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Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

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History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Serving as a judge in his native Bosnia in 1737 when war broke out between the Austrians and the Turks, Omer Efendi (about whose life little else is known) produced this vivid account of the conflict from an Ottoman perspective. Important for what it reveals about the region's social history, the work was revised and published by Ibrahim Müteferrika (c.1672–1745), the founder of Turkish printing. It was first published in English in 1830 after being translated by Charles Fraser, a professor at Edinburgh's Naval and Military Academy. Fraser also added an introduction to the work that gives both a brief history of Bosnia and an overview of the text. The narrative begins with a description of the army of the invading Austrians, who are described throughout as 'infidels'. An account is then given of the operations of the war, through to the signing of the Belgrade treaty in 1739.

Cambridge University Press

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Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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CAMBRIDGE
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Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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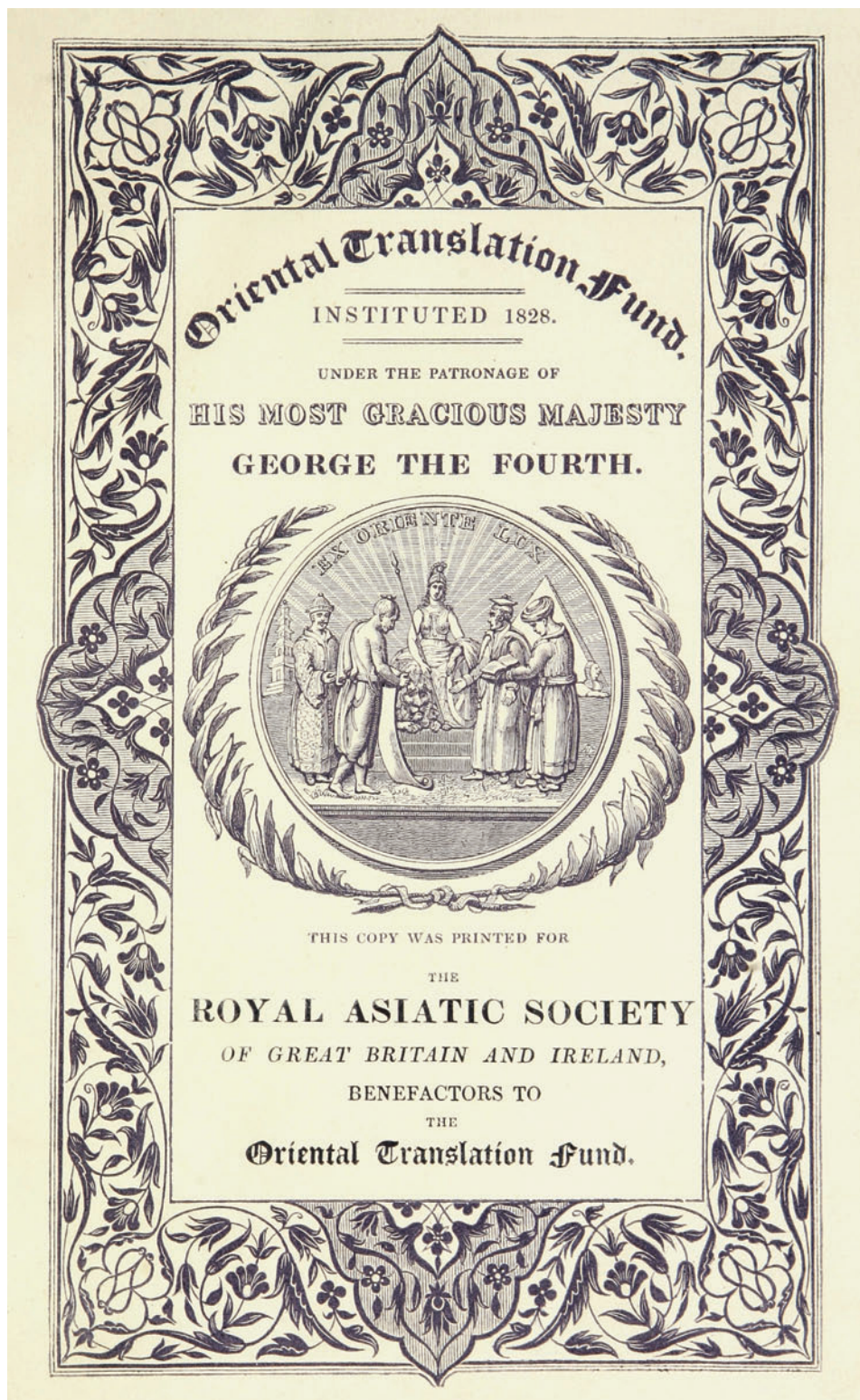
Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737-8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

HISTORY

OF THE

WAR IN BOSNIA

DURING THE YEARS 1737-8 AND 9.

TRANSLATED FROM THE TURKISH
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PROFESSOR OF GERMAN IN THE NAVAL AND MILITARY ACADEMY, EDINBURGH.

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Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

BOSNIA, or BOSNA, was included anciently in Pannonia Inferior; and in the fourth century formed a part of that vast district called Illyricum, which comprehended, under this general appellation, Rhætia, Noricum, Pannonia, Dalmatia, Mœsia or Mysia,* Thracia, Macedonia, and Greece; and which afterwards was divided into two provinces, viz. Liburnia and Dalmatia.

It received its present name from a river which runs through it to the Save (Savius), called Bosna (Bocantus); near the mouth of which stood Sir-

* In some histories Bosnia is supposed to be the country that was anciently called Mysia. Playfair, whom I follow, says: "That Mysia extended from the confines of Macedonia and Thracia northward to the Danube, and from Pannonia and Illyricum eastward to the Euxine sea: divided by the river Ciabrus, Zibris, into Mœsia Superior or Prima, now called Servia; and Mœsia Inferior or Secundus, now Bulgaria." Bosnia, or at least part of it, was, in 1103, called the kingdom of Rama.

Cambridge University Press

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Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

mium, anciently the capital of Pannonia, and the residence of the Roman emperors when they visited the Illyrian frontiers; where Claudius expired. Budalia, eight miles above Sirmium, on the Save, was the birth-place of Decius; and Cibalis (Sivilet) about fifty miles above the same place, on the Save, was the birth-place of Gratian; near to which Constantine vanquished Licinius in 315.

The original inhabitants of these regions are represented as having been fierce and barbarous; painting their bodies with various colours, and subsisting by rapine and piracy. They attracted the notice of the Romans two centuries before the Christian era, and were finally subdued by Tiberius towards the conclusion of the reign of Augustus.

Modern Illyricum comprehends the countries which belonged to it in the middle age, and is divided into Hungarian and Turkish Illyricum. Bosnia, which belongs to the latter division, was in process of time annexed to the kingdom of Hungary, but was afterwards erected into an independent state, and governed by its own sovereigns from the year 1351* to 1465; when the Turks, under Mo-

* In 1389, Amurath I. in an obstinate engagement with the united armies of Bosnia, Servia, and Bulgaria, was slain by a Bosnian noble. A mausoleum was erected by the victorious army

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

vii

hammed II., made themselves masters of it, about twelve years after the reduction of Constantinople. Stephen V., the last sovereign of Bosnia, was, on his surrendering himself, ordered by Mohammed, in violation of the most sacred promises, to be flayed alive: his family, and the nobles connected with him, were all sent to Constantinople to grace the triumphs of the Mohammedan conqueror. It is not improbable but this prince, urged on as he was by the most insatiable thirst of conquest, would have carried his triumphs as far as Imperial Rome herself, had it not been for the celebrated George Castriot, prince of Epirus, in Albania, generally known by the name of Scanderbeg, who with a small army resisted for many years all the power of the Turks, and gained twenty-two battles. He was at last obliged to take refuge in Lyssia, in the Venetian States, where he died in 1466; and with him also sunk the strength of Epirus, which afterwards became a Turkish province. Moham-

in memory of their king, and lamps are kept continually burning in it, which are watched by Dervishes. The Bosnian was put to death; and a stone has been placed over his grave, which is still revered by his countrymen. Fifty years afterwards, Amurath II. routed in the same place (the plain of Merles, or Cossovopoli, in Servia,) a Hungarian army.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

med II. died in 1481, after having reduced twelve kingdoms and two hundred towns, and put to death eight hundred thousand Christians of both sexes.

Bosnia is bounded on the west by the Una, on the north by the Save, on the east by the Drin, which separates it from Servia, and on the south by a ridge of mountains, lying in $44\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ N. latitude; being, according to some geographers, two hundred miles from east to west, and seventy-five from north to south, and according to others still less. Hassel estimates it to be 1062 German square miles, allowing the German square mile to be equal $11\frac{1}{5}$ English square miles.

It forms one Pashalick, and is divided into three districts called Sanjiakships; viz. Banialuka, Orach or Orbach, and Serai. It is a mountainous country, containing some fruitful plains and valleys, and watered by many rivers which run northward to the Save. The oak, the ash, the poplar, the maple, the hornbeam, the aspen, and the birch, grow on the sides of its mountains; the summits of which are covered with larches, firs, and yews. A great navy, it is said, might be built of the timber in the forests. The late emperor of the French, aware of the advantages that might be derived from them, ordered tools to be forged in the country: and workmen

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

ix

were employed, by his direction, in cutting a road by which the French legions might penetrate into Illyria, and the Bosnian oaks be transported to the harbours on the Adriatic.

The author, or rather publisher, of the History of the War in Bosnia, has strictly confined his narrative to the operations of the war, and is entirely silent with regard to the state of the country and the amount of population, except that he says it was in a defenceless condition when the Imperial troops commenced their aggressions. He has not given us even a statement of the strength and condition of the towns and garrisons which were assaulted, or of the Mohammedan force which was mustered on that occasion, for the purpose of opposing the invaders of their country. He satisfies himself with describing the number and attitude of the enemy, and with delineating the prowess, the deeds of invincible valour and the success, of the “orthodox troops,” though the number which are said to have been successively engaged in the various encounters with the enemy, seem in general to bear no proportion to the force which opposed them. He makes the Bosnians, the “true believers,” not only to conquer the “execrated infidel wretches”—the Germans—at all points, but drive the Prince of Saxe

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

INTRODUCTION.

Hildburghausen from Bosnia, and, in conjunction with the Ottoman Imperial troops, the Duke of Lorraine and Count Seckendorff from Belgrade, the capital of Servia also.* In short, he records the defeat of the Germans to have been so very complete, that not a “hoof of them,” as Ali Pasha, “the illustrious governor, prudent and skilful in affairs,” expressed it in one of his military councils, was left behind. The Bosnian warriors were not content with the triumph of overpowering and expelling the enemy from their own territories, but, in their turn, carried devastation and death into the dominions of the enemy, beyond the Una:†

* When the imperial negotiators proposed a treaty of peace, the grand vizir, who commanded in person at the siege of Belgrade, replied in a manner which at once shewed the haughtiness and heroic firmness of the Turk: he asserted that the bad faith of Austria had been the sole cause of the war, wherein God had favoured the Mussulmans; and had espoused the just cause: “As there is but one God,” he said, “I have only one word, and that word is Belgrade. Belgrade, untouched in its fortifications, shall be restored to my sublime emperor, and for that price he will sign a peace.”

† From the names of places given in the narrative, viz. Constanishæ, Ziren or Zrin, and Düb, &c., against which the Moslems directed their hostility on this occasion, we can be at no loss to perceive, that Hungarian Croatia and Hungarian Dal-

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

xi

and in all their battles and skirmishes, from first to last, they are not only victorious, but succeed also in carrying off immense booty, and in making many of the enemy prisoners, whilst they themselves are made to appear to have sustained very little loss.

Such is a short outline of the war in Bosnia, and we shall now leave Ibrahim to speak for himself. We are persuaded however, notwithstanding the defects we have been led to point out with respect to his narrative of the war ; and we might still add, that the engagements, the scenes, and the heroes, are too much generalised to excite that interest, which a more succinct and detailed account would have awakened. It will yet be found both curious and peculiar, inasmuch as it is written by a Turk, who seldom writes ; and also, as it gives a pretty full account, though not so circumstantial as

matia were the countries which are meant ; and which have frequently been exposed to the ravages of Christian and Turkish troops. In the fifteenth century the Venetians reduced the whole of Dalmatia, but they have since been dispossessed of a considerable part of it. At present Hungarians, Venetians, Turks, and Ragusans, share it among them. Grasdankoi, a castle on the Una, was once the residence of the counts of Ziren or Zrin, and noted for its silver mine.

Cambridge University Press

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Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

might be wished, of a war that was peculiarly disastrous to the Imperialists. The bad success of the Germans may probably be ascribed to their having at once divided their troops into five divisions, and attacking Bosnia in five frontier points,*—a circumstance which gave the war the character of a skirmishing and partisan warfare, in which the Turks, it is said, always shine. To this may be added the advantages which the native possessors of the soil, roused by every feeling which patriotism and religious hatred could inspire, must have had in repelling a foreign invasion : so that the defeat of the Imperial troops does not appear surprising.

Malte-Brun informs us that Bosnia is admirably defended by nature ; that the roads are so very bad that cannon or artillery can only be transported on a few of them ; that the Turks, in the event of an invasion, may convey the greater part of the provi-

* The first was directed against Banialuka ; the second against the fortresses of Būzin and Chetin ; the third against Osterwitchatyk ; the fourth against Tzwernick, and the fifth against Yangibazar, or Novi-bazar. This last division reduced the fortress of Niss in Servia on its march to Yangibazar. Niss is supposed to have been the birth-place of Constantine the Great, and Pristina, or Guisterdil, that of Justinian.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

xiii

sions in Bosnia into their strong-holds ; that the vizir can easily raise eighty thousand troops, thirty thousand of whom are sufficient for the defence of the forts, whilst the remaining fifty thousand may be employed in the campaign ; and, in short, that the great difficulty in the conquest of Bosnia must be attributed to its numerous passes and thick woods, its castles, and also to the known courage of the Bosnians when they combat in their own land, and to the necessity of protecting an immense frontier against the incursions and attacks of light-armed troops.

The same author informs us further, that Bosnia is, in proportion to its size, more populous than any of the other provinces in European Turkey ; and that it might, if its cultivation were extended, support three or four times the number of its present inhabitants : and in his table of the population in European Turkey, and which is constructed according to a scale of Hassel, (1823,) we find it stated that Bosnia contains five hundred and sixty thousand inhabitants. M. Liechtenstein, whom he quotes, calculates the population of Bosnia at nine hundred thousand individuals, of whom two-thirds are of Slavonian origin. Appended to this quotation from Liechtenstein is a note by Malte-Brun himself ;

Cambridge University Press

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Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

INTRODUCTION.

wherein he says, “I believe that M. Hassel and his guides have estimated the inhabitants of Bosnia and Servia too low by one half; and it is likely that the Slavonian population (including the Wallachians or Bulgaro-Slavo-Wallachians of Pindus) is at least equal to two millions.”

Whichever of these statements may be the nearest to the truth, we may conclude that its population, when the Prince of Saxe Hildburghausen and the Duke of Lorrain led their mighty and well-appointed forces against Bosnia in 1736, was not a very great deal less than when the above statements were made.

In the history of the war in Bosnia we meet with the names of several places and fortresses which are no where else to be met with, but which, from their being mentioned in connexion with others that are known, may be conjectured to be somewhere in their neighbourhood, or at least not far from them. We shall endeavour to give a short sketch of some of the most remarkable places; and in doing this we shall take Malte-Brun for our guide, from whom we have already borrowed a considerable part of our information concerning Bosnia. We begin with Bosnia-Serai, now the capital of the country: besides which and other principal towns, there are, it is

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

xv

said, twenty-four fortresses and nineteen castles, which were built in the middle ages.

Bosnia-Serai contains a population not less than sixty thousand souls. The forts are each flanked by four small turrets, and the walls are twelve feet thick. The houses in the city are adorned with gardens. On all sides are minarets, bastions, and turrets, and the whole is surrounded by well-wooded hills watered by the Miliaska and other feeders of the Bosna. It may be concluded, from the extensive trade in arms and jewellery, Malte-Brun observes, and from the numerous caravans which pass to Constantinople, that the inhabitants are as industrious as any in the Turkish dominions. A third of the inhabitants are members of the Greek Church.

Traunick, formerly the capital of Bosnia, and by Ibrahim called the seat of government and jurisdiction, lies on the west of Bosnia-Serai towards the frontiers of Dalmatia. Its citadel, M. Desfosses says, is of little importance, while M. Petuisier says it is almost impregnable. It is the residence of the vizir-pasha of the province, on whom is conferred the title of the vizir of Hungary. His annual revenue amounts sometimes to 10,000*l.*; and all the offices enjoyed by the ancient courtiers exist still in the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xvi

INTRODUCTION.

court of the vizir : but the guardian and protector, in the north-west of the empire is changed every three years, and is often, before that period expires, deprived of his dignities at the instigation of the Bosnians.

Yaitsha, or Iaicza, once the ancient abode of the kings of Bosnia, has fallen into decay.

Banialuka, a large and commercial town, is situated about twenty-four miles below Yaitsha on the Verbas. This is the only town of which any description is attempted in the following history. It contained, according to Ibrahim, forty temples and mosques ; but he makes no mention of the number of its population, leaving his readers to conjecture their probable number from their numerous temples. Malte-Brun says, that the houses, including those in the citadel, are not fewer than four thousand two hundred. The garrison is estimated at six thousand men, and the place is defended by three strong redoubts. The number of Christian families in it is about eighteen hundred.

Tzwernick, or Zwornick, situate on the Drin, had at one time a population of fourteen thousand souls, but at present it has less than six thousand. Vishegrade lies a little beyond it to the east. Maglay and Vrandouk, on the Bosnia, are remarkable for

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

xvii

their strong citadels. Gradishka on the Save is one of the strongest places in the country, having been fortified, in 1774, by French engineers. This was the palanka which the Prince of Saxe Hildburghausen, on his entrance into Bosnia, first reduced; whence, also, he proceeded to Banialuka, where his troops not only met with a vigorous resistance, but were completely routed by the “orthodox troops,” under the command of the vizir, Ali Pasha, and the intrepid Mohammed, the two principal heroes among the Moslems of that campaign.

The Sanjakship of Orbach is not so well known as the other parts of Bosnia. Hadji Khalfah makes the population of the town of Fotschia, which lies in this district, to amount to ten thousand souls. The different writers who mention it are not agreed as to its situation; some placing it on the White Drin, others on the Moracæ, and others again on the Zem. The church attached to the convent of Miloseva, in which are deposited the ashes of St. Saba, the first bishop of Servia, is said to be in this district. Yangibazar, or Novi-bazar, is in the district called Rascia, and is a populous town. Ozitcha, north of Yangibazar, was taken by the imperial troops in 1737, but was afterwards recovered by the Bosnians: it is a

b

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05508-6 - History of the War in Bosnia during the Years 1737–8 and 9

Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xviii

INTRODUCTION.

place of some trade, and contains about six thousand inhabitants.

Nooi or Novi, Dūb or Dūbieshæ, and Behack or Behka, are small fortresses on the Una, and which resisted, in 1789, the united efforts of an Austrian army.

Bosnia, before it was subjected to the Turkish yoke, was a Christian nation, though it is probable the inhabitants were split into Greek and Catholic Christians. Most of them have since, we learn, become Mussulmans, but differ entirely from the Turks in their manners, habits, and interests. Ibrahim has devoted a short but curious section, at the end of his work, to a description of the country and people of Bosnia, to which we refer the reader: their Christian neighbours are the members of a corrupt church. Those on the Drin and the Save, still attached to the Greek church, and those on the Verbas, from Yaitsha to Banialuka, and on the confines of Herzgovina, professing the doctrines of the Catholic faith, are all infected with the superstition, ignorance, and prevailing errors of the middle ages.

The Bosnian language is a dialect of the Servian, and generally spoken throughout the country. The Turks seldom think of acquiring it, and are con-

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Omer Efendi Translated by Charles Fraser

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

xix

sidered strangers. Polygamy, so peculiar to Mohammedan countries, does not prevail to any great extent in Bosnia, and both sexes enjoy the privilege of choosing their companions for life. An unmarried female appears in public without a veil, and respect is shown to the mother of a family. In all these respects they differ widely from the inhabitants of eastern countries; and Malte-Brun says, “the barbarism of the Bosnians must be imputed to an intellectual separation from the rest of Europe: if they were enlightened,—if the Christian religion were preached in its gospel purity amongst them, they might soon become an independent nation.”

We have now brought our observations on Bosnia to a close, and have only to say further, that in translating the following work, we have endeavoured to follow the original pretty closely, from an anxiety to preserve its oriental cast, which of course adds to its interest. The translation may, perhaps, from this cause appear clumsy and verbose, and not so well arranged as it might otherwise have been; but we thought it would be injurious to sacrifice the raciness of the original in endeavouring to adapt it to European taste.

THE TRANSLATOR.