

Fabrications on Medjugorje: on Mart Bax' Research

MART BAX, *Medjugorje: Religion, Politics, and Violence in Rural Bosnia* [Međugorje: religija, politika i nasilje u ruralnoj Bosni], Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1995., pp. xix+139

Mart Bax* is a member of the academia in the Netherlands, he has been a professor of political anthropology at the Vrije University in Amsterdam for many years. He got a PhD degree in 1976. His dissertation dealt with the relations between Catholics in Ireland; afterwards he wrote about the relations between the monastic and secular (Episcopal) clergy in the south of Netherlands, which is predominantly Catholic. In his doctoral thesis he claims that the monastic community, threatened by the introduction of a regular church hierarchy (a customary church structure made up of dioceses headed by bishops), often resorts to promoting the worship of saints and sanctuary cult of this kind in an area where it had been dominant in the past (due to the lack of diocese church organisation there or its own weakness) in order to protect its past positions. Upon hearing about the apparitions in Medjugorje, Mart Bax simply applied this thesis to the circumstances in Herzegovina. In his book *Medjugorje: Religion, Politics, and Violence in Rural Bosnia* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1995) he wished to prove that the Franciscans, who had been the dominant and exclusive representatives of the Catholic Church in (Bosnia and) Herzegovina for centuries, when faced with the risk of losing their centuries long privileges, went a step further in comparison with the Irish and Dutch monastic communities, namely they invented Our Lady

* In 2012 Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (Free University of Amsterdam) initiated an investigation into the work of this Dutch anthropologist, who was suspected of scientific fraud. The Final Report was officially published in September 2013 (http://www.vu.nl/nl/Images/20130910_RapportBax_tcm9-356928.pdf?utm_source=sub_persbericht&utm_medium=e-mail&utm_term&utm_content&utm_campaign=pb13107). One of the main incentives for this investigation was the article "Het kaartenhuis van hoogleraar Bax" (*De Volkskrant*, 13/4/2013, available at <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/3425105/2013/04/13/Het-kaartenhuis-van-hoogleraar-Bax.dhtml>) by a Dutch reported Richarda de Boer, who investigated Bax's work.

One of de Boer's informants was the author of this text, a historian and a priest in the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The text is a fierce criticism of Bax's research in Medjugorje and Bax's book *Medjugorje: Religion, Politics, and Violence in Rural Bosnia*, who was also a source of information in the mentioned investigation. The author was glad to concede his text which was slightly edited and shortened for publication (remark by Marijana Belaj, the editor).

and instructed a group of children in Bijakovići, a Medjugorje parish, who in June 1981 began to claim that the Mother of God appeared to them and started conveying her messages to the parish and the world.

Bax's writings quite clearly show that he supports his theses by made up stories and literature he does not understand, which often proves to be nonexistent; stories from the field which are a product of his imagination; testimonies of people who do not exist and with whom he has never spoken.

Nevertheless, Bax perseveres. In fact, leafing through the pages of his book shows that his basic thesis, namely that Medjugorje phenomenon had been invented by Herzegovinian Franciscans in order to defend their centuries long position on the territory of Herzegovina, is completely overshadowed and prominence is given only to a fictitious and impossible story about the conflicts among people from Medjugorje, about Medjugorje "clan wars", which culminated in a so-called *small war* in late 1991 early 1992. In this "clan war" in Medjugorje, according to Bax's research, 140 people died, 60 went missing and 600 became refugees, most of whom supposedly fled to Germany! It seems that a little later, in new conflicts another 80 Medjugorje "clan" members were killed (unless Bax had previously counted them among the mentioned 140?). At the time when the war in Croatia is in full swing and on the verge of sweeping over Bosnia and Herzegovina – Medjugorje "clans" are fighting their mutual war to extinction in which hundreds are killed and missing and three times as many refugees leave their centuries old homes due to an age long animosity between them and a "small" war. I shall go into the details of his book even though it is both excruciating and pointless, because it is based on fabrications. In fact, it is necessary to say something more about it because cultural anthropologists have been known to quote Bax and take his data and conclusions for granted.

Perhaps the question of how it is possible that no one had reacted to Bax's "findings", in spite of the fact that some of his works dealing with Medjugorje were published in 1980s, and the book I am reviewing here dates from 1995, needs to be raised. The answer is simple: Croatian scientists know for a fact that their referencing Bax's work would be to their detriment and would certainly put their scientific reputation at risk even though they know that Bax's statements are far from reality. Bax's works were recently brought to my attention by Richard de Boer, also Dutch (his mother comes from Serbia so Richard speaks Serbian and Croatian very well), who has recently done field work in Medjugorje in order to research and examine Bax's data and conclusions. Namely, we know that the Dutch academia has been seriously questioning Bax's scientific work for a long time now, in particular his research in the Catholic south of the Netherlands

(Brabant) as well as his work in Ireland, which culminated with his articles and a book on Medjugorje. Richard sent me Bax's book from 1995 in English and had already published an article on Bax's writings in connection with the phenomenon of Medjugorje („Het kaartenhuis van hoogleraar Bax“, *De Volkskrant*, 13 April 2013, pp. 2-3, 5). Other Dutch scientists are looking into Bax's work in order to clear their name after the disgraceful conduct of a prominent member of their country's academia.

Bax's sources

The way Bax approaches his sources is simply incredible, regardless of whether they are written sources or the accounts of witnesses from whom he seeks information. Firstly, he never talks about real people, but “conceals” their names in different ways.¹ Most often he says that “somebody” told him something (e.g. he was told by “some elderly people”, “an old man”, “Franciscan circles...”). Even Franciscan names are fictitious: friar Vjekoslav, friar Branko (1979), friar Krsto, friar Ksaver, friar Slobodan, friar Siro (what kind of name is this?), friar Zirko (!?), a Medjugorje archivist (!), friar Janko Babić. The only name that could be authentic is that of friar Leonard (Oreč), who Bax quotes on several occasions. Furthermore, friar Leonard's words could actually be authentic so why does he not refer to other Franciscans by their real names? It is difficult to explain in any other way other than Bax trying to hide his tracks. His citations are simply unverifiable. It is also incredible that Bax conceals the names of the seers themselves, who have been globally known for decades. In fact, one of the seers, Marijana, mentioned by Bax, does not exist at all (her account coincides with Vicka's, and it is unknown why Bax uses the name Marijana instead of Vicka). All things considered, Bax closes the door behind him in that his data are unverifiable and his informants elusive.

What about written sources? Bax provides an extensive list of literature at the end of his book (pp. 129-139) comprising mostly general publications which have nothing to do with Medjugorje. A part of it is related to the history of ex-Yugoslavia, however even those works (as far as I know) are misquoted by Bax who is actually fabricating things that are not written in them at all. As an example I shall point out his frequent references to Marko Vego, a historian who wrote about Brotnjo on several occasions (he published the final results of a multiannual research in a book *Historija Brotnja* [*History of Brotnjo*], in 1981), which makes his work relevant for Bax who writes extensively about the history of the area.

¹ Concealing of names is not done for the purpose of protecting the narrator, Bax conceals the names in an entirely unusual way.

However, references to Vego's work which Bax gives are actually not there. It is simply inconceivable that Bax references works which do not exist. This primarily relates to the book *Quaestio Hercegoviniensis*, which was published in 1979 in Duvno. It is the fundamental source for Bax's considerations of the relationship between Franciscans and Mostar bishops. In actual fact, the book does not exist. An analogous publication that comes to mind is a book by friar Jerko Mihaljević *Hercegovачki slučaj u svjetlu dokumenata [The Herzegovinian Case in the Light of Documents]*, which was published in Humac and not in Duvno in 1977 and not in 1979. Hence, Bax has never seen Mihaljević's book, which he often refers to under an erroneous name. One gets the impression that Bax had somebody translate some texts from Croatian, however the translation was done ineptly. There are other references which are even more tragic, e.g. the works of somebody named J. Soldo, whose work *Čitluk i Brotnjo. Istorija [Čitluk and Brotnjo. A History]*, published by *Privredni vjesnik* magazine in Zagreb in 1964 is referenced first and followed by a manuscript (!) entitled *Mali rat u Brotjnu [Small War in Brotnjo]* (with a misspelling of Brotnjo!) without the place or year of writing. I attempted to find the book by J. Soldo among *Privredni vjesnik* publications, but it simply does not exist. In the catalogue of the National and University Library in Zagreb the names Jago Soldo, Jakov Soldo, Josip Ante Soldo and Jure Soldo are mentioned, but none of them wrote anything remotely related to the title which Bax mentions. The only publication which could correspond to the title given by Bax is *Čitluk i Brotnjo: povijest, kultura, umjetnost, prirodne znamenitosti, turizam [Čitluk and Brotnjo: history, culture, art, natural sights, tourism]* which was indeed published by *Privredni vjesnik* (Tourist monographs edition), but it was written by Mato Njavro and published in 1987! The situation gets even worse with Soldo's *Small War in Brotnjo*, which is impossible to check because it is a manuscript, which Soldo delivered to Bax and there are no other copies. A more plausible scenario is that J. Soldo simply does not exist. It is certainly true that Bax often fails to include the numbers of pages of publications which he refers to, so that it is virtually impossible to verify either the accuracy of his writing or who the author of the quotations really was.

In one instance, Bax writes that he had studied archival material in "the provincial archives of Duvno Franciscans" (pp. 64–65, n. 3 and 10). In fact, monastery and parish archives are located in Duvno (Tomislavgrad) whereas provincial archives are located in Mostar. It was not before 2007 that Duvno archives were put in order by myself, which means that they were not available to the public (including Bax) prior to that time. Moreover, in another instance, he claims that Franciscan archives in Humac confirm that Serbs migrated to Medjugorje area and settled in the area between Medjugorje and Bijakovići (p. 71).

I also put in order Humac archives in 2012, prior to that time they were useless to anyone. Bax has certainly never set foot in the room where the (chaotic) archive material was kept.

Before I move on to Bax's argumentation and conclusions, I would like to mention another detail. Literature and notes that Bax gives also include publications in Croatian. Furthermore, he explains the pronunciation of Croatian letters c, č, ć, dj, j, š, ž (p. xiii) to an undiscerning reader. In spite of this, almost everything in Bax's book is misspelt. For example, Rodoč is "Rodoc", Šurmanci are "Šurmanći", Žanić is "Žanic", Oreč is "Oreć", Karadžić is "Karadžic", Sivrić is "Šivrić", Žarko Ilić is "Ilić, Z.", *četnici* (Chetniks) are "četnići", *rezervisti* (reservists) are "režervisti" to mention just a few since there are hundreds of such examples. It is even more tragic when Bax attempts to render whole sentences or book titles in Croatian.

These are but a few excerpts from Bax's book which clarify his procedure and show how much everything is muddled and absurd and has nothing to do with reality. It would be simply impossible to go into each factographic error so I shall concentrate on the most important ideas.

Herzegovinian Case

General public has long been familiar with the term "Herzegovinian case" or at least with its main elements. If Bax's basic intention is to prove that apparitions in Medjugorje are closely linked with the Franciscan attempt to keep the privileges they had enjoyed throughout centuries long Ottoman rule when they were the only Catholic priests in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that these privileges were essentially threatened by the introduction of "a regular church hierarchy" in 1881, then he also needs to take "Herzegovinian case" into consideration. However, it is his lack of knowledge about the recent as well as distant history of the Franciscans and the Catholic Church in (Bosnia and) Herzegovina that is problematic. The only source used is the already mentioned book *Quaestio Hercegoviniensis*. Indeed, there is a respectable body of literature in connection with the "Herzegovinian case" (which existed at the time when Bax was writing his papers), which one would need to familiarise themselves with in order to be able to make accurate conclusions. In fact, he refers to B. Gavranović, but it is quite clear that he did not read his book. Bax's ignorance of Franciscan history in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the causes that led to the introduction of church hierarchy in 1881 is truly tragic. Gavranović wrote about it, but so did many others, e.g. Ignacije Gavran, Đuro Kokša, Marko Perić, Jerko Mihaljević, Viktor Nuić, Ratko Perić, etc.

Our Lady's Apparitions

As was already mentioned, Bax sees Marian apparitions only as a Franciscan fabrication aimed at consolidating their position in Herzegovina in the context of "diocesanisation" (as Bax puts it), which means putting some parishes at the disposal of a local bishop. Fabrication of arguments in order to depict apparitions as a Franciscan hoax is inadmissible. I do not know whether Bax realises this, but he is in fact insulting numerous Franciscans, or more precisely a whole monastic community, which he names Herzegovinian Franciscan Province, with a seat in Mostar.

Everything was fabricated by friar Branko, Bax writes, who arrived in Medjugorje parish in 1979 he was a member of a charismatic movement. At one of the movement's meeting in a monastery in Italy he received two prophecies, one of which said: "Do not worry; I shall send you My Mother and everyone whall listen to Her." After several children who fell ill in the parish recovered in the course of the following year upon friar Branko and his religious students' intercession, six children found old Franciscan rosaries and finally on 24 June 1981 Our Lady appeared at Podbrdo. This is what the children came to inform friar Vjekoslav, their new parson, about because friar Branko had gone to Mostar (pp. 13–15). Who is supposed to be friar Branko and who friar Vjekoslav is an unsolvable mystery. Clearly, none of them are actual persons. It looks as though "Friar Branko" should be friar Jozo Zovko. However, he was not a parson there in 1979 but came in 1980 and at the time of apparitions he did not go to Mostar but he was on his annual leave. Also, he did not know most of the children to whom Our Lady appeared nor did he teach them catechism. They did not belong to any (charismatic) group that he was supposed to lead.

In describing the communist authorities' response, Bax exaggerates: ringing of the bells was never prohibited, nor were the Franciscans obliged to go to the police station in Čitluk for questioning twice a week. His description of Mostar Bishop's reaction is another exaggeration: it was not the bishop who prohibited worshippers' pilgrimage to Medjugorje (because he could not have done so!), but it was the Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia that banned the organising of official pilgrimages (that is to say, they could not be organised by priests or parish offices), and Franciscans did not request permission from the Order's general in Rome to instate more priests in Medjugorje because this falls within the remit of the Provincial of Mostar (pp. 17, 29 n. 16). It is a vicious lie that the diocese in Mostar spread the rumours about Franciscans or their relatives being involved in nationalist movements in the country and abroad and that announcement of these information (e.g. in pamphlets) was an incentive for the arrest of several

Franciscans (p. 18). “One of the leading Franciscans in Sarajevo told Bax in 1987 “that according to their calculations at least nineteen of his colleagues [Franciscans] had landed in prison for this reason. After paying a ransom, they were quickly released” (p. 29 n. 18). This is preposterous! It is also not true that some Franciscans were “excommunicated” (p. 13) – Bax is clearly unfamiliar with the meaning of the word excommunication. Another fabrication is that the Franciscans, in an attempt to protect themselves, employed an “active strategy” of spreading Our Lady’s messages through the members of the Franciscan movement which had branches around the world. So they invited experts from around the world who were partial towards them: theologians, scientists, doctors, etc. to corroborate their story about the apparitions (p. 19). They came on their own, as well as millions of pilgrims and other curious visitors; no invitation was necessary. On the other hand, Bax writes, numerous messages from Our Lady tell the Bishop and diocese priests to convert and make peace with the Franciscans (pp. 19–20). On the contrary, Our Lady’s calls for conversion are always universal. She urges the whole world, bishops, priests and Franciscans alike to convert.

And now of course it is time to discuss money. For Bax so many pilgrims assembling from around the world served only one purpose, namely that of collecting money from those who are naïve. In his view this was highly beneficial for both the Franciscans and the state authorities (which made a deal with the Franciscans so that they could get their hands on a piece of the cake), as well as for the seers and of course the parishioners themselves. Seers, according to Bax, surround themselves with assistants who are called *križari*, literally “crusaders”, (whom Bax links to *Ustasha*, Croatian nationalistic movement, who fought against the Partisans after the end of WWII; pp. 23–24, 29 n. 22). *Križari*, according to Bax organise visits to seers who pray for the pilgrims, bless them and “fleece” them. This is why the Franciscans, who have “created” both the seers and Our Lady’s apparitions themselves, became envious because they were losing a significant part of their “cake” so they would also fabricate “the seers of the second generation” later in order to be able to control “the seers of the first generation” (pp. 21–24, 31–42). For Bax everything boils down to the fight between Franciscan priests and the seers in the “religious arena” of Medjugorje, about who will accumulate more money from the pilgrims. Furthermore, according to Bax, the Franciscans put Križevac on the map again in order to reduce the influence of Podbrdo and the seers so that other clans in the parish can get their share of the income and be satisfied (p. 40). As if Podbrdo and Križevac excluded each other and as if there were too few pilgrims to visit both Podbrdo and Križevac! The inhabitants of Medjugorje and Bijakovići villages (as well as many others in the neighbouring villages) in time began to build catering establishments in order to receive a vast multitude of

pilgrims. This is a logical consequence of this sanctuary's development, which is by no means different from any other sanctuary in the world. However, Bax gives it a warped interpretation.

Hence, in order to get rid of bishops and retain their privileges, Franciscans as well as other monastic communities in a similar situation, encourage apparitions. Such cases, Bax informs us, were recorded in the Dutch province of Brabant in XIX century (which was the basis of his political anthropology project "The Power of the Roman Catholic Church in Rural Dutch Brabant"; pp. xvi) in New Spain and Eire in XVII century as well as in Peru in XVII and XVIII centuries. Bax states that ordinarily the hands of Rome were tied because any type of intervention would have only made things worse (p. 25).

In the next chapter (IV) Bax continues to expand his considerations about "the distribution of the cake", he introduces *zajednace* (a word that is absolutely unknown in the Croatian language!) which distribute pilgrims so that everyone earns enough and so on (pp. 43–51), however these are just concoctions and completely irrelevant matters.

A Mixture of the Pagan and the Catholic Cult and the Arrival of Serbs in Medjugorje

Bax could probably not surmise that his original purpose in writing (the relationship between monastic clergy at odds with the introduction of "diocesanisation" and "fabrications of apparitions" for the purpose of defending their privileges) would become only a second-rate sideshow. Suddenly, something else takes the centre stage – a fight for power between rural clans. He constructs a backdrop for this theme, made up of old superstitions, rural people's pagan customs and of course in Medjugorje Franciscans struggling to cultivate the pagans and make them accept at least some of the Christian beliefs and traditions. According to Bax, they did not succeed in the attempt, although they left the pagans a significant part of their superstitious customs and practices in order to attract them to the Church. It is not clear whether Bax refers to VII, IX, XIV, XIX or XX century here. It seems that on the whole he does not set much store by centuries and other exact and verifiable data.

As a kind of introduction into the mentioned theme, and at the same time a transition from the story about apparitions to the story about paganism, clans and their wars, in chapter (V) Bax writes about local women in Medjugorje who are possessed by Satan (pp. 53–65). In fact, Bax instructs us, they are not possessed and their disorders can be explained by simple scientific methods: on the one hand, they were overwhelmed by the huge amount of work in providing catering services for

tourists (or pilgrims) and on the other, unfortunately many emigrants who had been working abroad, heard about the possibility of earning a livelihood on pilgrims' money and decided to return from Germany and other Western countries. Hence, the women suddenly lost the power they used to have when they were running their households themselves. Then "women's madness", *ženska histerija* (a rare example of Bax actually spelling Croatian words correctly) broke out and they felt as if "the Black Power" or *crna moć* (Bax writes *Crna Moća*). Until May 1989, according to Bax, more than 300 afflicted women reported to the parish office, and there was approximately the same number of requests for exorcism (p. 56). Then the descriptions of old superstitions follow, which were extinct from this region many hundreds of years ago. Bax prattles about *kalajdžije* (which he identifies with witches and fortune tellers, although the word *kalajdžije* refers to men who forge iron), about *mučni vragovi*, "heavy devils" (supposedly *moćni?*, "powerful"), *sveti krug* ("sacred circle"), pagan rituals which have not been mentioned here for centuries, about the metaphors of *nadzemlje*, "the world above where God resides", *srednja zemlja poljana*, "the Middle Field" or *zemlja* "the field of the Earth's surface, where human beings live" (terms completely unknown in Herzegovina!), about *slava* (an exclusive Serbian Orthodox tradition of the veneration and observance of the family's patron saint on the saint's feast day), about exorcism, which had never happened among local believers in Medjugorje and since 1981 there were only few cases of exorcism, which were performed on foreigners. Generally speaking, cases of demonic possession as well as exorcism were hardly ever recorded in this region in the past, whereas none have happened in the last 30 years. Therefore, once again, everything described in chapter V is a figment of Bax's prolific imagination! Bax displays a tragic ignorance of the basics of theology, religious culture and religious practice, local customs, human relations, the role of a priest in a rural community. Everything concerning the people he describes and events he wishes to present to the (scientific) public is spiced and over spiced with total ignorance and warped views of the past and present reality.

In a postscript to chapter V, Bax writes: "During short visits in 1991 and 1992 several local people [again there are no specific names, n. b. R. J.] told me that women's madness had intensified. I could not systematically investigate this since many women had been evacuated and taken refuge in Germany" (pp. 63–64). Had Bax been able to test this in the field I wonder what type of texts would have ensued.

Next comes chapter VI (pp. 67–79) in which Bax describes the process of Christianisation of the pagan Croatian population in Medjugorje region for which Franciscans are the most meritorious. The great scientist got tangled up with Bogomils and medieval tombstones *stećci* (which he calls *stećći*). He invented

that Šipovac (which was renamed Križevac, Cross Mountain in 1934) was called *Gromljavina* (“Mountain of Thunder”) and that rituals of worship devoted to god *Gromovnik* (“the spirit of thunder”) were held there. He suggests that Franciscan Christianisation was partly successful in Bijakovići but not in Medjugorje which is why the Franciscans were able to construct a church courtyard with a chapel in Bijakovići during the Ottoman age. Bax mixed up centuries here because the church in Bijakovići was constructed in late XIX century, and he obviously has no clue about the fact that during the Ottoman rule the construction of a tiny chapel, even in a cemetery, was punished by beheading. Also, Bax does not know that from XVII to XIX century there were no churches in Herzegovina, not even a single cemetery chapel! And then, as Bax’s “older informants” attest, at the turn of the century (could it be XIX to XX century?) three Serb shepherd clans appeared from somewhere and settled in no man’s land between Medjugorje and Bijakovići. Their herds destroyed the local Croats’ crops, which was further aggravated by Serb wishes to build their own church on the slopes of Šipovac Mountain. They even offered money to Medjugorje elders, but the plan did not come to fruition. Thus the hatred was spreading and growing, reaching its culmination in several periods: first, during the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of Yugoslavia) when Serbs persecuted Croats; then during WWII when the situation was reversed, followed by Serb retribution after in the first decades after the war. All this (according to Bax) was happening in Medjugorje (pp. 70–73). If one is aware of a simple fact, that is known to everyone in Medjugorje and Brotnja as well as all over Herzegovina, to Serbs and Croats alike, be they literate or illiterate, and that is that Serbs had never lived in either Medjugorje or Bijakovići, that they did not come to this region at the turn of the century, XIX to XX or at any time, then the whole story which Bax presents is completely meaningless and based on pure fantasy. Why does Bax need all this? In order to bring his fiction to its culmination namely, to the “small war” that was waged between the warring (Croatian and Serbian) clans in Medjugorje 1991/1992! If we know that Serbs had never lived in Medjugorje then Bax’s stories about destroyed Serb property in Medjugorje (and vice versa), about the demolition of a Serb Orthodox Church and Monastery in the same village (which of course had never existed either) make no sense whatsoever. Serb civilians who were killed and thrown into a pit in Šurmanci did not come from Medjugorje (according to Bax) but from Prebilovci, a Serbian village on the other side of the Neretva river.

And who were these Serbs? According to Bax, they are Smoljani and Ostojići (pp. 82, 101–118)! Smoljani and Ostojići did not come to Medjugorje (and Bijakovići) at the turn of XX century but had been living there for ages. Naturally, they were not Serbs and Orthodox but ethnic Croats and Catholics. This

is not worth wasting any more words on because comprehensive research about Brotnja tribes were conducted based on the records kept from 1775 until today and exhaustive papers were published (Mandić, N. 2001 *Podrijetlo hrvatskih starosjedilačkih rodova u Brotnju*, Mostar – Brotnjo: Ostojići pp. 369–377, Smoljani pp. 488–491; Jolić, R. 2009. *Stanovništvo Brotnja u tursko doba*, Čitluk – Tomislavgrad, pp. 115–152; which provides clear arguments that Serbs had never lived in the region of contemporary Medjugorje parish and that their number in Brotnja was negligent in general).

What was needed to be done after decades of struggles and mutual destruction between (Croatian and Serbian) clans in Medjugorje? This was explained to Bax by a Medjugorje chaplain friar Janko Babić (need I repeat that such a person does not exist?): “The time was ripe for a divine intervention” (p.72). This is another reason for Our Lady’s apparitions! Why did she not appear in Medjugorje but in Bijakovići (more precisely, not at Križevac the place of the ancient cult sanctuary but at Podbrdo)? Bax has an answer: because during communist Yugoslavia Križevac was renamed Titovac (after Josip Broz Tito, a communist leader and the President of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) and a big red star, a communist symbol, was made there out of stones taken from a devastated Serbian church and a monastery at the foot of Križevac (pp.74–75). That is how at Podbrdo “a new type of shrine emerged: a holy ‘station’ visited daily by the Virgin Mary, who conveyed her messages and instructions to an international audience” (p. 75). As a matter of fact, Križevac was never renamed Titovac, no giant star had ever been made on it, especially not from stones belonging to a Serbian church or a monastery, which quite simply had never existed in the first place, nor did the Franciscans specify the place where Our Lady would appear. Indeed, Mart Bax outdid himself with his fabrications, but the culmination is yet to come.

Antagonism between Clans and Hamlets

The culmination of Bax’s warped constructs begins with chapter VII, which goes back to ancient past, XIII century to be exact, when according to Bax Medjugorje clans used to worship their pagan saints at Gomila. Main protagonists enter the scene here, namely three most important Medjugorje clans: Jerkovići, Sivrići and Ostojići (Serbs) that came to Medjugorje much later. Nobody knows where the mentioned Gomila is located. According to Bax, it should be a kind of pagan sanctuary, but also a cemetery where the clan elders allegedly come to worship their ancestors. Whether this could be Kovačica cemetery, the oldest cemetery in the parish or Brzomelj in Bijakovići (because Ostojići come from Bijakovići) or the place of an old parish church (but without a cemetery) I could

not fathom. This is unclear to anyone but Bax himself. He describes the periods of peace and war between the mentioned clans, introduces the name of the historian Marko Vega, although Vega's work does not contain anything remotely resembling Bax's fabricated stories. And again, small gangs of *hajduci*² (Bax writes *hajdući*), *ustaša*, *četnici* (according to Bax "*Četnići*"), *begs* and *spahis* (Turkish noblemen and soldiers), a Franciscan Miho from 1523... Bax does not concern himself with centuries, he does not make a difference between XIV and XX century. According to him, clan *slava* are held in Medjugorje to this day and they are connected with the celebration of St. Jacob, the parish patron saint. It is crystal clear that Catholics do not observe *slava* and that such customs have never existed there. Nevertheless, Bax does not mind attributing Serbian Orthodox traditions to Catholic Croatians and mixing in the Turks for good measure (p. 86).

The problem arose when a parish was established in Medjugorje, a church was built and worship of St. Jacob, the patron saint, was introduced. How can the pagan rituals at Gomila be reconciled with this (new) Catholic Saint worship (as if Medjugorje parishioners were not Catholics until that time, even though they did not have their own parish!)? This is what Bax writes about the construction of the parish church "Since there were [in Herzegovina after Austro-Hungarian occupation in 1878, n. b. R. J.] so few locally-born secular priests, in 1892 the new bishop of Mostar, a Hungarian himself, assigned the organisation of the new parish of Medjugorje to Tomaslev, another Hungarian. Tomaslev was assisted by several Slovene secular clergymen. Tomaslev's first task was to build a parish church where the liturgical ceremonies and sacraments could be properly performed. The Hungarian archdiocese was to donate the bulk of the construction costs, and the rest was to be provided by the local population" (p. 87). What can be said about this? Bax mixed up everything that can be mixed up. In 1892 friar Paškal Buconjić was Mostar-Duvno Bishop, who was a Croat, Herzegovinian Franciscan, and not a Hungarian; the name of the parish priest who built the church was friar Nikola Šimović, who was a Croat, native of Zvirovići, former Herzegovinian Franciscan Provincial; the parish has never been run by diocese priests but has from the beginning until today been run by Herzegovina Franciscans; Slovene diocese priests have never participated in the liturgical ceremonies held there. Nevertheless, Bax goes on. After the church had been built, he continues, since the Hungarian was boycotted by the local believers, he and his assistants Slovenes withdrew and Franciscans came there. According to the same source (*Quaestio Hercegoviniensis*, whatever that is) the mentioned Slovenes (perhaps Bax meant to say Slavs?) replaced their cassocks with Franciscan habits and continued to work

² Groups of highwaymen that were fighting independently against the Turkish rule.

in Medjugorje parish (p. 89). On the contrary, at the time of Archbishop Stadler there were cases of some Franciscans becoming diocese priests but this was not the case in Bosnia or in Herzegovina. There has never been a reverse case. But what does this mean to Bax? Time, space and historical truth are only determinants without meaning. In recently published monograph *Župa Medjugorje* [Medjugorje Parish] I have given detailed accounts of the process of church construction, the population of Medjugorje parish, basic historical events as well as the casualties of war. There is nothing even remotely similar to what Mart Bax described. However, he is not the one to take exact evidence into account.

Naturally, clan animosity continues: chetniks kill Croatian babies by throwing them in the air and stabbing them with their swords as they come down (p. 90), Croatian atrocities follow, which are in turn followed by the atrocities committed by Tito's Partisans. Of course, all this takes place in Medjugorje where clan battles (Croatian-Serbian) go on intermittently. The Serb family of Ostojić is especially hard hit, whose members are killed by *Ustasha*, and then they take revenge on Croat clans of Jerkovići and Sivrići whenever they get the chance.

Therefore, Franciscans reintroduce *slava* in order to stop the blood feuds and mutual extinction. Of course, Croatian Catholics have never had either *slava* or blood feuds to begin with! With the intention to fortify the peace, for ever if possible, Franciscans initiate apparitions in 1981. They support and encourage apparitions from the very beginning (p. 96). Then there is a great *slava* celebration again in 1985, which is supposed to be the final assurance of reconciliation (p. 97). The event that Bax refers to as *slava* is actually the feast of St. Jacob, parish patron saint, and has nothing to do with *slava* whatsoever just like it never did. From 1985 to 1991 there are liturgies at Gomila: "The worship of the ancestors and the holy sacrament of the eucharist were the central elements", Bax writes (p. 97). This proves that he actually has no idea about Catholic liturgy. He does not know that Catholics pray for their dead but that it has nothing to do with pagan ancestors worship. He is obviously confusing the blessing of the crops, which is performed at village cemeteries in all parishes in the spring, with pagan rituals. The truce between clans lasted until 1991 because everyone eeked a good living from pilgrims and that is why they buried the hatchet.

Then there comes the culmination that takes the top: in chapter VIII Bax describes a terrible clan clash in which 140 inhabitants out of 3000 were killed, 60 were lost and 600 banished the majority of whom ended up in Germany (pp. 101–102). It is not clear whether this is the total number of casualties because Bax writes elsewhere that another 80 people were killed out of which 60 were local people (p. 113). Bax claims that the cause for "the small war" derives from

the fact that the money stopped coming because the pilgrims almost stopped coming to Medjugorje due to the war in Croatia and subsequent war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Another reason for it, according to Bax, is the difference in ethnic origins: Jerkovići and Sivrići are ancient native tribes and Ostojići of Serb origin came to Medjugorje around a hundred years ago. They live at the foot of Križevac (in fact Vasilji live there!). Again Bax brings Chetniks, Ustasha, *režervisti* (reservists), *hosovci* (Croatian Defense Forces) into the mix so that even the best military operations experts could hardly find their way through the web of vague explanations given about the development and ending of the conflict. In any case, the carnage was horrible! In order to prove this to be true beyond a shadow of a doubt, Bax reports that he went to Medjugorje himself at the time and spoke to some of the conflict participants, more precisely with Ostojići in their hideaway (p. 111). There are small inconsistencies there, e.g. the objective was to destroy other people's wells so that the enemies did not have water. This is of course utter nonsense in a village which has had water supply for a long time and each household had good water supply even without a well (p. 111)! Bax's description of war and carnage in Medjugorje is a final defeat of science.

Clearly, Bax does not attempt to answer the question how it is possible that such atrocities and a war which lasted many months in 1991 and 1992 and happened in globally renowned Medjugorje remain completely unknown to the public. There is no reference to this in any newspapers, nothing was reported by either radio or television and there are no photographs of interclan warring. Furthermore, the inhabitants of Medjugorje and the surrounding villages know nothing about it. As a corroboration of his claims Bax cites *Mostarski list* [*Mostar News*] and gives the date of publication 28 August 1992 (p. 118 n. 14) – but such a newspaper never existed. He says that Čitluk birth records and parish records in Medjugorje were both destroyed by fire in the war (p. 116 n. 2). This is most certainly pure fabrication because the parish records in Medjugorje have been preserved and clearly prove that Bax simply invented all this because in 1991 and 1992 there was not a single casualty in the whole parish nor were there any casualties during the Homeland War not to mention the interclan war in Medjugorje which in fact never happened. Bax claims that Ostojići were completely wiped out and that there is no trace of their life in Medjugorje, not even at the cemetery because their tombs at Gomila were completely destroyed (p. 114). Anyone who comes to Medjugorje and Bijakovići can see for themselves that this is not so because many Ostojić household members live there. None of the houses, wells or any other facilities contrary to what Bax claims (p. 114) were destroyed during the Homeland War let alone in some interclan war in Medjugorje.

Mart Bax is obsessed by clans and blood feuds throughout history and in the present so he interprets everything through this prism, even war casualties who have absolutely nothing to do with them. Moreover, he also views Our Lady's apparitions through the same prism, namely the dispute between bishops and Franciscans. This is the context into which he fits the liturgies on the day of St. Jacob at Gomila (he says it is called Gomila, in spite of the fact that a place or indeed a cemetery bearing that name has never existed).

Finally, in the Epilogue (pp. 119–127) he talks about the *secret* of a pit in Šurmanci, although it is no secret at all and has been known for decades that “renegade *Ustaša*” in 1941 threw hundreds of Serb civilians into that pit (and not Germans in 1942 as Bax says!, p. 123). It is surprising that Bax could not find out at least that the civilians were from a village called Prebilovci and not Žitomislići, as he continuously claims and draws completely absurd conclusions about the lasting animosity between (Croatian) Medjugorje and (Serbian) Žitomislići. This is yet another example of Bax's prattles.

In his illustrative account of the situation in rural communities in (Bosnia and) Herzegovina Mart Bax uses Medjugorje as a practical example to prove that the processes of “barbarisation” have never really ended (at least not in rural areas) and that blood feuds and the worst human urges emerge every now and again in their most horrific and cruel form. The culmination occurs in the form of “the small war” in Medjugorje which was waged between brawling clans, claimed hundreds of human casualties and had other terrible repercussions. Bax especially likes to quote Misha Glenny who clearly and unambiguously stated his opinion on the peasants. For him Herzegovina is an area “where the most primitive branches of the Serbian and Croatian tribes live” (p. xvii), and also elsewhere similarly: “Mars must be more hospitable than western Herzegovina and it is hard to imagine anybody wanting to conquer it” (p. 1 and p. 117 n. 8 – Bax manages to quote this statement by Glenny twice!). In order to achieve a stronger impact, for the cover of his book Bax chose an image of Our Lady holding a cross at Križevac, with bullet casings strewn around her while the map of the surrounding areas in the background has bullet or grenade holes in it. In this way he wishes to convey to the global public the idea about a backward nation, infertile land, savage Herzegovina people and rural communities which have nothing but violence in them!

I am convinced that millions of people who have visited Medjugorje and Herzegovina in the past 30 years would beg to disagree with Bax and Glenny on each and every one of their claims.

Factographic Errors

It is impossible to enumerate all the factographic inaccuracies that occur in Bax's book. There are plenty of them on every page, almost in every sentence. Some were already mentioned in the text. Therefore, I shall only give samples of several of his errors.

Bax writes that there were 3–5 priests in Medjugorje before the apparitions and after that about 20 (p. 5). Before apparitions, there were 2 priests there, and only on one occasion there were 3 whereas after the apparitions there were 8–10 priests there and this is still the case today.

According to Bax, Križevac is 1200 meters high (p. 7). As a matter of fact Križevac is 448 meters high, which can be seen at any good map.

Speaking of introducing hierarchy in Bosnia and Herzegovina Bax writes that according to an agreement Franciscans were obliged to help in the construction of a diocese seminary and to send their candidates to diocese seminaries (p. 11). This cannot be true because Franciscans had their own seminaries where they looked after their own and not the diocese candidates just as they do today.

Bax writes that Mostar Bishop began to speak in favour of the (communist) authorities in order to obtain Franciscan parishes and that he signed a secret agreement to this effect with the Government in 1966, which was disclosed later on (p. 12). The truth is that Bishop Čule was engaged in the work related to changing the status of (some) parishes in his diocese at the time, however the negotiations were held in Rome and involved only church representatives, state authorities had no part in them. It is interesting that Bax conveniently forgets to mention that Bishop Čule spent several years in a communist prison from which he had a narrow escape. In the same manner he fails to mention that during the war, and especially in 1945, the partisans killed 66 Herzegovinian Franciscans.

It is a fabrication that some of the diocese priests took parishes from the Franciscans following a police intervention, just as it is not true that the Bishop requested "another five parishes" (these were the same parishes!) and that Rome excommunicated some Franciscans (p. 13). The truth is that diocese priests came to two parishes by fraudulent means, but this has nothing to do with a police intervention. It is also true that some Franciscans were suspended from their ministry (but it was much later, in 2001 to be more exact). Nobody was excommunicated – Bax does not know the meaning of the word.

The data about 16 local people being miraculously healed until 1991 is unknown (p. 23). Normally, records about the healings that happen in Medjugorje are kept in great detail and conscientiously.

The data about Franciscans education after the communists closed their educational institutions in 1945 is incomplete. They did not go to study abroad immediately, as Bax suggests (p. 27 n. 6), but they continued to go to a Bosnian Franciscans' grammar school and seminary, which were not closed. It was much later, after more than 20 years, that some of them went to study abroad. Until that time the borders of communist Yugoslavia were hermetically sealed.

On pp. 27–29 (n. 8) Bax gives information about an Association of Priests entitled *Dobri pastir* (The Good Shepherd). However, this issue goes beyond his comprehension so it is fraught with errors and misinformation.

Let me give a few striking examples from the last part of the book.

“Father Brno, the leading priest of the parish, was summoned to Rome in 1932. In a dream, Pope Pius XI had been told to build a huge cross on the highest mountain in Herzegovina in honour of the 1900th anniversary of the crucifixion of Christ. According to the Holy Father, having this cross in the vicinity would mean salvation for numerous believers”. Bax claims that friar Janko Babić (?) told him this. According to Pope's wishes friar Bernardin (Brno) Smoljan had a cross built at Šipovac (pp. 72–73). Šipovac (Križevac) is by no means the highest mountain in Herzegovina; the Pope did not have such a dream nor did he summon friar Bernardin to Rome. He advised the whole Catholic world to build crosses on the dominant mountains in honour of the 1900th anniversary of the crucifixion of Christ.

According to Bax, in 1512 a spahi (Turkish soldier) Osmok (?) invited several Franciscans from Živogošće Monastery to the north Bosnian border (p. 84). He mentions Marko Vega as the source. The whole thing is no more than a fabrication, especially the reference to Živogošće Monastery which was built as late as in or around 1612.

Austro-Hungarian Empire occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 according to Bax who also says that the Empire completely annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina “ten years later” (p. 86). This is not true as the Annexation Proclamation was issued on 6 October 1908, which is 30 years after the occupation.

Partisans, as Bax claims, demolished a parish church in Medjugorje and used its stones to cross the Lukoća stream because Ustasha had destroyed the bridge (p. 93). No church was demolished (until 1978 when an old church was demolished after a new one was built) neither was the bridge on the Lukoća destroyed so there was no need to use parish church stones in order to make a crossing there.

One of Bax's reliable informants, a judge from Čitluk, told him that between 1963 and 1980 there were at least 60 blood feuds in Medjugorje, or more precisely this is the number of law suits which were brought to court (p. 100 n. 6). There were never any blood feuds in Medjugorje.

According to Bax, friar Ljudevit Rupčić wrote a book in 1983 entitled *Gospina ukazanja u Međugorju* [*Our Lady's Apparitions in Medjugorje*] which was banned by the communist authorities and Rupčić was sentenced to 15 years of prison. Bax managed to get a copy of the banned book with great difficulty (pp. 96, 100 n. 8). The book had never been banned. Rupčić was not sentenced even to one day of prison nor was he summoned to court (the truth is that in the past he was sentence in a communist court on two occasions, namely in 1947/48 and from 1952–1956, but this had nothing to do with his book about Our Lady's Apparitions in Medjugorje). Hence, procuring Rupčić's book was not much of a heroic act.

Bax's vicious lies about the priests in Bosnia and Herzegovina are very dangerous. He writes literally: "With the help of the para-military *Ustaša* organization and backed sometimes by local Roman Catholic clergymen, the young state [Independent State of Croatia³] took every opportunity to cleanse Croatia and Bosnia Hercegovina of Serb elements" (p. 122). It is precisely because of these vicious lies that numerous priests were brutally killed by communists, although their culpability was never proven. On the other hand, friar Tugomir Soldo wrote an excellent text about the behaviour of Herzegovinian clergy during the war which is an excellent defense against the attacks which still come from the advocates of the fallen regime and – Bax!

Let me also mention a few randomly chosen indications of how little Bax knows about geography, history and the present of the area he describes.

Finally, it is unclear why the book is entitled *Medjugorje: Religion, Politics and Violence in Rural Bosnia* when Međugorje is located in Herzegovina. The title could have said "in Rural Bosnia and Herzegovina" (the name of the state) and if the author chose to narrow it down to the name of the region, he could have said "in Herzegovina" but not "in Bosnia". It is amazing that based on the text published in the book it can be concluded that Bax differs Herzegovina from Bosnia (p. xiii), how could then such an error have occurred in the titled of the book itself?

Conclusion

In the light of everything that was explicated above, it is clear that Mart Bax is a fraud. His written work is a degradation of all scientific work, conscientious approach to reality, study of historical documents and making conclusions based

³ Independent State of Croatia was a political creation. It was a member of the Axis powers, and existed from 1941 to 1945 in the territory of a part of modern day Bosnia and Herzegovina, a big part of modern day Croatia and a smaller part of Serbia. It was controlled by the Ustasha movement headed by Ante Pavelić.

on facts. Bax's procedure is diametrically opposite to scientific approach – he sets the topic and gives conclusions first, and then attempts to fit and adjust everything else to a predetermined thesis.

Not only that, as a rule his data are completely false and fabricated to a large extent. When he does attempt to corroborate them with sources, whether from literature or from narrations, he does so awkwardly referring to things which authors that he quotes do not mention and he puts the words in the mouth of "his witnesses". It is only in few instances that we can get a glimpse of truthful information, e.g. the conversation with friar Leonard (Oreč) or the host with whom he stayed during his visit to Bijakovići.

In correspondence with Richard de Boer we agreed that Mart Bax is a "pathological fantasist with special fixations, whose fictitious claims have only been partly disclosed due to his high international acclaim" (R. de Boer). I replied that I had never encountered such lies in my life and that it was simply hard for me to believe that Bax (was) an esteemed member of the academia and a university professor while his book is a disgrace for the academia and an insult to common sense. Richard responded: "I do not know which is worse – disgrace to the academia or the insult to Franciscans, seers, late Marko Vego, inhabitants of Medjugorje, Bijakovići and other places in Herzegovina. Bax used real human suffering in this part of the world throughout XX century to create his fictitious stories. Regardless of ethnic affiliation, every village in Herzegovina has its war trauma and bitter memories, which Bax used as a kind of theatre backdrop and nothing more."

I am convinced that cultural anthropology is very much needed as a science and that it has set high standards for all those who wish to seriously engage in it. Unfortunately, Mart Bax has harmed the reputation of cultural anthropology as a science with his actions, especially in the Netherlands where he worked as a university professor for 30 years.

Addendum

Wikipedia website (wikipedia.org/wiki/Mart_Bax) gives basic information about Mart Bax, professor emeritus. He was a professor at Vrije Universiteit (Free University) in Amsterdam. The very next sentence mentions that he came into prominence to a wider public after his retirement precisely because of the book which is discussed in this paper, in which he claimed that during "the Bosnian war" in Medjugorje interclan clashes 140 people were killed, 60 were missing and 600 were banished. His "discoveries" were publicly criticised in 2008 in a Croatian daily, *Jutarnji list*, (10 August). His "science" suffered a special blow under the

pen of a journalist/scientist Frank von Kolfschooten in a book published in Dutch, which deals with Bax's work about the Church in north Brabant, the Netherlands. Bax's own university, Vrije Universiteit initiated an investigation about his work. Dutch daily paper *De Volkskrant* have recently published the text by Richard de Boer about Bax's book about Medjugorje.

The text by Ivica Radoš, published in *Jutarnji list* (10 August 2008 – available at the daily's website) entitled *Fikcija, a ne povijest* [*Fiction and not History*] his book about Medjugorje is referred to as “a supreme academic scandal”. Friar Ivan Landeka, who was the parish priest at the time, says: “Immediately after Bax's book was published in 1995, the parish office issued a denial of Bax's writings”. He continues: “Many people are not interested in the essence of Medjugorje (...). They want to interpret Medjugorje in an ideological and sociological way, from a rigid atheistic point of view.” Mladen Ančić emphasises: “Mart Bax is an ignoramus and a bad cultural anthropologist, who wanted to capitalise on the fact that he had been to Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country where a war broke out. The problem ensues when an esteemed academic publishing house publishes his nonsense and his work becomes a part of the literature in serious books, e.g. Michael Mann's works, who wrote an excellent book on ethnic cleansing. Unfortunately, a professor of cultural anthropology from Amsterdam is usually taken as an authority on the matter without checking his work.” Ančić goes on to say: “Everything is unresearched and fabricated; the categories he uses are vague. For example, in his texts Chetniks and Ustasha emerge after 1945 and operate under the communist regime, he fabricated Serb migration to Brotnjo – simply outrageous.”

Čitluk, 16 May 2013

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