

Bilingualism in the Bosniak Literary Tradition

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Summary

The text entitled *Bilingualism in the Bosniak Literary Tradition* explores an interesting and frequent phenomenon among the writers of Bosnia and Herzegovina (from Hasan Kafi Pruščak, Abdullah Bošnjak and Mesnefi-efendi Kninjanin, to Mehmet Teufik-efendi Azabegović and Hilmi-efendi Taslidžak) to write some of their works in Arabic or Turkish language only to later translate them, at the request of their students, intellectuals belonging to another language area or representatives of authority, into the wanted language variant.

Key words: bilingualism, Arabic language, Turkish language, Hasan Kafi Pruščak, Abdullah Bošnjak, Mesnefi-efendi Kninjanin, Mehmet Teufik-efendi Azabegović, Hilmi-efendi Taslidžak.

AS ISLAM SPREAD beyond the borders of the Arabic language, the first examples of bilingualism in the Muslim literary tradition can be seen. Writing in Arabic meant adjusting to the autochthonous flows of the Islamic culture and love towards the language of Revelation and of the Prophet, as well as the cultivation of the people's expression and preservation of traditions that were not opposite to the Sharia. As

the number of speaking areas where Islam was being adopted increased over time, other languages, primarily Persian, followed by Turkish, Urdu, Malay, etc. were accepted, alongside Arabic, as languages of the Islamic civilization. In the non-Arab speaking areas, Arabic had, in a way, become the language of faith, while other languages were used for administration and literature. However, there were also certain deviations from this practice, thus one can often see writers who use all the three major Islamic languages in their works. The same practice was adopted in our area, to a greater or lesser extent. In Bosniak collections of poetry in oriental languages, a disproportionate number of poems written in Arabic, Persian and Turkish can be found. Polyglot poets sometimes demonstrated with great skill their superior knowledge of these languages, so they had tried and even succeeded to write one poem, verse by verse, in three or four languages consecutively. We find the first example of this in a poem (Arabic-Persian-Turkish) by Mustafa Muhlisija, a poet from Gornji Vakuf, who wrote a *quaseeda medhiyya* for Ali-pasha Hekimoglu, after his great victory with Bosniaks against the Austrian army on 4 August 1737 near Banja Luka,¹ and the second example (Arabic-Persian-Turkish-Bosnian) can be seen in an anonymous *quaseeda arzuhal* portraying the difficult situation in Bosnia during the rule of vizier Mustafa-pasha Tekelija (1057/1647).²

An interesting phenomenon can be observed in two periods when our prominent writers were writing some of their works in Arabic or Turkish, only to translate them, at the request of their students, intellectuals from another language area, or the representatives of the authorities, into the wanted language variant. The first such phenomenon can be observed in the late 16th and early 17th century (Hasan Kafija Pruščak, Abdullah Bošnjak and Mesafi-efendi Kninjanin) and the second in the late 19th century (Mehmed Teufik Azabagić and Hilmi-efendi Taslidžak).

¹ The poem was published by Omer Mušić in his work "Hadži Mustafa Bošnjak – Muhlisi", Contributions to Oriental Philology, XVIII-XIX/1968-1969, Sarajevo, 1973, p. 105-107.

² Sarajevo, Gazi Husrev-bey's Library, Manuscript No. 3202; Muhamed Enveri Kadić, Kronika, IV/1, p. 119.

I

The first example can be seen in the late 16th century and is related to Hasan Kafija Pruščak (d. 1025/1615)³ and his work *Usūl al-hikam fī nizām al-‘ālam* (The Basic Wisdom about the World Order) for which he is most famous.⁴ Kafija wrote the main text of this work in Arabic, in Prusac, during the month of Dhu al-Hijjah 1004/1596, and in the following month (5 Muharram 1005) he left Prusac to join the sultan’s army en route to Jegar. “On that thankful and victorious journey – he wrote in his autobiography *Nizāmu l-‘ulemā’ ilā Hātim al-anbiyā’*⁵ – I had exposed my treatise *Usūl al-hikam...* to representatives of the sultan, to the ministry dignitaries and to the grand scholars, to provide me with comments. However, they recommended that I translate it into Turkish in order to present it to the sultan and in order for the officials of the imperial diwan to make use of it. Then they obliged this meager servant to accept the position of a qadi in Prusac. In accordance with their noble recommendation – Kafija continues – I began translating and interpreting.”

Kafija added a special foreword to the Turkish version of the work and then he provided a translation into Turkish under every sentence in Arabic, commenting almost every significant thought, providing illustrations by numerous examples and emphasizing events and phenomena he alluded to in the main text, which increases the value of this version of this work. We should also add that the Arabic version was written in rhymed prose, while Turkish translation and commentary are enriched by numerous verses in Persian.

³ Bearing in mind the abundance of works related to Hasan Kafija, his life and work, not even the main data about the author is mentioned here. An exhaustive list of sources and literature can be found in a book entitled: Hasan Kafija Pruščak, *Izabrani spisi*, Sarajevo, 1983.

⁴ The work was published several times: Istanbul, 1285/1868; Istanbul, s. a. Hadži Ali ef. Fočo’s edition and Prijedor-native Ali ef. Cepić’s lithograph; The Hidžaza printing press of Vilayet, 1331/1913. The work has been translated into: French (Garcin de Tassy) 1732 and 1824; Hungarian (Imre v. Karácson) in 1909; German (L. v. Talloczy) in 1911; and Bosnian (S. Bašagić) in 1919 and (A. Ljubović – F. Nametak) in 1983.

⁵ Mehmed Handžić, *Nizāmu l-‘ulemā’ ilā Hātim al-anbiyā’* (A Succession of Scholars until the Last Prophet). Written in Arabic by Hasan Kafi-ef. Pruščak, Sarajevo, Islamska dionička štamparija, 1935, 55.

“Having provided an interpretation of the work in the clearest of styles, - Kafija continues – having completed the work in the month of Rajab of 1005/1597, I left the duty of a *qadi* and set out to the protected imperial city of Istanbul (...).” Upon his arrival in Istanbul, Kafija delivered the work to the Grand Vizier Ibrahim-pasha who, together with some other works of Kafija, forwarded it to the sultan and the sultan, in an irrevocable edict (*hatti-sherif*), presented Kafija with a *kaza* in Prusac as a lifetime retirement, provided that he taught students in his homeland.

II

The second interesting example is a pedagogical treatise by Muslihuddīn b. ‘Alī, known as Musāfi/Masāfi effendi, of whom we only know what he said about himself in the introduction to the treatise. He was born in Knin (year unknown) where he probably acquired elementary education and then (by his own will or through the parents’ incentive) left for Istanbul where he completed one of the secondary madrassas. He majored in Sofia under Sheikh Muhammed-effendi, better known as Kurd-effendi. Having completed his education, he returned to his birthplace and, dissatisfied with the situation there, he moved to Banja Luka where he taught for over twenty years, built a house, established a madrassa and a library and wrote scientific works.

It is unknown in which of the Banja Luka madrassas he lectured before building his house and founding a library, which initially counted one hundred and twenty manuscripts.

He wrote his only work known today at the request of one of his pupils and called it *Tuhfat al-mu’ allimīn wa hadiyyat al-muta’ allimīn*. The writing of the Arabic version of the work started during the rule of the Bosnian vali Gurdži Mehmed-pasha (Muharram 1015/9. V – 7 VI 1606 – Muharram 1017/17 IV – 16. V 1608), whom he mentioned in the introduction, and finished writing in 1018/1609. He was then asked by some of his students who had a better command of the Turkish language to translate it into Turkish, which he did and called this version *Munyat at-tālibīn wa ġunyat ar-rāġibīn*.

This work is the first pedagogical treatise in our area. It was written following the example of Muhammad al-Ghazali’s work (d. 505/1111) and Burhanuddin az-Zarnuji (cca. 600/1203), it is divided into five chapters and written on the basis of abundant literary sources methodically cited by the author.

Once he completed writing this work, Mesafi efendi set off for Istanbul and presented it to Sultan Ahmed I (1603 – 1617). According to an undated entry in a manuscript about the founding of a waqf, which was preserved in the Sarajevo Oriental Institute, he was then made Mufti of Banja Luka. It is not known how long he performed that duty.

Speaking of himself he also mentioned that he participated in various conflicts and that he fought “with a quill and a sword for over forty years”. Another, also undated record from a manuscript, informs us that he died (year unknown) and was buried in Banja Luka.

Both versions of his work are preserved in the Oriental Collection of the Croatian Academy of Sciences in Zagreb: the Arabic, under number 564, and the Turkish, under number 352. Two shorter excerpts from the Arabic version of the work were copied in Medžmua No. 4432 (F. 100b-102a) of the Oriental Institute in Sarajevo.

III

A third, no less interesting case, is related to Abdullah Abdi Bošnjak (d. 1054/1644) and his commentary on Ibn Arebi's work *Fusūs al-hikam*, entitled *Tadǧalliyātu 'arā'isi n-nusūsi fī manassāti hikami l-fusūsi*, after which it was named *Šāriḥ al-Fusūs*.⁶ Haǧǧī Halīfa stated of this commentary that it was “perhaps one of the best commentaries in general”. He stated that the author had first written the commentary in Turkish and that it had become famous in the Arabic world, so he was asked to write the same commentary for the Arabs, in their language, in accordance with their taste and for their pleasure.⁷ He added a longer *qasida* in Arabic at the end of the commentary, the same way he had completed the Turkish commentary with a similar *qasida*.⁸

⁶ Safvet-beg Bašagić, *Bošnjaci u islamskoj književnosti*, Sarajevo, 1912, p. 74 – 78; Mehmed Handžić, *Književni rad bosanskohercegovačkih muslimana*, Sarajevo, 1934, p. 29 – 31; Čedomil Veljačić, *Istočni utjecaji i interesi za Indiju u jugoslovenskoj književnosti i filozofiji*, Zagreb, 1968, p. 591-599; Fejzullah Hadžibajrić, “Uvodne tesavufske interpretacije Abdulaha Bošnjaka”, *Anali GHB*, No. 1/1972, (Sarajevo), p. 35-47; Džemal Čehajić, “Šejh Abdulah Bošnjak”, *Collection of Works ITF*, 1/1982, (Sarajevo), p. 75-89.

⁷ Haǧǧī Halīfa, Mustafa b. 'Abdullah, *Kašf az-zunūn 'an 'asāmī al-kutub wa l-funūn*, Istanbul, 1310/1892, cilt II, p. 192.

⁸ Fejzulah Hadžibajrić, “*Tesavufsko-tarikatska poema Abdulaha Bošnjaka*”, *Anali GHB*, No. 2-3/1974, (Sarajevo), p. 21-31

IV

With the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878, the Muslims of this country were faced with a fateful dilemma: either to stay in their homeland under a non-Muslim authority, or to move to some of the remaining provinces of the Ottoman Empire. A unanimous stance did not exist, be it amongst the *ulama* or amongst the people. The Tuzla Mufti who later became a professor and headmaster of the Sarajevo School of Sharia (19 XII 1887 – 11 XII 1893), and later also the Grand Mufti of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina (20 X 1893 – 31 III 1909) Mehmed Teufik Azabagić (1838 – 1918),⁹ tried to answer this religious and existential issue of Bosniaks in his three-chapter long *Treatise on Exile (Risāla fī l-hiğra)* from 1884.

In the first chapter, he examines the notion of *hiğra*, hadiths on *hiğra* and opinions of the Islamic scholars on this issue. In the second chapter, he explains the notion “*daru l-harb – daru l-islam*” (the area of war/the area of Islam) and in the third chapter, he explains “*feth*” (liberation/occupation).¹⁰

He wrote the same treatise in a somewhat shorter version in Turkish and, having received a positive review by Husejn Nuruddin Hafizović and approval of the Ulama muftiship, he printed it in Sarajevo in 1886 in the printing press of the *Vatan* magazine (ran from 1884 until 1897), which was published by Mehmed Hulusi (1849 – 1907).¹¹

V

Hilmi b. Husejn Taslidžak, better known as Hilmi-baba Bošnjak from Pljevlja had a completely different opinion from Mehmed Teufik Azabagić of Tuzla. Biographical data about this learned Bosniak is scarce at best.¹² It is known that he wrote the following works: 1. *Fath al-asrār wa*

⁹ Hazim Šabanović, *Književnost muslimana BiH na orijentalnim jezicima*, Sarajevo, 1973, p. 676-678.

¹⁰ Osman Lavić wrote extensively about the Arabic version of the text in *Anali GHB*, (Sarajevo), No. XV-XVI/1990, p. 197-222.

¹¹ Kasim Dobrača, *Katalog arapskih, turskih i perzijskih rukopisa*, Svezak II, Sarajevo, 1979, p. 688.

¹² A. R. M. K., “*Himmat ar-riğāl tağallu al-ğğāl*” (People’s Labor Will Move the Mountain), *Rehber*, II/1315 (12. III 1898), No. 43, p. 2-3 (On the works of our writers in oriental

l-muškilāt alā Rūh al-bayān bi`l-išārāt, 2. *Kitāb min al-fiqh wa l-fatāwā*, 3. *(al-)Mağālis al-Bosnawī (al-bosnawiyya)*, 4. *Mu`ğizāt an-Nabiyy*, 5. *Risāla fī s-siyāsa*, 6. *Tefsīr-i sūre-i wa d-Duhā*.¹³ After the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, he leaves his hometown and first goes to Istanbul. Dissatisfied with the situation in the capital of the Ottoman Empire, Hilmi-baba leaves Istanbul and, after brief stays in Middle Eastern cities, he arrived in Medina where he first wrote an Arabic and then a shorter Turkish variant of his *Treatise on Exile and Refugees (Risāla fī al-hiğra wa al-muhājirīn)*, to justify his actions and to propose a hiğra of Bosniaks from the occupied areas.¹⁴ It is written at the end of the Turkish variant that the work was written in the Mahmudijja madrasa in Medine-i Munevver and was completed on 23 Shawwal 1302 (early August 1884).¹⁵

VI

A confirmation of bilingualism in the Bosniak literary tradition can also be found in the poetry of the transitional period, when Bosniaks stopped writing in the oriental languages and increasingly started expressing their literary and poetical gift in the Bosnian language. Two extraordinary anonymous examples were published by Salih Trako and we will not mention them here.¹⁶

Translated into English by Amira Sadiković

languages: Ali Dede Nevesinli, Hasan Kafi Pruščak and Hadži Hilmi Taslidžak); H. Šabanović, *Književnost*, p. 649.

¹³ Omer Nakičević, “*Rukopisna djela bosanskohercegovačkih pisaca i mislilaca na orijentalnim jezicima koja se čuvaju u biblioteci Sulejmaniji u Istanbulu*”, *Anali GHB*, VII-VIII/1982, p.235. Manuscripts of these works are kept in Istanbul, the Sulejmaniye Library (the Ibrahim-efendi Collection) No. 132, 358, 517 i 518, 211, 422, 137. (Yazma bagislar) No. 647/2.

¹⁴ An autograph of this work is preserved in the Sulejmaniye library in Istanbul, in the Ibrahim-efendi Collection No. 421.

¹⁵ I am grateful to Osman Lavić from Gazi Husrev-bey’s Library in Sarajevo, who enabled me an insight into the photograph of this manuscript and who is translating these treatises.

¹⁶ Salih Trako, “*Dvije dvojezične pjesme nastale na tlu Bosne*”, *Contributions to Oriental Philology*, Oriental Institute in Sarajevo, Sarajevo, 34/1984, pp. 85-92.