

Cultural Heritage and Digitisation Projects: The Gazi Husrev-bey's

Library in Sarajevo[©]

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Social acceptance and appreciation of libraries as cultural heritage institutions is immanent to the understanding of theory and practice of library science in general.

In line with this, especially in the time of intensive transformations of library practices influenced by modern technologies that we bear witness to, libraries legitimate themselves as institutions that are, among other things, responsible for collecting, storing, preserving and protection of heritage knowledge, and users' community and society in general expects them to do so.

If we go back in the past for one decade, it becomes clear that evidence of intellectual activities of mankind and cultural identity, as a result of inadequate political systems, in this part of Europe were especially threatened in the area of ex-Yugoslavia.

Consequently, narrowing in this paper the area of interest to Bosnian & Herzegovinian cultural context, it becomes obvious that the issue of cultural and

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national identity, its preserving and an attempt for its reconstruction has been raised as an extremely important issue, especially when we take into consideration that the libraries in B&H, repeatedly, and not only during the last, disastrous war, were denied, threatened and prevented from performing their centuries-long task: to preserve heritage knowledge as knowledge on one's own cultural and national identity.

So, it is necessary to investigate as soon as possible how heritage knowledge management can be improved by using modern technology methods, e.g. digitization. An essential question would be how the possibility of digitization or, rather the need for digitization projects reflects on the institutions that are bearers of cultural heritage of a nation or a state. Or, what is the importance of library attempts to continue with their tradition of heritage knowledge management, but now taking into consideration and using new possibilities created in the new information surroundings, such as digitization of the library material.

Thus, it is much needed to identify advantages but also limitations of electronic media before going into a digitization projects, and by summing-up different attitudes, the following indications can be given: the biggest achievement, at this moment, with regard to the digital heritage objects, is facilitation of the access to information, and as its Achilles' heel are considered the problems of protection, crypting, copyright and intellectual property as well as the efforts about creating metadata concerning electronic materials. It seems

that a real challenge and true task for the future is finding a way for a parallel and fruitful coexistence and complementarity of analogue and digital formats, and especially attempts to make the existing analogue materials available to users by the possibilities of digital technologies.

In accordance with Stančić (2000: 58), Humanities Advanced Technology & Information Institute of the University of Glasgow produced a study on usage of information technologies in the area of culture whose guidelines I recognize here as indicators of possibilities offered by the digitization of heritage objects:

- The project decreases a risk of destroying cultural treasure,
- The project foresees a free access,
- The project supports preservation and protecting,
- The project results in cultural treasure,
- The project adds to education,
- Digitization of heritage objects contributes to the public welfare,
- Digitization increases access to cultural heritage,
- Digitization considerably decreases wearing out of holdings due to the frequent use,
- The project foresees possible applying of international standards for keeping and preserving documents.

So, even those social communities that still represent their cultural heritage mainly in a traditional way, such as Bosnian & Herzegovinian community, have been raising their consciousness of establishing their own

institutions in line with new ways of “consuming” culture, and one of the most transparent characteristics of this new relation toward cultural content is reflected in the users’ possibility to perceive cultural artifacts in a private atmosphere and, in accordance with their own wishes, with a preferred timing.

Cultural multiplying and interweaving, coexistence of different cultural patterns and dialogisms among them, as well as polyalphabetic writing systems are only some of the numerous characteristics of Bosnian & Herzegovinian cultural heritage. As it has been repeatedly apostrophized in literature, something like this is a result of turbulence of Bosnian & Herzegovinian territory, firstly in historical and political, and thereby also in a cultural sense. In accordance with this, Bosnian & Herzegovinian cultural heritage should be talked about, in the first place, with regard to many different sources of influence, primarily religious ones, within which scope Moslem, Orthodox, Catholic and Jewish traditional components were developing, first as relatively closed heritage systems, and today forming, above all, a mosaic heritage conglomerate within the common Bosnian & Herzegovinian cultural tradition. Religious and writing systems unhomogenousness, specific cultural heritages and other phenomena that shaped heritage variety in Bosnia & Herzegovina certainly mirrored in heritage institutions of this country.

Even if the common cultural heritage of Bosnians and Herzegovinians in the analogue age used to be mostly disunited and stored in the heritage

institutions that actually owned it, modern information technologies now in this field too offer new possibilities and implementations.

Namely, development of digitization projects in the context of Bosnian & Herzegovinian heritage institutions, with necessary inter-institutional cooperation, would enable a today's user as well as that one in the future a "travel" through Bosnian & Herzegovinian cultural heritage in a way that was not possible in the traditional approach to the cultural heritage facilities. Something like this would assure not only organized and stereotype "exhibitions" of our heritage without an obligation of real physical presence in "scattered" heritage institutions but also a possibility of composing narrative sequence on Bosnian & Herzegovinian past and heritage, and this narration would take place through visiting virtual collections of our heritage institutions.

Gazi Husrev-bey's library in Sarajevo comes to mind as an avoidable segment in preserving of Bosnian & Herzegovinian written heritage, taking into consideration the following starting points: a moment in time when it was founded, functions that it performed in its centuries-long past with regard to the fate that has befallen some other B&H libraries during the Agression against Bosnia & Herzegovina, while the library holdings of the Gazi Husrev-bey's were preserved entirely.

The Library was founded in 1537 in accordance with social practice of founding “vakufs”¹, generally spread among Ottoman governors in Bosnia, but also among people of much lower social status – all those who owned property that they wanted to endow to the social community.

This historical reference is important for this paper since it reminds that Gazi Husrev-bey’s library was the first well known public library in Bosnia & Herzegovina.

Beside the fact that the Gazi Husrev-bey’s library in Sarajevo is an institution with the longest library activity in Bosnia & Herzegovina, and also an institution of legacy type, which contributed a lot to the value of its holdings, this Library of Oriental type, that contains a number of books that are cultural heritage of not only Bosniaks but also of non-Bosniak people in Bosnia & Herzegovina, is important for another reason. Namely, by a happy combination of circumstances and dedication of its personnel, this Library emerged from the previous war with completely preserved holdings, which makes it an irreplaceable library institution in Bosnia & Herzegovina in many considered contexts. Not only it is the richest library institution of Oriental type in Bosnia & Herzegovina, and even wider, in the Balkans, and one of the most important in Europe but it is also a mainstay of its kind for a possibility of at least partial reconstruction of another one, also very important library of Oriental type in Bosnia & Herzegovina, that was destroyed deliberately down to its foundations

¹ About the notion of *vakufs* or legacy compare Begović (1963) and Ćerimović (1935).

during the Aggression against Bosnia & Herzegovina. In such a constellation of relations, by itself and with regard to the destroyed holdings of the Library of Oriental Institute in Sarajevo and National and University Library of Bosnia & Herzegovina², Gazi Husrev-bey's library stands as one of the key library and heritage institutions that, with regard to what has been previously said, in its efforts of preserving and presenting its content in the context of modern technologies, primarily digitization, has to be paid a due attention.

With regard to the treasure of the Gazi Husrev-bey's library, it is necessary to point out its, for Bosnia & Herzegovinian written heritage, the most precious samples. The holdings of the Gazi Husrev-bey's library counts up to 80,000 volumes of books, journals and documents in Oriental languages and Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, as well as in some European languages. Among these, 10,000 codices of manuscripts, with about 20,000 bigger and smaller works on Islamic sciences, science of Oriental languages and fiction. 25,000 printed books are in Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian and some European languages. Periodicals contain the oldest newspapers and journals that were published in Bosnia & Herzegovina, and almost all the issues of Moslem/Bosniak newspapers and journals that were or are still published in Bosnia & Herzegovina. The official gazzete of the Bosnian State "Bosnia", that was

² On 18th May 1992, manuscripts collection of Oriental Institute in Sarajevo was destroyed, that contained 5,236 codices in the Arabic, Turkish and Persian language, among the oldest texts were recorded in 1023. In a complete destruction of the holdings, 7,156 manuscripts were destroyed from the period between 16th and 19th century and over 200,000 documents from the old Turkish Archive. Reference collection of 15,000 volumes was also destroyed. Some time later, on 25 August 1992, National and University Library of Bosnia & Herzegovina was burnt down . About 1,200,000 books were burnt on that occasion and about 10,000 series of periodicals.

published in the period between 1866 and 1878, is almost entirely deposited in this Library. The newspaper “Sarajevski cvjetnik”, published by the first Bosniak journalist in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Mehmed Šaćir Kurtćehajić (died in 1872. in Vienna), is also almost complete, as well as Bosnian & Herzegovinian newspapers that Austro-Hungarian authorities started publishing upon their arrival in Bosnia & Herzegovina. Collection of newspapers and journals in Oriental languages is also valuable. Especially important is autograph of “Cronicle” by Sarajevian chronicler Mula-Mustafa Bašeskija, that covers the period from 1747 till 1804. Very important is also a collection of photographs, posters, proclamations and leaflets. The oldest manuscript in the Gazi Husrev-bey’s library is theological-mystical work “Ihjou ulumud-din” by Ebu-Hamid Muhamed el-Gazali (died in 1111.), transcribed in 1131. The Library owns a significant collection of photographs by eminent Bosnian & Herzegovinian individuals, buildings, as well as postcards from all places in Bosnia & Herzegovina. Together with already mentioned collections of leaflets and proclamations, these library units are valuable examples for study on Bosnian & Herzegovinian past.

Current activities related with the project of digitization of holdings of the Gazi Husrev-bey’s library in Sarajevo are only at an initial stage. The reason for that is insufficient financial support that otherwise doesn’t origin from home institutions and supporters, but primarily from international investors, mainly library institutions of similar, Oriental and specialized orientation.

Gazi Husrev-bey's library in Sarajevo is currently implementing a project of conversion of analogue formats into digital ones, and exclusively ones that we call locally held electronic publications.

So, in the Gazi Husrev-bey's library there is at the moment a process of converting analogue formats into digital ones, and specifically into off-line electronic materials, i.e. CD-ROM, through a procedure of recording using high quality digital cameras. Since this Library publishes its printed catalogues, together with an online catalogue, an initial criterion for digitization was a chronological sequence of the units in the catalogue, in a way that only one copy of a physical unit has been digitized, and when the project strengthened, this was expanded to all the units of the library holdings. Since this is a very demanding and expensive process, it is foreseen by the Library that it will continue for many more years. To the benefit of the Library added the fact that all the manuscripts in this Library, as well as the old printed material, are in a very good condition thanks to, among other things, permanent conservation and restoration work that is given a due attention by this Library, so there was no fear that the very process of digitization would put at risk their condition.

On-line (intangible) electronic materials of this Library are provided for now exclusively at an initial stage, in the form of photo web gallery accessible in the network. Only small number of the Library units, and not in a complete version, is presented through the network toward all the users interested in cultural and written heritage of Bosnia & Herzegovina, for its oriental and non-

oriental books, and generally its history. Only manuscripts have been presented through the network, and the criteria for their selection were reflected in the following: age of the manuscripts, illuminations that are an important characteristic of Oriental book, as well as manuscripts in general, but also contribution of transcribers or authors from this region. With regard to the managing of library holdings, this Library didn't recognize the problem of protection of the holdings primarily in digital form, but in the much older microfilming of the books.

Digitization as a form of real protection of materials is more than questionable concerning the problems of migrations of media and permanent need for transport of the content on more modern media, which is especially dangerous for manuscripts due to its wearing out and fragility that would be even more endangered by permanent converting. That's why the Gazi Husrevbey's library since the end of the war, having witnessed destruction of other Bosnia & Herzegovinian libraries and frightened by the possibility of mechanical destruction of its manuscripts, microfilmed its materials to protect it, so up to now a complete collection of manuscripts has been stored and protected, as well as all the old books and issues of periodical publications that the Library owns. This process is going on, with an intention to have all the library units deposited on microfilms.

In this process, it seems that the most appropriate solution for this Library, but also for all other libraries of similar orientation and amount of holdings at

this moment would be so called hybrid conversion that implies microfilming of the materials for its protection and then its digitization in order to enable users to access it through users' network systems. For born digitized materials the same procedure is acceptable, but now, logically, in an opposite direction.

It is advisable to mention one more time the fact that this Library is an inexhaustible source of information on Bosnian & Herzegovinian cultural heritage and in accordance with that, it is very interesting from paleographic, historical, literary and generally educational point of view, so presentation and preserving of its holdings is a common interest of all Bosnians and Herzegovinians.

At the end, it is worth mentioning that I haven't understood in this paper digitization of library holdings as a final protection of the originals, but firstly as a creative protection of originals from everyday use, and especially as a form of democratization and promotion of knowledge on our own heritage to the users who are used to the web technologies, both at national and a global level.

Of course, a digitized collection with its founding already raises a number of issues that are to be solved in order to have a functional collection, and these are namely problems of catalogue processing, production of metadata, protection problems etc, which for this paper are only open questions to which attention has been brought, and whose real importance should be raised in some other future work.

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