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Source: *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin*, SEPTEMBER 1990, Vol. 14, No. 2 (SEPTEMBER 1990), pp. 169-178

Published by: Indiana University Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/43384296

Kafana Konak Čaršija Ćuprija (Perception of Place in Ottoman Bosnia) Literary Narrative as an Art-Historical Resource

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Literary sources from and about the Ottoman period in Bosnia can help us identify how buildings and places had different emotional, symbolic, and emblematic content for different social groups: for the ruling Ottomans, and for the ruled Muslims, Jews, and Christians. In this article I address the historical novels and stories of two Bosnian authors, Ivo Andrić and Isak Samokovlija, and suggest that their works help demonstrate how certain places became socially significant, and how their meanings were assigned to them. This article will focus on four sites: the coffeehouse (*kafana*), the vezir's residency (*konak*), the marketplace (*čaršija*), and the bridge (*ćuprija*).

I will abandon for the present the traditional art-historical stance that meanings inhere in buildings, and instead adopt the ideas of the humanistic urban theorists who suggest that meanings are social constructs, and that people assign meanings to places in specific social and historical contexts. Thus, places have no single meaning, even at any given moment, but there are changing and overlapping place evocations which are all aspects of human experiences. For the Ottoman period in Bosnia, I am interested in the many conceptualizations and uses of places by the powerful, landholding Bosnian Muslim notables (the *begs*), the Jewish notables, the Muslim (and non-Muslim) merchant classes, and the Ottoman vezirs who represented the distant government in İstanbul.

David Canter[1] has suggested that we approach the affective meaning of place by looking at people's actions as this expresses conscious objectives; that is, meaning comes from these conscious actions, and

1 David Canter, "Action and Place: An Existential Dialectic," in *Environmental Perspectives; Ethnoscapes; Current Challenges in the Environmental Sciences*, eds. David Canter, Martin Krampen, and David Stea (Avebury, Brookfield, Vermont: Gower Publishing, 1988), pp. 1-17.

social meaning comes from the shared objectives which are shaped by the roles of the actors and by place-related rules. Thus the method I will use to find the meanings of place in Bosnia will be to investigate not just descriptions of behavior, but people's conscious intentions when they use or avoid these places in a social context.

An investigation of this type of historical meaning would be well served by a complete ethnography of Ottoman Bosnia, a distant culture whose places have changed beyond recognition, or have lost their function, or no longer exist. Because this type of secondary source does not exist, however, I will attempt to use the historical fiction of Andrić and Samokovlija, recognizing that this genre problematizes issues of authority and authorial intention, and potentially confuses historical background and fictional foreground. Yet ethnographies and historiographies are also fictions or constructs, and are equally problematic. For this reason, all works, fictional or not, must be "read against the grain," seeking out half-hidden voices. The novel, in fact, can be an excellent arena in which to express the multiple discourses and subcultures of a society.

I use here three of Andrić's works—*The Bridge on the Drina*, (*Na Drini Ćuprija*) which chronicles the Bosnian town of Višegrad during its four-hundred years under Ottoman rule, *Bosnian Story* (*Travnič ka Hronike*), about the Bosnian capital town of Travnik in the early years of the nineteenth-century, and "The Vezir's Elephant" ("Priča o Vezirovom Slonu") which takes place in the streets of Travnik a few years later (about 1820)—as well as Samokovlija's story about the Jews of the town of Sarajevo in this period ("The Sarajevo Megilla" ["Sarajevska Megila"]), the relevant part of which takes place in about 1820.[2]

My original intention was to investigate whether "Ottoman-ness" was a category of perception which attached to buildings. I chose Bosnia because a large percentage of its urban population had converted to Islam under Ottoman influences by the sixteenth century, and thus became, I conjectured, one of the conquered colonies which might identify most strongly with the empire. This quest for "Ottoman-ness," framed by an art history which privileges monuments and patrons, was

2 Quotations from these works are cited in the text using the following abbreviations: *BD* (Ivo Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*, trans. Lovett Edwards [New York: Macmillan Co., 1959]); *BS* (Ivo Andrić, *Bosnian Story*, trans. Kenneth Johnstone [London: Lincoln-Praeger, London, 1958]); *VE* (Ivo Andrić, *The Vezir's Elephant*, trans. Drenka Willen [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962]); and *SM* (Isak Samokovlija, "Sarajevska Megila," *Jevrejski Almanah*, 1955-56, pp. 245-55.

very productive—but in an unexpected way. By asking about a specific social group, I found out about others, and about the intricate complexity of Bosnian society. My understanding of Bosnian Ottomans had, in fact, been based on a traditional stereotype which confused Bosnian Muslims—who, whether convert of immigrant, were called Turks (*Turcis*) by local Christians and Bosnians (*Bošnjacis*) by the central government—with the Ottomans (*osmanlijas*) who represented foreign rule. The Ottomans remained an unpopular minority in Bosnia and many Muslim Serbs neither identified nor interacted with them. In fact, *these* "Turks" did not speak Turkish, but spoke Serbian which they wrote using the Ottoman script. Furthermore, these Bosnian Muslims were not a monolithic group but were divided by social and economic class and by historical and regional attachments. Some were extremely powerful land-owners, or *begs*, who formed a ruling class of their own; some were wealthy merchants, minor shopkeepers and artisans, or even peasants. The other "non-Ottomans," the Christian and Jewish populations of Bosnia, were also divided among themselves by sect and by privilege. For example, there were Orthodox and Latin Christians, and Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews. While all of these differences were operational in the social use of space, I will consider only a few of the place and role relationships which have been protrayed by Andrić and Samokovlija, and only a few of the places made meaningful by people's intentions and activities: that is, the coffeehouse (*kafana*), the residency (*konak*), the marketplace (*čaršija*), and the bridge (*ćuprija*).

Kafana (The Coffeehouse)

In "The Sarajevo Megilla," Isak Samokovlija's story which takes place in Sarajevo in 1819, the big Hasidic Jew (*veliki hasid*) Rafael Alevy urgently needs to speak to the Muslim notables of Sarajevo—and he knows where they are, in the neighborhood coffeehouses. By tradition these coffeehouses are off-limits to Jews; although there are no sanctions against Jews entering, they are not to sit down (SM, p. 251). Alevy is locally prominent and respected as a pious man, however, so the *kafeožija* (coffeehouse owner), in order not to embarrass him, serves him coffee himself. Alevy drinks quickly, then, instead of leaving the customary two cents ("*para* for the poor"), he leaves on the table a large gold ducat. He does this in the *kafane* of each of eight Sarajevo *mahales* (neighborhoods), stunning and confusing the coffee-drinking notables, so that by the end of his rounds they have all gathered in front of his

house. Here he presents his case to rally their support against the vezir, Ruždi Paşa. Alevy tells the *beg*s that the vezir has taken hostage in his *konak* the town rabbi and twelve Jewish notables, in ransom for whom he demands four-hundred sacks of gold. Although the Jewish community cannot raise that amount, what Alevy is asking for is not money, but action. He tells the *beg*s that "what the vezir has done to us he will do to you next, and then take all of our money and go off to Carigrad (İstanbul)" (*SM*, p. 253).

If Alevy had been a Bosnian Muslim notable, he would not have needed to revert to this circumlocution, he would just have sat down to talk, for the coffeehouse is the place where Muslim notables transact their affairs. In his description of the Travnik of 1807, Ivo Andrić describes Lutva's Cafe (*Lutvina Kahva*, "where it is a pleasure to sit and difficult to rise"), and where, by long-standing tradition, the *beg*s of Travnik would meet, about the time of evening prayer, to make their political decisions (*BS*, p. 13).

Thus, according to local unwritten rule, the *kafana*, at least at certain times of day, was reserved for Muslim notables. Rafael Alevy, a non-Muslim but a notable, understood this rule of place and used it to his advantage. He "invaded" the premises of the "other," and for that reason, perhaps as much as for leaving all that money, aroused attention. Nonetheless, as the Jew invaded, he also assumed a conscious overlapping of roles, entering the *kafana* as a notable in order to participate in shared concerns.

Vezirskim Konakom (The Vezir's Residency)[3]

Just as the Ottoman sultan ruled from his palace in İstanbul, the local vezir and the Ottoman officials he brought with him from the capital governed from the residency, or *konak*, located in the major city of a province, or *sancak*. In Travnik the *konak* faced a wooden bridge and was entered by a great gate which opened into a narrow courtyard. Past this was another courtyard with fountains and flowers, surrounded by a high fence. Although the vezir was not a prisoner in his *konak*, his forays outside it were few and always in the company of his formal guards and retainers. More importantly, the formality and ceremony with which he received dignitaries, especially the foreign consuls at Travnik, were impressive and visible to the population.

3 Johnstone translates *konak* as "residency" in *Bosnian Story*, but Edwards leaves it as *konak* in *Bridge on the Drina*.

In Andrić's *Bosnian Story*, both the French and the Austrian consuls were paraded to the *konak* through the streets of Travnik in the company of colorfully robed retainers sent by the vezir. The vezir's presence also emanated from the *konak* when he sent messages and gifts to dignitaries. The *konak* isolated and insulated the vezir, whose movement into the town was done by proxy: he left the *konak* and returned to it symbolically, following rules and procedures which he orchestrated to underscore his wealth and power. Thus, to the spectators in the town, the vezir and the *konak* remained un-separated, his "presence" a signal of his absence.

In more than one story, however, the predominant sense evoked by the *konak* was one of fear and hatred. This was true whether the vezir was depicted as relatively benign, as with Husrev Mehmed Paşa, or as perversely evil, as were some of the later vezirs of Travnik. In Andrić's stories, this fear separated all the non-Ottomans from the *konak*, including the Bosnian Muslim *beg*s who, in "The Vezir's Elephant," stood by powerlessly as the vezir, Celaludin Paşa, randomly gathered and massacred groups of *beg*s in various Bosnian towns as well as in the *konak* yard. The *konak* also represented the powerlessness of the common folk whose courage abandoned them in the face of its high walls. In "The Vezir's Elephant," the craftsman Alyo Kazazi and two of his friends from the *čaršija* boldly planned to address the vezir about his pet elephant, the *fil* which was allowed to "play" in (this is to destroy) the market streets; but "on the way to the *konak* one of the three got such cramps in his intestines that he turned aside into one of the dense gardens along the route and vanished without a trace." His other friend also vanished, "betraying all the oaths of the night before" (*VE*, pp. 34-35).

Certainly these local Bosnians felt no sense of identification with the Ottomans or their empire. Their shared fear—and hatred—of the ruling Ottomans is evidenced by how quickly Rafael Alevy, in "The Sarajevo Megilla," was able to rally their support against the vezir. These powerful Sarajevo *beg*s never considered entering the *konak* with a petition or with any half-way measures; instead they organized armed men and cavalry, storming the *konak* and enchaining the vezir. Thus, the vezir's *konak* was symbolic of absolute, unreasonable power, and of the types of actions that were not possible—that is, of entrance, appeal, dialogue, and interaction.

Čaršija (The Marketplace)

Between the *begs* of the *kafana* and the Ottomans of the *konak* were wealthy merchants, lesser artisans, and working folk whose lives centered around the *čaršija*, which was the pulse of the Bosnian town, the daily world of the Bosnian town folk as well as the center of all consumer activities. In the *čaršija* of Andrić's stories, artisans produced their wares in their own shops, importers brought in trade items to be sold, and townsmen purchased their daily needs; and there, on market days, Christian and Muslim peasants came from the outlying villages to procure a loan, to sell produce and herbs, and to buy farm tools, wool dyes, and spectacles.

While the notables convened in the *kafana*, the merchants would meet in the *čaršija* (although in "The Vezir's Elephant" the Travnik merchants had to abandon their usual political discussions there because of their fear of Celaludin Paşa). In fact, the activity in the *čaršija* shows it as a place of solidarity, at least for the Muslim town folk. It also represented the power of the merchant classes, including Christians and Jews. The smaller merchants, such as the shopkeepers in "The Vezir's Elephant," obtain a sense of identity from the *č arš ija*, referring to themselves as "*čaršija* men" (*VE*, p. 28). The *čaršija*, in fact, was considered to be unified in opinion and to have a common "voice."

In this regard, the market was far more than a place to do business, for it was also an institution organized to deal with current events and problems, and to voice its opinions through actions. Most of these actions represented active planning and conniving, such as the occasion in *Bosnian Story* when the merchants refused to sell to the foreign consuls (at which point things were gotten secretly from the Christians and the Jews) (*BS*, p. 151), or when the richer, more distinguished *čaršija* merchants plotted (successfully) to poison the vezir's elephant.

In *Bosnian Story*, the *čaršija* was also the place where the ineffable resentments of all classes were unleashed, making it a signboard of deepest popular feelings. In 1808, the vezir Husrev Mehmed Paşa left Travnik, ostensibly on campaign, but in reality to abort an assassination which was to accompany the news that the Porte had replaced him. The Muslim town folk had disliked Mehmed Paşa because of his affiliation with the "reformist" sultan Selim III; his ability to elude their wrath enflamed them.

With the banging of shop doors the merchants went home for cover,

and what Andrić calls a "Bosnian riot" took over the *čaršija*, lasting for three days. An undisciplined hatred among the poor and the peasants took up the anger of the merchants, "for in these, as in all movements and revolutions all over the world, there are those who start and lead the affair and those who realize it and execute it." The refrain that ran through the town at these times was "*zatvorila se čaršija*" (the bazaar is closed!). This always meant trouble (*BS*, p. 161).

Thus, in Andrić's stories the *čaršija* is a place of group cohesiveness for a large merchant class who gather there to implement their immediate goals and whose conscious dissatisfactions become mobilized as the ineffable discontent of the classes below them.

Ćuprija (The Bridge)

Whereas the *kafana*, the *konak*, and the *čaršija* took their meanings from the activities which they either fostered or denied, in Andrić's novel, *The Bridge on the Drina*, the bridge at Višegrad takes some of its meanings from its accumulated history, both legendary and real. The legends which were created around the bridge both enlarged and preserved its mystique and explained elements of its form. For example, it is said that infant children were walled into the structure of the bridge as it was built, in order to appease the water fairies; this legend explained the decorative blind windows said to be left so that their mother could nurse them. Legend also says that the dark opening in the central pier houses a "black Arab," and that anyone who sees him will die.

The Višegrad bridge was built in 1571 at the bequest of Sokullu Mehmet Paşa who was grand vezir for fifteen years under three Sultans.[4] He had been drafted from the Bosnian village of Sokolovići as part of the *devşirme*, the Ottoman levy on Christian peasant boys for service at the Porte after their conversion to Islam. Like many *devşirme* recruits, Sokullu Mehmet Paşa maintained ties with his homeland, and as grand vezir was able to endow many pious institutions (*evkaf*), including the bridge over the Drina, and a stone caravansary (*han*) beside it, whose upkeep was to come from taxes on his lands conquered in Hungary.

This bridge, then, took on a personal meaning for the people of Višegrad, for it represented a local boy made good. Although the text

4 From 1564 to 1579, under Süleyman I (1520–66), Selim II (1566–74), and Murad III (1575–95). He maintained contact with his family and was active in Serbian concerns even before becoming grand vezir. In 1557 he was instrumental in the re-establishment of the Metropolitanate of Peć, with his brother as archbishop.

does not say this explicitly, it would appear that the Christian population could claim the bridge through one of their sons, while the Bosnian Muslims may have considered it as their special connection to the empire.[5] For the Muslims it also had the further, religious meaning that it had been established in God's honor and for the soul of the donor.

But the bridge also took a large part of its meaning from the activity that took place on it, activity that was often unrelated to crossing it as the over-water part of a road. The most important segment of the bridge, in terms of conscious, directed activity, was called the *kapija*. At the very center of the bridge, the parapets opened out on either side creating balconies over the water. On one side this balcony was lined with stone benches (*sofas*); there were no benches on the opposite side, instead the stone rose higher in the middle of the balcony giving it the appearance of a door (a *kapija*), on which was a plaque with a founder's inscription (a *tarih*) and below that a fountain. In *Bridge on the Drina*, many people went to the bridge merely to stop at this mid-section, the *kapija*, sometimes for the view, or to flirt, or to taste the first cherries that were laid out for sale on the parapet. Even wedding and funeral processions, when crossing the bridge, would stop at the *kapija* to dance and drink or to rest the bier. During times of peace, the bridge functioned like a public square, a coffee-seller even setting up his *mangal* (brazier) below the *tarih* to serve the elders who came to sit and talk. This portion of the bridge was thus used according to the same place-related rules which governed the use of the *kafana*, with the Muslim notables coming there at a certain time of day and the Jews gathering there on Saturdays. Only after the coming of the Austrians in 1878 did these old rules of place break down, replaced by "modern" ones which allowed even women to sit on the *sofa*.

Since much of the time people had no intention of crossing the bridge, but came only to sit on it, its link to a larger world was often symbolic. During the Serbian Independence movement of the early

5 Andrić's use of the Turkish *ćuprija* (Turkish *köprü*, bridge) instead of the Serbian *most* emphasizes the Ottoman Turkish connotation of the bridge at Višegrad. Turkish words and linguistic elements were, until very recently, a common denominator for the spoken form of all Balkan languages. In many cases unchanged Turkish words entered local languages along with the cultural import they denoted, such as *konak*. More frequently Turkish words adapted to local morphology (for example, the Serbian *ćaršija* derives from the Turkish *çarşı*, *kafana* from the Turkish *kahve* or *kahvehane*). All loan words became subject to the rules of Serbian grammar so that the plural for *kafana* became *kafane* rather than the Turkish *kahvehaneler*, and *mahala* (Turkish *mahalle[ler]*, neighborhood[s]) became *mahale* in the plural. Many Turkish words replaced or existed alongside native ones, such as *kapı* (Turkish: portal, door) as well as the already mentioned *ćuprija*. In fact, Andrić and Samokovlija are masters at using Turkisms to capture and preserve the meaning of items and behavior patterns which are no longer in use.

nineteenth century, the bridge became impassable because the Ottomans established a guard house over the *kapija*, authorizing only "Turkish" families fleeing from Serbia to Bosnia to cross it, and dealing most severely with Christians. In the mid-nineteenth century, the bridge's open passage was again blocked, but this time to people travelling in the other direction, from Sarajevo where there was an outbreak of plague. The bridge again became a link to an outside world which was to be avoided. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Austrians built a railway which made the bridge obsolete for travel to the west; and when, in 1913, the Ottomans withdrew from Bosnia, "The East vanished like an apparition and the bridge, which had lost its connection with the West because of the Railroad, now lost the East. It now linked nothing more than the two parts of the town and their villages" (*BS*, p. 227). During World War I the Austrians, who had never formed an attachment to the bridge through legend or through use, mined it and a large section was destroyed. When the mine went off the townsfolk were left bereft: "Do they not know that this is a Vezir's bequest, built for the good of his soul and the glory of God and that it is a sin to take even a stone from it?" (*BS*, p. 223).

Using the Historical Novel

Although this exploration of the historical novel has yielded a complex evocation of places that resonate with activity and emotions, not one of these four places can be interpreted in a central, dominating way, for their complexity is in fact their essence. This insight, I believe, is the gift of the story-teller who can layer characters, plots and subcultures in a way which the "scientific" ethnographer and historiographer must neglect. An investigation of the background of an author can mitigate some of the problematic aspects of using the historical novel as a source. For example, both Andrić and Samokovlija grew up in Bosnia, and the topic of Andrić's Ph.D. dissertation was Bosnian folklore and language.[6] We also must address an author's discourse and agenda, however. Was he addressing a contemporary concern such as the Ottoman legacy? What other texts will put the novels we use into context? In using historical novels as a resource, we must attempt to distinguish the

6 Zelimar B. Juričič, *The Man and the Artist, Essays on Ivo Andrić* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1985); and Marko Marković, "Pripovjedački Lik Isaka Samolovlije" (The Narrative Personality of Isak Samokovlija), *Jevrejski Almanah*, 1955–56, pp. 225–36.

"fictional" foreground from the "historical" background, even though this may be beside the point. For example, "The Sarajevo Megilla" is Samokovlija's interpretation of a real event that took place in 1819.[7] The "true story" corroborates the fictionalized one, except on one key point: Rafael Alevy did not go to the *kafane* to rally the Muslim notables, instead he went directly to a specific *beg*, Ali Asak, who already hated the vezir and who began the organization procedure. Yet it would appear from Andrić's references that Samokovlija reported if not a real, then a possible scenario, based on his own understanding of Bosnian life. In our search for meanings there can be no such place as "right," as "objective," just as there is no kernel of truth, or, as Walter Andrews has said: no "meaning cake for which all other meaning is frosting."[8] Certainly the validity of any text, both internally and contextually, must be addressed, but this should not replace what we can learn from it. The reading of Ivo Andrić and Isak Samokovlija for their references to the activities which give meaning to places is a productive one which offers singular clues, leads and insights into a culture that can only imperfectly be understood.

7 See Izet Rizvanbegović, "Stari Jevrejski Nadgorbni Spomenik Na Krajšini Kod Stoca" (An Old Jewish Grave Marker in Krajšini Near Stole), *Naše Starine*, 3 (1956):265–67, who discusses the grave of the ransomed Rabbi, and the story of the Sarajevo Megilla as reported in the 1933 publication of the Sephardic "La Benevolencia" Society.

8 Walter Andrews, *Poetry's Voice, Society's Song: Ottoman Lyric Poetry* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), p. 9.