CHAPTER TWO

BOSNIAC AUTHORS AND THEIR WORKS

Results of the research on Bosniac cultural heritage, especially in the field of bibliography, served as a starting point for registrating, collecting and processing data on authors and their works that will be the subject of this book. But before presenting them, there are some short remarks on creativity of the Bosniac in Arabic, since that is the language in which the works in the field of logic were written. This is, certainly, not purely formal differentiation. It is well-known that Arabic was kept in the Ottoman Empire as the “second language”, primarily as the language of the Qur’an; then as the language of a whole range of disciplines linked to the Qur’an and Islam in general; and, eventually, as the language of almost all sciences, from natural and exact sciences to social; and thus, the ones that entered the education system. That is where the most significant features of creativity in Arabic in Bosnia came from. The following are some of the most significant characteristics:

– Writings by Bosniacs in Arabic (in individual disciplines), directly or indirectly leaned on the findings and achievement of classical Arabic or Islamic science, culture and tradition, in a sometimes changed, adapted or developed form;
– these writings were usually composed to meet the requirements of the education system (in its broadest sense), and they follow the program and development of the Ottoman education and society in general;
– for this reason, these works are usually textbooks, compendia, commentaries on some famous works or marginalia, and seldom original and independent works;¹

¹ Such classification by form can be found in catalogues of oriental writings and other textbooks, but it can be only conditionally taken into consideration. There were some very different ways of commenting, and different forms of commentaries: from those that comment only on some words (those are usually elementary notions or terms), to those that are very comprehensive and detailed, that take certain standpoints only as ideas for writing of very original works. For more details on this classification,
– although this heritage is mostly linked to the medieval ambiance, based on the multitude of manuscripts (in general, and the number of preserved copies) and notes by authors on themselves and their works, it can be said that they were present among various classes of society, especially in urban population;
– despite the fact that today there are very little data on the audience’s response to the works, it can be said that works in those disciplines not bordering with religion and dogma reached their readers very slowly, mainly because they were written in a foreign language and had a very difficult and complicated vocabulary. Also, printing was adopted relatively late, in addition to the fact that there were no developed institutions apart from education that would help their faster and easier spreading and development;
– finally, most of these works were written by scholars, usually educated in all parts of the Empire, who were teachers or officials of the legal system.

Chronologically speaking, surveys and histories of literature and the arts in the Oriental languages in Bosnia and Herzegovina first appeared when the first Bosniacs converted to Islam. For some of them converting meant an opportunity to get higher education, which implied their participation in the process, either directly, as teachers, or to contribute in another way to the elaboration and development of the Arabic-Islamic classical arts and culture inherited by the Ottoman society.

One of the first names recorded in the old Ottoman chronicles and other sources, which was later described by Joseph von Hammer in his History of the Ottoman Empire, is Mawla 'Abdulkarim (died in 1493), originating from the area inhabited by South Slavic peoples. According to these sources, he was the author of a marginalia (glossarium) accompanying a work very famous in the East, Sources of Light in

2 Hağhi Halîfa (Katib Çalabî), Fızleke-i Tarih, Istanbul, 1286/87 (1869/70), I, 497; C. Brockelmann, GAL, G I, 467; Hammer—Purgstall, Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches, I–X, Pesth, 1834–1836, see II, 586; S. Bašagić, Bosnjaci i Hercegovci u islamskoj književnosti [Bosnians and Herzegovinians in Islamic Literature], Sarajevo, 1912, 19; H. Šabanović, Književnost Muslimana BiH na orijentalnim jezicima [Literature of the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Oriental Languages], Sarajevo, 1973, pp. 44–46.