

# Middle Eastern Librarianship in Bosnia

Five Centuries of Continuity, Loss, and  
Renewal

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# Why Bosnia?

- European contact zone of Islamic book culture
- Continuous tradition since the 16th century
- Libraries as custodians of cultural memory



Alipašina Mosque, Sarajevo, 1560/61  
(© Tarik Jesenković)



Map of the western Balkan region by Joan Blaeu, 1659

# Gazi Husrev-beg Library (Sarajevo)

- Founded in 1537
- Waqf-based institution
- One of the oldest continuously active libraries in Europe



# Gazi Husrev-beg Library (Sarajevo)

- 10,585 manuscript codices ( $\approx$ 20,000 texts)
- 12th–20th century
- Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, Persian, Bosnian (*Arabica*)
- The complete collection is catalogued, microfilmed and digitized.



# Gazi Husrev-beg Library (Sarajevo) UNESCO Memory of the World

- Oldest manuscript: al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, copied in 1106 CE during the author's lifetime



# Gazi Husrev-beg Library UNESCO Memory of the World

- Inscribed on UNESCO Memory of the World Register (2017)



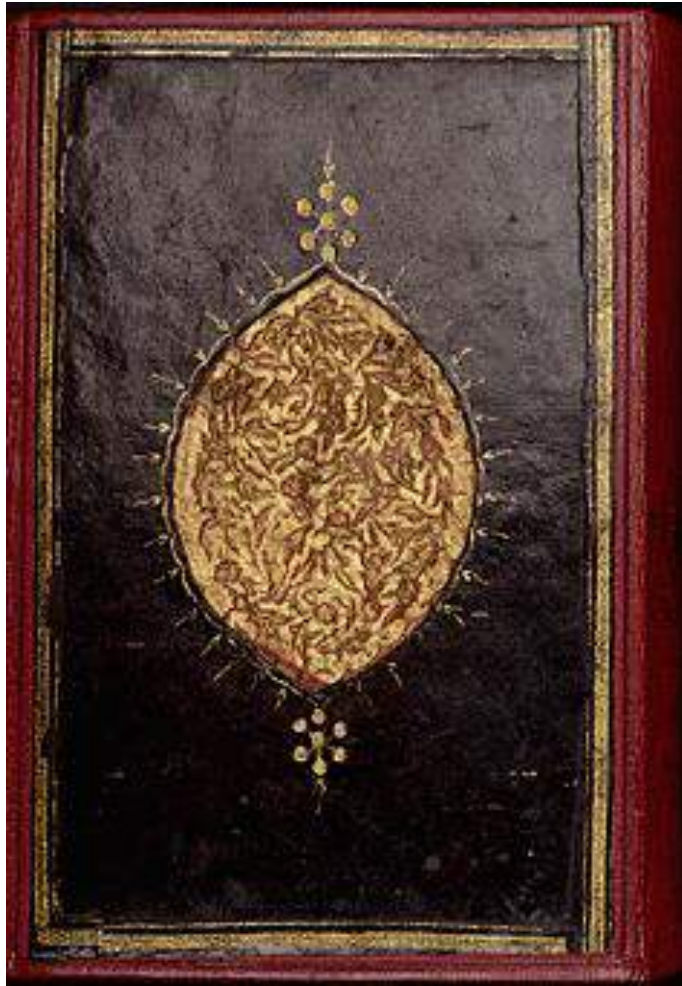
The richly illuminated pages of the *Muṣḥaf* Fadil-paša Šerifović (d. 1882)

# Bašagić Collection (Bratislava)

- Safvet-beg Bašagić (1870–1934), Bosnian intellectual, historian and writer
- 284 manuscripts and 365 printed volumes
- 12th–19th centuries
- UNESCO Memory of the World (1997)



# Bašagić Collection (Bratislava)



Abū al-Faḍl ‘Iyād al-Sabtī al-Mālikī, *Kitāb al-shifā’ fī ta’rīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā*

# University & Research Libraries

- **Faculty of Islamic Studies Library (1977):** ~25,000 volumes
- **Oriental Institute (1950):** 10,000+ titles before destruction in 1992
- **National and University Library (1945):** Special Collections – manuscripts, archives, maps



Faculty of Islamic Studies, University of Sarajevo

# War, Destruction, and Loss (1992)

- Sarajevo City Hall, housing the National and University Library, burned
- Over 90% of National and University Library holdings destroyed
- Oriental Institute destroyed (5,263 manuscript codices lost)



Sarajevo City Hall



Oriental Institute, Sarajevo

# Regional Continuity: Behram-beg Library (Tuzla)

- Behram-beg Medresa (Tuzla): founded 1626
- Behram-beg Library: public special library since 1996
- 32,000 books, 143 manuscripts Public access and education



# Continuity into the Present

- Preservation
- Digitisation
- Cataloguing
- International cooperation

# Conservation in Practice

- Largest paper conservation lab in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Established in 2005 (300 m<sup>2</sup>)
- Manuscripts, rare books, archives



# Conclusion

- Bosnia as a European hub of Middle Eastern librarianship
- Continuity, loss, and responsibility
- Shared future of preservation and access

Thank you for your  
attention!