LIFE IN SARAJEVO IN THE 18TH CENTURY
(According to Mulla Mustafa’s mecnuua)

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When in 1998 the outstanding Turkish intellectual Mina Urgan1 published her book of memoirs titled Bir Dinozorun Anıları, interested readers wanted to get hold of copies. Interest in the book is not over yet. Professor Mina Urgan’s 80-year life covers an unusually interesting time Turkey’s history, from the fall of the Ottoman state through the foundation and development of the Republic to the modern times. However, we could not say that the readers are only interested in the book for the historical facts it contains, as other books also include a lot of these facts. In the memoirs, in which the author talks about her life with the skill of a professor of literature, history is told through many a detail, of a time that other sources do not mention. On the very first page of her memoirs, Mina Urgan explains to the reader why she undertook to write such a book: “I believe it would be useful if everybody wrote down what they know and what they remember. That is the way for us to avoid becoming a society without consciousness. If a grocer on the street corner took notes on how the houses in that street became residential buildings, what changes the residents of the street went through, how his grocery store became a market, I believe that would be interesting.”

Mina Urgan almost regretfully admits that in her life she has written neither diaries nor travelogues, she has not written things down, so she has forgotten many things. We forget some things because we want to forget them, says professor Urgan, and some because our memory fails. The thought expressed by Mina Urgan at the beginning of her book, of memoirs as a way in which “a society nurtures consciousness of

1 Minâ Urgan (1915–2000), professor of English literature, writer and translator. From 1960 she taught at the Department of Anglistics at Istanbul University. She published several books about English literature: History of English Literature, and analyses of works by Thomas Moor, Shakespeare, and Virginia Wolf. She also published a number of books of translations from English into Turkish. She is called the doyen of Turkish Anglistics for her huge contribution to the development of that academic branch, particularly for her teaching career spanning many years.

for over 50 years Mulla Mustafa recorded everyday events and situations in Sarajevo where he lived, with the names, occupations and personal features of deceased citizens he had known in person or whom he had heard about. With these notes he filled altogether 130 of the 164 pages in his notebook, which he called mecmua. Mulla Mustafa’s notes in the Ottoman Turkish language constitute immediate evidence of the time and people in Sarajevo in the second half of the 18th century.

Fortunately, Mulla Mustafa’s mecmua has survived. In 1917 it reached Gazi Husrev-beg’s library in Sarajevo, endowed by Mehmed Şevki Alajbegović, son of Ibrahima Hilmi Effendi. We can read the benefactor’s name in the short text of an endowment deed written on L.4b page. The benefactor set a condition for the use of “the property” he endowed. “(The mecmua was) Not to be taken out of the library mentioned, not to be replaced in any way by another asset, and to be lent for reading only to those who will use it in that way…” He obviously thought that Mulla

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3 This is exactly what Mulla Mustafa says in one of his notes.
4 The word mecmua comes from the Arabic language meaning “a collection”, “an anthology”, “collected texts”. This is the meaning it also had in the Ottoman language. On the remaining 34 pages of his mecmua, he wrote down various texts as follows: on the first page, Mulla Mustafa wrote down the names of Ottoman sultans, from the first Osman to his time (L.1a); on the succeeding pages (L.1b–3b) he wrote down the names of several rulers in world history and the history of Islam; the following two pages contain the names of residential quarters (mahalas) in the city of Sarajevo (L.3b–4a). In the middle of the mecmua, on pages 46b–48b, some events from the history of Islam are noted and the names of a number of Islamic scholars; and, at the very end there are Hebrew, Cyrillic and Italian alphabets (L.156b), and the names of the deceased who Mulla Mustafa prepared for the funeral (L.157b–158a). Besides the quoted notes which, mainly, consist of personal names or names, Mulla Mustafa wrote short folk tales, witty remarks and jokes on about 15 pages of his mecmua (L.99a–116a), then several poems he wrote himself in the Turkish language (L.120b–122a), three folk poems in the Bosnian language (L.157a), several riddles (L.158b–160b), the folk names of some plants (L.161b) and explanations of dreams (L.150b–153a). On the last page, in the left lower corner, Mulla Mustafa wrote down, Bu mecmû’ada yaprak ‘adedi 164 temâm. (This mecmua has 164 pages.).
5 That page was blank, so that the text of endowment having a total of 7 lines is the only one on that page.
6 Mulla Mustafa’s mecmua is still in the manuscript collection of the Gazi Husrev-beg library in Sarajevo today, under the call number 7340 (Catalogue of Arabic, Turkish, Persian and Bosnian manuscripts, Vol. IV, processed by F. Nametak, London-Sarajevo, 1998, p. 279).