

Qudret Kemerli: A Bridge between Barbarity and Civilization

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## **Qudret Kemerli: A Bridge between Barbarity and Civilization**

**BOZIDAR JEZERNIK**

**ON Monday, 9 November 1993, units of Hrvatsko Vijeće Odbrane (HVO, the Croatian Council of Defence) started shooting at the Old Bridge of Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Approximately six missiles 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 (895-996), Istanbul, 1931, p. 5; see also Alija Nametak, 'Mostarski stari most', Napredak, 1932, nos 11-12, pp. 135-42 (hereafter 'Mostarski stari most') (137); id., Islamski kulturni spomenici turskogop eriodau Bosni i Hercegovini, Sarajevo, 1939, p. 28; Franz Babinger, 'Die Briicke von Mostar', Morgenblatt 115: ii, Zagreb, 15 May 1938.**

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**In the middle of the nineteenth century the Hercegusa tower served as a powder store and the Halebinka as a city dungeon.<sup>2</sup>**

**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.<sup>3</sup> 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'.<sup>4</sup>**

**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'.<sup>5</sup>**

**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'.<sup>6</sup> 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'.<sup>7</sup>**

**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**

**2 Dragutin Franic, Sjaciama kroz Bosnu-Hercegovinu, rnu Goru, Dalmaciju, Jadranskom ore, Istru (Trst, Mletke, Rojeku) i Hrvatsku, Donja Tuzla, 1901, p. 108; Nametak, 'Mostarski stari most', p. 140; Hamdija Kresevljakovic and Hamdija Kapidzic, 'Stari hercegovacki gradovi', Nase starine, 2, 1954, pp. 9-21 (11).**

**3 Muhamed A. Mujic, 'Krivi most na Radobolji u Mostaru', Nase starine, 2, 1954, pp. 213-15 (215).**

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

**5 Heinrich Renner, Durch Bosnien und Hercegovina reu zu nd qu er, Berlin, 1897, pp. 307-08; Robert Michel, Auf der Sudostbastion unserer 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; Dzamal Celic and Mehmed Mujezinovic, Stari mostovi u Bosni i Hercegovini, Sarajevo, 1969 (hereafter Stari mostovi), p. 188.**

<sup>7</sup> Evliya Celebi, *Putopis*, Sarajevo, 1979, p. 470.

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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.<sup>8</sup>

The symmetry and simplicity of the Old Bridge had the power to impress and inspire even twentieth-century travellers: 'I myself can say I have never been so impressed by another building as much as I have been by that bridge.'<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup> 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) (1608-57), 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.'<sup>11</sup>

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 (1520-66) 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:

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 47 f.

<sup>9</sup> Michel, *Auf der Südostbastion unserer Eichen*, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Hivzija Hasandedic, *Spomenici kulture turskog doba u Mostaru*, Sarajevo, 1980 (hereafter *Spomenici kulture turskog doba*), p. iii.

<sup>11</sup> Konstantin Jirecek, *Die Handelstrassen und Bergwerke von Serbien und Bosnien während des Mittelalters*, Prague, 1879, p. 79; Johann de Asboth, *An Official Tour through Bosnia and Herzegovina*, London, 1890, p. 258; Carl Peez, *Mostaru und sein Kulturkreis*, Leipzig, 1891, p. 15; Renner, *Durch Bosnien und die Hercegovinakeruz und quer*, p. 307; R. Michel, *Mostar*, Prague 1909, p. 14; id., *Auf der Südostbastion unserer Eichen*, p. 30; Ajkić, *Mostarski tarimost*, p. 8; id., *Stari most*, p. 7; Fehim Bajraktarević, 'Mostar' in M. Th. Houtsma et al. (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden and London, 1936, vol. iii, pp. 608-09; Celic and Mujezinovic, *Stari mostovi*, p. 184; Hasandedic, *Spomenici kulture turskog doba*, p. 112. Hejira is the date of Muhammed's flight from Mecca to Medina, from which the Muslims calculate their calendar.

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The soul of Sultan Mehmed should be glad,  
For it has left such a work of men's hands,  
And a homage also to Suleiman,  
who ruled when the bridge was being finished.  
By the effort of the nazir he bridged as built  
And the chronogram as written: 'qudretk emeri'.

The year 974.<sup>12</sup>

From the inscription Evliya Celebi noted only the chronogram: 'qudret kemeri' (the arch of God Almighty), which was inscribed into the middle of the arch.<sup>13</sup> If the numeric values of the letters are added

together, following a sophisticated Arabic custom, the sum gives the year of the construction of the bridge, that is the year 974 of Hejira:

$q = 100 + d = 4 + r = 200 + t = 400 + k = 20 + m = 40 + r = 200 + j = 10$ . The construction of the bridge was therefore finished between 8 July and 4 September, 1566.<sup>14</sup>

Over time alternative accounts about the building of the bridge developed. According to Hadjji 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'.<sup>15</sup>

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

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Celic and Mujezinovic, *Stari mostovi*, p. i87.

<sup>13</sup> Qelebi, *Putopis*, p. 470.

<sup>14</sup> Renner, *Durch Bosnien und die Hercegovinak reuzu ndq uer*, p. 307; Michel, *Auf der Suidostbastion uneres Reiches*, p. 30; Ajkic, *Mostarski stari most*, p. 13; Celic and Mujezinovic, *Stari mostovi*, p. i87; Hasandedic, *Spomenici kulture turskog doba*, p. i14.

<sup>15</sup> *An Official Tour through Bosnia and Herzegovina*, p. 258; Renner, *Durch Bosnien und die Hercegovinak reuzu ndq uer*, p. 307; Mustafa Hilmi Muhibic, 'Stara cuprija u Mostaru', *Glasnik zemaljskog muzeja Bosne i Hercegovine*, 3, 1889, pp. 10-13 (13). Michel, *Auf der Suidostbastion uneres Reiches*, p. 30; Juraj Neidhardt and Dzemal Celic, 'Stari most u Mostaru', *Nasies tarine*, 1, 1953, pp. 133-40, (135); Hasandedic, *Spomenici kulture turskog doba*, p. i16.

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trough as a medicine at least until the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup>

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 and he swore he would kiss her, dead or alive. He finally succeeded in doing so after a long siege of the town of Ploče, 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.<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup>

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 nothert ellso f the buildingo f the bridgei n Visegradw heret he bridger epeatedlyc ollapsedo vera seven-yearp eriodu ntilt he architect Mitra was advised by his muse to wall up Stoja and Ostoja in the bridge.<sup>19</sup> T he traditionw as so strongt hat at the beginningo f 1870 the inhabitantso f Trebinjes tole a child'sc orpsei n the Dubrovnika reaa nd had it walled up in the foundation of the bridge over the Trebinjcica

<sup>16</sup> Muhibic, 'Stara cuprija u Mostaru', p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Ajkic, Mostarski stari most, p. 6; id., Stari most, p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> Asboth, An Official Tourt hroughB osnia andH erzegovinap, . 258; Renner, DurchB osnienu ndd ie Hercegovinak reuzu ndq uer, p . 307; Muhibic, 'Stara cuprija u Mostaru', p. 13; Michel, Mostar, p. 14; id., Auf der Sudostbastionu nseresR eiches, p. 3'; Ajkic, Mostarskis tari 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 kulture turskog doba, p. ii 6.

<sup>19</sup> Renner, Durch Bosnienu ndd ie Hercegovinak reuzu ndq uer, p . 195.

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river.<sup>20</sup> From one of the Ionian islands, Zante (Gr. Zakynthos), there is the tale, likewise from the second half of the nineteenth century, that the peopleh ad wantedt o sacrificea Muslimo r ajew at the buildingo f the more important bridges.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> Because of the belief that Romans built the bridge there were several attempts to find a Roman town, Matrix, nearby.<sup>24</sup>

The first author to name the Romans as the builders ofthe bridge was a French officer.<sup>25</sup> 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;<sup>26</sup> others thought it to be the EmperorAnthony.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> One

<sup>20</sup> Asboth, An Official Tourt hroughB osnia andH erzegovinap, . 258; Renner, DurchB osnienu ndd ie Hercegovinak reuzu ndq uer, p p. 197 and 358.

<sup>21</sup> Carl-Martin Edsman, 'Bridges', in The Encyclopediao f Religion, ed. Mircea Eliade, New York and London, 1987, vol. 2, pp. 310-14 (313).

<sup>22</sup> Amedee Chaumette des Fosses, Voyagee n Bosnie dans les anne'esI 807 et I808, Paris, i8i6 (hereafter Voyagee n Bosnie), pp. 25 and 43.

<sup>23</sup> Aleksandr Gil'ferding, 'Poezdka po Gercegovine, Bosnii i Staroi Serbii', Zapiski imperatorskagor usskagog eograficheskagoob shestvav ol. 13, St Petersburg, 1859, p. 43; Asboth, An Official Tour through Bosnia and Herzegovina, p. 257; Renner, Durch Bosnien und die Hercegovina kreuz und quer, p. 306; Muhibi6, 'Stara cuprija u Mostaru', p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Renner, *Durch Bosnien und die Herzegovina*, p. 306.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Pertusier, *La Bosnie considérée dans ses rapports avec l'empire Ottoman*, Paris, 1822, pp. 265 and 356.

<sup>26</sup> John Gardner Wilkinson, *Dalmatia and Montenegro: with a Journey to Mostar in Herzegovina*, London, 1848 vol. II, (hereafter *Dalmatia and Montenegro*) pp. 59-60; Ida von Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Aus Dalmatien*, Prague, 1857, vol. III, p. 327; Charlotte de Lazen, *L'Herzégovine et le pont de Mostar*, Vienna, 1861 (hereafter *L'Herzégovine*), p. 2; George Arbuthnot, *Herzegovina; or Omer Pasha and the Christian Rebels*, London, 1862 (hereafter *Herzegovina*), p. 89; Johann Roskiewicz, *Studien über Bosnien und die Herzegovina*, Leipzig and Vienna, 1868, p. 140; Arthur John Evans, *Through Bosnia and Herzegovina during the insurrection of 1875*, London, 1877 (hereafter *Through Bosnia and Herzegovina* byfoot), pp. 348-49.

<sup>27</sup> Ami Boué, *Recueil d'itinéraires dans la Turquie d'Europe*, Vienna, 1854, vol. II, p. 211.

<sup>28</sup> 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 de M. Quicleta Constantinople à 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 rivers somewhere; that certainly means that the beautiful Turkish bridge, the curiosity of the town, was built in the Roman era. Later on the cart-track was probably added to the bridge, but the grounding and foundation is obviously Roman and we can suppose that it had been constructed in 98 BC.'<sup>29</sup> This belief was represented and advocated even by experts like the famous English Egyptologist and traveller Sir Gardner Wilkinson: 'The tradition pretends, that the towers are Roman constructions, and that the one on the eastern side is the most ancient.

The building of the bridge is attributed to Trajan, or, according to some, to Hadrian; and reports speak of an inscription, that once existed upon it, with the name of one of those emperors. The Turks attribute its erection to 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'. The Turkish once alleged the original Masonry; of a block is to be seen of Roman time, and the smallness of the stones, the torus under the parapet, and the spandril projecting lightly over the arch, give it all the appearance of Turkish. But the grandeur of the work, the form of 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.<sup>30</sup>

What is especially interesting is the fact that all of those authors were acquainted with the tradition that dates the time of the building of the bridge to Sultan Suleiman's reign.<sup>31</sup> The tradition was supported by two inscriptions on the bridge that were 'unquestionably Turkish, even though difficult to decipher'.<sup>32</sup> But the prejudice was too strong: the inscriptions were dismissed as referring to repairs made during the Turkish era, not to the building of the bridge.<sup>33</sup> Some even accused the Turks of having deliberately removed the original (Roman) inscription to conceal the real authorship of the bridge.<sup>34</sup> At any rate too much reliance must not be placed in them, as the Turks have been frequently

<sup>29</sup> Charles Yriarte, *Bosnie et Herzégovine*, Paris, 1876, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Gardner Wilkinson, *Dalmatia and Montenegro*, p. 59-60.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60; de Lazen, *L'Herzégovine*, p. 2; Arbuthnot, *Herzegovina*, p. 89; Evans, *Through Bosnia and Herzegovina* ... byfoot, p. 348; Muhibic, 'Stara cuprija u Mostaru', p. ii.

<sup>32</sup> Otto Blau, *Reisen in Bosnien und Herzegovina*, Berlin, 1877, p. 36; Asboth, *An Official Tour through Bosnia and Herzegovina*, p. 257.

<sup>33</sup> Gardner Wilkinson, *Dalmatia and Montenegro*, p. 6; Arbuthnot, *Herzegovina*, p. 89; Roskiewicz, *Studien über Bosnien und die Herzegovina*, p. 140.

<sup>34</sup> Boue, *Recueil itinéraire dans la Turquie d'Europe*, I, p. 212.

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convicted of removing Roman inscriptions and substituting Turkish ones on their place.'<sup>35</sup>

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'.<sup>36</sup> 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'.<sup>37</sup>

But, if the Turkish Empire was a great power in the middle of the eighteenth century,<sup>38</sup> 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'.<sup>39</sup> 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'.<sup>40</sup> 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'.<sup>41</sup> 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',<sup>42</sup> and the Turks themselves were simply 'Asiatic barbarians in Europe'.<sup>43</sup>

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'.

<sup>44</sup> At any rate, the majority of stone bridges in Turkey were considered to be the work of 'ancient Romans or Greeks of the

<sup>35</sup> Arbuthnot, *Herzegovina*, p. 89.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Brown, *A Brief Account of some Travels in Divers Parts of Europe*, London, 1673, p. 82.

<sup>37</sup> Poulet, *Nouvelles relations du Levant ... par Monsieur P. A.*, Paris, 1667, vol. I, p. 75.

<sup>38</sup> Augerius Gislenius de Busbequis, *Travels into Turkey*, London, 1744, p. 137.

<sup>39</sup> Francois Charles Pouqueville, *Travels in the Morea, Albania, and other parts of the Ottoman Empire*, London, 1813, p. 430.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Walsh, *Narrative of a Journey from Constantinople to England*, London, 1829, pp. 220-21.

<sup>41</sup> A. Boue, *La Turquie d'Europe*, Paris, 1840, vol. II, p. 415.

<sup>42</sup> Felix Kanitz, *Srbija. Zemlja i stanovništvo B, elgrade*, 1985 (hereafter *Srbia*), vol. II, p. 65.

<sup>43</sup> Gustav Rasch, *Die Turken in Europa*, Prague, 1873, p. V.

<sup>44</sup> Gardner Wilkinson, *Dalmatia and Montenegro*, p. 56-57.

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Byzantine Empire or even Bulgarians'.<sup>45</sup> Others 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 and in the Serbo-Bulgarian epoch had declined to 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.<sup>46</sup>

This underestimation and devaluation of Turkish influence reached its peak with the publication of a graphic map with images from Dalmatia and Herzegovina. In her rambles along the Eastern Adriatic coast the painter Charlotte de Lazenw as especially attracted to Mostar and its stone bridge, which she described as a remnant of Latin civilization amidst Turkish barbarity:

Its famous ridge with a single arch that spans two riverbanks and rises in the midst of Turkish barbarity as a marvellous remnant of Latin civilization. Unfortunately, history offers no reliable information on that remarkable monument. In general it is 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 from the year 1087 of Hedjra or 1659 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 I. But, primitive as may be, although in great part recovered with reparations, does not permit further speculation about its origin.

The form of arch, the grandeur of the style, hardness and lightness of proportions point to ancient tradition.<sup>47</sup>

In a similar way archaeologists of the nineteenth century, unwilling to believe that the Indians could have built such magnificent buildings, have attributed the architectural achievements of the inhabitants of pre-Columbian America to the Egyptians, or Phoenicians, or Greeks, or to the ten lost tribes of Israel, or in turn to Madoc and the Welsh, or St Brandon and the Irish.<sup>48</sup> In connection with Bosnia itself, for example, certain nineteenth-century (Croat) authors maintained that

<sup>45</sup> Boue, *La Turquie d'Europe*, vol. III, p. 73.

<sup>46</sup> Kanitz, *Srbija*, p. 203.

<sup>47</sup> de Lazenw, *L'Herzégovine*, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> Glyn Daniel, *A Hundred and Fifty Years of Archaeology*, Cambridge, 1978, p. 277; Claude Baudouin and Sydney Picasso, *Lost Cities of the Maya*, New York, 1992, p. 54.

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the town of Jajce had been built by an Italian architect, in imitation of the Neapolitan Castello del uovo (despite the fact that no old building similar to Jajce could be seen in the Neapolitan region in the middle of the nineteenth century).<sup>49</sup>

The first doubts as to the Roman origins of the bridge can be traced back to the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century in the travel account of an Austrian noblewoman, who, mentioning the bridge of Mostar, says that 'history names it Roman'.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup>

The belief in Roman workmanship of the bridge was convincingly dispelled by a German consul-general Dr Otto 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 or its surroundings contain any inscriptions, sculptures or other remnants of the Roman art.<sup>52</sup>

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, this 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 to its creation by 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 Gardner 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 Gardner that the grandeur of the work, and the form of the arch, as well as the tradition, attest its Roman origin.<sup>53</sup>

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

<sup>49</sup> Ivan Frano Jukić, 'Putovanje po Bosni godine 1843', Kolo 3: 3-32, Zagreb 1847, p. 26;

Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski, Putovanje po Bosni, Zagreb, 1858, p. 74.

<sup>50</sup> Ida von Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, Aus Dalmatien, 1857, vol. 111, p. 194.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>52</sup> Blau, Reisen in Bosnien und Herzegovina, . 36.

<sup>53</sup> Evans, Through Bosnia and Herzegovina ... by foot, pp. 348-49.

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preceded it on the same site, and so gave rise to the tradition that this one is of Roman construction.<sup>54</sup> Even if it had been built by the Sultan's command in 1566, some of them still maintained 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.'<sup>57</sup>

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

Who built the bridge of Mostar?

Everybody asks, who passes by it.

Some say: a well-knowing Roman,

Some, that it was built by Turks.<sup>58</sup>

In Europe the Old Bridge continued to be known as *Römerbrücke* (Roman bridge), although its Turkish origin had been proved.<sup>59</sup> And in the writings of a certain Englishwoman who travelled through Bosnia and Herzegovina with a painting and palette we can still read: 'Over the river Neretva, at Mostar, is a fine old Roman bridge which connects two parts of the town.'<sup>60</sup> The Narodna enciklopedija Republike Hrvatske i Slovenije (The Serbo-Croat-Slovenian Encyclopedia)

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'.<sup>61</sup> The case of the bridge over the Drina river at Visegrad was essentially similar. The subtitle under its photograph, in a book written by a German traveller from the middle of 1930s, has it as 'Old Roman bridge over the Drina'.<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Robert Munro, *Rambles and Studies in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Edinburgh and London, 1895, p. 181.

<sup>55</sup> Asboth, *An Official Tour through Bosnia and Herzegovina*, p. 257.

<sup>56</sup> Edmund Styx, *Das Bauwesen in Bosnien und Herzegovina*, Vienna, 1887, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> Muhibic, 'Stara cuprija u Mostaru', p. 13.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted by Ajkic, *Stari most*, pp. 3 and 17.

<sup>59</sup> Carl Peez, *Mostar und sein Kulturkreis*, Leipzig, 1891, p. 15; Michel, *Mostar*, p. 14; Albert

Kohler, *Sonne über dem Balkan*, Dresden, 1930, p. 91.

<sup>60</sup> E. R. Whitwell, *Through Bosnia and Herzegovina with a Paint Brush*, London, 1909, p. 51.

<sup>61</sup> Stanoje Stanojevic (ed.), *Narodna enciklopedija srpsko-hrvatska-slovenska*, Zagreb, 1925, vol. III, p. 1049.

<sup>62</sup> Louis Matzhold, *Brandherd Balkan*, Vienna, 1936, p. 39.

<sup>63</sup> Benedict Curipeschitz, *Itinerarium v. egyptik in. May. potschaftgen Constantinopel u dem Turkischen eiser Soleyman*, Vienna, 1531.

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The first foundation of Mostar was laid around 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')<sup>64</sup>

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 *lithograph* of the bridge had been constructed to meet the needs of regional traffic (the Turkish troops crossed it when conquering western Herzegovina and Dalmatia), its 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.<sup>65</sup> Prior to that it used to be 'Sheher Blagaj', and 'kasaba Mostar'.<sup>66</sup>

The close connection between the town of Mostar and the Old Bridge is reflected in the way its inhabitants connected the name of the

town with the bridge. Qelebi had already noted that the name Mostar was supposed to mean 'k6prili-sheher' ('town with a bridge').<sup>67</sup> By the nineteenth century the inhabitants of Mostar believed that the name of

<sup>64</sup> Konstantin Jirecek, *Die Handelstrassen und Bergwerke von Serbien und Bosnien während des Mittelalters*, Prague, 1879, p. 79; Celic and Mujezinovic, *Stari mostovi*, p. 184; Hasandedic, *Spomenici kulture turskog doba*, p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Jirecek, *Die Handelstrassen und Bergwerke von Serbien und Bosnien während des Mittelalters*, p. 79;

Styx, *Das Bauwesen in Bosnien und der Hercegovina*, p. 10; Renner, *Durch Bosnien und die Hercegovina*, p. 306; Hazim Sabanovic, *Bosanski asaruk*, 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.

<sup>66</sup> Nametak, 'Mostarski stari most', p. 135. 'Sheher.' is a large town, 'kasaba' a smaller one.

<sup>67</sup> Qelebi, *Putopis*, p. 469.

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the town itself was merely a shorter form of 'Most-star' (Old Bridge).<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, writers who argued for the Roman origin of the bridge referred to this tradition in claiming that 'the very name of the town would imply the existence of a bridge in very early days'.<sup>69</sup> Certain historians have therefore assumed that the beginnings of the bridge could be explained by the Romans having built a settlement there, 'Pons vetus' ('Stari most', 'Old Bridge'). It was suggested that the incoming Slavs translated the name into their idiom and made from it 'Most-star', Mostar.<sup>70</sup>

The first person to doubt his etymological derivation of Mostar from Most-star was the Russian linguist Aleksandr Gil'ferding, on the ground that such a composition is not in accordance with the normal patterns of Slavonic languages. He assumed that a settlement had developed around the Old Bridge, that its inhabitants had started to call themselves Mostari (as for example Blatari from the local name Blatoo or Drvar from the local name Divo), and that the settlement had eventually developed into a town.<sup>71</sup>

One should add to these linguistic arguments which opposed the derivation of the name Mostar from the name Stari most a historical argument: the name Mostar is older than the name Stari most, which occurred only in the eighteenth century, that is, three centuries after Mostar already had its present name.

But, in spite of the problem created by this etymology, the development of Mostar was nevertheless closely related to its Old Bridge:

Although the presence of a Roman local name Pons vetus is yet to be proved definitively and the derivation of the name of the town from Most-star must be discredited as inappropriate according to the rules of the Slavic languages (the name would have been Starimost), it is nevertheless possible to derive the name of the town from the presence of an old bridge, which was certainly the core of the original settlement (as a matter of fact Mostari, plural 'die Brückner', just like Mostari in Croatia).<sup>72</sup>

According to the most recent research, Mostar owes its name to the bridge keepers (mostarwi) who guarded the bridge, and from whom in fact the town derived its name, while its inhabitants became known as Mostari. According to Ivan Milicevic, the keeper of the bridge (most)

<sup>68</sup> Chaumette des Fosses, *Voyage en Bosnie*, p. 25; Wilkinson, *Dalmatia and Montenegro*, pp. 59-60; Boue, *Recueil d'itinéraires en Serbie et Turquie*, vol. II, p. 212; Gil'ferding, *Poezdka po Gercegovine i Bosnii i Staroi Serbii*, p. 43; Arbuthnot, *Herzegovina*, p. 89; Roskiewicz, *Studien über Bosnien und die Herzegovina*, p. 140; Blau, *Reisen in Bosnien und der Hertzegovina*, p. 34; de Asboth, *An Official Tour through Bosnia and Herzegovina*, p. 260; Muhibic, 'Stara cuprija u Mostaru', p. 13.

<sup>69</sup> Arbuthnot, *Herzegovina*, p. 89.

<sup>70</sup> Peez, *Mostar und sein Kulturkreis*, p. 18.

<sup>71</sup> Gil'ferding, Poezdka p o Gercegovine B, osnii i Staroi S erbi, p. 43.

<sup>72</sup> Peez, Mostar unds ein Kulturkreisp, . 18.

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was called *m ostajru*, st as the keepero f the gates (*vratav*) as called *v 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.<sup>73</sup>

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*.<sup>74</sup> Others derive its name from *most-tara* (tower on the left bank), *most-ar* (from *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*.<sup>75</sup>

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.'<sup>76</sup> 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.<sup>77</sup> '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.'<sup>78</sup>

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

<sup>73</sup> Vladimir Corovic, *Mostari njegovik njizevnici*, *M ostar*, 1907, p. 4; Ajkic, *Mostarskis tari most*, p. 11; id., *Stari most*, p. 21; Hamdija Kresevljakovic, 'Esnafi i obrti u Bosni i Hercegovini (1463-1878)', *Zbornik za narodni zivot i obi&aj* *Jeu znih Slavena* 35, 1951, pp.61-138 (61); Hasandedic, *Spomenici kulture turskog doba*, p. 6.

<sup>74</sup> Mandic, 'Mostar u Hercegovini, njegov postanak i znacenje imena', p. 107.

<sup>75</sup> Ajkic, *Stari most*, p. 21; Mandic, 'Mostar u Hercegovini, njegov postanak i znacenje imena', p. 103.

<sup>76</sup> Ajkic, *Stari most*, p. 13.

<sup>77</sup> Ivan Zdravkovic, 'Opravka kula kod Starog mosta u Mostaru', *Nas Vest arine*, 1, 1953, p. 4, 141-43, p. 141; Mak Dizdar and Dugan Pilja, *The District of Mostar*, Sarajevo, 1959, p. 13.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

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*Sophia* is to *Istanbul*.<sup>79</sup> 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-Serbian *A leksinac* (after the Serbian poet Aleksa Santic, born in Mostar) or as the Greater-Croatian *Herceg-Stjepan grad* (after Herzeg Stjepan). Those men, then, who destroyed the Old Bridge weren't targeting the bridge alone, but were aiming to 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.**

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