Chapter Six: Bosnian Muslim Written Culture as Reflected in Traditional Oral Poetry and Folklore

As with most pre-modern societies, Bosnia in the 12th/18th and early 13th/19th centuries was a predominantly oral society. For the purposes of this dissertation, it is pertinent to ask both what the significance of possessing books in such a society was and how the forms and expressions of oral culture can help us understand book ownership better in the pre-modern period. The present chapter proposes to answer these questions by referring to two sources rooted in orality and folklore: oral poetry and beliefs and customs related to book culture.

A Bosnian Muslim living in 12th/18th or early 13th/19th century Sarajevo was exposed to two principal types of poetry. The first was high literary poetry, composed in Arabic, Ottoman, and Persian and cultivated by a small minority, made up largely of the scholarly class (*'ulamā'*), bureaucrats, poets and men of letters, though there were no doubt also merchants and even artisans whose *madrasa* education or private tuition had provided a sufficient mastery of these languages for them to be able to appreciate such poetry. Nelly Hanna has sought to highlight the role of the Cairene middle classes, who were educated without being scholarly. There was also a small corpus of poetry with didactic content written in the vernacular and in Arabic script, mostly composed by Sufis. We may nonetheless assume that competence in these languages varied greatly, even among educated Sarajevans, ranging from the no doubt small minority who would not have felt out of place in the literary salons of the great imperial centres of culture, on the one hand, to the majority with at best a smattering of these languages, on the other. We have seen how Basheskī comments on the varying degrees of linguistic competence of his fellow Sarajevans (*Chapter Two: Sarajevo and Its Book Culture 1109-1244/1697-1828*).

The second was traditional oral poetry, which is usually subdivided into epic and lyric. The oral epics were accompanied on the tambour or, rather more commonly, the *gusla*, a single-stringed instrument played with a bow and found throughout the Balkans. Sung in the Slavic vernacular, this type of poetry obviously commanded a much broader Bosnian following and was popular among various sections of society, both the sophisticated town-folk and simple villagers, men and women, rich and poor. Basheskī mentions a man who could name "by heart all the heroes of the Krajina [the Bosnian frontier zone] and their military units in a single song. He memorized all the heroic songs and in that he was a kind

of a *ḥāfiẓ* [a person who has memorized the Qur'an] or something of that sort."[1126] The second sub-type of poetry includes love songs, also known as women's songs, insofar as they were usually sung by women. Both these types of traditional oral poetry contain relatively frequent reference to written culture in general and to book culture in particular. We shall present the references in order to see how these genres present written culture and book culture to their audiences.

Another possible way of understanding book ownership in the pre-modern era is to examine book-related customs and beliefs. The book is not used only for reading, reciting, copying, buying, selling, donating or displaying. Certain other book-related customs, especially those centring on the Qur'an as a material book, were to be found throughout the Muslim world, including for example the use of the Qur'an for divinatory purposes. Others appear to be peculiar to Bosnia, as is the case with the custom of holding a copy of the Qur'an above the bride's head during the wedding ceremony, a practice understood to be rooted in Bosnia's pre-Ottoman past.

Taken together, the twin sources of traditional oral poetry and book-related customs cast additional light on the meaning and function of book ownership and in that way complement the written sources in the form of inheritance records, chronicles, and high poetry.

6.1 Oral Poetry on Writing and Book Culture

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine all the published collections of traditional oral poetry which originated among Bosnian Muslims during the Ottoman period. The intention here is not to document every reference to writing and book culture in those collections, but to look at certain particularly illustrative ones.[1127] Before

[1126] "Serḥad erlerinüŋ adları bütün bir türkide ve çete etdikleri yerleri hep bir türki söylerdi, ḥāfıẓ idi öyle şeyde," *MMB,* fol. 135b; *Saraybosnalı,* p. 351.

[1127] References to written culture in South Slavic poetry have not been the subject of systematic study. For a brief overview of these references, see: Josip Milaković, *Knjiga i pismo u našoj narodnoj pjesmi: graqja za narodnu pedagogiju* [the Book and the Letter in our Folk Poetry: Materials for Popular Pedagogy] (Sarajevo: Naklada knjižare L. Finzi, 1911). Another study, also limited in scope, is: Hifzija Suljkić, *Islam u bošnjačkoj narodnoj poeziji* [Islam in Bosniak Folk Poetry] (Tuzla: Izdavačko-trgovinsko preduzeće R&S Tuzla, 2003). A useful tool for identifying motifs in South Slavic oral poetry is Branislav Krstić's *Indeks motiva narodnih pesama Balkanskih Slovena* [A Motif Index for the Folk Songs of the Balkan Slavs] (in the summary, for some reason, translated as *A Motif Index for the Epic Poetry of the Balkan Slavs* (Beograd: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, posebna

presenting the material taken from these collections, let me briefly explain their significance and the reasons behind the choice.

The Wife of Hasanaga: In 1774 the Italian abbot and scholar Alberto Fortis published his *Travels through Dalmatia* in which he included a poem he had heard from the Slavic-speaking inhabitants of the Imotski region, an area that formed part of Ottoman Bosnia between 898/1493 and 1129/1717. Known in Bosnian as *Hasanaginica* (literally *the wife of Hasan-āghā)*[1128], the poem, a recent version of which is entitled *the Sad Song of the Noble Wife of Hasan-aga*, is a ballad of less than 100 lines and it is about love and betrayal. This poem is not the earliest specimen of traditional Bosnian Muslim oral poetry to have been written down,[1129] but it was the first South Slavic folk song to be translated into other languages and widely publicized.[1130] *Hasanaginica* contains references to written culture in a way typical of much traditional Bosnian oral poetry, even though it certainly does not exhaust the possibilities. This fact, coupled with the poem's significance for cultural history, makes it a natural starting point for exploring references to written culture in Bosnian Muslim oral poetry.

Women's songs from the Milman Parry collection: This collection of songs from the Milman Parry collection at Harvard University is another source.[1131] It includes audio-recordings of

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izdanja, knjiga DLV, Odeljenje jezika i književnosti, knjiga 36, 1984). The study is clearly inspired by the Stith Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk Literature* (6 volumes, 1955-8). The author occasionally mentions motifs from written culture. See also the Index of motifs, *ibid*., pp. 463-501.

[1128] Alberto Fortis, *Viaggio in Dalmazia*, *I-II* (Venezia, 1774). For an English translation of Fortis' travelogue, see: Alberto Fortis, *Travels Into Dalmatia* (London, 1778). The poem was recorded among Dalmatian Christians, whom Fortis mysteriously calls *Morlacchi*, but its Muslim background is obvious. The events it describes must have happened before 1717, when the region of Imotski, in which they are set, fell to the Venetians prompting the flight of its Muslim population.

[1129] The earliest recorded specimens of Bosnian Muslim poems date back to the "Erlangen Manuscript" from the early 18th century.

[1130] The poem's extraordinary appeal is clear from the fact that its translators included Goethe, Byron, Scott, Bowring, Mérimée, Mickiewicz, Pushkin, and Lermontov, see Malcolm, *Bosnia: a Short History*, p. 78. For the significance of the song, translations into various languages and an extensive bibliography, see: *Hasanaginica 1774-1974: prepjevi, varijante studije* [Hasanaginica 1774-1974: versions, variants, studies] ed. with a foreword by Alija Isaković (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1975).

[1131] *Embroidered With Gold, Strung With Pearls: the Traditional Ballads of Bosnian Women, Publications of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature No.* I, ed. by Aida Vidan, (The Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003). Aida Vidan's study focuses on forty songs and their variants or

songs made by the American scholar Milman Parry in Yugoslavia in the 1920s, together with his student, Albert B. Lord, who would later expand his teacher's work.[1132] This particular study consists of a selection of the so-called women's songs, i.e. songs sung by Bosnian Muslim women from the Milman Parry collection.

Folks Songs of the Muhammedans in Bosnia-Herzegovina by Kosta Hormann was published in 1899 and it remains the most popular collection of Bosnian Muslim oral poetry.[1133] Originally published as *Narodne pjesme muhamedovaca u Bosni i Hercegovini* [Folks Songs of the Muhammedans in Bosnia-Herzegovina] the collection includes 85 poems, varying in length from 97 lines ("Filip General osvaja Zvornik," I, pp. 300-303), to 1722 lines ("Džanan Buljugbaša i Rakocija", I, pp. 95-145). Only nine poems do not contain some reference to written culture.

Serb Folks Songs is a major collection of oral material by the Serbian ethnographer and linguist Vuk Stefanović Karadžić and it comprises the material collected from the speakers of the *štokavian* dialect, all of whom Vuk considered ethnic Serbs regardless of religion. I have drawn from the songs thought to come originally from the Bosnian Muslim community.[1134] Lastly, several examples are taken from three smaller collections of published oral poetry.[1135]

"multiforms" (Albert Lord's term) from the Milman Parry collection, which were sung by women singers born between the 1860s and the 1910s. In contrast to Vidan's study on the lyrical songs referred to as women's songs, Kosta Hörmann's cycle comprises the epic or the so-called men's songs, which are introduced on the next page.

[1132] Their work led to the formulation of the Parry-Lord theory in literary and folklore studies. For a critical appraisal of the theory, see: Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 58-87.

[1133] *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka u Bosni i Hercegovini, I-II*, collected by Kosta Hörmann 1889-1889, ed. with an introduction by Đenana Buturović (Preporod: Sarajevo, 1996). Originally published as *Narodne pjesme muhamedovaca u Bosni i Hercegovini* [Folks Songs of the Muhammedans in Bosnia-Herzegovina] the collection includes 85 poems, varying in length from 97 lines ("Filip General osvaja Zvornik", *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka u Bosni i Hercegovini, I*, pp. 300-303), to 1722 lines ("Džanan Buljugbaša i Rakocija", *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka u Bosni i Hercegovini, I*, pp. 95-145). Only nine poems do not contain references to written culture.

[1134] *Srpske narodne pjesme* [Serb Folk Songs], collected and edited by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike, 2006).

[1135] Hifzija Suljkić, *Islam u bošnjačkoj narodnoj poeziji* [Islam in Bosniak Folk Poetry] (Tuzla: Izdavačko-trgovinsko preduzeće R&S Tuzla, 2003); Sait Orahovac, *Stare narodne pjesme muslimana Bosne i Hercegovine* [Old folk songs of

After going through these published sources, I have identified two sets of references that are relevant for this dissertation. The first is concerned with written culture in general, while the second relates to book culture in particular. The first includes: 1) letter-writing, 2) administrative documents, 3) the use of charms and talismans, and 4) references to script. References to book culture belong to one of the following categories: 1) books in general, 2) the scriptures, and 3) book symbolism.

I will begin by summarizing examples of references to written culture, partly because they are more numerous and partly because describing them helps set the references to book culture into a wider context of the written word. The references to book culture will be backed by quotations from the original verses.

1.a Letters

By far the most common reference to written culture to be found in Bosnian Muslim oral poetry is to letter-writing. In most cases the word used for letter is *knjiga*, which in modern Bosnian (as in Croatian and Serbian) means *book*.[1136] The modern word for letter, *pismo*, appears much less frequently. Sometimes the message is delivered in the form of papers (*ćage* = kāġıd), a piece of paper (*listak*) or a sheet of paper (*hartija*). The word *nama* (from Persian via Ottoman Turkish *nāme*) is seldom used. [1137]

The poems about letter-writing contain numerous references to pens (*pero*), ink (*murećef*), ink-pots (*divit*), paper (*papir*), seals (*muhur*), etc. Several poems describe the use of blood for writing letters between lovers due to the absence of ink, but perhaps more importantly also as a sign of love and fidelity.[1138] Messengers are often mentioned in their capacity of carrying and delivering letters. A messenger may be mentioned as a particular person with a name (e.g a friend), or an anonymous messenger referred to as *tatar*[1139] i.e. a postman

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the Bosnian Muslims] (Svjelost: Sarajevo, 1976); *Sa gornjeg čardaka,* [From the upper belvedere] ed. by Munib Maglajlić and Smail F. Terzić (Tešanj, 1976).

[1136] Petar Skok, *Etimologijski rječnik hrvatskog ili srpskog jezika, II* [Etymological Dictionary of the Croatian or Serbian Language] eds. by Mirko Deanović and Ljudevit Jonke (Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti: Zagreb, 1972), p. 109. This double meaning is not peculiar to Bosnian. The Greek χάρτα and Romanian *carte* can also mean both a letter and a book, *ibid,* p. 110.

[1137] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka, I,* p. 169.

[1138] Vidan, *Embroidered With Gold,* p. 105. Using blood instead of ink is a common theme in Bosnian and South Slavic poetry in general.

[1139] Škaljić, *Turcizmi,* pp. 602, 603.

mounted on a horse, known as the *menzil* horse (post-horse) or simply *menzil*. Sometimes the messenger is referred to as *knjigonoša* (letter-carrier).[1140] In a few poems, messages are delivered by falcons.[1141]

Going back to the example of *Hasanaginica*, the ballad is about the tragic fate of the wife of a Bosnian nobleman. When her husband wrongfully accuses her of infidelity and divorces her, she is unable to bear the pain of separation from her five children and dies of a broken heart. This relatively short poem refers to writing and reading in five instances: 1) Hasan-āghā sends a letter of divorce to his wife; 2) his wife's brother presents his sister with the letter of divorce, 3) the wife reads the letter, 4) she asks her brother to write a letter on her behalf to her new husband, 5) the *kadi* reads her letter.[1142]

1.b Administrative Documents

Oral poetry often contains references to various types of administrative document: the *fermān* (imperial edict) is perhaps the most commonly mentioned type, followed by *maḥżar* (a round-robin signed by all present), *buyruldu* (imperial decree), *'arżuḥāl* (a written petition), *ḳātil-buyruldu* (a death sentence), etc.

Occasionally one comes across references to registers (*defters*), usually in the sense of army registers of soldiers and horses in preparation for a military campaign.[1143]

Sometimes a poem or sections of a poem are so replete with references to various types of document that they almost appear a versified record of an administrative paper-trail. The poem "Dženan Bubljugbaša i Rakocija"[1144] mentions the following items related to written culture: *mahzar* (a round-robin signed by all present), *muhur* (seal), *muhur-sahibija* (seal-

[1140] Vidan, *Embroidered With Gold,* p. 110. On the postal service in the Ottoman Bosnia, see: Milan Ljiljak *Pošta, telegraf i telefon u Bosni i Hercegovini, I* [Post, Telegraph and Telephone in Bosnia-Herzegovina] (Preduzeće PTT Saobraćaja: Sarajevo, 1975), 47-124.

[1141] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka, I*, p. 157.

[1142] There are minor differences in the translation as against the original text, due to poetic (or translator's) license. However, it should be noted that the original verses imply sending a message in writing, as in the verse: *ter poruča vjernoj ljubi svojoj*, which Francis Jones translates as: *He sends a letter to his loyal love*), "The sad ballad of the noble lady Hasan Aginica", tr. By Francis Jones, *Forum Bosnae* 51 (2010), p. 270. Having said that, Scott's translation also refers to writing: "wrote the stern chieftain this severing line/ – 'Away from my Castle/ its mistress no longer/ Away from my children and all that is mine'-..", *Hasanaginica 1774-1974*, p. 238.

[1143] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka, II*, p. 330.

[1144] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka, II*, pp. 95-145.

master), *aman-pismo* (letter of clemency), *tatar* or *tatarin* (a horse-mounted messenger), *tatar-aga* (chief messenger), *menzil* or *menzilski konj* (postal horse), *menzilhana* (postal station), *tura* (imperial monogram), *ćatibi* (scribes), and *tefterhana* (finance office). The poem also contains references to letters, books, gospels, and the Qur'an, of which more will be said shortly.[1145]

1.c. Charms and Talismans

Traditional oral poetry also contains numerous references to charms and talismans. In one poem we learn of a boy and a girl who are deeply in love with one another and just as their wedding ceremony is performed and before the marriage is consummated, the boy falls ill. The young couple continue to live separately in their parents' homes. Time goes by and the boy remains ill. Torn between her love and the constant nagging by her parents to move on in life and find another husband, the girl asks the boy to allow her to marry, if he thinks he will not recover. He gives her permission to marry whomsoever she chooses. On the day of her wedding to another man and as the wedding party is passing by the boy's home, the girl asks her future brother-in-law to allow her one final visit to the sick boy. After performing ablutions and prayer, she enters the room where he lies on the bed. She takes out her "magic-prayer book" (*sihir hamajlija*) and, as she starts reciting (*učiti*), the boy's heath is gradually restored. With each Qur'anic verse (Bosnian: *ajet*; Arabic: *āya*) she recites, the boy makes a full recovery and the couple finally gets married.[1146]

[1145] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka, I*, p. 106.

[1146] Vidan, *Embroidered With Gold*, p. 128. The story resembles the tradition on how the Prophet became ill after a spell was cast over him, from which he recovered when his son-in-law 'Ali (the fourth caliph and the first imam in Sufism and Shi'ism) recited the last two Qur'anic *sura*s, also known as al-Mu'awwidhatayn ("the two *sura*s of seeking refuge"). For more on this, see: Budge, *Amulets and Superstitions*, pp. 61-67, also quoted in Christiane Gruber, "A Pious cure-all: the Ottoman illustrated prayer manual in the Lilly Library" in *The Islamic Manuscript Tradition: Ten Centuries of Book Arts in Indiana University Collections*, ed. by Christiane Gruber (Bloomington & Indianopolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 148, 149, n. 44. Another example is found in a poem in which mother "prepared charms and spells/to make Alibeg hate his wife", Vidan, *Embroidered With Gold*, pp. 202, 203. Vidan translates the verb *izučiti* as "to read", while a more accurate translation would be "to recite", as Bosnian makes a distinction between the two.

Carrying talismans (Tur. *ṭilsum*) is frequently mentioned. In one poem a hero is given a golden kerchief (*zlatna marama*) which contains "up to nine talismans" (*do devet tilsuma*) to protect him from harm.[1147]

Written talismans were also used for the protection of animals, especially horses. Talismans for the horse are known as *dilbagija* or *dilbaga*, a "kind of *hamajlija*, an elongated oval silver box in which a written inscription (*zapis*) against the evil eye was carried. [the word] 'masāhallāh'[1148] was usually inscribed on the outside. It would be placed around a horse's neck or tied around the forearm."[1149] *Hamajlije* (Turkish: *ḥamaylı*) could also be put on the horse.[1150] In one poem a Christian hero seizes from his Muslim rival "seven hamaylis," alongside "nine dilbagijas" from his horse, which he then places on his own horse. What really makes him invincible is not that these talismans were written by a famous *khʷāja*, but that in contrast to their previous Muslim owner, Vuk sincerely believes in their powers and that enables him to confront the "the czar's armies of five hundred thousand."[1151]

1.d. Scripts

The word *jazija* (Turkish: *yazı* = writing, script) occurs in oral poetry to designate script. In one poem a person is said to know thirty scripts ("umije trideset jazija"), thirty tongues ("trideset jezika") and is able to read all sorts of books or letters ("svake knjige pročitati znade"), depending on how one understands the word *knjige*. [1152]

[1147] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka, II*, p. 213.

[1148] *Māshallāh* = literally, "whatever God wills", usually exclaimed to express joy or approval. The expression comes from the Qur'an, 18:39.

[1149] Škaljić, *Turcizmi*, p. 217. Škaljić is unsure about the etymology of the word and says he could not find it in Turkish or Persian dictionaries and literature. He suggests that the word might be a combination of the words "tongue" (*dil*) and "tie" (*bag*), meaning "tongue-tie" or "the tie which ties and fetters the tongue of a person watching a horse, in order not to say a word that would harm it", *ibid*. Similarly, a *hamayli* with *māshallāh* written on it is believed to prevent someone marvelling at something beautiful from saying *māshallāh* (in accordance with Qur'an, 18:39) and so keep him "tongue-tied".

[1150] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka, I*, p. 597.

[1151] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka, I,* p. 224. It is interesting to note that this sympathetic portrayal of a Christian fighter is found in the corpus of Bosnian Muslim oral poetry.

[1152] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka, I*, p. 496. Serdar Muṣṭafāga then asks his master to send Velagić-Selime "a small letter" (*sitnu knjigu*). While the latter verses clearly use the word *knjiga* for a letter, the preceding verses use the plural *knjige* in the sense of books.

An interesting motif in Bosnian oral poetry are the occasional references to literate, even learned, females. One poem tells of a man who is illiterate, but who has a literate mother, the wife of Šahin-pasha. When a messenger delivers a letter for her son, he has to take it to her to read the writing (*jazija*). The verse ends.[1153]

For the Pasha's wife has studied learning,	Pašinica ilum naučila,
As she is of noble stock. [1154]	Jer je ona soja gospodskoga..."

These verses seem to link literacy and social rank, at least in the case of Muslim noble women. The poem confirms what we know about the cultivation of the Bosnian Cyrillic script among Muslim noblewomen. The script is known as *bosančica* and also as *begovica*, i.e. the script of the beys.

If these verses indicate that literacy and learning in general carried social prestige, one should mention a poem about a mother who is trying to find a suitable match for her only daughter. The prospective husbands are described mainly in terms of their profession. The girl keeps finding fault with each of the men her mother mentions: the merchant is always in debt, the tailor is poor, the only son would have an angry mother, etc. When her mother mentions marrying a scribe she refuses on the ground that "his scratchy pen would steal my sleep" (*u pisara pero šara spavat mi ne da*). She also refuses to marry a clerk (*ćatib* = kātib) because "a clerk's hands are black from ink" (*u ćatiba crne ruke, od murećefa*!). In the end she asks to be married to a merry carouser (*sarhoš*).[1155]

6.2 References to Book Culture

The references to book culture are less frequent in traditional oral poetry than the references to written culture more generally. Those references show us the ways in which books were thought of in a largely oral society of Bosnian Muslims during the Ottoman period. They also testify to the mutual borrowings between the oral and the written culture.

[1153] Suljkić, *Islam*, p. 21.

[1154] Suljkić, *Islam*, p. 18.

[1155] *Sa gornjeg čardaka,* eds. by Munib Maglajlić and Smail F. Terzić, p. 186. Translation by Asim Zubčević.

2.a Books

The most frequently used word for the book in traditional oral poetry is *ćitab* or *kitab* (from Arabic, via Turkish - *kitāb*). For the most part the word is used generically, without specifying the genre or the content of the book or books mentioned. For example:

The khʷāja begs the royal tatar-aga[1156],	Hodža moli tatar-agu carskog,
to let him get to his lodgings,	da ga pušti do konaka doći,
to collect his robes	da pokupi svoju odorinu
and the books and old fermans,	i ćitabe i stare fermane,
which khʷāja Ćuprilija has.	koje ima hodža Ćuprilija.[1157]

After leading a failed rebellion, a man is condemned to death. As he is taken away for execution he asks his brother to look after his soon-to-be-orphaned children:

Brother Alija, watch over my children,	Brate Alija, pazi mi djecu,
When you send your children to school,	Kada svoju djecu dadeš u *maktab*,
Send mine as you do yours	Podaj i moju baš k'o i svoju
Let them carry books for your children,	Neka za tvoju ćitabe nose,
Let the world know they are orphans.	Nek se znade da su sirote.[1158]

It would seem that the word *ćitab* is used in a Muslim cultural context, while the word *knjiga* (in the sense of book, not letter), usually, designates books from Christian book culture. Here is an example of *knjige* (books) as Christian books:

There are twenty monks there	Tude ima dvades't kaluđera,
bareheaded, their hair disentangled,	gologlavih, kose raščešljane,
holding books and gospels in their hands.	u rukam' im knjige i indžili.[1159]

The only other type of the book to be identified more narrowly, by genre, are book-interpretation manuals, as in the following verse:

[1156] *Tatar-aga* = the chief of the postal service.

[1157] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka*, *I*, p. 115.

[1158] Hajrudin Ćurić, *Školske prilike Muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini* 1800-1878 [Educational Conditions of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1800-1876] (Beograd: Srpska akademija nauka i umjetnosti, 1965), p. 95; quoted also in Suljkić, *Islam*, p. 42.

[1159] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka*, *I*, p. 121.

"My brother in God, the kh^{w}āja tabirji,[1160]	"Bogom brate, hodža tabirdžija,
open now the book of dream interpretation,	otvorider ćitab-tabirnamu,
because last night I had an ugly dream."	jer sam noćas ružan san usnio."[1161]

On hearing the dream, the *kh^{w}āja* says:

"I shall not open the book, O bey,	"Ćitab, beže, otvarati neću,
but shall interpret the dream freely.	već ću 'nako sanak tabiriti."[1162]

2.b Scriptures

It will come as little surprise that the Qur'an is mentioned in traditional Bosnian Muslim poetry. It is perhaps more surprising to find references to the Christian gospels, too. One poem describes the death of a boy who dies of broken heart the night his beloved is forcibly married to another. As his coffin is carried past his lover's home the girl takes out a copy of "the Qur'an amulet" (*Kur'an hamajliju*) and recites the *sura Yāsīn* for his soul.[1163] This is sura 36 in the Qur'an and it is traditionally recited for the soul of the dead.

Sometimes the word *musaf* (*muṣḥaf* = collection) is used for the Qur'an. A poem describes the abduction of a Muslim girl whose Christian captor breaks into a mosque and tramples over the "small *Muṣḥaf*s" (*sitne musafe*). [1164]

Another poem describes a *kh^{w}āja* (Bosnian: *hodža*) who goes around "without a Qur'an" (hodža brez Kur'ana) and who has a "fondness for mead" (kome 'no je medovina draga). [1165]

[1160] *Hodža tabirdžija* is a Muslim cleric (*kh^{w}āja,* Bosnian*: hodža*) who is skilled at dream interpretation (*ta'bīr*).

[1161] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka, I,* p. 560.

[1162] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka*, *I*, p. 561.

[1163] Vidan, *Embroidered With Gold*, p. 148.

[1164] Vidan, *Embroidered With Gold*, p. 171. Vidan translates the "sitne musafe" as "small prayer books". The standard dictionary of Turkish loan words in Bosnian by Abdulah Škaljić clearly gives the meaning of the word *musaf* as the Qur'an ("kur'an"), adding that the original meaning of the word in Arabic is *a bound book, a collection* ("uvezana knjiga, zbirka"). So far as I am aware, in Bosnia the word *Muṣḥaf* or *Musaf* is always used to mean a bound copy of the Qur'an only. As Professor Enes Karić has observed, one can speak of an Islamic book monotheism in which there can only be one Qur'an, however many copies there may be. Personal communication with Enes Karić, September 7, 2012. The word Vlach was an old term for Eastern Orthodox Christians. Today, the word is considered a pejorative for an ethnic Serb.

[1165] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka, I,* p. 127.

Sometimes the Qur'an is referred to as the "Turkish book," meaning the "Muslim book," as illustrated by the following verses:

God will forgive him sins,	Bog će njemu gr'jehe oprostiti,
as the Qur'an, the Turkish book, says.	tako Kur'an, turski ćitab kaže.[1166]

As already mentioned, the traditional oral poetry of the Bosnian Muslims includes references to the gospels. In one poem, a Muslim hero crosses over into the neighbouring Christian kingdom dressed as a monk and carrying "a heavy gospel" in his bag to make his ruse more credible.[1167] In another poem, three Muslim friends cross into Christian territory in an attempt to rescue a Muslim girl taken captive. When they get caught, they pretend to be Christians. Their captors become suspicious and, on the advice of the local Christian lord ("od Zadarja bane" = the lord of the town of Zara), gospels are brought for the suspects to read. When the gospel reading of one of them turns out to be not only fluent, but even "better than the ban" (*čita bolje nego bane*), the prisoners succeed in hiding their true identity.[1168]

In yet another poem, the sultan's mother's covert profession of Christianity comes to light after the discovery of a secret church manned by monks and furnished with "books and gospels" (*knjige i indžili*).[1169]

2.c Book Culture Metaphors

Traditional oral poetry includes the occasional use of metaphors from book culture. In one poem a female lover speaks of her longing for the departed lover (both symbolised by two speaking flowers). When asked about how she feels about her missing lover, the love-struck flower responds:

"If the sky were a sheet of paper,	"Što je nebo, da je list artije,
And the mountains pens,	"Što je gora, da su kalemovi,
And sea black ink;	"Što je more, da je crn murećep;

[1166] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka, I*, p. 414.

[1167] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka*, *I*, p. 381.

[1168] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka*, *I*, p. 620. A loan-word from Hungarian, *katana* designates an armed solider mounted on a horse, Škaljić, *Turcizmi*, p. 400.

[1169] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka, I,* p. 121.

And I to write three full years,	Pak da pišem tri godine dana,
I could not write down my sorrow."	"Ne bi moji ispisala jada."[1170]

Another poem describes the physical features of three young men who cross the border to rescue an abducted girl. One of them is said to have a face which resembles a letter or a book (depending how we understand the word *knjiga*) on account of the many moles on his face:

there are more moles on his face	više mu je bena po obrazu
than dots on a white page.	nego nokti po knjizi bijeloj."[1171]

Here the word for dot is *nokta*, from the Arabic *nuqṭa* via Turkish.

6.3 Books and Writing in Folklore

Certain Bosnian Muslim customs entail the use of the book, mostly the Qur'an, as a material object. This is hardly surprising given the central role the Qur'an traditionally plays in Muslim culture.[1172] Most of these customs are linked to the life cycle and rites of passage.

It could be argued that traditionally the Qur'an was present in the life of the Bosnian Muslim not just from the earliest moments of his or her life, but from even before he or she was born. Thus, if a woman experiences difficulties during labour ("koja teško rađa"), it is believed that the birth will be made easier if one opens a copy of the Qur'an in front of her and gets her to drink water over it.[1173]

When the bride enters her new home, she is given a copy of the Qur'an to hold under her right arm and bread (pogača) under her left arm. This is followed by a ritual known as

[1170] Vuk, *Srpske narodne pjesme*, p. 141.

[1171] Hörmann, *Narodne pjesme Bošnjaka*, *II*, p. 620. These verses resemble a famous *alhamijado* (the vernacular written in Arabic script) poem in which a boy explains Arabic letters to a girl by comparing her face to various letters.

[1172] The present section is concerned only with customs which include the use of the Qur'an as a material book. The customs presented here are drawn primarily from Antun Hangi's *Život i običaji muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini*, first published in 1899. Its author was the first to describe Bosnian Muslim customs.

[1173] Hangi, *Život i običaji*, p. 95. Consumating sweets, traditionally distributed during the *Mawlid* celebrations (Bosnian: *Mevlud*, the Prophet's birthday), is also recommended for facilitating birth, *ibid*. Various Qur'anic chapters are also recited to promote a happy birth and keep the child alive.

"selecting the *Muṣḥaf*" (*pribijeranje musafa*): in the presence of a *bula* (a religiously learned Muslim woman)[1174] the bride turns pages of the Qur'an, reciting verse 36:58 over each page. At the end, the bride kisses the Qur'an and the *bula* places the Qur'an on the bride's head.[1175] The *muṣḥaf* is then placed in a high place with its pages open for some time.[1176] Once a dova (*du'ā'*) has been recited, the bula takes the opened copy of the Qur'an and moves it in a circle around the bride's head.[1177] According to a scholar who has studied the pre-Islamic origins of Bosnian Muslim customs extensively, this particular custom is not found in other parts of the Muslim world. Tihomir Đorđević, a leading Serbian ethnographer during the first half of the 20th century, considered the Bosnian Muslim custom of the bride entering her new home with bread and the Qur'an to be of pre-Islamic origins.[1178] A medieval Catholic Church document mentions the rejection of baptism by water and its replacement with baptism by the book as one of the heretical practices to be found among Bosnian Christians: "Bosnian *krstjani* do not recognize baptism by water, which they hold both useless and irrelevant. Salvation comes only through 'baptism by the book,' which in terms of distribution should correspond with the Cathar ritual of 'consolation' (consolamentum). Before he finally accepts the perfect order of the *krstjani*, the novice must be instructed and baptised in the 'true apostolic' faith. When the Bosnian Church council of 'elders' becomes convinced that a candidate is firm in his faith, it subjects him to 'spiritual baptism,'

[1174] On the role of the *bula* among Bosnian Muslims, see: Tone Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 189-191, 209-13.

[1175] Muhamed Hadžijahić, "Bračne ustanove u bosanskih muslimana prije 1946. godine" [Marriage institutions among Bosnian Muslims before 1946], *POF* 31 (1981), pp. 155-168. There are local variations of the custom. In Zvornik in northeast Bosnia, before the bride enters her new home, bread (*pogača*) and salt are given to her to hold under her left arm and a copy of the Qur'an to place under her right arm. See: Suljkić, *Islam*, p. 207.

[1176] Hadžijahić, "Bračne ustanove u bosanskih muslimana prije 1946. godine", p. 161.

[1177] Enver Mulahalilović, *Vjerski običaji muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini* [Religious Customs of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina], (Hamidović: Tuzla, 2005), p. 87. Mulahalilović states that he left out customs he deemed un-Islamic, saying that his study will "not address various beliefs and superstitions (*sujevjerja i praznovjerja*) which are essentially popular in character and are relatively common among all our peoples and so have their roots in ancient Slavic times. The only exception are those pre-Islamic beliefs whose content acquired a pronounced Islamic religious character after Islamization", *ibid*, p. 5.

[1178] Tihomir R. Đorđević, *Naš narodni život* [Our Folk Life], *knjiga šesta* [book six], (Beograd, Izdavačka knjižarnica Gece Kona, 1932), p. 41; *Naš narodni život*, *knjiga treća* [book three], pp. 110, 138-159.

probably so-called because the person receiving baptism (*krštenik*) has the book of the gospels placed on his head during the act."[1179]

Before the foundations for a new house are laid, the chapter *Yāsīn* is recited over four pebbles, each of which is placed with one of the cornerstones.[1180] The first person to enter the new house or flat is the master or mistress of the house. Having performed ritual ablutions (Bosnian: *abdest*), he or she carries a sieve, covered with a scarf or wrapped in cloth. In some places, a wooden box for keeping bread is used in place of the sieve. A copy of the Qur'an, prayer beads (Bosnian: *tespih*) and bread are placed in it.[1181]

Finally, let me mention a custom which, to the best of my knowledge, has not been described in the literature: on St. George's eve, the husband or wife performs ritual ablutions and, holding a copy of the Qur'an under one arm, walks around the house reciting verses from the Qur'an they know by heart. The same act is performed around the barn. This is believed to bring protection and blessings to the household.[1182]

A Bosnian Muslim folk legend explains why a newly born child cries as follows: "When the child is born, it screams and starts crying. The child does not want to come out of its mother's womb before angels give it a voucher (Bosnian: *senet*),[1183] a written confirmation that it will not die. When the child receives the voucher, it starts leaving its mother. As

[1179] This is a quote from: Franjo Šanjek, *Bosansko-humski krstjani i katarsko-dualistički pokret u Srednjem vijeku* [Christians from Bosnia and Hum and the Cathar Dualist Movement in the Middle Ages] (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1975), p. 88. The translation is by Asim Zubčević. On the rejection of baptism by water, see also: *ibid*, p. 129, while for baptism by the book, see: *ibid*, p.131. See also by the same author: *Bosansko-humski krstjani u povijesnim vrelima (13.-15. st.)* [Krstjans of Bosnia and Hum in the Historical Sources (13th – 15th c)] (Zagreb: Barbat, 2003), especially the description of a debate between a Roman Catholic and a Bosnian Patarene. The first chapter (DE BAPTISMO), pp. 166-173, is devoted to the question of the right form of baptism and the Roman Catholic condemnation of baptism by the book, as practiced among Bosnian *krstjan*s.

[1180] Mulahalilović, *Vjerski običaji*, p. 42.

[1181] Mulahalilović, *Vjerski običaji*, p. 44. In Sarajevo, on moving into a new home, one would carry a copy of the Qur'an, with some bread and rice.

[1182] Interview with Ismeta Baković (née Rovčanin, born 1 January 1945 in the village of Gračanica, municipality of Prijepolje, Serbia) on June 7, 2012, in the village of Gračanica near Visoko (23 km northwest of Sarajevo). The Baković family moved from the Sandžak region (Serbia) to Bosnia in the 1970s and continued to keep this custom for a while. When asked why she and her husband stopped practising it, she said that they did not want to appear strange to their new neighbours. The same custom is still followed by some families in the region of Visoko, however, according to her daughter Muniba Šukurica (née Baković).

[1183] *Senet* = Arabic: *sanad*, Škaljić, *Turcizmi*, p. 558.

soon as it falls on the pillow or on the ground, it starts screaming and crying because the angels have grabbed the voucher from its hand, and so it cries for help because it was tricked and because it will die."[1184]

When a new-born child is placed in the crib for the first time, seven days after its birth, this is usually done by a strong member of the clan, so that the child may grow strong, while Qur'anic *suras* are recited or God's name is invoked out loud by household members. Sometimes a small copy of the Qur'an is placed in the child's crib.[1185]

One of the key concerns for the parents and family of the newly-born is to protect them from the evil eye and *ograma.*[1186] Elaborate practices are involved in safeguarding the child from these. In the case of the *ograma*, which is "very hard to heal,"[1187] if everything else fails, the child should be taken to a "learned *khʷāja* to recite (*prouči*) from the books for you, and then you will recover."[1188]

[1184] Hangi, *Život i običaji*, p. 96.

[1185] I have not found written evidence for this custom, but know from personal experience how widespread it is. In my family and the family of my relatives it has been observed for as long as I can remember. It is not clear how long into the past it goes.

[1186] *Ograma* and *ograjisanje* are difficult to translate into English. According to Norwegian anthropologist Tone Bringa, "[it] has no simple literal translation and requires some explanation. The villagers use it to express the bewitching of a person as a result of certain acts performed by him or her. It is a word which does not exist in any dictionary, and my Sarajevan informants did not understand it. They suggested it was supposed to be *nagaziti (na urok*), which means to be 'bewitched', or alternatively *nagrajisati*, which means to get into trouble or to fare badly. It is believed that a person may be 'bewitched' by what most informants referred to as just 'something,' or more rarely as a 'devlish brew,' which may attach itself to breadcrumbs, nails, blood, wood chips, or rubbish which has been left outdoors by humans. This stuff is believed to be used by sorcerers when making *sihir*. This devilish brew containing malevolent spirits may thus be transferred deliberately by sorcerers to people who are thereby 'poisoned', *ibid*, pp. 178-9.

[1187] Hangi, *Život i običaji*, p. 108.

[1188] Hangi, *Život i običaji*, p. 108. It is noteworthy that both Muslims and Christians were willing to solicit the help of *khʷāja*s and priests or monks in search of a cure. A written note (Turkish: *tezkere*) of 11 Muḥarram 1120/2 April 1708 by Muḥammad-bey, the governor's representative in Sarajevo, asks a friar in the Kreševo monastery near Sarajevo to cure a mad girl by name of Hatidža (Khadīja) from Sarajevo, but also warns that the cure must not involve anything that runs against religion (*din*), Sejfudin Fehmi bin Ali Kemura, *Bilješke iz prošlosti bosanskih katolika i njihovih bogomolja po turskim dokumentima* [Notes from the history of Bosnian Catholics and their houses of worship according to Turkish documents] (Sarajevo: Islamska dionička štamparija, 1334/1916), p. 10. Kemura interprets the document as a permission, but his translation is in the form of command.

Muslims believe that when a person dies, he or she will be questioned by angels in the grave. In Bosnian Muslim tradition, they are known as *suvaldžije* (Turkish: *suvalcı*). Those who led an upright life and followed the precepts of religion will be able to answer the questions easily. As a result they will have a foretaste of Paradise already in the grave. In the following poem we see how a young sultan's daughter beseeches the angels:

"For the sake of God, you many examiners,	"A boga vam, mloge suvaldžije,
I have prayed five prayers today	Ja sam danas pet vakat' klanjala
and looked into the book five times."	I pet puta u ćitab gledala."[1189]

Given that the book is mentioned after the five daily prayers, it is reasonable to assume that it refers to the Qur'an. In one of the previous poems, we have seen the Qur'an referred to as the "Turkish book."[1190]

In the chapter on customs surrounding birth, etnographer Antun Hangi writes about a lady whom he heard swearing "by all the books [of God?]" ("tako mi svih ćitaba").[1191] The word *ćitab* or *kitab*, most likely refers to God's revelations in the form of the book which constitutes one of the articles of faith.

Conclusion

In order to understand the meaning and function of book ownership it is necessary to take into account the predominantly oral environment of pre-modern societies and look at the sources rooted in orality such as oral poetry and folklore in the form of popular beliefs and customs.

By identifying and examining references to written culture in traditional Bosnian oral poetry one gains an impression of a culture whose members had a degree of familiarity with reading and writing, even when they were illiterate in the sense of being able to read and write themselves. This impression is gained from reading *Hasanaginica*, one of the best known Bosnian Muslim poems. As is the case with most Bosnian oral poetry, the references to writing in it are expressed through the theme of letter writing. Other types of reference

[1189] Hangi, *Život i običaji*, p. 211.

[1190] See n. 1162. Having said this, *gledati u ćitab* can also mean "to predict the future by looking into the book", a practice also known as *fal* (Arabic: *fa'l*). It is done by "looking into" the Qur'an, but in Sarajevo there is also a tradition of using Ḥāfiẓ Shirāzī's *Diwan* for the same purpose (personal communication with Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, September 5, 2012).

[1191] Hangi, *Život i običaji*, p. 92.

that figure frequently in Bosnian oral poetry are to various Ottoman administrative documents, talismans and to book-learning in general. All such references relate to the practical needs of life and the ways in which writing serves them: by facilitating communication (letters) and government (*fermans*, *buyruldis*, etc), by giving protection from harm (*hamaylis*), and e.g. by enabling people to face the future (dream interpretation manuals), etc. Oral poetry also shows that this was very much a scribal culture of pen and paper, of scribes who have "hands black from ink."

If one takes oral poetry to be, among other things, a vessel for the transmission of social values, it is remarkable that many verses stress the value of literacy, knowledge and books. Heroes are explicitly commended for being literate and learned. Some verses appeal to our modern sensibilities in depicting literate or learned female characters in contrast to illiterate and unsophisticated men. It does not follow from this that each and every Bosnian Muslim girl and woman was literate or that female literacy rates were equal to those of men; at the very least these verses show that literacy was not seen as the exclusive preserve of men.

Given the high esteem in which books are held in Muslim culture, it is tempting to see this poetry as a product of Muslim culture and the religious value it places on learning and books. This may be so. But before jumping to conclusions it should be remembered that much of the material in these Bosnian oral poems belongs to the common cultural humus that nourished the Southern Slavs and their oral tradition, regardless of religious affiliation. A cursory look at Vuk's collection shows, e.g., that references to letter writing are also common in the poetry cultivated by Eastern Orthodox Serbs in Bosnia and Serbia. Learning and education there are associated more closely with churches and monasteries. A comparison of the two traditions with regard to references to written culture could show differences as well as mutual borrowings, which – considering, for example, that *Hasanaginica* was preserved among Christians or that in some cases Muslim singers sang about Christian heroes – may well be substantial.

Although it is practically impossible to draw detailed empirical conclusions on the basis of poetry about levels and types of literacy, poetry can still be useful to us. It shows us the world the nameless bards drew for their listeners and which reflects the values of the society in which they were cultivated. The same may be said about book-related customs, or more precisely, Qur'an-related customs linked to major events in the life cycle like birth, marriage, death, as well as the changing of the seasons (St. George's day), etc.

Most recorded South Slavic oral poetry was collected in the 13th/19th century, but its origins go back further in time and much of it would have been known to Sarajevans living in the 12th/18th and early 13th/19th centuries. This is attested by the Sarajevan scribe Basheskī, who notes in his chronicle the popularity of these songs and the versatile memory of their singers, whom he compares with "ḥāfiẓes."