boratav 139 can come independently in Serbian material, too).

In Turkish variant (EB 127)²⁷ traveling hero cannot change his destiny, he is usually depicted as a stupid man who ends his life by being devoured by animals because of his own stupidity. Such ending is very uncommon in Serbian material; it can be found in one tale written down in Muslim community²⁸ the hero is not eaten by animals, but he continues his unfortunate existence; there is a couple of modern variant where he continues his poor life; there is one Albanian story which matches with Turkish type Truhelka 1905²⁹; according to some comparative research, this is an original version, with unhappy ending.³⁰ Karel Horalek thinks that Serbian variant was modeled lately, after this variant with animals.

Both Serbian and Turkish tales are the part of the same tradition, but there is strong difference coming from different orientation of the stories. In one case it is a didactic story about unmutability of fate – as usual in stories about destiny; in Serbian variants the hero changes his fate.³¹ I dare to say that Serbian variant retains pagan conception of male dispenser of Fate, probably of Indo-European origin. (There is variant from Pancatantra, too, about poor Somilaka).³² So these tales can perhaps be classified not only as novels or fairy-tales but as sort of pagan legend. Entering into the field of comparative mythology, we can see that Usud resembles deities like Indian Bhaga or Pluto – he is lord of the wealth, chthonic deity, with the character of forefather; in Turkish mythological system he has similarities to old Turkish god Tengri or Baj Ülgen or Art Toyon-aga, whose function is giving of the *kut*.³³

In one variant from south of Serbia the helper of mythological Carpenter tells him: „O carpenter, carpenter, thousand died, thousand and one were born“³⁴ (in variant one hundred and one hundred and one). This formula is to be found in one tale of Serbian Roma³⁵, and in

²⁷ Boratav Eberhard, *age*, s. 146 – They accept Aarne's idea about Indian origin of this tale, too.

²⁸ GEM = Glasnik Etnografskog muzeja, VII, 1933, pp.110-111.

²⁹ Ćiro Truhelka, *Arnauteske priče. Niz primjera arnauteske narodne poezije iz izvornog govora pribrane i priregjene II*, Sarajevo 1905, text nr. 3.

³⁰ Karel Horalek, „Prilog tipologiji pripovedaka Vukove zbirke“, *Rad 11. kongresa Saveza folklorista Jugoslavije u Novom Vinodolskom 1964*, Zagreb 1966.

³¹ Although there are Turkish variant with changed fate (Uysal-Walker 1905, Vol. 63; fate is represented as old man); Boratav: 1955 (text nr. VII, *La poule noire*).

³² That opens the other issue, too: of possible transmigration of story from India (*Pancatantra*) via Persians (*Tuti name*) and Turks to Serbs, as, for example, Jagić supposed that was the way. But there is also a mediaeval Serbian variant.

³³ Jean-Paul Roux, = Žan Pol Ru, *Religija Turaka i Mongola* (J.P. Roux, *La religion des Turcs et des Mongols*, trans. by M. Perić-Marjanov), Sremski Karlovci-Novı Sad 2002, ss. 182-183.

³⁴ D. Đorđević, *age*, text nr.92.

³⁵ thousand and one were born – T. Đorđević, *age*, 2002; text nr.16.

some Macedonian tales³⁶. I suppose that in all these cases formula comes from orinetal influence, where idiomatic expression thousand (and hundred) simply means „a lot of“. Since there is fear from even numbers, one number is added to escape the possible evil influence of even numbers. So the title of famous collection *Elf leyla ve leyla* was created, of course, but in this case I think that we should pay attention to Turkish idiom *bin bir*, (which entered Persian language, too, as *hazar yek*) and obviously influced the formula of this stories. Outside of this region I'm familiar only with one Lithuanian tale where it has the form: „100 died, 100 are born“,³⁷ so without introducing the odd number. It is not surprising that positive number in this expression should be linked to birth, and negative to death. In traditional Serbian culture – and beliefs of other Slavic nations, too, even numbers have negative conotations, so this Turkish idiom perfectly fits in already suitable pattern.

Concluding, we can notice that while in tales about Nasredin Hoce, or characters like Köse or Keloğlan adaptation („aclimatization“-Aarne) to local circumstances and life was not as strong, because these were told like amusing tales (fairy-tales, novelas); in tales of destiny living belief was strong (and they were told for the purpose of its confirmation) and belief determined the aclimatization.

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³⁶ Стефан Верковиќ., **Македонски народни умотворби** 4, Скопје 1985; texts nr. 24; 109.

³⁷ Brednich, **age**, s. 194.

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