A LITTLE-KNOWN EARLY WORK IN OTTOMAN-ISLAMIC ‘ART HISTORIOGRAPHY’: THE BOSNIAN SHEIKH KEMURA’S WRITINGS (1908–1913) ON THE ‘PUBLIC BUILDINGS’ OF SARAJEVO

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Abstract: The late twentieth-century trend of looking into ‘historiography’ has not gone unnoticed among historians of Islamic art. In recent years, they have demonstrated great interest in the foundations of their field of research in the late nineteenth century and in the protagonists involved and their motives. In this context, notice has not been taken of one work produced around the same time in an area that was a buffer zone between the Ottoman and Habsburg empires: Bosnia-Herzegovina, which until its eventual annexation by Austria-Hungary in 1908 was de iure part of the sultan’s domain but de facto ruled by Vienna. There, a Muslim scholar began to publish in the same year a series of well-researched articles on the principal Islamic monuments of his hometown, Sarajevo. While the nature of this work as ‘art history’ is arguable – its author was not interested in a grand narrative to the extent some of his contemporaries were – its authorship by a local Muslim in a distant (post-)Ottoman province, employing a remarkably scientific methodology, warrants at least a note on this work, even more so as its language, presently called Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian, has rendered it not only inaccessible but also invisible to most scholars of Ottoman and Islamic art.

The late twentieth-century trend of looking into ‘historiography’ has not gone unnoticed among historians of Islamic art. In recent years, they have demonstrated great interest in the foundations of their field of research in the late nineteenth century and in the protagonists involved and their motives.1 In the Ottoman case, some emphasis has been placed on the cosmopolitan group that prepared the

monumental album *L’architecture ottomane* for the Vienna World Fair of 1873. The principal aim of that publication project was to supply the evidence for the claim that there existed an independent Ottoman artistic tradition and that, like its western counterpart, its design indeed followed certain rules. The first generation of writers of Muslim background, such as the historian Celal Esad (Arseven) and the architect Kemaleddin, has also received some attention. In general, the focus has been on discourses of/at ‘the centre’, in which the actors were either westerners, who sought to study the artistic heritage of countries colonized or visited in accordance with the methodologies and sensibilities developed for the assessment of art in the West, or Muslim intellectuals in Islamic metropoles such as Istanbul.

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*Sarajevske džamije i druge javne zgrade turske dobe* (The mosques of Sarajevo and other public buildings of the Turkish era) was the title of a series of articles that began to be published in 1908. In 1913, just before the outbreak of World War I, all the articles that had appeared until then were collected in a 382-page monograph. Their author was a Muslim native of Sarajevo named Šejh Sejfuddin Fehmi bin Ali Kemura (1863–1917). Born to a saddler, he worked in that profession and as a bread-seller until after the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878, when he began to develop an interest in Islamic learning. After briefly holding the position of sheikh at a local dervish convent of the Nakşibendi order, between 1905 and 1914 he served as the librarian of the pious foundation (*vakf*) connected to the so-called Careva džamija (Turkish: Hünkar Camii, or Emperor’s

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The Bosnian sheikh Kemura’s writings on the ‘public buildings’ of Sarajevo

Ill. 1. Portrait of Kemura, from Sarajevske džamije, p. VIII.
Mosque) in Sarajevo. At the same time he served as a teacher of religion at Sarajevo’s Technical School and the Franz Joseph Gymnasium.³

It was, undoubtedly, during his time as a librarian that he began to develop a keen interest in historical sources. In collaboration with the Habsburg institutions that had been instituted to promote scholarship in the occupied territory, first and foremost the Landesmuseum with its journal,⁴ he published several collections of Ottoman-period sources on certain topics. Especially his acquaintance in 1908 with the Osijek-born Ćiro Truhelka (1865–1942), who was soon thereafter appointed the director of the museum, led to a series of interesting collaborations: Truhelka seemingly helped Kemura publish his materials, illustrate them, and improve his style of writing.⁵ In turn, Kemura supplied Truhelka with Ottoman-period documents in languages inaccessible to those who had been ordered to study the new territory’s history and culture and help strengthen Austria-Hungary’s grip on Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁶ This conflation of the interests of the various groups involved resulted in a number of interested projects in the cultural sphere that have remained very little known outside Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁷

Kemura declares in the preface to the volume presenting his collected articles that the project, which turned out to be more wearisome than he had expected, had been driven by his curiosity about the past, which had developed in tandem with his


⁶ In addition to the series itself, cf. Ćiro Truhelka: “Gazi Husrefbeg, njegov život i njegovo doba”, in: Glasnik zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini, XXIV/1 (1912), pp. 91–233, esp. acknowledgements on p. 49 and 50 (footnotes).

interest in his faith and its history. Similarly, he apparently anticipated the audience of his writings to be islamski narod (‘the Muslim people’) willing to be instructed about the history of naša domovina (‘our homeland’). The perceived significance of the project is also highlighted by his pointing to a saying attributed to the prophet Muhammad, according to which only three things remain when a man dies: a pious son, a charitable foundation, and knowledge that has been made accessible by him and from which the people can derive benefit.8

Sarajevske džamije, when published in 1913, included detailed information on fifty-five buildings in Sarajevo.9 They are treated one after another, with no general introduction or analysis that tries to gather and interpret the wealth of data collected by the author. The individual entries contain descriptions of the buildings and local traditions and historical sources about them. The latter are usually presented in Arabic printed letters and translations into the local language. The vast majority of these sources were drawn from two categories: epigraphy (typically inscriptions on buildings) and endowment deeds, copies of which Kemura had discovered in the court records stored in the Emperor’s Mosque foundation’s library. The sources are usually reproduced in full, without much selection or editing. This has made Sarajevske džamije a useful sourcebook for students of Sarajevo’s history in general.

The preface also reveals that the 1913 publication was only meant as the first volume – a term for which Kemura uses the Turscism džilt (Turkish: cilt) – of what was apparently conceived as a series of books.10 A glance at the buildings covered in it shows that Sarajevo’s most remarkable sacral buildings – the Emperor’s Mosque and the mosque of Gazi Hüsvre Beg – are actually missing. This is surprising in light of the fact that Kemura had begun the series (if still under a different title, namely Javne muslimanske građevine u Sarajevu [‘Muslim public buildings in Sarajevo’]) with a lengthy article, published in the Landesmuseum’s journal, devoted to the Emperor’s Mosque – the Ottoman building he probably knew best.11 Irrespective of the helpful

8 Kemura: Sarajevske džamije, p. I.
9 While this is the number mentioned by the author in his preface, the number of individual structures is actually higher, totalling 76 (20 mosques, 33 oratories, 7 mausoleums, 5 elementary schools, 3 bridges, 3 dervish convents, 2 fountains, 2 cemeteries, 1 college). Though the number of mosques seems high, it includes only two of Sarajevo’s monumental domed mosques. The vast majority of the 76 individual structures do not count among the city’s best known. The very large number of oratories (mescids) included – a building type outside the domain of monumental architecture – seems to illustrate that Kemura was more interested in the historical import of these institutions than in their buildings’ design.
10 Kemura: Sarajevske džamije, p. II.
11 Sejfudin Fehmija ef. Kemura, “Javne muslimanske građevine u Sarajevu: I. Careva džamija”, in: Glasnik zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini, XX/4 (1908), pp. 475–512. Interestingly, this article was also published at the same time in Ottoman Turkish as Kemurazade Seyfeddin Fehmi bin Ali, Saray Bosna’da ebniye-yi hayriyenin musavver tarihi. Sarajevo: Islam Matbaası, 1908.
information supplied in the series of articles, *Sarajevske džamije* thus fails to provide an overview of the Bosnian capital’s Islamic monuments; major buildings were left to be treated in a separate volume that never saw publication.

In comparison to works written by the author’s contemporaries in Istanbul, it must also be stressed that Kemura seems to have been more interested in studying these buildings and institutions because they offered a privileged insight into the urban history of Sarajevo than because he thought they should be compared with Ottoman and Islamic buildings elsewhere and that they should be integrated into a grand narrative of an artistic tradition. This is not to say that Kemura’s work is one in urban history as we know it. His focus was on buildings and the community-serving institutions housed in them as the backbone of Sarajevo’s historical development, which he does not attempt to reconstruct in a linear fashion, however. To be sure, Kemura does describe the buildings, their spaces and elements, building materials, etc.; yet he does so without stylistic criticism. The illustrations, which may have been drawn by Truhelka or someone else within the orbit of the Austro-Hungarian administration, partly make up for that, and perhaps Kemura thought that there was no point in describing in greater detail what can already be seen in these drawings. More likely, he lacked the vocabulary to systematically compare them; or he simply saw no point in doing so. Be that as it may, *Sarajevske džamije* is a curious work that deserves not to be forgotten in the context of current debates on historiography.
LVI. Ferhad begova džamija u Ferhadijiji ulici.

U Ferhadijiji ulici na južnoj strani ima jedna džamija, koja se u zvaničnim spisima naziva i piše Ferhad begova džamija a narod je sove Ferhadijom kao i njenu okolinu mahalju.

Džamija je od klesanog kamera sa sasadi pokrita kubatem, koje je elovom pokriveno, sa kamenim muqarnom. U džamiji ima i u ostalim minber od izresanog kamea vrlo krasno i fino napravljeno; ima i džans, koji i ako je drven, ipak je lijepo napravljen a masandara joj je na kamenim oblim stupcima. Džamija je deter široka i duga s dobro i vidna zbog mnogih pendžera.

Slika 110. Ferhad-begova džamija u Ferhadijiji ulici.

Vrata su jej na svod a ispred vrata su sole, pokrita sa tri pomalešna kubeta. Oni su također iz kamenim oblim stupcima.

Ovu je džamiju načinio nekakav Ferhad beg i to 970, (= 1562. g.), što nam tvrdi natpis, koji se nalazi i danas isklesan na kamenoj ploči, što je više vrata usidana a glasi:

Slika 111. Natpis više vrata Ferhad-begovo džamije u Šamjevu.

Ill. 2 Presentation of the Ferhad-begova džamija (Mosque of Ferhad Beg) in Sarajevo, 1562/3, in Sarajevske džamije, p. 324.