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Cultural and Social Life of Turkish Pasha in Belgrade – Example of Ali Riza Pasha

Abstract: This paper focuses on the analysis of a very peculiar relationship of the last commander of the Belgrade fortress Ali Riza-Pasha towards the social and cultural life of the Serbian capital. Having in mind that the relations between the Serbs and Turks at the time were very specific, this pasha decided to break with the shackles of the past and became the first pasha up until that time to get himself fully immersed in the Serbian social life. He personally participated in numerous festivities, while his wife Meyra became known as the first wife of a pasha to organize parlour receptions for women from the upper echelons of the Serbian society at the time. Her oriental-themed salons left a deep mark on the society of the Serbian capital. Our goal in this paper is to present a folkloric and cultural dimension of the life of a Turkish pasha, but also the life at court by showing the activities of his wife.

Key Words: Ali Riza-Pasha, Belgrade, Serbia, Prince Mihailo Obrenovic, social life, cultural life, Pasha's spouse Meyra

Introduction

The relationship between Serbs and Turks at the time were very specific, that is, such as between a *rayah* and a *masters*. Turks predominantly lived in cities, while Serbs lived in villages. Since Serbs were granted autonomy by royal decrees (firmans) of 1793, 1794 and 1796, Turks were not allowed to dwell in villages, which meant there were few instances of interaction or conflict between the two populaces (Pantelić 1927, 157–176; Pantelić 1949, 97–103). The situation started changing at the start of the 19th century, especially in the wartime period during the Serbian revolution (1804–1815), when relationships between Serbs and Turks were hostile. After Serbs were granted autonomy by the hatt-i sharifs signed in 1829, 1830 and 1833, Turks started slowly moving out from the cities, while at the same time Serbs started moving in (Shaw, Shaw 1977, 31–32; Ljušić 2004, 1–21; Ljušić 2008, 61–119; Miljković-Katić 2002). Turks and their garrisons remained in the six “imperial cities” of Belgrade, Smedere-

vo, Sabac, Kladovo, Uzice and Soko Grad. In the capital, Belgrade, Turkish military was garrisoned in the Kalemegdan fortress, while the population in the city itself was mixed.

In both domestic and foreign literature, about Turkish commanders of Belgrade are not very much written. The exception is the article of Radmila Tričković, *Spisak muhafiza Beograda od 1690. do 1789. godine [A list of Belgrade muhafiz from 1690 to 1789]*. The mentioned work is extremely important and indispensable for the researchers of the history of Belgrade and the Serbian people in the 17th and 18th centuries. For the life and work of Turkish pashas in Belgrade from 1789 until the beginning of the First Serbian Uprising, where the most significant person was Hadži Mustafa Pasha (1793–1797, 1799–1801) are significant works of Dušan Pantelić, *Beogradski pašaluk posle Svištovske mira 1791–1794. [Pashalik of Belgrade after the Treaty of Sistova 1791–1794]* and *Beogradski pašaluk pred Prvi srpski ustankom 1794–1804 [Pashalik of Belgrade before the First Serbian Uprising 1794–1804]*. Work and activities of the commanders of Belgrade Fortress in the period 1804–1807. and 1813–1839, we can observe in the works of Radoš Ljušić, *Vožd Karadjordje [Vozd Karadjordje]* and *Kneževina Srbija 1830–1839 [The Principality of Serbia 1830–1839]*, as well as in the trotomic book of Mihailo Gavrilović about Milos Obrenovic. The least works is written about the Turkish pashas in Belgrade between 1839 and 1867.

The Belgrade Muhibiz was the official name for all Belgrade pashas and commanders from the end of the 17th century. Although the title muhibiz was characteristic for war and endangered border areas and fortresses, from the end of the 17th century this title was identified with regular administration in the border areas. This change and transformation of the provisional, military function of muhibiz to a permanent administrative function signified a profound change in the entire military-administrative system of the Ottoman Empire (Tričković 1971, 297–303; Rizaj 1970, 329–332).

As Belgrade was the administrative center of the pashalik, it concentrated all Turkish authorities. The Belgrade fortress was the largest in Serbia, with the largest crew. In the fort, besides the military barracks, there was a pasha's court and two mosques. The Belgrade Vizier, also the commander of the fortress, was named *the Light*. The First (1829), the Second (1830) and the Third (1833) hatt-i sharifs gained autonomy to Serbia, and the former rights of the Turkish authorities are significantly narrowed. According to the provisions of the Third hatt-i sharif, the status of Belgrade was also regulated. The Turks were directly subordinate to the Belgrade Vizier (Ljušić 2004, 1–21, 349, 358). In the period from the acquisition of the autonomy of Serbia at the site of the Belgrade muhibiz, about twenty pashas has changed. In the last ten years of the Turkish administration in Belgrade, even six Turkish commanders have been changed.

Due to the specific nature of their relations at the time, there were few instances of socialization and common leisure activities between the two populations. Belgrade pasha, who was the sovereign to all Turks in Serbia, mostly kept to formal relations with Serbs and their representatives, received the collected tax money and addressed the most important issues with Serbian rulers that usually had to do with Serbo-Turkish relations (Ljušić 2004, 352–360). The situation only changed during the tenure of the last Belgrade fortress commander, Ali Riza-Pasha. For the first time, we can see forging of closer social relations and organization of common activities, not only between men, but also among women. For the first time, a Turkish pasha attended balls that were organized by a Serbian Prince, while at the same time his wife hosted Serbian upper class women at the court.

Ali Riza-Pasha

Ali Riza-Pasha (Ali Rizâ Paşa Cezâyirli, ? – september/October 1876), was the last commander of Belgrade fortress, he came to Belgrade in august 1864. He was the son of Hamadan effendi and was schooled in Paris in 1840's, as one of the young people sent by Mustafa Reshid-Pasha, who served as a Turkish ambassador in the French capital. After returning to Constantinople, he became an officer at the royal arsenal. He moved through the ranks, becoming *Liva* (Brigade General), *Mirliva* (General-major) and eventually *Ferik* (Lieutenant General) (Sureyya 1996, 301).

“His upbringing was one of a proper, cultured European”, he spoke French, German and English and after coming to Belgrade he also studied Serbian with Matija Ban (1818–1903), famous poet, dramatist, playwright, and Serbian diplomat (Dimitrijević-Stošić 1965, 64). Soon after the arrival of the new pasha to Belgrade a difference was noticed. The relations between Serbs and Turks were extremely tense since the bombing of Belgrade downtown in June of 1862. Not even a full month after the arrival of Ali Riza-Pasha, on the 16th of September 1864, the pasha decided to attend the birthday celebration of the Prince personally. After the Prince’s return to the Cathedral Church, pasha and other Turkish officers greeted him at his court and offered their congratulations in person, and invited in the Turkish military orchestra. After the afternoon steamboat ride along the Danube and Sava rivers, the Serbian Prince and other officials were saluted by the military orchestra again (*Fremden-Blatt*, 26 September 1864). Pasha was later a guest at the evening celebration, marking the first and the last time a Turkish pasha established such a personal contact with a Serbian ruler. It is important to note that only Ali Riza-Pasha made such a personal and friendly relationship with a Serbian ruler, who was at the time Prince Mihailo Obrenovic (Serbian Prince 1839–1842, 1860–1868).



1. Pasha's Court at Belgrade Fortress (1860s)

Ali Riza-Pasha himself left a distinct mark in the social life of Belgrade. He attended nearly all festivities and balls organized by Prince Mihailo (*Srbske novine*, No. 13, 3/15 February 1866; No. 13, 31 January/12 February 1867). The Prince organized the first charity lottery ball in February 1865 in the Serbian crown hotel, with the goal of building the first hospital in Belgrade (*Srbske novine*, No. 14, 6/18 February 1865; No. 15, 9/21 February 1865). The fund's prize money pool increased with staggering speed, as people sent gifts from all around Serbia. The wife of Ali Riza-Pasha donated a Persian shawl, a traditional vest, a veil and slippers embroidered with gold and two beads made out of amber. Two days before the ball was to take place, Belgrade and entire Serbia were caught by a tremendous storm. At one moment, Prince Mihailo ordered a cavalry unit to ride through the city and stamp the snow to make a path to the court, and to Belgrade Fortress especially. Ali Riza-Pasha with his wife was one of the most prominent guests, marking the first time a Turkish pasha took part in a ball in Belgrade. After the festivities, the lottery winners were declared, and Ali Riza-Pasha received the portrait of the Russian emperor Nicholas I, who had been one of the prime enemies of the Ottoman empire in the 19th century, who lead the Russian Empire in the Crimean War (1853–1856).

The last Turkish commander of Belgrade was not only known for attending balls, he also enjoyed going for hunting trips with the Serbian Prince. The hunting trips were commonly organized in late December in Topcider, around Rakovica and on mount Avala, where they would typically spend up to three full

days (*Srbske novine*, No. 139, 14/26 December 1865; No. 147, 15/27 December 1866.). He was a frequent guest in notable Serbian homes, often meet with a well-known Serbian merchant Hadzi-Toma.

He traveled with Prince Mihailo to Constantinople as well, where in April 1867 a Firman (signed on 10th of April 1867) addressed to Prince Mihailo declared that fortresses of Sabac, Beograd, Smederevo and Kladovo are granted to the Prince and to the Serbian military, with the condition that both Turkish and Serbian flags are hoisted on them (*Archives diplomatiques* 1867, 1559, 1560–1562, 1563–1564; Rajić 2013, 123–140; Janković 2006, 76–90). On Sunday, 5th of May, 1867, pasha and his officer went on an audience with Prince Mihailo for the last time. Around 11 o'clock, on the 6th of May, 1867 the last Turkish soldier, Ali Riza-Pasha, left Serbia. Together with the Serbian Prime Minister Ilija Garasanin (1812–1874, Prime Minister 1861–1867) and Minister of War Milivoje Petrovic Blaznavac (1824–1873, Minister of War 1865–1868), Ali Riza-Pasha was taken in Prince's own chariot from the fortress towards river Sava where he was to board a ship destined for Zemun. In upper town, near the mosque, he was greeted by an honorary rifle platoon. At the river Sava, he was greeted by the gendarmerie accompanied by military guard and music, where he was shown respect once again. After the ship carrying Ali Riza-Pasha departed, seventeen cannons fired an honorary salvo from the fortress, while at the lower rampart, a rifle platoon fired a round in his honor once again. He reached Zemun in the company of Minister of War, several high officers, Prince's first aide and the governor of Belgrade town. Serbian papers at the time chronicled: "Ali Riza-Pasha left a gracious and ineffable memory with citizens and authorities alike, with his politeness and his moderate and friendly demeanour" (*Srbske novine*, No. 56, 25 April/7 May 1867).

The Woman's salons of pasha's wife Meyra

The most notable mark in the social life of Belgrade was left by Ali Riza-Pasha's wife Meyra. On her father's side she was Greek, while her mother was a Frenchwoman. She was born on the island of Tinos, in a wealthy family which offered her the opportunity to get good education. She was tutored by French teachers. "She had a sophisticated demeanour, and was a woman of unusual beauty, with captivating dark eyes, wonderful pale complexion and a slim figure. Her black hair was curled" (Dimitrijević-Stošić 1965, 64). Anka Konstantinovic-Obrenovic (1821–1868), a member of the Serbian royal Obrenovic dynasty as the niece of the dynasty's founder Milos Obrenovic, was recorded saying Meyra had a "wonderful female figure. It is such a shame her veil conceals such divine beauty, that people cannot enjoy it." She spoke Turkish, Greek



2. The Inner Fortress and Pasha's Court at Belgrade (1860s)

and French, and in Belgrade she studied German and Serbian. She played the violin, had a beautiful voice and could also expertly perform a variety of oriental and European dances. Through the wife of Matija Ban, Margaret, who was also of Greek origin, she got acquainted with numerous women from the Belgrade high society (Dimitrijević-Stošić 1965, 65).

Meyra remained known as the only wife of a pasha who organized luxurious country parties with women from Belgrade, but also with women from other countries. From November to June, every year, and especially during Bayram, she hosted unforgettable and glamorous festivities. Eunuchs posted on white marble staircases at the entrance to pasha's residence would greet the incoming guests. The country parties were attended also by wives of Austrian officers from the nearby Petrovaradin, Pancevo and Zemun garrisons. The perennial guest seen frequently was Anka Konstantinovic, accompanied by her daughter Katarina.

In luxurious salons, decorated with Persian carpets and other priceless pieces, the guests sat on feather pillows made out of qatifa, always with a lavish snack served. The parties usually started at two in the afternoon and went on until five. Meyra remained known as a warm and approachable woman that greeted personally every guest, often in French or “clumsy and insecure Serbian.” The atmosphere of the party was dictated by her, as she personally recited verses of famous French romantic poets of the time, and retold stories from



3. Place where The City Keys were handed over
to The Serbs in 1867 (Kalemegdan)

French and German literature. Moreover, there was always dance and song present, and it was told that pasha's wife enjoyed the most the Serbian song: "Sunce jarko ne sijas jednako". Meyra was an exquisite pianist, violinist and guitarist, and she loved singing as well. An important aspect of socializing was the musical program. Guests enjoyed playing the piano in four hands, with two people at a time, which was a fad at the time in Europe. Meyra often played in tandem with Margareta Ban. The wife of Italian consul was often heard playing the piano and she most often played a popular patriotic song from Italy *Viva L'Italia* (Dimitrijević-Stošić 1965, 66).

The fact that the salons of pasha's wife Meyra were frequented by notable guests who visited Belgrade as well speak volumes about their significance. During their time in Belgrade, Meyra's salon parties were frequented by actresses from Novi Sad, the singer and women's rights activist Draga Dejanovic (1843–1871) and Draginja (Draga) Dankulov (1841–1890). Draga Dejanovic in her role as an actress and writer read parts of her own works and recited the poems of German romantic poets, but she spoke even more as an advocate for women's rights and talked about the new role of women in the society. Actress Draginja Dankulov, well known in the theatre for her singing ability, often performed on the piano and sang. She also recited patriotic poems by Jovan Jova-

novic Zmaj (1833–1904) and Djura Jaksic (1832–1878), as well as poems of German orientalist poets such as Friedrich Martin von Bodenstedt (1819–1892), Georg Friedrich Daumer (1800–1875) and Karl August Georg Maximilian von Platen-Hallermünde (1796–1835), all of whom were very popular at the time.

Every departing guest was given a white wicker basket, covered on the bottom with green, blue or red silk, a basket full of exotic fruit, yellow sugar, Turkish delight, candy, musk soap, rose oil and a bottle of fine western European fragrance. Guests were escorted home by a servant who carried the gifts (Dimitrijević-Stošić 1965, 66).

“The salons of the wife of Ali Riza-Pasha open a window into the semi-private world of the wife of a high-ranked Turkish official. Well-educated and musically trained, pasha’s wife Meyra set the tone for her art salons, creating a unique meeting point of East and West, both in her own conduct and in the very diverse composition of her guests, their clothes, languages and alternating sounds of different dances and waltz. It is important to note that the position of Ottoman women was far less limiting than the rumours in the West were telling” (Kokanović Marković 2017, 40-41; see also Faroqhi 1994, 103–106; Sancar 2007, 163–172; Erdogan Nilgun 1996). “Women could go out, visit cousins and friends, and affluent women could also order a chariot” (Kokanović Marković 2017, 41). Godfrey Goodwin points out that women at the time were characterised by “acumen, intelligence and often talent for music” (Goodwin 1997, 170–180). By looking into art parties organized there and in other Belgrade court and civic salons, we can discover an important role of women not only in the social and cultural sphere, but also in the political life of the capital. Modelled after European salons, the female city-dwellers of old Belgrade, in their parties and salon discussions, played an important role in the emancipation of women during the modern state building period. In the salon atmosphere, women had an outlet to show their skills and knowledge – often addressed to the female population, such as playing an instrument (usually piano), conversation in a foreign language, dance, poetry, ancient mythology and literature. However, this “decorative form of education”, welcome and expected for women at the time in Europe, was overcome by an active participation of women in the discussion about the rights of women in the society, following domestic and foreign press and the political scene, and advocating for introducing changes and novelty to the life in the capital.

“Without a doubt, salons strengthened the social consciousness, education and public opinion, which contributed to the improvement of education of the citizenry. Of important note is the fact that through salon encounters, enlightened female citizens began constituting a new role for women in the society. The confidence of women and their entry in the public life had an important role, especially at the time where social conventions and prejudices of old ruled.

Sunce jarko, ne sijaš jednako

Текст:
Исидор Тирп (1844-1893)

Andante espressivo

Sун - - - ие яр - - - ко не си - яш ед - на - - - ко,
Sun - - - ce jar - - - ko ne si - jaš jed - na - - - ko,

сун - це яр - ко „и - ме мо - ё“ не си - яш ед - на - - - ко.
sun - ce jar - ko „i - me mo - je“ ne si - jaš jed - na - - - ko.

Sunce jarko, ne sijaš jednako,
Мој ме драги не любиједнако.
Ил' једнако ил' немој никако.
Ил' ме люби ил' ме окани,
Ил' се мани или ме сарани.
Знаш наверо како си се kleо?
Насред села код бреста зелена:
Другу небу за тобом умреу,
А данас си веру превруо,
Болесна те превртала мајка,
Од Митрова до Петрова данка,
И опет ти душа не изашла,
Док на моме крилу не застапо!
(Свака се прста два пута пева и додаје
„име мое...“.)

Sunce jarko, ne sijaš jednako,
Moj me dragi ne ljubi jednako.
Il' jednako il' nemoj nikako.
Il' me ljubi il' me okani,
Il' se mani ili me sarani.
Znaš, nevero, kako si se kleo?
Nased selu kod bresta zelena:
Drugu neću, za tobom umreću,
A danas si veru prvernuo,
Bolesna te prevratala majka,
Od Mitrova do Petrova danka,
I opet ti duša ne izasla,
Dok na mome krilu ne zastrapo!
(Each line is sung twice with 'my name'
added.)

4. One of the favourite songs of Ali Riza-Pasha's wife “Sunce jarko ne sijas jednako” (“The Sun does not shine brightly equally”)

It was important to overcome barriers of mentality and educational barriers, as well as the social and economic conventions” (Kokanović Marković 2017, 40). The social life that sprang from the salons of pasha's wife Meyra reflected the aspirations of women of the period, not only of Christian but also Muslim faith. Pasha's wife Meyra showed, on her own example and through organizing the women's salons, that she was aware of the necessity of change of the role of women in the society.

Conclusion

Immediately after arriving to his post, the last Turkish commander of the Belgrade fortress, Ali Riza-Pasha, effectively changed the way relations between the Serbs and Turks looked. He tried to strengthen the political ties with the Serbian Prince Mihailo Obrenovic, and of special significant was his role

in the social and cultural life of Belgrade. For the first time, a Turkish pasha visited festivities organized by Serbs, especially balls that were organized by Prince Mihailo. Moreover, he took his wife Meyra with him. Apart from the role of the pasha himself, a prominent role in the social life of the capital and the emancipation of Belgrade society was played by his spouse Meyra. She remains known as the only wife of a pasha that organized luxurious parties and socialized with women from Belgrade and elsewhere. From early November to June, every year, and especially during Bayram, she hosted remarkable and magnificent parties. She spoke Turkish, Greek and French, and learned German and Serbian. She played the violin, sang beautifully, and she was a skilled in European and oriental dances. Her salons offer us insight into a brand-new view on life of a Turkish pasha's wife, and with her role she contributed to the cultural emancipation of women in Belgrade.

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*Kulturni i društveni život turskog paše u Beogradu
– primer Ali Riza-paše*

U radu je analiziran vrlo poseban odnos poslednjeg komandanta beogradske tvrđave, Ali Riza-paše prema društvenom i kulturnom životu srpske prestonice. Budući da su odnosi Srba i Turaka bili vrlo specifični, ovaj paša je po prvi put raskinuo stare okove i kao jedini turski paša do tada uključio se u potpunosti u društveni život sa Srbima. Lično je učestvovao na brojnim zabavama i proslavama, a njegova žena Mejra je ostala poznata kao prva pašina supruga koja je organizovala salonska druženja za žene iz tadašnjih visokih društvenih slojeva. Njeni orijentalni saloni ostavili su dubokog traga na društvo srpske prestonice. Cilj nam je bio da predstavimo jednu folklornu i kulturološku dimenziju života turskog paše, ali i života na njegovom dvoru preko angažovanja i delovanja njegove supruge.

Ključne reči: Ali Riza-paša, Beograd, Srbija, knez Mihailo Obrenović, društveni život, kulturni život, pašinica Mejra

*Vie sociale et culturelle du pacha turc à Belgrade
– l'exemple du pacha Ali Riza*

Dans ce travail est analysée la manière très particulière dont le dernier commandant de la forteresse de Belgrade, le pacha Ali Riza, s'était impliqué dans la vie sociale et culturelle de la capitale de Serbie. Étant donné que les rapports entre les Serbes et les Turcs étaient très spécifiques, ce pacha avait décidé de se libérer du vieux joug du passé et avait été le premier pacha turc à s'immerger complètement dans la vie sociale serbe. Il avait personnellement participé à de nombreuses festivités, et sa femme Mejra est restée connue comme la première épouse d'un pacha à avoir organisé des réceptions pour des femmes des couches sociales élevées de cette époque-là. Ses salons à thème oriental ont laissé de profondes traces sur la société de la capitale serbe. Notre objectif a été de présenter la dimension folklorique et culturelle de la vie du pacha turc, mais aussi la vie à sa cour à travers l'activité de son épouse.

Mots clés: Pacha Ali Riza, Belgrade, Serbie, prince Mihailo Obrenović, vie sociale, vie culturelle, la femme du pacha Mejra

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