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Qudret Kemeri: A Bridge between Barbarity and Civilization

BOZIDAR JEZERNIK

On Monday, 9 November 1993, units of Hrvatsko Vijece Odbrane (HVO, the Croatian Council of Defence) started shooting at the Old Bridge of Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Approximately sixty shells hit the bridge in two days of shelling. Although the bridge could no longer be crossed, shooting continued until the next day, when the bridge finally collapsed into the depths of the Neretva river. The HVO soldiers celebrated their achievement with triumphal hooting into the air.

The stone bridge of Mostar was undoubtedly one of the most beautiful and famous achievements of the Golden Age of Turkish architecture in the Balkans. It was built in 1566 according to the plans of Mimar Haireddin, one of the architects of the Court and a pupil of the famous Kodja Mimar Sinan, the greatest architect of the Ottomans. At the narrowest point of the Neretva canyon, the river Neretva twisted and wound between boulders, so that it was compelled, especially at its edges, to force its foaming waters through veritable labyrinths of rocks. The banks of the river, high and rocky, were connected by this beautiful bridge for which Mostar has always been celebrated. It consisted of a single arch, reaching a height of 17.85 metres (19 metres with the parapet); the full breadth from one span to the other was 27.34 metres, the width of the bed 38.50 metres and the breadth of the bridge 4.56 metres. It was these proportions which gave
the colossal structure its graceful lightness.

At both ends of the Old Bridge there still stand towers which once housed a garrison of 160 men, who guarded the bridge day and night. The local people used to call these towers, together with the Old Bridge, 'The Castle'. The tower on the left bank of the river was known as Hercegusa, and the one on the right bank as Halebinka or Cehovina.

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1 This was first noted by the Turkish historian Ahmed Refik Bej, Mimar Sinan (1895-1996), Istanbul, 1931, p. 5; see also Aljaž Nametak, 'Mostarski stari most', Napredak, 1932, nos 11-12, pp. 135-42 (hereafter 'Mostarski stari most'); id., Islamski kulturni spomenici turskogap eriodau Bosni i Hercegovini, Sarajevo, 1939, p. 28; Franz Babinger, 'Die Brücke von Mostar', Morgenblatt, 115:1, 15 May 1938.

2 In the middle of the nineteenth century the Hercegusa tower served as a powder store and the Halebinka as a city dungeon.

In the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century documents the bridge was described as the Bridge of Sultan Suleiman. Documents thereafter refer to it as the Great Bridge, and, more recently, as the Old Bridge. Its dimensions, construction, shape and setting made it a unique monument of its kind. The only similar bridge is one on the Vojusha river in the town of Konica in north-west Greece near the Albanian border, 'which resembles the Old Bridge as a twin resembles his brother, except that it has no towers'.

The citizens of Mostar were very proud of the bridge, believing it to be unique. In his poem dedicated to the town of his birth, the Turkish poet Dervish-Pasha Bajezidagic (1552?-1603), famous general, adviser to Sultan Murat III, and Vizier of Bosnia, compared the bridge to the firmament, in which the stars followed their appointed paths: 'But even the skies cannot compare to it, for the greatness of the bridge's arch overshadows the greatness of the sky.'

The Old Bridge had always had many admirers. Anyone who saw it was overwhelmed by its beauty and the boldness of its construction. An unknown Arabian traveller could not take his eyes off the bridge; he is quoted as saying: 'I have travelled far and have stopped in awe at the doors of Mostar, for I have noticed minarets, slender as the voices of prayers, and a bridge over the water as the moon in the sky.'

Evliya Mehmed B. Dervish (1611/12-79), the 'globe trotter', as he repeatedly calls himself, was also struck by it. He visited Mostar in 1664 and wrote one of the most vivid descriptions of the town and its bridge. Although he had travelled more widely than any of his contemporaries, he had never seen a bridge that could be compared to the bridge of Mostar: 'Here, let it be known: I, the poor and unworthy servant of God, Evliya, have travelled and visited sixteen kingdoms and have not seen a bridge so high.'

From the time of the building of the bridge many scholars travelled to see it, among them viziers and dignitaries from all the Ottoman territories. The visitors were especially impressed by the custom of


4 Muhamed Ajkic, Stari most - simbol Mostara, Mostar, 1955 (hereafter Stari most), p. 5.

5 Heinrich Renner, Durch Bosni und Hercegovinu, C, rnu Goru, Dalmaciu, Jadranskom ore, Istru (Trst, Mletke, Rojeku) i Hrvatsku, Donja Tuzla, 1907, p. 307-8; Robert Michel, Auf der Sudostbastionu nseres Reiches, Leipzig, 1915, p. 29; M. Ajkic, Mostarski stari most, Mostar, 1936, p. 12; id., Stari most, p. 16.

6 Ajkic, Mostarski stari most, p. 13; Dzemal Celic and Mehmed Mujezinovic, Stari mostovi u Bosni i Hercegovini, Sarajevo, 1969 (hereafter Stari mostovi), p. 188.
jumping off the bridge, which survived until the bridge itself was destroyed in 1993. They watched with admiration as the children of the town jumped into the water, flying through the air 'like birds'. The children would perform several acrobatic tricks: some would jump headfirst, some with their legs crossed 'a la turca' and others in groups of two or three. When they emerged from the water, they would be given small rewards by the visitors for their courage and skill.

The symmetry and simplicity of the Old Bridge had the power to impress and inspire even twenty-first-century travellers: 'I myself can say I have never been so impressed by another building as much as I have been by that bridge.'

Before the Turks took over Mostar there had been a wooden bridge, mentioned for the first time in a letter from Dubrovnik, dated 3 April 1452. The first information on the medieval bridge of Mostar dates from a time when the stone bridge had already been in use for a century. The famous historian and geographer Mustafa ben Abd Allah Hadjdji Khalifa, known also as Katib (elebi (i608-57), who also wrote about Rumelia and Bosnia at the beginning of the seventeenth century, described this bridge, which according to him was built in 974 Hejira, as follows: 'As most of the gardens lie upon the further side of the river (on the Radobolje stream, which runs into the Narenta [Neretva] just by the bridge), a bridge suspended from chains led across to them; but as the pillar shrank, it swayed to such an extent that people feared for their lives in crossing it.'

It is known from existing sources that the bridge was impassable in the middle of the sixteenth century. The citizens of Mostar then asked the Sultan Suleiman (I520-66) to authorize the building of a better, more substantial bridge across the Neretva. The request was granted and the bridge was built in the last year of the reign of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, that is 1566.

The date of its construction was confirmed by two inscriptions cut into the bridge. The first one said:

8 Ibid., p. 471.
9 Michel, Auf der Südobastion unseres Reiches, p. 29.
10 Hivzija Hasandedic, Spomenici kulture turskog doba u Mostaru, Sarajevo, 1980 (hereafter Spomenici kulture turskog doba), p. 111.
11 Konstantin Jirecek, Die Handelstrassenu nd Bergwerke v on Serbien und Bosnien wahrend d es Mittelalters, Prague, 1879, p. 79; Johann de Ashoth, An Official Tour through Bosnia and Herzegovina, London, 1890, p. 258; Carl Pfez, Mostaru nds einK ulturkreisL eipzig, 1891, p. 15; Renner, Durch Bosnien und die Hercegovinak reuz und quer, p. 307; R. Michel, Mostar, Prague 1909, p. 14; id., Auf der Südostbastionu nsersR eiches, p. 30; Aškjaš, Mostarski tari most, p. 8; id., Stari most, p. 7; Fehim Bajraktarevic, 'Mostar' in M. Th. Houtsma et al. (eds), The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Leiden and London, 1936, vol. iii, pp. 668-99; Celic and Mujezinovic, Stari mostovi, p. 314; Hasandedic, Spomenici kulture turskog doba, p. 112; Hejira is the date of Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina, from which the Muslims calculate their calendar.
together, following a sophisticated Arabic custom, the sum gives the year of the construction of the bridge, that is the year 974 of Hejira:

\[ q = 100 + d = 4 + r = 200 + t = 400 + k = 20 + m = 400 + r = 200 + j \]

The construction of the bridge was therefore finished between 8 July and 4 September, 1566.14

Over time alternative accounts about the building of the bridge developed. According to Hadjdji Khalifa, at the request of the inhabitants Sultan Suleiman sent Sinan, the greatest Turkish architect of all time, with instructions to build a stone bridge. After he had seen the place, he declared the task to be impossible, so the plan to build the bridge was abandoned. Later on, however, a local carpenter declared himself willing to take responsibility for the task, and the building of the bridge was accomplished. The single-arch stone bridge was built, and it was said that 'the bridge is a masterpiece, which puts to shame all the architects in the world'.15

In the village of Podporim, along the old Mostar road leading to Konjic, stands a carved stone trough, although there is no trace of any well or spring. It was said that the architect who built the bridge pledged to forfeit his head if the bridge collapsed. When the bridge was completed, he could not bring himself to attend the removal of the scaffolding but fled from Mostar and waited until this was done. Excited and impatient in the expectation of news, so the story went, the builder distractedly drilled a hole in a stone by hitting it with a hammer and so he carved out the trough. People used the rain-water from that trough as a medicine at least until the beginning of the twentieth century.16

Another tradition was recounted by the Muslims of Mostar until the middle of the twentieth century. The Sultan Suleiman heard of the exceptional beauty of a woman named Mara Lehovkinja and he swore he would kiss her, dead or alive. He finally succeeded in doing so after a long siege of the town of Promin, of which Mara's husband was the king. When Mara's husband realized that Suleiman's troops were about to break into the town, he beheaded his wife and had her head and body thrown into the deep river, so that Suleiman could not keep his word. In order to keep his word and save the throne, Sultan Suleiman offered a large reward to anyone who would take over the castle and find the body of the dead Mara. A certain Huso from Mostar brought the Sultan Mara's head from the depths of the river and a certain Ahmo from Visegrad brought him her body. Having kissed the dead Mara, the Sultan summoned Huso and Ahmo to visit him and asked them what reward they wanted for their service. Each of them asked the Sultan to build a bridge as their reward: one on the Neretva river in Mostar and the other on the Drina river in the town of Visegrad. The Sultan kept his promise and had the bridges built.17
The Orthodox tradition says that the architect Rade, who had been sent into slavery, regained his freedom from the Turks by means of this bridge. For a long time his work was in vain: what he built during the day, the river would wash away during the night. The bridge always collapsed, until, upon the advice of Vila, the fairy of the mountain forest, his muse, he walled up a pair of lovers, Stoja and Stojan, alive in the foundations.18

One frequently encounters similar traditions and motifs associated with the building of castles and bridges on the Balkan Peninsula. One of the most renowned is probably the story about the building of Scutari; a nother elso f the building of f the bridge n Visegradw heret he bridger epeatedly collapsed vera seven-yearr erioud ntil he architect Mitra was advised by his muse to wall up Stoja and Ostoja in the bridge.19T he traditionw as so strongt hat at the beginningo f f 1870 the inhabitantsto f Trebinjes tole a child's corpse n the Dubrovnika reaa nd had it walled up in the foundation of the bridge over the Trebinjcia

17 Ajkic, Mostarski stari most, p. 6; id., Stari most, p. 15.
18 Asboth, An Official Tour through Bosnia and Herzegovina, p. 258; Renner, Durch Bosniu und die Hercegovina, p. 307; Muhibić, 'Stara cuprija u Mostaru', p. 15; Michel, Mostar, p. 14; id., 'Auf der Sudostbastionu nseres Reiches', p. 3'; Ajkic, Mostarski stari most, p. 5; id., Stari most, p. 14; Neidhardt and Celic, 'Stari most u Mostaru', p. 135; Celic and Mujezinovic, Stari mostovi, p. 196; Hasandedic, Spomenici kulturne turskog doba, p. 116.

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20 From one of the Ionian islands, Zante (Gr. Zakinthos), there is the tale, likewise from the second half of the nineteenth century, that the peopleh ad wantedt o sacrifice a Muslim or a jew at the building of the more important bridges.21

One story, which circulated in the nineteenth century among foreign visitors to Mostar, associated the construction of the Old Bridge with the predecessors of the Turks. First a French diplomat attributed the building of the Old Bridge to the Greeks; according to him the Greeks of the Eastern Empire built the bridge in Visegrad in the twelfth century and the Old Bridge of Mostar was another building from the same period.22 Later on, the opinion prevailed that the bridge must be of Roman workmanship, on the ground that such a tall and solid singlearch bridge made out of big blocks, spanning a river so turbulent and wide, and with such steep banks, bore the stamp of Roman architecture.23 Because of the belief that Romans built the bridge there were several attempts to find a Roman town, Matrix, nearby.24

The first author to name the Romans as the builders of the bridge was a French officer.25 He was followed by many others, among them experts on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Most of them believed that either the Emperor Trajan or Hadrian had ordered the bridge's construction;26 others thought it to be the Emperor Anthony.27 Those assumptions were justified by the belief that the Romans had built the bridge on that spot because their road to Pannonia was supposed to lead that way.28 One

20 Asboth, An Official Tour through Bosnia and Herzegovina, p. 258; Renner, Durch Bosniuen ndd iHercegovinak rezu ndq uer.p. 197 and 358.
23 Aleksandr Giffard, 'Poezdka po Gurgegovine, Bosnii i Staroi Serbii', Zapiski imperatorskog uzsakog eograficheskogo obshchestva 257; Renner, Durch Bosniuen und die Hercegovinak rezu und quer, p. 306; Muhibić, 'Stara cuprija u Mostaru', p. 12.
\[\text{24} \text{ Renner, DurchB osnienu ndd ie Hercegovinak rezu ndq er, p. 306.}\]
\[\text{25} \text{ Charles Pertusier, La Bosnie consideried ans ses rapportsa vec l'empire Ottoman, P aris, 1822, pp. 265 and 356.}\]
\[\text{27} \text{ Ami Boue, Recueil d'itineraires dans la Turquie et l'Europe, V ienna, 1854, vol. II, p. 211.}\]
\[\text{28} \text{ But if the site of Mostar was so favourable that the town seemed in the nineteenth century the most natural and only possible passage over the Neretva, it had not always been that way. In the seventeenth century a French traveller on his way from Dubrovnik to Sarajevo did not pass through Mostar; in his travel report he stated that there were several wooden and stone bridges over the Neretva river (Quiclet, Les voyages e M. Quicleta Constantinoplea rue terre, Paris 1664, p. 60).}\]

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French author went so far as to calculate the alleged exact date of the construction of the Old Bridge: 'Let us note that the road dividing Mostar in two halves had to cross the Neretvar ivers omewh e; t hat certainly means that the beautiful Turkish bridge, the curiosity of the town, w as built n the Romane ra. Lat er n the cart-trackw as as probably added to the bridge, but the grounding and foundation is obviously Romana nd we can supposet hat it had been constructedin 98 BC.'\textsuperscript{29}

This belief was representeda nd advocate d eve n by experts ike the famousE nglishE gyptologista nd travellerS ir GardnerWilkinson:

\begin{itemize}
\item The traditionp retends, t hat the towersa re o Romans ubstructionsa, nd that the one on the eastern side is the most ancient.
\item The buildingo f the bridgei s attributedt o Trajan,o r, accordingt o some, t o Hadrian;a nd reportss peako f an inscription, hat once existedu pon it, with the nameo f one of thosee mperorsT . he Turksa ttributei ts erectiont o Suleyman, the Magnificent; but the Vizir, in answer to my question respecting the date, said that 'though they claim it as a work of that Sultan, the truth is, it was there long before his time, and was probably built by the Pagans'.
\item The Turke ntirelyc oncealedt he originalm asonryn; ot a blocki s to be seen of Roman time, and the smallness of the stones, the torus under the parapet,a nd the spandrilp rojectings lightlyo ver the arch, give it all the appearanceo f Turkish.B ut the g randeur o the work, t he formo f the arch, and tradition, all favour its Roman origin; and the fact of the town being called Mostar, shows that an 'old bridge' already existed there, where it received that name; and Mostar was a city long before the Turkish invasion of the country.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{itemize}

What is especiallyi nterestingsi s the factt hat all of thosea uthorsw ere acquainted with the tradition that dates the time of the building of the bridge to Sultan Suleiman' sr eign.\textsuperscript{31}T he traditionw as supporte db y two inscriptionso n the bridget hatw ere' unquestionablyT urkish,e ven though difficultt o decipher'.\textsuperscript{32}B ut the prejudicew as too strong; t he inscriptions were dismissed as referring to repairs made during the Turkishse ra, not to the buildingo f the bridge.\textsuperscript{33}S ome even accusersd e Turkso f havingd eliberatelyr emovedt he original( Roman)i nscription to conceal the real authorshipo f the bridge.\textsuperscript{34}A t any rate too much reliance must not be placed in them, as the Turks have been frequently

\textsuperscript{29} Charles Yriarte, Bosnie et Herze'govineP, aris, 1876, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{30} Gardner Wilkinson, Dalmatia and Montenegro, p. 2; Arbuthnot, Herzegovina, p. 89; Evans, ThroughB osnia and Herzegovina . . . byfoot, p. 348; Muhibi c, 'Stara cuprija u Mostaru', p. ii.
\textsuperscript{31} Otto Blau, Reisen i Bosnien u nd herzegowinaB, erlin, 1877, p. 36; Asboth, An OfficialT our throughB osnia and Herzegovina.p . 257.
convicted of removing Roman inscriptions and substituting Turkish ones on their place.'35

In the sixteenth and seventeenth century the Turkish Empire was in the ascendant and it seemed that 'they may probably obtain and conserve a far larger Empire, and even all Europe, unto the Western Ocean'.36 At that time European authors had no doubts about the abilities of Turkish architects. A French traveller from the seventeenth century found the bridge of Mostar to be a construction 'hardier, without comparison, and wider than the Ponte Realto in Venice, although the latter is esteemed a marvel'.37

But, if the Turkish Empire was a great power in the middle of the eighteenth century,38 its strength began to wane at the beginning of the nineteenth. An opinion was formed among European authors that 'Turkey drains and exhausts herself and approaches more and more rapidly towards her final ruin every day'.39 So the Turkish Empire, which not so long before had been considered the greatest power in the world, suddenly became, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a 'dying lion', which 'after a few violent convulsions would never rise again'.40 In the nineteenth century Turkey was 'still the same Oriental monarchy as it had been in the fourteenth century; Europe had not yet set foot on its ground'.41 And finally, for the authors of the second half of the nineteenth century it was an unquestionable fact that South-Eastern Europe 'had been in the hands of Asiatic barbarity for centuries',42 and the Turks themselves were simply 'Asiatic barbarians in Europe'.43

Running parallel to this perception of Turkey as a diminished and barbaric power were general doubts about Turkish ability in the fields of culture and architecture and in particular about their ability to construct bridges. Some thought that during the long period of Turkish nationhood, the Turks had never gone beyond a particular stage in house architecture, and that the mosques in Constantinople (with the exception of their minarets) were 'mere imitations of Christian churches'.

At any rate, the majority of stone bridges in Turkey were considered to be the work of 'ancient Romans or Greeks of the

35 Edward Brown, A Brief Account of some Travels in Divers Parts of Europe, London, 1673, p. 82.
37 Angerius Gislenius de Busbequis, Travels into Turkey, London, 1744, p. 137.
38 Francois Charles Pouqueville, Travels in the Morea, Albania, and other parts of the Ottoman Empire, London, 1813, p. 430.
41 Gustav Rasch, Die Turkten in Europa, Prague, 1873, p. v.
42 Gardner Wilkinson, Dalmatia and Montenegro, p. 56-57.

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Byzantine Empire even Bulgarians'.45O thers claimed that under Turkish rule few towns had been built in South-Eastern Europe, compared to the West, and that many of those towns that had previously been famous cultural centres in the time of the Romans, Byzantines ad in the Serbo-Bulgariane ochh ad declined t o the level of poor villages. In addition, even what had been built was not attributed to the Turks themselves, since Christian artisans had been
needed for larger construction projects, such as the building of mosques, palaces and a railway on the Bosphorus.46
This underestimation of Turkish influence reached its peak with the publication of a graphic map with images from Dalmatia and Herzegovina.47 Her rambles along the Eastern Adriatic coast, the painter Charlotta Lazen was especially attracted to Mostar and its stone bridge, which she described as a remnant of Latin civilization amidst Turkish barbarity:

"Its famous bridge with a single arch that spans the riverbank as it rises in the midst of Turkish barbarity as a marvellous remnant of Latin civilization. Unfortunately, history offers no reliable information on that remarkable monument. It is generally attributed to the Emperor Trajan, or by others to Hadrian; according to tradition, there used to be an inscription with the name of one of the Emperors."

Two town towers, dressed up with ivy, guard the access to the bridge and it is possible to block the passage on the right bank if necessary. The foundations of the towers are said to originate in the Roman times. On both pillars of the bridge are inscriptions in Turkish, one of them being dated 1087 of the Hijri year and 659 Christian era, probably referring to repairs, done at that time.

In the opinion of Turkish people, the construction of the bridge of Mostar is attributed to Suleyman II. But, primitively asonyr, though great art recovered with repairs, does not permit any speculations about its origin.

The form of arch, the grandeur of the style, hardihood and lightness of proportions point to ancient tradition.47

In a similar way, archaeologists of the nineteenth century, unwilling to believe that the Indusc owed its civilization to the Phoenicians, Greeks, or to the ten lost tribes of Israel, or in turn to Madoc and the Welsh, or St Brandon and the Irish.48 In connection with Bosnia itself, for example, certain nineteenth-century authors maintained that the town of Jajce had been built by an Italian architect, in imitation of the Neapolitan Castello del Ouvo (despite the fact that no old building similar to Jajce could be seen in the Neapolitan region in the middle of the nineteenth century).49

The first doubts as to the Roman origins of the bridge can be traced back to the beginning of the second millennium the nineteenth century the travel account of an Austrian noblewoman, who, mentioning the bridge of Mostar, says that 'history makes it Roman'.50 But in notes added to her travel account by Baron Otto, the reader is once again informed that the bridge was built either by the Emperor Trajan or by Hadrian.51

The belief in Roman workmanship of the bridge as convincingly dispatched by a German consul-general with Blau, who wrote that there was nothing about the bridge reminiscent of Roman architecture. 'From an architectural point of view, the whole bridge is of one piece..."
and style, even the stones of the lowest layer that can be reached show no sign of an older foundation. Neither the bridge nor its surroundings contain any inscriptions, sculptures or other remnants of the Roman art. 52

One of the most famous English archaeologists, Arthur Evans, published his work at the same time as Blau's. He was still able to claim that the bridge was built by the Romans, and not by the Turks: According to the tradition, his was the work of the Emperor Trajan, whose engineering triumphs in Eastern Europe have taken a strong hold on the South-Slavonic imagination. Others refer its creation to Hadrian, and the Turks, not wishing to leave the credit of such an architectural masterpiece to Infidel Emperors, claim the whole for their Sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent. He and other Turkish rulers have certainly greatly restored and altered the work, inasmuch that Sir Gardiner Wilkinson declares that none of the original Roman masonry has been left on the exterior, but he was none the less convinced of its Roman origin; and anyone who has seen it will agree with Sir Gardiner that the grandeur of the work, and the form of the arch, as well as the tradition, attest its Roman origin. 53

When at the end of the nineteenth century it became impossible to resist the evidence confirming that the bridge was of Turkish origin, some authors, unable to accept this fact, still maintained that there must be some truth in the traditions supporting the Roman origin of the bridge: 'Though now proved to be of Turkish origin, dating from the time of Suleiman II. (1566), it is not unlikely that a Roman bridge preceded it on the same site, and so gave rise to the tradition that this one is of Roman constitution.' 54 Even if it had been built on the Sultan's command in 1566, some would maintain that it must have been built either by Dalmatian-Italian architects or by stonemasons from Dubrovnik. It is especially noteworthy that this viewpoint influenced the local tradition: 'Disregarding the judgement of the experts concerning the era of the construction of the bridge, I would conclude that it certainly must have been built before the conquest of Herzegovina; which nation built it, I leave to the experts to decide.' 55

At any rate, the dilemma as to who had built the bridge remained unresolved at the beginning of the twentieth century. Fra Grga Martic of Herzegovina expressed the dilemma in a poem:

Who built the bridge of Mostar?
Everybodya sks, w ho those who know it.
Some say: all knowing Roman emans,
Some, that it was built by Turks. 58

In Europe the Old Bridge continued to be known as Romerbrücke (Roman bridge), although the Turks held it to have been built by stonemasons in the writings of a certain Englishwoman who travelled through Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1840s. She can still read: 'Over the river Narenta, at Mostar, is a fine old Roman bridge which connects two parts of the town.' 60
claimed in the 1920s that 'the stone bridge over the Neretva in Mostar is believed to be of Roman workmanship, which is confirmed by the style of the construction'.61 The case of the bridge over the Drina was essentially similar. The subtitle under its photograph, in a book written by a German traveler from the middle of the 1930s, has it as 'Old Roman bridge over the Drina'.62 On a picture of Visegrad Castle in a travel account by Benedict Kuripesic there is also an image of the bridge over the Drina from the first half of the sixteenth century: it has quite a different shape from that of the famous bridge over the Drina.63

The first foundations of Mostar were laid round the original wooden bridge on the left bank of the Neretva river. In the middle of the fifteenth century a small settlement was built, and it was mentioned for the first time in a letter dated 3 April 1452. The letter says, inter alia, that Vladislav Hercegovic opposed his father Herzeg Stjepan and conquered some of his towns; these included, besides Blagaj, two towers on the bridge over the Neretva ('duo castelli al ponte de Neretua').64 It was because the old wooden bridge was a very unstable construction, dangerous to cross, that the town with its carsi (market places) and mahalla (residential districts) developed almost exclusively on the left side of the river. A thought the bridge had been constructed to meet the needs of regional traffic (the Turkish troops crossed it when conquering western Herzegovina and Dalmatia), it is very existence conditioned the gradual concentration of the population. At the end of the fifteenth century a town already existed, housing the Turkish governor, which was called Most, Mostici or Mostar (actually Mostari, plural).

The oldest mention of Mostar's current name goes back to the year 1469. The sources from that year mention nahia (county) Mostar and in Turkish K6prihisar ('tower on the bridge'). The defter (census) from 1477 noted that Mostar had nineteen houses (families) and one single inhabitant at the time. Due to its favourable location at the crossroads of regional communications with Herzegovina, the town quickly evolved into the economic, cultural and political centre of Herzegovina during the Turkish era. It overtook Blagaj, which had been the capital of Hum, and by the first decades of Turkish rule had entirely supplanted it.65 Prior to that it used to be 'Sheher Blagaj', and 'kasaba Mostar'.66

The close connection between the town of Mostar and the Old Bridge is reflected in the way its inhabitants connected the name of the bridge...
town with the bridge. Qelebi had already noted that the name Mostar was supposed to mean 'kőprili-sheher('t own w ith a bridge').67B y the nineteenth century, the inhabitants of Mostar believed that the name of 64

Konstantin Jirecek, Die Handelstrasse und Bergwerke von Serbien und Bosnien wahrend des Mittelalters, Prague, 1879, p. 79; Celic and Mujezinovic, Stari mostovi, p. 184; Hasandedic, Spomenici kulture turskog doba, p. 5.

Styx, Das Bauwesen in Bosnien und der Hercegovina, p. 10; Renner, Durch Bosnien und die Hercegovinak reuzu nd quer, p. 306; Hazim Sabanovic, Bosanski pasaluk, Sarajevo, 1959, p. 142; Dominik Mandic, 'Mostar u Hercegovina, njegov postanak i znacjenje imena', Hrvatski Kalendar, Chicago, 1968, p. 96 ff; Hasandedic, Spomenici kulture turskog doba, p. 6 and 9.

Nametak, 'Mostarski stari most', p. 135. 'Sheher.' is a large town, 'kasaba' a smaller one. 67


According to the most recent research, Mostar owes its name to the bridgekeepers( mostarwi) who guarded the bridge, and from whom the town derived its name, while its inhabitants became known as Mostari. 67

As both, An Official Tour through Bosnia and Herzegovina, P. 260; Muhibic, 'Stara cuprija u Mostaru', p. 13.

According to the most recent research, Mostar owes its name to the bridgekeepers who guarded the bridge. From them, the town derived its name, while its inhabitants became known as Mostari. 68

8 Chaumette des Fosses, Voyage en Bosnie, p. 25; Wilkinson, Dalmatia and Montenegro, pp. 59-60; Bone, Recueil d'itinaires ed ans a Turquie d'Europe, vol. n, p. 212; Gil'ferding, Poezdka po GercgovineB osnii i Staroi Serbii, p. 43; Arbuthnot, Herzegovina, p. 89; Roskiewicz, Studien iiber Bosnien und di Hermegovina, p. 146; Blau, Reisen in Bosnien und der Herzegovina, p. 34; de Asboth, An Official Tour through Bosnia and Herzegovina, P. 260; Muhibic, 'Stara cuprija u Mostaru', p. 13.

69 Arbuthnot, Herzegovina, p. 89.

70 Feez, Mostar unds ein Kulturkreis, p. 18.
was called ostajru, st as the keepero f the gates (vrataw) as calledv ratar, the keepero f the road (cesta)c estara nd the keepero f the cattle (govedo) govedarM; ostar's name follows then a general Slavonic linguistic pattern.73

There are some other theories of the origin of the name Mostar.

Some, for example, think that Mostar derived its name from the towers of the bridge, popularly known as mostare.704 thers derive its name from most-tara( tower on the left bank), most-ar( fromm ost+ ahar - there was a janissaries' ahar [stable] on the right-hand side close to the bridge), from mostarina (a tax for crossing the bridge), without the ending -ina.75

At any rate, the Old Bridge became a true symbol of Mostar and gradually became so closely related to the town that it was unimaginable without it: 'Mostar without the bridge would not be what she is. She would be a body, congruent and beautiful, good-hearted, but with no soul and mind.'76 Until its destruction, the tradition now modified - prevailed among the citizens of Mostar that the Old Bridge was inextricably linked with the very name of the town; the tradition survived almost until the present day.77 'The traveller stops in wonder when he comes across the Old Bridge, the town's principal attraction, from which the town derived its name: Most meaning the bridge and star meaning old.'78

The aim of such a barbaric act as the deliberate destruction of a unique cultural monument was the unequivocal destruction of a symbol of the presence of Muslims in Herzegovina and a brutal attempt to change the fundamental identity of the town. If earlier observers were reluctant to recognize the contributions of the Ottomans to Bosnian culture and erased the Ottoman past by re-attributing the bridge’s construction to other cultures, the HVO went one step further along this path by obliterating the bridge itself. 'The Old Bridge with its towers is the main attraction of the town. This exceptionally valuable object of our cultural heritage not only gave Mostar its name, but also became its physical manifestation. The Old Bridge is to Mostar, what Notre Dame is to Paris, the Kremlin is to Moscow or St Sophia is to Istanbul.'79 As long as the Old Bridge spanned the banks of the Neretva river, it was Mostar itself. It is impossible to imagine the town either as the Greater-SerbianA leksinac( aftert he Serbianp oet Aleksa Santic, born in Mostar) or as the Greater-CroatianH erceg-Stjepan grad (after Herzeg Stjepan). Those men, then, who destroyed the Old Bridgew ere n ot targetting he bridgea lone,b ut werea imingt o destroy its symbolic value and meaning: they aimed to destroy the most important monument of Mostar's cultural history and to destroy the...
possibility of communication between the citizens of both sides of the river, the Bosniaks (Muslims) on the left bank and the Croats (Catholics) on the right.

79Neidhardt and Celic, Stari most u Mostaru, p. 134.