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Caught between Two Empires: The Teaching of Persian in Bosnia at the Time of Transition from Ottoman to Austro-Hungarian Rule

Abstract

This article considers the presence of Persian within the educational system of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the westernmost frontier of the 'Persianate world', between the 1860s and the first decade of 1900. Based on a survey of primary sources, such as the first journals introduced in Bosnia by the Ottoman administration, I show that the introduction of new educational establishments in the 1860s and 1870s brought a mass expansion of the teaching of Persian in Bosnia. Even after the Austro-Hungarian occupation of 1878, Persian continued to be taught in old and some newly founded schools. However, the following decades saw a lively debate on the teaching of Persian, highlighting the redundancy of this language in a new social and cultural context. As a result, Persian was completely removed from Bosnian schools at the beginning of the 20th century. In addition to presenting new knowledge about the spread of Persian in the Balkans, and the instruction of foreign languages in the Ottoman Empire, I intend to demonstrate here that a similar process of withdrawing and removing Persian from the educational system was occurring in Habsburg Bosnia simultaneously with the decline of Persian in British India.

Keywords: Teaching Persian, Bosnia and Herzegovina, educational system, Ottoman Empire, Habsburg Monarchy

1. Introduction

At the height of its expansion, Persianate culture covered vast expanses, from China and the Indian Subcontinent in the east to the Balkans in the West. Intensive cultural interactions created and maintained the so-called 'Persianate world' that stretched from the Balkans to Bengal and even China.[1] Bosnia, a land in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula, is therefore considered the westernmost point of the spread of Persianate culture in the past. The dissemination of Persian literacy in this land began with the arrival of the Ottomans in the 15th century and lasted until the end of their rule in the late 19th century.

An educated person in the Ottoman Empire was expected to have a good grasp of Ottoman Turkish (the language of both officialdom and the Imperial educational system) and Arabic (the language for Islamic ritual and disciplines), as well as some mastery of Persian, depending on the area of study or literature in which they specialised.

1 Green 2019, xiv. In this sentence, Green summarised a previous and in a way a deeper debate about Hodgson's Nile-to-Oxus region vs. Ahmed's Balkan-to-Bengal complex. See Hodgson 1975; Ahmed 2015.

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Literacy in these three languages thus spread and developed in a variety of ways. As in other parts of the Ottoman Empire, from the mid-15th century onwards, Persian was considered the language of belles-lettres and the Sufi canon in Bosnia and other Balkan lands. Consequently, mastery of it was always connected with classical literary and Sufi texts. Some of these texts (most frequently Rumi's *Masnavi*, the *Golestān* of Saʿdi Shirāzi and the *Divān* of Hāfez Shirāzi) served local authors as models for the creation of both poetry and prose works; and classical Persian texts served others as subjects of commentaries. Some works in Persian – particularly the *Pandnāmeh* and the *Golestān* – occupied a significant place in the educational system, especially in certain Bosnian madrasas, up to the end of the 19th century. As a result, Persian was and remained a significant element in both the intellectual life and the general educational culture of Bosnia. This was its status as the country entered a period of turbulent changes during the final decades of Ottoman rule and the Austro-Hungarian interlude (i.e., from the 1860s to the beginning of the 20th century).

The second half of the 19th century was a major turning point in the political and cultural history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, both generally and in terms of Persian literacy. Even though the reforms were launched in 1839 by the central Ottoman government, it took more than two decades before they encompassed Bosnia in earnest. During the reign of the Ottoman governor Osman Paşa (1861-1869), a series of large infrastructural projects was introduced in Bosnia: the construction of roads fitted for wheeled traffic and new public buildings. Reforms were implemented in other areas, such as the judiciary and the economy; and particular attention was given to reforms in the field of education. Osman Paşa established Bosnian journalism by publishing a number of magazines through his press office and opened several public and secular schools (*ruşdiye*) that were attended by members of all Bosnian ethnic and confessional communities.[2] These and other schools took up the study of Persian among other subjects.

While the reforms were pursued with enthusiasm in the 1860s, they soon stalled under several of Osman Paşa's successors. Before long, with the Austro-Hungarian occupation of 1878, which changed to formal annexation in 1908, the country gradually passed from the Eastern into the Western culture circle, with subsequent changes that have continued to reverberate up to the present day. The Austro-Hungarian authorities started a large-scale modernisation of the country, by introducing major reforms in almost all fields of social life. These included building projects, agriculture, industry, opening up the country for foreign visitors and tourists, and particularly a series of educational reforms. Education was deemed essential to the Austro-Hungarian 'civilizing mission' in Bosnia.[3]

The shift in the dominant cultural frame was particularly significant for the status and study of foreign languages in Bosnia. After the Austro-Hungarian occupation, the so-called *Elsine-i selāse* (Arabic, Persian, and Turkish) no longer enjoyed the same status that had prevailed in the Ottoman period. Even though the cultivation of Arabic, Turk-

2 For more on this, see Okey 2007, 6-8.
3 Carmichael 2015, 41-43.

ish and Persian had never entirely ceased, despite the shrinking number of Bosnians inclined to master these languages,[4] active literacy and literary creation in them was gradually replaced by translation into Bosnian (which had barely existed as an activity during the Ottoman period) and ultimately by academic study.[5] In other words, previous active bearers of literacy and literary creation in turn became objects of academic study and investigation.

This article examines the teaching of Persian at educational institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina after the implementation of the educational reforms launched by the central Ottoman administration in Istanbul. It traces the introduction of the language into new public educational establishments in the last two decades of Ottoman rule, tracking its status after the country was no longer part of the Persianate geography, until its final abolition from the educational institutions in the early 20th century.

1.1. State of Research

Various authors have emphasised the importance of the period between the Tanzimat and the collapse of the Empire in the history of Ottoman education.[6] The Balkan states that were an integral part of the Ottoman Empire at the time followed the policies of the capital and went through major educational reforms during the second half of the 19th century.[7] Bosnia and Herzegovina was also part of this process.[8]

The modernisation of public education in the Ottoman Empire officially began with the establishment of the first modern civil schools in Istanbul in 1838-1839. Two major turning points in the history of Ottoman public education after this were the foundation of the Ministry of Public Education (*Maʿārif-i Umūmiye Nezāreti*) in 1857 and the issuance of the Regulation of Public Education (*Maʿārif-i Umūmiye Nizamnāmesi*) in 1869.[9] All these events initiated educational reforms in Bosnia and other Balkan countries, too. The reform of public education and the foundation of new public schools in Bosnia and some other Ottoman provinces did not start before the 1860s.[10] The attempts at reforming education in the provinces corresponded with the ruling bureaucrats in the late Tanzimat period recognising that the quality of the education provided by traditional schools was not suited to the new social and cultural circumstances.[11] Consequently, new educational institutions were established throughout the Empire, towards the last decades of the 19th century, in order to align them more closely with those of the European countries. Some of these were envisaged as bridges between the

4 Algar 1994, 264.
5 See Algar 2016, para. 8.
6 Ergin 1977; Berkes 1964; Somel 2001; Halis 2005; Akyüz 2008; Aktan 2018; 83-108, among others.
7 See Somel 1997; Aşkin 2017; Osmani and Pay 2018.
8 See, for instance, Ćurić 1983; Gölen 2004; Gölen 2010.
9 Somel 1997, 443-444.
10 Ćurić 1983, 142.
11 Somel 2001, 3.

old, religious education in the *ṣibyān-mektebs* and madrasas on the one hand, and the new, secular education on the other.

The extensive and far-reaching reform of education in the Ottoman Empire also influenced the study of foreign languages, particularly due to the introduction and expansion of French and innovations in the study of Turkish, Arabic and Persian.[12] Several scholars in the fields of Iranian studies and the history of Persian language and literature in the Ottoman Empire have stressed that important changes took place in the study of Persian during the 19th century.[13] These changes were primarily reflected in the introduction of Persian into the curricula of new public schools, such as the *ruşdiye* and the *Dār al-muʿallimin*. In addition, old dictionaries and textbooks were gradually abandoned, to be replaced by the first Persian grammars and textbooks modelled on the grammatical description of European languages. Another significant development in Persian language learning was a gradual shift from studying classical literary texts towards a focus on the contemporary language.

Shortly after the implementation of the wide range of Ottoman educational reforms, Austria-Hungary occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878, with the approval of the Congress of Berlin. Occupation gave way to fully-fledged annexation, which followed between 1908 and 1918. Even though this period lasted only forty years, it resulted in a huge transformation of Bosnian social institutions, including administration, religious communities and particularly schools.[14] After 1878, the educational system of Bosnia and Herzegovina underwent fundamental changes: most of the Ottoman educational establishments were closed and only some were later reopened, albeit with significantly altered programmes. However, the local Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) intelligentsia sought to preserve its own specific educational culture under the new circumstances.

Thanks to the Austro-Hungarian authorities, Bosnia and Herzegovina was largely spared the violent de-Ottomanisation of its urban centres, in contrast with the experience of neighbouring Serbia and Montenegro. Bosnian towns retained their Islamic character, which was best reflected not only in Islamic architecture, but in a number of other important continuities: religious endowments, Islamic judiciary and courts, and most importantly, educational autonomy.[15] Furthermore, a local committee that administered religious and educational issues affecting Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina (*ʿUlemā-meclis*) was established.[16] As a result of educational autonomy, many subjects and courses previously taught in Ottoman schools continued to operate in the first two decades of Austro-Hungarian rule. These subjects were also included in the curricula of some new establishments. However, a shortage of teaching materials and well-trained personnel posed a serious challenge in preserving the educational autonomy of Bosnian Muslims.

12 Potukoğlu and Büyüktolu 2020, 2007.
13 Riyāhi 1369/1990, 242-247; Rašnavzādeh 1383/2004, 382-385; Çelik 2005; Inan 2019, 92.
14 Furat 2012, 80.
15 See Okey 2007, 49-52.
16 Ćurić 1983, 235-236.

The case of the Persian language at these schools has attracted little scholarly attention, although, as illustrated below, its learning sparked numerous debates at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Any discussion of the status of Persian in the educational system of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the second half of the 19th century should start with an overview of the position of the language in traditional Ottoman educational institutions, particularly the madrasas. Even though it represents one of the three most important and interrelated aspects of Persian literacy in the Ottoman Empire (the other two being the spread of Persian classics and literary production by local authors), the status of Persian in Ottoman madrasas has not been comprehensively studied. Research findings so far tend to be partial, and conclusions based on individual cases. Moreover, contemporary research offers a wide range of contradictory conclusions, as some authors argue in favour of the importance of Persian, while others suggest that it was rarely taught at madrasas. The status of Persian in Ottoman madrasas in Bosnia has been the subject of even less investigation and requires a focused study. However, the current state of research does allow for some general conclusions, which will improve our understanding of the history of the subject in the second half of the 19th century.

In this context, I provide in this study new information about the spread of the Persian language and its place within the educational system of the once westernmost frontier of the Ottoman Empire and the Persianate world at the time of the transition between the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian periods of Bosnia-Herzegovina. I also offer new insights into the implementation of the Ottoman educational reform in the provinces of the Empire during the second half of the 19th century, particularly in the field of foreign language instruction. Finally, I analyse Persian language teaching in Bosnian madrasas in earlier centuries, in a broader context, thus contributing to the study of Persian at Ottoman madrasas. Although Persian enjoyed higher esteem in the Indian Subcontinent than in the Ottoman Balkans, where it was regarded as a third significant language following Turkish and Arabic, there are similarities between the decline of Persian in India and Persian in Bosnia in the 19th and the start of the 20th centuries.[17] I make a few comparisons in this regard.

1.2. Sources

The data for this project were collected mainly from the following four periodicals published in Sarajevo from the 1860s to the 1910s: *Bosna, Sarajevski cvjetnik*, *Vaṭan* and *Bošnjak*. The first two, *Bosna* and *Sarajevski cvjetnik* (*Gülşen-i Saray*), were weekly magazines published bilingually in Ottoman and Bosnian by the official Bosnian Vilayet Printing House (*Sopronova pečatnja*). The Arabic script was used for Ottoman Turkish and the Cyrillic script for Bosnian. Every issue comprised four unnumbered pages: the first and fourth in Ottoman, the second and third in Bosnian. The *Bosna* and the *Sa-*

17 On the decline of Persian in India, see Cohn 1996; Alam 1998; Rahman 1999; Green 2019b.

rajevski cvjetnik published documents and regulations issued by the local authorities, which reflected the official policy of the central government in Istanbul as well. These two gazettes also reported about new schools – their general condition, their programmes, and the regulations pertaining to them in the Bosnian Vilayet from 1866 until 1872. They regularly gave accounts of examinations, providing valuable data on the teaching of Persian.

Bošnjak and *Vaṭan* were two important privately-owned weekly magazines in Habsburg Bosnia. The former was founded in 1891 by a group of Muslim intellectuals and literati for the promotion of national ideas of ethnic Bosniaks, and continued to be published until 1910. Its first owner was Mehmed-beg Kapetanović Ljubušak, the mayor of Sarajevo at the time, while one of its editors was a renowned Bosnian novelist, Edhem Mulabdić. This magazine was an important vehicle for the expression of progressive European ideas among Bosniaks and opposition to the aggressive policies of the neighbouring countries. *Vaṭan* was published from 1884 to 1897 in Turkish, with the occasional text in Arabic; it was primarily intended for local Muslim religious scholars and teachers who were still more accustomed to the Arabic script and old educational traditions. This magazine promoted stronger ties with Ottoman culture, but at the same time was loyal to the Habsburg government.

In addition to the above, the primary sources I used for the present paper include an issue of the Yearbook of the Bosnian Vilayet (*Bosna Vilayeti Salnamesi*), as well as archival material relating to certain schools that had Persian in their curriculum.

2. Discussion

2.1. Studying Persian in Ottoman Madrasas

The most important educational institutions in the Ottoman Empire were the madrasas, in which Arabic occupied a more significant place than Persian or Turkish.[18] Arabic morphology and syntax comprised the core of the madrasa curriculum for preparatory studies, and stylistic and rhetoric were the main subjects at more advanced levels. Even the textbooks for studying the core disciplines (Qur'anic exegesis – *Tafsir*, Prophetic traditions – *Hadith*, and Islamic jurisprudence – *Fiqh*) were generally in Arabic, too.[19] Accordingly, Arabic had clear primacy in the curricula of Ottoman madrasas in Bosnia, as well as in other parts of the Empire and the Islamic world at large. Ottoman was officially the first language of the Empire, and students started learning it during the first phase of education in the *ṣıbyān-mektebs*, so that graduates of the madrasa system also knew it. A number of commentaries on classical works written in Ottoman were also read and studied at the madrasas. Persian was not as prominent in this regard as either Arabic or Ottoman Turkish; or rather, we know considerably less about how it was studied than we do about Arabic or Ottoman.

18 Ćurić 1983, 119.
19 See Mehmedbašić 1937, 24-26.

While it is mentioned as far back as the time of Mehmed II (i.e., Mehmed the Conqueror, 1451-1481), we know that Persian, as a course, was not part of the typical madrasa curriculum until the 19th century.[20] Its absence from madrasa programmes is sometimes explained in terms of negative attitudes, in madrasa circles, towards classical Persian texts, particularly those of a Sufi character. On the one hand, these circles refused to accept Persian poets like Hāfez Shirāzi, ʿOrfi Shirāzi, and ʿOmar Khayyām, as they wrote of wine and women; on the other hand, they neither understood nor favoured the concept of *vaḥdat al-vojud*, 'the Unity of Existence', as propagated in the works of authors like Sanā'i Ghaznavi, Farid al-Din ʿAttār and Jalāl al-Din Rumi. As a result, Persian had a certain stigma and it was felt that it was necessary to establish separate institutions for the study of these works.[21] Or rather, these classics were studied with private tutors, outside the institutional framework. A similar process was observable in the teaching of Persian in Indian madrasas under British rule. The metaphorical use, in Persian poetry, of topics such as wine, adolescent boys, and the union the Beloved was viewed by the religious authorities as having a corrupting effect on its readers. For this reason, Indian scholars either eliminated Persian classics from madrasas or used abridged and censored texts in the teaching process. This phenomenon was part of the puritanical movement that motivated Muslim religious scholars in British India to change centuries-old curricula.[22]

Nonetheless, a significant number of graduates from madrasas, the fundamental educational institution of the Ottoman Empire, knew Persian. The language was particularly dear to Ottoman intellectuals of the earlier period (14th and 15th centuries), who were still closely connected to the Seljuk tradition, and Persian was the language of both the culture and administration during the Seljuk period. Some of these intellectuals from the first decades of the Ottoman era were trained in Seljuk madrasas and later joined the Ottoman service. The Persian literary tradition was also conveyed by the Ilkhanids and the Timurids, who ruled over large parts of Anatolia in the 13th and 14th centuries. Furthermore, the Ottomans were also highly conscious of the Persian literary scene in both Safavid Iran and Mughal India. Educated in the cosmopolitanism of Persian, many madrasa graduates still knew Persian during the classical Ottoman period (15th and 16th centuries).[23]

To better understand this contradiction, one should note that the fields studied in Ottoman madrasas changed and differed significantly according to the period and geographical area.[24] This is particularly clear from a 1641 endowment document (*vakfnāme*) for the *Dar al-Hadith* in the Bosnian town of Livno, in which Mustafa-bey ibn Ibrahim Agha stipulates that the *Masnavi* of Jalāl al-Din Rumi should be studied

20 Inan 2019, 92.
21 Ergin 1977, vol. I, 154.
22 Rahman 1999, 59-60.
23 Özkan 2017, 154; about the status of Persian in the Ilkhanate and the Timurid empire, see Morgan 2016, 66-68, 91-92.
24 Ihsanoglu n.d., 13

in the school.[25] The *Masnavi* was very rarely studied in Ottoman madrasas. On the other hand, despite the negative attitude towards certain classical Persian texts among certain madrasa circles, there is ample documentary evidence that Persian was studied in other contexts throughout the Ottoman Empire. The classes were commonly named after the textbooks studied,[26] which may have misled some modern scholars, who claim that the language was not studied in the madrasas at all.[27] Furthermore, at least in the Balkans, alongside the more important madrasas were *hāniḳāhs*, establishments for educating and training dervishes and prospective Sufi masters. Sufi theory and practice were central to these establishments, and Sufi teaching in the Ottoman Empire was based largely on classical texts in Persian. Thus, these establishments also contributed to the fact that Persian was given a significant place in the educational system. The Bosnian *hāniḳāhs* were never just *tekkes*, but also madrasas with a particular Sufi orientation. For instance, until the early 20th century, the Gazi Husrev-bey *hāniḳāh* was termed a madrasa and its rector a *muderris*, or madrasa teacher. This is confirmed in manuscript copies preserved in the collections of the Gazi Husrev-bey library, on whose pages the scribes note that they copied the works in the *Hāniḳāh madrasa*.[28]

Two classical Persian texts managed to pass 'below the radar' of madrasa circles, insofar as they differ from those mentioned above, in terms of both content and theme. These were the *Golestān* of Saʿdi Shirāzi and the *Pandnāmeh*, a work misattributed for centuries to Farid al-Din ʿAttār and so often in the Ottoman lands referred to as the *Pend-i ʿAṭṭār*. These two works had a prominent place in madrasa curricula throughout the Empire, as confirmed by the significant number of manuscript copies made and preserved in Bosnian madrasas. The first copies of Saʿdi's *Golestān* made in Bosnia date from as early as the 15th century, allowing us to conclude that the work was popular from the very beginning of the Ottoman period. The text was commonly copied in the local madrasas of Bosnia,[29] which means that it was also studied there. The *Pandnāmeh* began to be used more widely from the start of the 17th century, which is when we begin to see a larger number of copies of the work appearing in Bosnia, too.[30]

The *Golestān* and the *Pandnāmeh* were not used for studying Persian as much as for studying Islamic ethics.[31] Before or while studying these works, students prepared by poring over dictionaries or learning the texts by heart. Persian-Turkish dictionaries were undoubtedly of considerable help to Bosnian students simultaneously learning Persian and Turkish, given that neither language was their native one. Foremost amongst them

25 See Aličić 1941, 7-11.

26 A unique feature of Ottoman madrasas was the development of the entire curriculum based on textbooks rather than subjects. See Sijamhodžić-Nadarević 2017, 229.

27 For the names of some of the madrasas where Persian was taught, see İzgi, I, 167–169.

28 See Handžić 1936, 40-41.

29 See Trako 1986, 184-201.

30 Muḥammed b. Dervīş Mostārī made the oldest known copy of the Pandnāmeh in 1004/1595, and the book was copied or printed up until the second half of the XIX century. For more on the copying of the *Pandnāmeh* and the *Golestān* in Bosnian madrasas, see Ždralović, II, 31, 244, 245, 259; Trako, 1986, 150; Nametak and Trako 2003, II, 267, etc.

31 See Ćurić 1983, 120

were the *Subḥe-i sibyān*, an Arabic-Persian-Turkish dictionary composed by Muhammad al-Rumi, and intended for children and beginners; the *Tuḥfe-i Şāḥidī*, a Persian-Turkish dictionary in verse, written in 1515 by the Mevlevī Sheykh Ibrāhīm-dede Şāḥidī;[32] and the *Tuḥfe-i Vehbī*, another Persian-Turkish word list in verse composed in 1792 by Sünbübulzāde Vehbī, who was the Ottoman ambassador to Iran for a time.[33] A large number of Bosnian copies of the *Tuḥfe-i Şāḥidī* date from the 18th century, suggesting that this was the point of its incorporation into the teaching programmes of a larger number of madrasas. This does not mean that the *Tuḥfe-i Şāḥidī* was not required before that. Far from it, as is evidenced by the large number of copies executed during the 16th and 17th centuries, and even more by the preface to Mustafa Ejubović – Sheykh Yuyo's commentary on the dictionary, written in 1698. In the introduction to his commentary, Sheykh Yuyo points out that the dictionary was popular in Bosnia and other lands, and that he had written the commentary at the request of friends to facilitate its learning.[34] The original copy of Ejubović's commentary was kept in the collection of the Oriental Institute in Sarajevo, but the manuscript was destroyed in 1992, when the Institute was shelled and burned down during the Bosnian War.

The popularity of the *Tuḥfe-i Şāḥidī* is further confirmed by the fact that it can be found copied together with the *Pandnāmeh*, in dozens of manuscripts executed in different Bosnian madrasas. One such codex containing the *Pandnāmeh* and Ejubović's commentary on the *Tuḥfe-i Şāḥidī* was copied in the Atmejdan madrasa in Sarajevo in 1154/1741, by one Ismāʿīl b. Ibrāhīm b. Ṣāliḥ b. Ḳāsim. Another copy was made at the Gazi Husrev-bey madrasa in Sarajevo, in 1176/1762.[35] The *Tuḥfe-i Vehbī* is considerably more common from the start of the 19th century onwards, particularly printed copies of the work.[36]

Therefore, it can be safely claimed that Persian was incorporated into the curriculum at a considerable number of madrasas in Ottoman Bosnia. However, generally such courses were not listed under the title of Persian, but under Islamic ethics, and sometimes only the titles of the textbooks used for studying are mentioned.

32 The *Tuḥfe-i Şāḥidī* is a very important text for Bosnia and Herzegovina's cultural heritage. As well as being a textbook for Persian within the educational system, the dictionary also served as a model for the first Turkish-Bosnian dictionary by Muḥammed Hevāyī Uskūfi, entitled *Maḳbūl-i ʿārif* (often referred to in Bosnian as *Potur Šahidija*), which dates from 1631. Apart from this, at least five Bosnian authors wrote commentaries on it, namely Aḥmed Sūdī, Mustafa Ejubović – Sheykh Yuyo, ʿAtfi Aḥmed-i Bosnavī, ʿAli Zekī Kimyāger and Aḥmed Hātem Aḳovālizāde.

33 See Inan 2019, 88.

34 Trako, 1986, 99-100.

35 Trako 1986, 79; Ždralović 1988, vol. II, 143. For other copies of the Tuḥfe-i Şāḥidī in Bosnian madrasas, see Ždralović 1988, vol. II. 187, 197, 245; Popara 2004, 559-560, 564-565.

36 More than forty printed copies of the dictionary have been preserved at the Gazi Husrev-bey library in Sarajevo.

2.2. Expansion: The Final Two Decades of the Ottoman Period

The new schools founded in the Ottoman Empire after the Tanzimat took up the study of Persian as an important aspect of general Ottoman culture. Only after this did it become possible to see how widespread Persian had been in the preceding period. In reality, Persian did not become more important in Ottoman culture during the Tanzimat period, just more visible, as the educational system overall became more regulated. The first of the new educational establishments were the *ruşdiyes*, lower, middle schools positioned in the educational system between the *ṣıbyān-mekteb* and the madrasa. The first Ottoman *ruşdiye* opened in Istanbul in 1840.[37] From the 1860s, there were more than thirty such schools in the Bosnian Vilayet (which in the 19th century included parts of today's Serbia and Montenegro, or more precisely the historical region of the Sandžak), and the plan was to open such a school in any settlement with more than 500 inhabitants. Pupils studied in the *ruşdiye* for four years. The best surviving written records belong to the Sarajevo *ruşdiye*, which was founded between 1861 and 1864.[38] *Ruşdiye* schools in other towns date mostly from the 1860s, and in some cases the 1870s. Alongside Arabic and Turkish, these schools offered instruction in Persian, religious education, ethics, history, geography, arithmetic, geometry and logic. An early issue of the magazine *Bosna* mentions that students at the Sarajevo *ruşdiye* were required to take exams in various subjects, including Persian. A certain Seyrī Efendī is mentioned as the examiner.[39] Persian was also taught at the Banja Luka *ruşdiye*, as well as in Travnik, Glamoč, and elsewhere.[40] In 1870, *Bosna* also reported on a test at the *ruşdiye* in Novi Pazar (today in Serbia) that included questions on Arabic, Persian and Turkish grammar.[41] On the same day, the *Sarajevski cvjetnik* published a letter from a student at the Mostar *ruşdiye*, Alija Rašid Rizvanbegović Stočević, in which he notes that the students attained a good mastery of Arabic and Persian grammar.[42] Two years later, another student of the same school, Jusuf Zija, reported that in just two years the students attained significant success in Arabic, Turkish, Persian and several other subjects.[43] These data suggests that lessons in Arabic, Turkish and Persian formed the core of the *ruşdiye* curriculum and that Persian was taught in most, if not all, Bosnian *ruşdiyes* up to 1878.

The Persian textbooks used in the schools were the aforementioned *Tuḥfe-i Vehbī* and *Taʿlīm-i fārsī*. This is confirmed by a letter from 1891, published in the magazine *Bošnjak*, by a student from the Sarajevo *ruşdiye* (see more below). The *Taʿlīm-i fārsī* is a short textbook of thirty pages penned by the Ottoman bureaucrat Kemal Paşa (1808-

37 For more information about function and importance of *ruşdiye* schools in the Ottoman Empire, see Berkes 1964, 106-110.
38 Ćurić 1983, 142.
39 Bosna no. 27, 27 November 1866.
40 Ćurić 1983, 144-146.
41 Bosna no. 187, 10 January 1870.
42 Sarajevski cvjetnik no. 2.2, 10 January 1870.
43 Bosna no. 318, 30 July 1872.

1887), who served as an interpreter of Persian, and was minister of public education between 1847 and 1854. The introduction of the book includes a statement that it was written to meet the needs of the *ruşdiyes*.[44] The textbook presents parts of speech and their combinations in various types of sentences, starting with pronouns, through nouns and adjectives, to verbs and numbers. A short dictionary of common verbs is appended to the book, with translations into Turkish. Brief explanations, in Turkish, of certain grammatical categories of Persian are given in a few places throughout the book.

Persian also figured in the teaching of Islamic ethics in the higher grades of the *ruşdiye*. After the *Taʿlim-i fārsī* and the *Tuḥfe-i Vehbī*, students read the *Pandnāmeh*, the *Golestān,* and a short collection of ethical and didactic texts in Persian entitled the *Nasihat al-hokamā*.[45]

However, *Ruşdiyes* were not the only Bosnian schools in which Persian was taught. On 31 July 1867, the *Sarajevski cvjetnik* published a decree with the title *Uredba o osnivanju Darul-muallimina* (*Order to establish a Dār al-muʿallimin*), "a higher school where primary school teachers can be instructed in the disciplines they need". Persian had a significant place in this higher school from its inception, both in preparation for the entrance exam and in the actual teaching programme. Article 2 of the *Order* sets out the conditions for enrolment. Potential graduates were expected to know Arabic and Persian (Turkish was assumed as the official language). Regarding Persian, the level required was "*that they have studied the Pend-i ʿAṭṭār, or have progressed sufficiently in practical terms to be able to read and understand the text of this book*". Article 7 stipulates what is to be read at the school, including the titles of two aforementioned Persian-Turkish verse dictionaries, the *Tuḥfe-i Şāhidī* and the *Tuḥfe-i Vehbī*.[46] The article states that the dictionaries are to be read in Turkish, supporting the view expressed above that these two dictionaries were used for learning Persian and Turkish simultaneously. The teacher of Persian at the Sarajevo *Dār al-muʿallimin*, from its foundation to the Austro-Hungarian occupation (1869-1878), was ʿĀrif Sidḳī, a Kurd from Diyarbakir. In 1849, he was a teacher at the madrasa in Fojnica, but by 1868 he had moved to Sarajevo and held the position of *muderris* at the Miṣrī mosque and Sheykh of the Skender Paşa tekke. Two years after the occupation, he was a teacher at the Gazi Husrev-bey madrasa in Sarajevo, before leaving for Istanbul. Sidḳī was remembered as an expert teacher of Persian, who contributed greatly, through his activities and teaching, to the programme of the *Dār al-muʿallimin* and other schools in Bosnia.[47]

Between 1865 and 1869, an Administrative School (also called *Mourning School*, i.e., *Ṣabāḥ mektebi*) was active in Sarajevo.[48] This school was opened to educate future gov-

44 Kemal Paşa 1291 [1874], 2.
45 See Ćurić 1983, 153.
46 Sarajevski cvjetnik no. 31.1, 31 July 1867.
47 See Traljić 1937, 136-137.
48 The school opened for a short period in 1865, but teaching was then interrupted, to be continued in 1867. It is known that it was operational up until August 1869, when Bosna (no. 166, 16 August 1869) reported that it was in summer recess. There are no available data

ernment officials, particularly clerks for the service of the Bosnian Vilayet. In one of its issues, *Bosna* published an order from the grand vizier, instructing the Bosnian governor (*vāli*) to establish the school. The order states that candidates to be enrolled should be aged between eighteen and thirty and that the teaching programme would last two years and include the following subjects: history and geography, French, Persian, and Bosnian.[49] However, the examination list includes the titles of a number of other subjects, including *fetvā*, stylistics (*belāġe*) and arithmetic (*ḥesāb*).[50] The Persian lecturer and examiner was Seyrī Efendī, who also taught the language at the Sarajevo *ruşdiye*. We know this from published evidence recording the names of teachers and graduates of the school.[51]

In 1873, another and somewhat different educational establishment opened its doors in Sarajevo: the School for Cadets (*Mekteb-i iʿdādī*). This school was modelled after contemporary French military academies, and the French consul in Bosnia and Herzegovina was pleasantly surprised by at least one student who knew French. Persian was part of the curriculum, its teacher being a certain Muṣṭafā Efendī with the rank of captain. The same teacher, who had come to Sarajevo from Istanbul in September 1873 to take up his post, also taught maths.[52] During the first year, students were enrolled without an entrance exam, but by the next year, the school authorities had already published suggestions as to how to prepare for the entrance exam. This was taken in front of a committee and included *ṣarf* (Arabic morphology), *naḥv* (Arabic syntax), Turkish *imlā* (orthography) and the *Golestān* (for Persian).[53] Therefore, Persian was an entrance requirement for this school, similar to the *Dār al-muʿallimin*, and was included in the curriculum.

The inclusion of Persian in the curricula of these new schools with their various orientations gave a fillip to the study of the language in Ottoman Bosnia. In the final decades of Ottoman rule, the study of Persian increased even further, as it was introduced into the programmes of the *ruşdiyes* and the Administrative School, and was made a condition for enrolment and part of the curriculum at the *Dār al-muʿallimin* and the Cadet School. Therefore, it was equal in status to Turkish and Arabic in all the schools, while in the Administrative School, it was even preferred to Arabic, with the focus on the latter being largely left to the madrasas, as the Islamic religious schools.

on the school's activities after this. For more on its activities and organisation, see Ćurić 1983, 155-158.

49 Bosna, no. 50, 13 May 1867. Bosna was printed in both Bosnian and Turkish, with official documents translated for the local readership. The translation of this order into Bosnian is not fully faithful to the Turkish original, as the Turkish text specifies French, Persian and Bosnian, but the Bosnian translation has Arabic instead of French. This mistake in translation led Ćurić (1983, 156) to mistakenly claim that Arabic (and not French) was taught at the school. The correctness of the Turkish version is confirmed by a later report in Bosna no. 82 from 23 December 1867 on examinations, which mentions French but not Arabic.

50 Bosna no. 82, 23 December 1867.

51 Bosna no. 132, 21 December 1868.

52 Bosna Vilayeti Salnamesi 1291 [1874], 48; Bosna no. 377, 15 September 1873.

53 Bosna no. 418, 29 June 1874.

It thus seems reasonable to conclude that during the final two decades of Ottoman rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina, all students passing through the reformed educational system, as well as a certain number of those going through the madrasas, studied Persian. Candidates for the *Dār al-muʿallimin* and the Cadet School were expected to have some prior knowledge of Persian before enrolment, which meant being able to read and understand the texts of the *Pandnāmeh* or the *Golestān*. This tells us something very important – these texts were used at two levels of education at least during this period: in the *ruşdiyes* and in the higher schools. Graduates from the madrasas where Persian was taught, and who later enrolled in the *Dār al-muʿallimin*, studied Persian at all three levels of their education.

Even if the educational system of the Ottoman Empire in general, and in Bosnia in particular, underwent significant change during the 19th century, the teaching of Persian continued to follow the established methodology. This methodology can essentially be summed up as reading the *Pandnāmeh* and/or the *Golestān* and learning (often by heart) two Persian-Turkish dictionaries: the *Tuḥfe-i Şāhidī* and the *Tuḥfe-i Vehbī*. This preserved a certain continuity in the methodology for teaching and studying the language. However, it was precisely this insistence on old literature that would become a major shortcoming of Persian instruction in the following decades.

2.3. From Questioning to Abolition: The Austro-Hungarian Period

The madrasas were the best preserved of the Bosnian schools at the beginning of the Austro-Hungarian period and remained relatively intact until 1895. However, reforms to teaching had already been introduced in these institutions. Back in 1873, the grand vizier of the Ottoman Empire sent a letter to the government of the Bosnian Vilayet, informing them of the intention to regulate teaching at madrasas. The letter lists the books to be studied,[54] with particular emphasis on Arabic morphology and syntax. Indeed, more than half of the recommended textbooks relate to these subjects, while the rest cover Islamic religious disciplines. Persian is not mentioned. The order certainly had an impact on the standing of the language at madrasas in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We know, for example, that Persian survived and continued to be taught for some time during the Austro-Hungarian occupation at the Elçī Ibrāhīm Paşa (Feyziye) madrasa in Travnik, as well as the Atmejdan and Miṣrī madrasas in Sarajevo, where the teacher was the aforementioned ʿĀrif Sidḳī from Diyarbakir.[55] In 1895, the Bosnian grand mufti, as the supreme religious authority of the Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina under Austro-Hungarian rule, published general directives to govern the operations of madrasas, which again make no mention of Persian.[56] We also know that Persian was studied in certain madrasas in other cities and towns, probably through the reading of the *Pandnāmeh*. For instance, Mehmed Hulusi Mulahalilović (1878-1952), who would later

54 Bosna no. 358, 06 June 1873.
55 See Algar 2016, para. 8.
56 See, for instance, Miri Zija 1900 2; Ćurić 1983, 228.

be the first translator of the *Pandnāmeh* into Bosnian, studied the language at the madrasa in Brčko.[57] When these madrasas closed, the study of the language also stopped.

In November 1879, the Austro-Hungarian authorities established the Realgymnasium (now the First Gymnasium) in Sarajevo, which offered Persian as an optional subject during the first years of its life.[58] The list of students from 1879/1880 gives the names of five students from the preparatory class and twelve from the first year who studied Persian. The student list from 1883/1884 also contains Persian as a subject, but it is no longer listed in the annual from 1908.[59] It would appear that Persian was temporarily removed from the school programme, no doubt because the highly intensive programme overburdened Muslim students, who consequently fell behind other pupils in studying obligatory subjects.[60]

Clearly, there is no further mention in the sources of the Administrative and Cadet Schools, because they had been established to train candidates for employment at Ottoman institutions and were therefore no longer required. The *Dār al-muʿallimin* was also suspended, but it was reactivated in 1891, with the goal of "*educating teachers for our schools, which will over time come into step with modern teaching professionals in contemporary Europe*".[61] Naturally, Persian does not appear in the subject list of the new programme.[62]

During 1892, there was an interesting discussion over introducing Turkish and Persian lessons into the programme of the new Sharia Judicial School (*Šerijatska sudačka škola*), founded in 1889 in Sarajevo. The *Vaṭan* magazine published a report on 3 June 1892 about a letter received from a reader complaining that Turkish and Persian were not included in the programme of the Sharia Judicial School. The response to the letter stated that there was no need for it, because a knowledge of Persian acquired by learning Turkish was quite sufficient; moreover, learning Persian in order to master Arabic was only necessary in Persia and the Ottoman Empire. It is clear from this that the opinion had already taken root that Persian was essentially a means or additional tool for mastering Turkish or Arabic.[63] The same issue of the publication carried a response to a student from the school, Ali Riza Prohić, which includes the following (see Fig. 1):

57 See Dobrača 1958, 333; Mulahalilović and Mrahorović 1990, 12-13.

58 See 'Naredba Zemaljske vlade za BiH kojom se otvara realni gimnazij' in Bukvić et al. 1990, 14. Barbalić (1955, 10) claims that Persian (and Arabic and Turkish) was obligatory 'for Muslim children', but this is not in line with the Order and is likely mistaken.

59 The partial archives of the First Gymnasium are kept at the Sarajevo Historical Archives (Sign: PG–235).

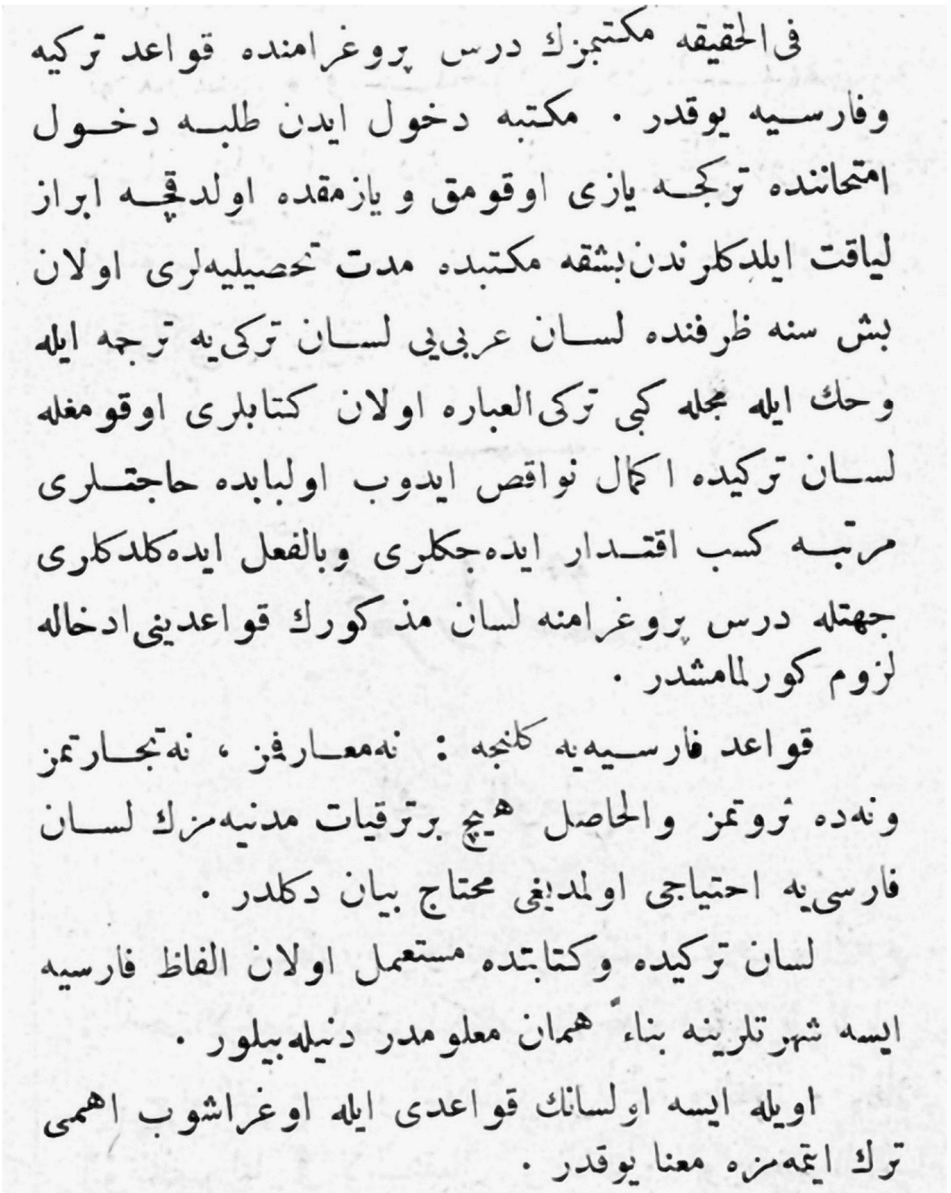
60 The first grade involved thirty-five hours of mandatory classes per week, compared to thirty-six in the second grade. See Barbalić 1955, 10.

61 Bošnjak 17.1, 22 October 1891, 3.

62 See Ćurić 1983, 242; on how these institutions operated, see Mulabdić 1941, 141-148.

63 This view would continue to be maintained for several decades, when Persian studies, covering both language and literature, were included as part of the introduction of an oriental languages programme at the Faculty of philosophy/arts in Sarajevo in 1950, with a view to aiding better mastery of Turkish literary and linguistic studies.

Figure 1: A letter from Ali Riza Prohić to the Vaṭan Magazine, *03 June 1892, 4*



فی الحقیقه مکتبمزك درس پروغرامنده قواعد ترکیه
وفارسیه یوقدر . مکتبه دخول ایدن طلبه دخول
امتحاننده ترکجه یازی اوقومق و یازمقده اولدقجه ابراز
لیاقت ایلدکلرندن بشقه مکتبده مدت تحصیلیه‌لری اولان
بش سنه ظرفنده لسان عربیی لسان ترکیه ترجمه ایله
وحك ایله مجله کبی ترکی العباره اولان کتابلری اوقومغله
لسان ترکیده اکمال نواقص ایدوب اولبابده حاجتلری
مرتبه کسب اقتدار ایده‌جکلری وبالفعل ایده‌کلدکلری
جهتله درس پروغرامنه لسان مذکورك قواعدینی ادخاله
لزوم کورلمامشدر .

قواعد فارسیه‌یه کلنجه : نه‌معارفمز ، نه‌تجارتمز
ونه‌ده ثروتمز والحاصل هیچ برترقیات مدنیه‌مزك لسان
فارسیه احتیاجی اولمدیغی محتاج بیان دکلدر .

لسان ترکیده وکتابتده مستعمل اولان الفاظ فارسیه
ایسه شهرتلرینه بناءً همان معلومدر دنیله‌بیلور .

اویله ایسه اولسانك قواعدی ایله اوغراشوب اهمی
ترك ایتمه‌مزه معنا یوقدر .

It is true that our school's programme does not include Turkish or Persian grammar. Students enrolling at the school are expected to demonstrate, at the entrance exam, a satisfactory knowledge of Turkish through both reading and writing. In addition, during their five years of training at the school, students will perfect their knowledge

of Turkish, both by translating from Arabic into Turkish and by reading books in Turkish, including the *Mecelle*.[64] As they really will achieve the desired level of knowledge in this way, and regularly do so, there is no need for the teaching programme to include the grammar of these languages.

With regard to Persian grammar, there is no need for Persian, whether for our system of education, for trade purposes, for our own personal enrichment, or indeed for our cultural development.

As for Persian words present in Turkish, it suffices to say that their popularity renders them sufficiently well known. Accordingly, there is no justification for spending time on the grammar of that language and neglecting other matters.[65]

Jusuf Midžić, a student at the Sharia Judicial School, was involved in the debate, as he sent in his reaction to *Bošnjak*. His contribution includes the following:

Jednom od gospode dopisnika 'Vatanovih' prohtjelo se nešto napisati, pa valjda ne znajući šta bolje, taknu u našu Šerijatsku sudačku školu [...] što ne stoji u naukovnom programu našega mekteba turski i perzijski jezik. Znam dobro da neće nijedan pametan i našem mektebu vješt čovjek držati one prigovore umjesnim [...] Šerijatska sudačka škola nije ustrojena da djeca u njoj nauče pisati bilo bosanski, turski, perzijski ili arapski, nego da se odrasla taleba usavrši u većima naukama... Ja mislim da neće niko, ko makar malo poznaje šta je škola, reći da učenje turskog i perzijskog jezika spada u program takog mekteba [...]jer se sa potpunim pravom mora zahtijevati od đaka u 20. godini – kao što se taleba u Šerijatsku prima – da zna turski i perzijski koliko je uopće nužno.

One of the honourable correspondents of *Vaṭan* seems to have wished to write something, but not being quite sure what, decided to attack our Sharia Judicial School [... stating] that our school programme includes neither Turkish nor Persian. I am quite sure that nobody with any knowledge of our school will give any weight to these objections [...] The Sharia Judicial School is not for teaching children Bosnian, Turkish, Persian or Arabic, but to allow grown-up students to perfect themselves in a range of disciplines... I doubt that anyone with the least familiarity with education would claim that learning Turkish and Persian are necessary parts of such a school programme [...] because it is to be fully expected that students of 20 years of age or so, like the students at the Sharia School, will already know both Turkish and Persian, as generally required.[66]

64 The Mecelle (*Mecelle-i aḥkām-i ʿadliye*) is the first official codification of the civil law in the Ottoman Empire. In the Bosnian *Vilayet*, as an integral part of the Ottoman Empire, the *Mecelle* served for a decade as the source for the newly formed regular and Sharia courts. After the Austro-Hungarian occupation in 1878, it continued to serve as the source of civil law. As many local court officials were unable to read the original text in Turkish, it was translated into Bosnian in 1906. On the application of the *Mecelle* in post-Ottoman Bosnia, see Bećić 2014, 51-65.

65 Vaṭan, 03 June 1892, 3-4.

66 Bošnjak 23.2, 09 June 1892, 3.

The teaching of Persian thus continued in the *ruşdiyes*. The Austro-Hungarian authorities treated them as primary schools for Muslim children, but generally considered them unnecessary. From 1891, the main source of data on these schools is the *Bošnjak* magazine. We learn something more about their role, and the operation of the Sarajevo school in particular, in the issue of 13 August 1891. There, we find that *ruşdiye* are generally tasked with training the young in the fundamentals of their faith and ensuring that they are literate in, and learn, Arabic and Turkish, while also providing training in several general subjects through instruction in their native language. As a result, Persian remains in the teaching programme of at least some *ruşdiyes*, as the rest of the text makes clear. The author writes that Arabic, Persian and Turkish were taught at the Sarajevo *ruşdiye*. He goes on to criticise the teaching methodology, considering the material too extensive, comparable to studies of "*those preparing to be a muderris*". He goes on to criticise the fact that students have to read and translate "*philosophical books like Saʿdi's Golestān"*, and "*learn Turkish-Persian dictionaries in verse by heart*".[67]

The following issue includes a discussion of textbooks. According to a reader with the initials F. S., who was, according to the editors, a final-year gymnasium student who had quite recently graduated from a *ruşdiye*, the *Tuḥfe-i Vehbī* was not fit for use. It should be replaced by learning from "*the Arabic verse dictionary (Subḥe-i Ṣibyān) because it includes words from the Qur'an, and in this way, children would learn qur'anic words and Arabic verse, which is more important for students than Persian*" (underlined by M. D.).[68]

Three weeks later, Edhem Mulabdić (using the pseudonym Ašik Garib) criticised the teaching methods of the *ṣibyān-mektebs*, praising the *ruşdiyes*, by comparison, and evaluating their students as being better educated than those from the *mekteb*. He went on to state that "*a ruşdiye student will know how to write letters, read the papers, keep accounts, and so forth in both Turkish and Bosnian, while also understanding something of Arabic and Persian*".[69]

However, as time passed, the negative assessment of textbooks for learning Persian in the *ruşdiyes* came to the fore, but so did the idea that this language was generally not worth teaching in schools. The attitude expressed in a letter by students at the Sharia Judicial School in 1892 seems to have gained weight, namely that a knowledge of Persian was unnecessary under the emerging social and cultural situation. Muslim children were overburdened by learning antiquated material that was intended just for them, and so fell behind other children in their general education. The weakest link in this chain of education was Persian. This approach was clearly articulated by an author using the pseudonym Miri Zija, in a series of articles, starting in 1900 in the magazine *Bošnjak,* about the educational system in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As for Persian in the *ruşdiyes*, he wrote:

67 Bošnjak 7.1, 13 August 1891, 1-2. Similarly, students in some other parts of the Ottoman Empire were unable to understand the courses of Arabic and Persian languages, so were forced to memorise the textbooks in a mechanical way. See Somel 2001, 263.

68 Bošnjak 8.1, 20 August 1891, 2-3.

69 Ašik Garib 1891, 2.

> *I dok se I ne misli o tom da bi djeca što bolje učila turski jezik I da bi, što je najpotrebnije proučavala islamske nauke I u islamu se usavršavala, dotle se u ruždijama uveo I ukorijenio perzijski jezik. Naime, tu djeca moraju obligatno učiti u I I II razredu gramatiku perzijskog jezika, a u IV razredu Gjulistan, I s time džabe glavu razbijati, dok o turskom jeziku pojma ne imadu, dočim za nas perzijski jezik jest toliko 203oliko, recimo, indijski ili koji drugi. Istina, perzijski jezik lijepo je znati, ali da se djeca s istim u ruždiji muče I jade jade, imadavši drugih stotinu stvari, mnogo I mnogo prečnijih, to je ne samo beskorisno, nego to uvelike djecu smeta, da bi ono malo naučili što im je od prijeke nužde.*
>
> Instead of supposing that children would be better off learning Turkish and, as they really should, studying Islam and perfecting themselves in its study, they introduced and rooted Persian in the *ruşdiyes* instead. So, the children have had the mandatory study of Persian grammar in first and second grade, and the *Golestān* in fourth grade, beaten into their skulls pointlessly, so that they end up with no idea of Turkish, while Persian is basically as relevant to us as Indian, or whatever else. No matter how nice it may be to know Persian in principle, it is clearly pointless to put these students through the mill and make them endure this in the *ruşdiyes*, alongside a hundred more important other things. Moreover, it clearly bothers the students themselves, as they are forced to learn things for no reason but that they have to.[70]

It is clear that at this point Persian was no longer considered a necessary subject and represented a burden in an educational system crying out for reform and adjustment to changed social circumstances. Consequently, Persian was not included in the list of subjects to be taught under the provincial government's new educational plan of 1906, based on a proposal from the *ʿUlemā-meclis*.[71] As a result of this order, Persian officially ceased to be part of the educational system in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The story of Persian in India during late 19th and early 20th centuries is similar in many aspects to the story of this language in Bosnia. After centuries of good reputation among Muslim scholars in the Subcontinent, by the last quarter of the 19th century Persian was seen as a language of a past that had little grasp of the present let alone the future. The classical rigidity of its lexicon and genres in a modern context, as well as its affiliation to an older class of Muslim elites in India, were the main reasons for the changed attitude towards Persian.[72] Such an attitude influenced the educational policy thereafter: while, in 1904, it was still taught in most madrasas, even in rural areas, an official *Report on Progress of Education in the Punjab for the year 1913-1914* states that the instruction of Persian is "*now entirely omitted except where there is a definite local demand for it*".[73] This comparison shows that the decline of Persian in Bosnia was part of a larger process of its simultaneous withdrawal, both in the East and in the West.

70 Miri Zija 1900, 2.
71 See Ćurić 1983, 235-236.
72 Green 2019b, 220.
73 Rahman 1999, 59.

3. Conclusion

The second half of the 19th century, which saw the transition from the Ottoman to the Austro-Hungarian period, was a particularly important time for the study of Persian in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a consequence of sweeping reforms in the Ottoman Empire, a series of new educational institutions were established in Bosnia, to meet the new needs of the Empire. Persian occupied a significant place in their curricula. It was only by the middle of the 19th century that the importance of Persian in Ottoman Bosnia, where it had for centuries been a vital element of general literacy and a sign of belonging to the educational elite, became fully evident. There also emerged a noticeable regulation of teaching of the language, accompanied by the appearance of some better-adapted introductory textbooks.

However, the long-established tradition of studying Persian did not change all that much. This is particularly clear from the orders to establish the various institutions and articles and discussions in domestic periodicals of the second half of the 19th century. These documents show clearly that the approach to teaching Persian remained much as it had been during the 16th and 17th centuries; the same textbooks in Persian were recommended not just for studying Persian as a language, but also for Islamic ethics. The basic problem was that Persian was studied more as a dead than a living language, so that some dictionaries were memorised while supplementary textbooks were not adapted to the age and needs of the students. Of course, Persian was hardly exceptional in this regard, as the same issues affected teaching in other fields, particularly Arabic. These problems came increasingly to the fore with the beginning of the Austro-Hungarian occupation of 1878. Before new teaching materials and methodology proposed by central Ottoman government in Istanbul could be fully implemented in its westernmost province, Bosnia witnessed a fundamental change in administration, which arrested the modernisation of Persian teaching. Moreover, the Bosniak intelligentsia was increasingly focused on preserving its own specific educational culture rather than engaging in further modernisation, which gave rise to significant tensions and a sense of backwardness compared to other ethnic groups of the region.

These two features – the change in the social and cultural context and the evident obsolescence of the educational system that could not meet the needs of the modern West-oriented society – inevitably resulted in significant changes in how people approached what should be taught at the end of the 19th and the start of the 20th centuries. While it was hardly the only problem, Persian was often singled out as the weakest link in the educational chain. Moreover, many considered it only a means of mastering Turkish and not a subject important in its own right. It held its place in certain educational institutions for a while, after the Austro-Hungarian occupation, only to be expunged entirely from them all in 1906, as a hangover from the past. It would eventually return at the university level, as its importance for the study of the written and general cultural heritage of Bosnia and the Balkans of the Ottoman period came to be better appreciated. This need was initially recognised between 1937 and 1945, in the programme of the Higher Islamic Theological School, and then after 1950, at the faculty of philosophy/arts of the newly founded University of Sarajevo.

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