

The Influence of Akhi Institution on the Formation and Functioning of Guilds (*Esnaf*) in the Bulgarian Lands

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(Summary)

In the context of this research it is useful to remind that the Akhi institution originated in Anatolia in the second half of the 13th century and under its influence the first guilds were founded there following the model of the Arabic Shia-Muslim statutes *Futuwwa*. Thus, the Akhi institution was invented among Ottoman Turks mainly as a political and religious community connected to Shia Islam. Later on, the social and economic element became a dominant factor in the development and growth of the Akhi institution and this process was manifested by the formation of guilds: craftsmen's associations, originally known as *esnaf*. In this way the Akhi institution became open for people of different ethnic and confessional affiliation, and remained open as late as its decay in the end of the 19th century. The guilds were practically accessible to people of various ethnic backgrounds, belonging to different religions or religious schools. One of the most characteristic features of the Akhi institution is the organic combination of socio-economic and religious platforms. The specificity of this symbiosis is further enhanced by the principle of hierarchy, borrowed from the dervish orders. As I will show in the text, this principle was also applied in the formation of the guilds in the Bulgarian lands.

Another characteristic of the Akhi institution after the first half of the 15th century was that it took root exclusively in urban environment which was also manifested in the Bulgarian case. The village craftsmen worked individually and the craft was not their main means of living. They were not organized in cooperative communities, i.e. they were not members of associations. In towns and cities the craftsmen formed associations and practiced as professionals. Because of this reason, during the Ottoman period the guild had always been an urban formation. Its origin, development and public recognition were connected only to the urban milieu. Another important peculiarity of the Akhi institution was its autonomy. It was also typical of the guilds which originated and developed as independent formations since they were in possession of enough power to ensure their autonomy.

The published research shows that Akhi institution is still outside the focus of attention in Bulgarian historiography and the history of *esnaf* associations has not been examined in regards with the role and impact of this institution. Being convinced that Akhi fraternities are the mainstays of guilds in the Ottoman state, I will examine the most essential aspects of the impact of Akhi institution on the formation and functioning of guilds in the Bulgarian lands. For this purpose, I will dwell on four main factors (lexical, structural, ritual and normative) which indicate the impact of the Akhi institution on the origins and development of *esnaf* associations in the Bulgarian lands during the period from the middle of the 15th to the end of the 19th century.

In the appendix I offer a general description of the *testir* (ceremonies of passage to a higher level in the *esnaf* hierarchy) which took place in the first half of the 19th century in the Bulgarian town of Turnovo. I draw mostly on information about the *testir* of construction workers in 1854 when the last ceremony of this kind took place in the town. The description was written in 1900 by K. Touleshkov and is to be found in the Oriental section of the Saints Cyril and Methodius National Library in Sofia.