



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: Persian Influence in Ottoman and post-Ottoman times. During their long association with the Ottomans, which began in the mid-15th century and ended effectively with the imposition of Austro-Hungarian rule in 1878, the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina (the Austro-Hungarian administrative name) came to assimilate virtually all the cultural habits and interests of the Ottoman Turks. For the learned elite, this included an acquaintance with Persian language and literature; for Ottoman Turkish was suffused with Persian loanwords, and the Persian classics remained models for most literary creation in Ottoman Turkish down to the mid-19th century. A number of Persian loanwords, mostly relating to realia or Islamic practices and beliefs, also passed into the Bosnian language by way of Ottoman Turkish (for a partial list, see Moqaddam, pp. 92-94). Many Bosnian scholars and literati sought their fortunes in Istanbul; but Persian language and letters were also cultivated in cities such as Sarajevo and Mostar, and several authors resident there tried their hands at literary composition in Persian. The resulting works were fewer than those written by Bosnian or Herzegovinian authors of the Ottoman period in Turkish, and they were, for the most part, mediocre and imitative in nature; they are nonetheless of interest as representing the westernmost diffusion of traditional Persian literary culture. The study of Persian language and literature has continued, moreover, in post-Ottoman Bosnia-Herzegovina, albeit it at a reduced level. In addition, the manuscript collections of Sarajevo that have survived the vicissitudes of modern Balkan history, most notably the Serb bombardment of the city in the spring and summer of 1992, still contain several hundred works



in Persian.

The first South Slav to concern himself with Persian was Maḥmud Pasha, with the sobriquet of ‘Adni, minister to Sultan Moḥammad the Conqueror, who executed him in 1474; his *divān* contains forty-five Persian *gāzals*, some written as *naẓiras* to poems by Zāhir Fāryābi and Ḥāfeẓ (Šabanović, p. 42). Far more influential than ‘Adni was Aḥmad Sudi (d. 1000/1591), perhaps the most prominent of all Ottoman Persianists. Born in the village of Sudić near Foča in eastern Bosnia, Sudi traveled by way of Istanbul to Diyarbakir where he made the acquaintance of a Sunni refugee from Safavid Persia, Moṣleḥ al-Din Lāri, and studied Persian with him. Lāri’s interests were primarily in the religious sciences, but Sudi dedicated himself to Persian literature. Appointed to a teaching position at the Ibrahim Paša *madrassa* in Istanbul after his master’s death, Sudi devoted himself there to writing a series of commentaries in Ottoman Turkish — mostly philological in nature—on classics such as the *Maṭnawī* of Rumi, the *Bustān* and *Golestān* of Sa’di, and the *Divān* of Ḥāfeẓ (al-Ḳānji, pp. 78-79). The last of these commentaries has retained its utility down to the present (editions: *Divan-ı Hafız şerhi*, Bulāq, 1250/1834, 3 vols.; *Die Lieder des Hafis, persisch mit dem Commentare des Sudi*, Leipzig, 1854-60, 3 vols.; *Šarḥ-e Sudi bar Ḥāfeẓ*, Persian translation by ‘Eṣmat Sattārzāda, Tehran, 1341-47 Š./1962-68, 4 vols.).

Among Sudi’s students in Istanbul was Derviš Pasha of Mostar, a versatile figure whose official career included two terms as governor of Bosnia and repeated participation in military campaigns in Hungary; it was in the course of one such campaign that he died in 1011/1602, fighting to defend the Ottoman garrison on the island of Csepel in the Danube. He was also an initiate of the Mevlevi order, which had taken root in Mostar soon after the Ottoman conquest; hence his sobriquet of Derviš. In Bosnia-Herzegovina as elsewhere in the Ottoman lands, Mevlevis always recited the *Maṭnawī* in its original language; they not only made of Persian a semi-liturgical language, but also contributed heavily to its general currency among the educated elite. Inspired both by his Mevlevi affiliation and by the enthusiasm for Persian letters he had imbibed from Sudi, Derviš Pasha decided to write a work in imitation of the *Maṭnawī*. He desisted, however, after completing two *joz*, when Rumi appeared to him in a dream and told him (in Persian): “O dervish, this book of mine is beyond imitation (*tanzir*); abandon this fancy” (al-Ḳānji, p. 70). He did, however, write a complete *divān* in Persian, and, at the behest of Sultan Morād III, render into Ottoman Turkish verse the Persian



Sakā-nāma of Bannā'i; his translation, entitled *Muradname*, has been judged superior to the original by at least one critic (Kātib Çelebi cited in al-Ķānji, p 70).

Mostar had already been home to at least one other poet who wrote in both Persian and Turkish, Ḥasan Žiā'i (d. 992/1584); to him are owed a Turkish version of the Persian romance *Warqā' wa golšāh*, and *Qeşsa-ye Şayk' Abd al-Razzāq*, a narrative poem inspired by the story of Shaykh Şan'an in 'Aṭṭār's *Manteq al-ṭayr*, as well as *@gazals* in both languages, now apparently lost (Čehajić, 1972-73). Derviš Pasha's son, Aḥmed Bey Dervišpaşazade (d. 1051/1641), with the sobriquet Şabuḥi, was, like his father, an initiate of the Mevlevi order; the few lines that have survived of the Persian and Turkish verse that he wrote are remarkable mostly for their use of recondite Arabic vocabulary (Şabanović, pp. 242-43). Another Persian-writing Mevlevi from Mostar was Aḥmed b. 'Abdullāh, with the sobriquet of Ruşdi, who migrated at an early age to Istanbul. When Ruşdi's only son died, he had him buried next to the Yenikapı Mevlevi hospice and then dug himself a tomb next to it, in which he would spend much time meditating on the transience of life. It is not therefore surprising that his poetry, written in the "Indian style" as exemplified by 'Orfi of Shiraz, is marked by a profound melancholy (al-Ķānji, p. 115). Among the Persian-writing literati of Mostar, mention must finally and most significantly be made of Fevzi (d. 1160/1747), author of the only prose work known to have been written in Persian by a Bosnian: the *Bolbolestān*, a work written in imitation of the *Golestān* of Sa'di (see [FEVZI MOSTĀRI](#)).

Sarajevo was home to at least three Persian-writing poets in the Ottoman period. Like the poets of Mostar, one of them, Tavakkoli Dede (d. 1035/1625), seems to have owed his competence in Persian primarily to his Mevlevi affiliation (Bogdanović, 1343/1964, p. 65); another, Nargesi (d. 1044/ 1634), was admired in his own time more for his surpassingly opaque epistolary style in Turkish than for his Persian verse (al-Ķānji, p. 35). The third, Raşid Moḥammad, vaunted his bilingual literary abilities in this line of verse: "Sometimes Persian (*dari*) I utter, sometimes Turkish (*rumi*); / For I am a nightingale warbling varied melodies." He displayed his command of Persian by writing chronograms for a number of public buildings and *qaşidas* praising various Ottoman officials (Şabanović, pp. 423-29).

The birthplaces of another trio of men of letters from Bosnia-Herzegovina who wrote partly in Persian are unknown. The first, Aḥmad Yusri, migrated to Istanbul at an early age and held teaching posts in various cities until his



death in Damascus in 1106/1694; he composed poetry in Arabic and Turkish as well as Persian (Šabanović, p. 381). The second, ‘Ali Zaki “Kimyāgar,” who occupied a succession of administrative posts in Istanbul and the Hijaz, wrote riddles and chronograms in both Persian and Arabic; was famed for an ornate epistolary style in Persian and Turkish; and wrote a well-regarded commentary on the *Toḥfa-ye Šāhedi*, a versified Turkish-Persian glossary (Šabanović, p. 439). The third, Mostafā Ladunni (d. Wallachia, 1127/1715), is the only writer from Bosnia-Herzegovina known to have traveled in Ottoman times to the Persian-speaking world. His verse is said to have been admired in Persia, although there is no record of him in the Persian anthologies of the period. It may have been his visit to Bukhara that inspired him with the unfulfilled ambition of writing a commentary on the *Divān* of Šawkat-e Bokāri, a Central Asian practitioner of the “Indian style” (al-Ḳānji, p. 135).

The last poet of the Ottoman period known to have composed poetry in Persian was Ḥāji Mostafā Moklesī of Gornji Vakuf in central Bosnia. *Dalil al-Manāhel va Moršed al-Marāḥel*, his description in Turkish of the *hajj* of 1161/1748, is adorned with occasional Persian verses describing the sacred sites of Mecca and Medina. He also produced *molamma’* poetry, in which the lines alternate among Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, and surpassed even this feat by writing a letter which incorporated use of the Bosnian language as well as these three (Šabanović, pp. 453-61).

The severance of Bosnia-Herzegovina from the Ottoman realm brought about an inevitable lessening in the cultivation of the three classical Islamic languages—Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. They began to be exoticized as “oriental,” and translations made from them into the Bosnian language took the place of original composition; the earliest anthology of such translations was Muhammed Beg Kapetanović-Ljubušak’s *Istočno Blago* (“Oriental Treasure,” Sarajevo, 1896-97, 2 vols.). The Ottoman *madrassa* system was, however, retained for a while under Austro-Hungarian rule, and instruction in Persian was given in the Elči Paša Hadžina *madrassa* in Travnik and the Atmajdan *madrassa* in Sarajevo, where the instructor was a certain Mehmed Emin Efendija. Persian was taught at the Misrina *madrassa* in Sarajevo by a scholar from Erzurum, Arif Sidki-efendija, who organized a club which fined its members for speaking any language other than Persian during its meetings. Together with Arabic and Turkish, Persian was taught even in the high school (*realnagimnazija*) that was established in Sarajevo in 1880 by the Austro-Hungarian authorities as an alternative to the *madrassas*; the instructor was



one Spahić Hadži Husni.

It was, however, primarily the continued activity of the Mevlevi order, especially in Sarajevo, that kept interest in Persian language and literature alive for many decades, admittedly among a dwindling elite. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Mevlevi hospice of Sarajevo, the Tekija na Bendbaši, was presided over by Hadži Abdullah-efendija Saračić, who simultaneously functioned as a teacher at the Merhemić *madrasa*. Neither he nor his successor, Šejh Ruhi-efendija Šehović (d. 1927), the last shaykh at the *tekke* to be appointed by the leadership of the order in Konya, had sufficient command of Persian, however, to teach or lecture on the *Maṭnawī*. It was instead Hadži Džemaludin-efendija Čaušević (d. 1938), not only a Mevlevi devotee but also from 1914 onward the official head of the Bosnian Muslim community (*reis ul-ulema*), who continued the Mevlevi tradition of Persian learning in Sarajevo. He had learned Persian while in Istanbul from Hacı Muhammed Esad Dede, his initiator into the Mevlevi order. Čaušević held public lectures on the *Maṭnawī* at the Tekija na Bentbaši until 1917, when they were transferred to the house of Hadži Mujaga Merhemić (d. 1959); they continued there under Čaušević's auspices until 1928, and under those of Merhemić until 1932. Merhemić also offered general instruction in the Persian language and lectured on texts such as the *Divān* of Ḥāfez, the *Bustān* and *Golestān* of Sa'di, the *Bahārestān* of Jāmi, and the *Pandnāma*, a work erroneously ascribed to 'Aṭṭār. Together with another Mevlevi devotee, Hadži Numan-efendija Bajraktarević, *imām* at the Kalin Hadži Alijna mosque, Merhemić had learned his Persian from Mustafa Aga Nedžati Hadžihalilović, teacher at a Sarajevo *madrasa*.

The most lasting contribution of Merhemić to the perpetuation of Mevlevi tradition in Sarajevo was his inauguration, in 1957, of an annual commemoration of the death of Rumi known as Šebi-Arus ("the bridal night"), by way of allusion to a celebrated *gāzal* of Rumi. The ceremonies, which continue down to the present, include the recitation of passages from the *Maṭnawī* and the *Divān-e Šams* in Persian, as well as devotional poems in the Bosnian language. Until his death in 1990, Fejzulah Hadžibajrić was a prominent and learned participant in these ceremonies. Fully fluent in Persian as well as Turkish and Arabic, he established in 1970 an institute devoted entirely to the study of the *Maṭnawī*, the Kateder za Mesneviju ("Chair of *Maṭnawī* Studies"), conceived of as a modern version of the Ottoman Dār al-Maṭnawī. In addition, he published a translation of the first two *daftars* of the



Matnawi (Mesnevi , 2 vols., Sarajevo, 1985-87).

The academic study of Persian language and literature in Bosnia and Herzegovina began in 1950, when Šaćir Sikirić (d. 1966) established a department of oriental studies in the faculty of philosophy at the University of Sarajevo. Only one year of Persian was taught initially, as an auxiliary course to meet the needs of students specializing in Ottoman Turkish. Sikirić had obtained his doctorate at the University of Budapest in 1923, and it was there that he studied Persian. In addition to his academic activities, he was shaykh of the Naqšbandi *tekke* at Oglavak near Fojnica; this dimension of his personality also contributed to his strong interest in Persian. He published first a grammar and then a chrestomathy of Persian (*Gramatika perzijskog jezika*, Sarajevo, 1951; *Perzijska hrestomatija*, Sarajevo, 1955), as well as some brief studies on Jāmi. In 1970, the Persian program at the University of Sarajevo was expanded to a full three years. This development was due to an initiative by Bećir Džaka, who had obtained his doctorate in Persian from the University of Tehran the previous year with a dissertation comparing the South Slav epic with the *Šāh-nāma* of Ferdowsi (published in Bosnian translation as *Naša narodna epika i Firdusijeva Šahnama*, Sarajevo, 1976). Džaka has also published an anthology of contemporary Persian poetry in translation (*Savremena poezija Irana*, Kruševac, 1979), a translation of the *Bak̄tiār̄nāma* (*Bah̄tijarnamah*, Sarajevo, 1989), a history of Persian literature from pre-Islamic times down to the end of the fifteenth century (*Historija perzijske književnosti do kraja 15. vijeka*, Sarajevo, 1997), and a textbook of elementary Bosnian for Persian-speakers (*Zabān-e Busniā'i: dawra-ye moqaddemāti barāye fārsi-zabānān*, Sarajevo, 1997). Also associated with the teaching of Persian at the University of Sarajevo has been Salih Trako; he has produced a translation of Sa'di's *Golestān* (*Džulistan*, Sarajevo, 1989) and a catalogue of the Persian manuscripts preserved at the Oriental Institute in Sarajevo until its destruction by Serb forces on 17 May 1992 (*Katalog perzijskih rukopisa Orientalnog Instituta u Sarajevu*, Sarajevo, 1986). Džemal Čehajić (d. 1990), who earned a doctorate in Persian literature at the University of Tehran in the late 1960s, was active both at the Oriental Institute and in the Persian program of the University of Sarajevo; to him is due a translation of Fevzi's *Bolbolestān* (*Bulbulistan*, Sarajevo, 1973). The roster of Bosnians with a record of scholarly accomplishment in Persian may be completed with a mention of Fehim Bajraktarević (d. 1970); in the course of a lengthy career at the University of Belgrade devoted primarily to the study of Ottoman history and literature, he found time to write also on authors such as Kayyām and Sa'di



and to compile an anthology of Persian poetry in translation (*Iz perzijske poezije*, Belgrade, 1971).

When the newly proclaimed Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina came under massive attack by Serb forces in the spring of 1992, the Islamic Republic of Iran was the only state actor to come promptly to its aid in a variety of fields—political, military, and humanitarian. The resulting complex of relations between the two states came to include cultural links, and these have proved more durable than the close political ties that were brought to an end by the Dayton Accords of December 1995. The cultural attaché of the Islamic Republic continues to operate a much-frequented cultural center, separately located from the embassy, on Ferhadija Street in the center of the old city of Sarajevo. It maintains a reading room; organizes colloquia and conferences on a variety of topics, often in conjunction with various Bosnian institutions; offers instruction in the Persian language; and publishes a periodical in Bosnian, *Beharistan*, dealing with themes related to both Bosnian and Persian cultures and their interaction. It has also helped in the restoration of mosques, schools, and libraries, in Travnik, Mostar, and elsewhere, which were damaged or destroyed during the war. An Iranian-sponsored cultural institution founded in 1997, the Ebn Sinā Scientific Research Institute (*Naučnoistraživački Institut “Ibn Sina”*), became officially affiliated to the University of Sarajevo on 14 February 1998, in accordance with an agreement on cultural cooperation between Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Islamic Republic. It publishes the periodical *Znakovi Vremena* (“Signs of the Times”), containing articles on Islamic and comparative philosophy and mysticism by both Bosnian and Iranian scholars, as well as a series of books on the same subjects, for the most part translations from Persian, French, and English.

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