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Ivo Andrić

THE BRIDGE ON THE DRINA

Translated by Lovett F. Edwards



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INTRODUCTION

William H. McNeill

The committee that awarded the Nobel prize for literature to Ivo Andrić in 1961 cited the epic force of *The Bridge on the Drina*, first published in Serbo-Croat in 1945, as justification for its award. The award was indeed justified if, as I believe, *The Bridge on the Drina* is one of the most perceptive, resonant, and well-wrought works of fiction written in the twentieth century. But the epic comparison seems strained. At any rate, if the work is epic, it remains an epic without a hero. The bridge, both in its inception and at its destruction, is central to the book, but can scarcely be called a hero. It is, rather, a symbol of the establishment and the overthrow of a civilization that came forcibly to the Balkans in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries and was no less forcibly overthrown in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That civilization was Ottoman – radically alien to, and a conscious rival of both Orthodox Russia and the civilization of western Europe. It was predominantly Turkish and Moslem, but also embraced Christian and Jewish communities, along with such outlaw elements as Gypsies. All find a place in Andrić's book; and

with an economy of means that is all but magical, he presents the reader with a thoroughly credible portrait of the birth and death of Ottoman civilization as experienced in his native land of Bosnia.

No better introduction to the study of Balkan and Ottoman history exists, nor do I know of any work of fiction that more persuasively introduces the reader to a civilization other than our own. It is an intellectual and emotional adventure to encounter the Ottoman world through Andrić's pages in its grandiose beginning and at its tottering finale. Every episode rings true, from the role of terror in fastening the Turkish power firmly on the land to the role of an Austrian army whorehouse in corrupting the old ways. No anthropologist has ever reported the processes of cultural change so sensitively; no historian has entered so effectively into the minds of the persons with whom he sought to deal. It is, in short, a marvelous work, a masterpiece, and very much *sui generis*.

Perhaps a few remarks about Bosnia and its history may be helpful for readers who approach this work without prior acquaintance with the Balkan scene. Bosnia is a mountainous region in the central part of Yugoslavia. Today it is one of the constituent republics of that federal state. In medieval times it broke away from the Kingdom of Serbia in A.D. 960 and thereafter became more or less independent, though perpetually subject to rival jurisdictional claims because of its borderland position between Orthodox and Latin Christendom. In the twelfth century, the ruler of Bosnia sought to assert a fuller independence by becoming a Bogomil. This was a religion, related to Manichaeism, that spread also to western Europe where it was known as Albigensianism. Many Bosnians followed their ruler's example, remaining heretics in the eyes of

their Christian neighbors until after the Turkish conquest, when nearly all of the Bogomils became Moslem. As a result, about one-third of the population of Bosnia is Moslem today, even though they speak a Slavic language, Serbo-Croat, as their ancestors had done back to Bogomil days.

The Turks conquered Bosnia between 1386 and 1463. Conversion to Islam proceeded rather rapidly, especially among the land-owning families of Bosnia; and with religious conversion went a cultural transformation that made Bosnia an outpost of Ottoman civilization. From the fifteenth century onwards, Bosnian military manpower reinforced Ottoman armies. Year after year, Moslem warriors answered the summonses of local governors to go raiding into Christian lands to the north and west. Simultaneously, at irregular intervals, agents from Constantinople chose Christian peasant conscripts to replenish the ranks of the sultan's personal household. These recruits were officially classed as slaves, and in addition to military service in the Janissary corps many performed menial services in and around the court. Some, however, after appropriate training, emerged as the topmost military administrators and commanders of the Ottoman armies. A select few rose to the supreme administrative post of grand vizier.

Andrić's story of how the bridge was built is completely historical. A Bosnian peasant's son, Muhammad Sokbllii (ne Sokolović) became grand vizier in 1565, and as such governed the empire until his death in 1579. Having been recruited into the sultan's service as a youth, he remembered well his Bosnian birth, and among other acts acknowledging his origins, he chose his own blood brother to become patriarch of the Serbian church. The construction of the bridge across the

Drina was another, similar act emanating from the grand vizier's desire to be remembered in the place of his birth.

Ever since the Turkish conquest, Bosnian society had comprised a complex intermingling of Moslems, Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians. As long as Turkish power remained secure, local Moslem dominance was assured, both by the prowess of Moslem landowners and by the sporadic force Ottoman armies could bring to bear against any outside challenge. As Ottoman power diminished, however, and the might of adjacent Christian empires correspondingly increased, the religious divisions of Bosnian society became potentially explosive. Revolt by an oppressed Christian peasantry could expect to win sympathy abroad, either in Russia (for the Orthodox) or in Austria (for Roman Catholics). Simultaneously, mounting population pressure made it harder and harder for the peasantry to maintain traditional standards of living. On top of this, early in the nineteenth century, a handful of intellectuals, educated in Germany, picked up the idea that nationhood and language belonged together and could only attain full perfection within the borders of a sovereign, independent state. Since existing literary languages did not define clear boundaries between the Slavic dialects spoken in Balkan villages, the ideal of linguistic nationalism intensified confusion in the older religiously structured (and divided) society by offering individuals alternative loyalties and principles of public identity.

These circumstances provided the background for the „Eastern question“ that so bedeviled nineteenth-century European diplomats. Bosnia played a conspicuous role. First it was Moslems who revolted against Constantinople (1821, 1828, 1831, 1838-50) in a vain effort to defend their accusto-

med privileges. Soon after their reactionary ideals had met final defeat (1850), through military conquest by reformed (i.e., partially westernized) Ottoman armies, Christian peasants of Bosnia, objecting to an intensified tax burden brought on by a modernized administration, took up the standard of revolt (1862, 1875-78). This, in turn, provoked intervention by the Christian powers of Europe, with the result that at the Congress of Berlin (1878), Bosnia and the adjacent province of Herzegovina were placed under an Austrian protectorate. A generation later, in 1908, the Austrians announced the annexation of these two provinces to the Habsburg crown. This precipitated a diplomatic crisis that was part of the prologue to World War I; and, of course, that war was itself occasioned by the murder of the Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital, by Bosnian revolutionaries who wanted their land to become part of Serbia. After 1918, they had their way, for Bosnia was incorporated into the new south Slav kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. During World War II, Bosnia, because of its mountainous character, became Tito's principal stronghold, and after 1945 it was made one of the six constituent republics of the new federal Yugoslav state.

Ivo Andrić was born in Travnik, Bosnia, in 1892, but he spent his first two years in Sarajevo, where his father worked as a silversmith. This was a traditional art, preserving artisan skills dating back to Ottoman times; but taste had changed and the market for the sort of silverwork Ivo's father produced was severely depressed. The family therefore lived poorly; and when the future writer was still an infant, his father died, leaving his penniless young widow to look after an only child. They went to live with her parents in Višegrad on the banks

of the Drina, where the young Ivo grew up in an artisan family (his grandfather was a carpenter) playing on the bridge he was later to make so famous, and listening to tales about its origin and history which he used so skillfully to define the character of the early Ottoman presence in that remote Bosnian town. The family was Orthodox Christian, i.e., Serb; but in his boyhood and youth Andrić was thrown into intimate contact with the entire spectrum of religious communities that coexisted precariously in the Bosnia of his day; and his family shared the puzzling encounter with a strange new Austrian world that he portrays so sensitively in *The Bridge on the Drina*.

The young Andrić returned to Sarajevo to attend secondary school, and there became a nationalist revolutionary. This did not prevent him from attending Habsburg universities, at Zagreb, Kracow, Vienna, and Graz; but with the outbreak of World War I his political activity caused the Austrian police to arrest him. Andrić therefore spent the first three years of World War I in an internment camp, where he wrote his first successful book, published in 1918. On release (1917), he took an active part in conducting a literary review that advocated the political union of all south Slav peoples, and he had a minor part in the political transactions that brought Croatia into the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes that emerged in December, 1918.

Thereafter, Andrić returned to academic pursuits, working towards a doctor's degree at the University of Graz, achieved in 1924. His thesis was entitled „The Development of the Spiritual Life of Bosnia under the Influence of Turkish Sovereignty.“ The solid and precise historical information that underlies *The Bridge on the Drina* was thus systematical-

ly built up through academic study; but instead of continuing as a historian Andrić opted for a diplomatic career. Between 1924 and 1941 he was stationed at various European capitals. In his spare time he wrote short stories and planned his later, larger works.

World War II presented him with the enforced leisure necessary for realization of those ambitions. With the collapse in 1941 of the government he had served, Andrić, who had been Yugoslav ambassador at Berlin, returned to private life in Belgrade. During the ensuing years of harsh occupation and mounting resistance, he wrote no less than three novels, including *The Bridge on the Drina*. They were published in rapid succession in 1945, and at once established his reputation in Yugoslavia as a major writer. Translated into English in 1959, *The Bridge on the Drina* became the principal basis for his Nobel Prize for literature, which, in turn, made him a literary figure of world renown. Under Tito, Andrić held a number of honorific offices, but even after the Nobel Prize he maintained a discipline of work that permitted continued literary creation, and kept a zone of privacy around himself that few could penetrate. He died in Belgrade in 1975.

What seems truly remarkable about Andrić's literary achievement in *The Bridge on the Drina* is the way he entered into the minds of the Moslems of Bosnia. No doubt, in his youth he had ample opportunity to observe the fractured world in which the Bosnian Moslems found themselves. Very early in life he found the Orthodox Christian world view he himself had inherited to be inadequate. Revolutionary linguistic nationalism, to which he lent support in his student days, recognized no distinction between speakers of Serbo-Croat on the basis of their religion. Yet older habits of thought and

feeling lingered on in Bosnia, so that Orthodox Serbs and Roman Catholic Croats stubbornly distrusted one another, while both Christian communities remembered the former Moslem domination with dread.

Clearly, Andrić grew up in a world where rival and mutually incompatible world views found themselves in acute conflict. This in itself is liable to provoke intellectual detachment, at least among sufficiently intelligent, sensitive, and experienced individuals. Andrić's mature years pushed him further in that direction, for his youthful reliance on linguistic nationalism as a means of bridging gaps between Serb, Croat, and Moslem soon proved vain. During World War II he saw Tito lead yet another revolutionary ideal to power. But his age and temperament did not allow him to lend that movement active support. Instead, he turned his mind backward to the deeper past, probing for the roots of the conflicts that so distracted his Bosnian homeland.

In youth he had repudiated the Orthodox outlook. In middle age he was compelled to abandon the expectation of his youth that linguistic nationalism would somehow resolve social conflict in Bosnia. Just what he thought of the Communist recipe for solving ethnic and social conflicts is unclear. He definitely preferred the inclusive south Slav sympathies of Tito's movement to the narrow nationalisms of rival Serb and Croat leaders who disputed power with the Communists during the occupation years. This made him acceptable to the postwar Communist government. Yet anyone reading *The Bridge on the Drina* will find it hard to believe that its author thought Marxism or any other new faith could be expected to resolve long-standing national and religious conflicts.

In spite of the many honors paid him by Tito's regime, it seems plausible to suggest that Andrić by the 1940s had become a thoroughgoing conservative. He clearly implies that the sort of cultural transformation required to transcend Bosnia's religious and social divisions will cost a great deal, requiring the surrender of precious local peculiarities and identities. Moreover, to judge by how such changes came in the past, as Andrić understands that past, the requisite cultural changes are most likely to come about, if at all, not through intelligence and good will but through force and brutal interference from without – as happened both when the Ottoman identity was implanted on the province from distant, mysterious Constantinople, and when western patterns were imposed by a no less distant and incomprehensible Vienna.

Such a message cannot appeal to the youthful enthusiast who wants to make all things new and to brush away past errors. But for a person who has lived long enough to experience the persistent gap between human achievement and expectation, Andrić's sensitive portrait of social change in distant Bosnia has revelatory force. That is the way it was. Here is human reality, stubborn, irregular, awkward, heartfelt, and ever-changing in spite of everything people can do to maintain, or to overthrow, inherited patterns of life.

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

The customs and the minds of men alter less rapidly than the vagaries of political and ideological change. The visitor to Yugoslavia can still see the bridge on the Drina, whose fate is described in this book, though once again modernized and repaired. But he will find Višegrad itself less changed than he may expect and will not find it hard to identify the types of Andrić's novel even under a national state and a communist administration. The Bosnian peasant faces the hazards of an egalitarian administration with the same incomprehension and imperturbability as he faced the novelties of the Austro-Hungarian occupation; he experienced the greater brutalities of the last war with the same courage and resignation as he faced those of World War I, and his relations with state controlled purchasing agencies differ mainly in degree from those of his fathers with the banks and merchants of the Višegrad market. The last war, in Bosnia especially, showed examples of horror and torment at least equal to those of Turkish times, while the idealism and fanaticism of youth, so well described in the conversations on the *kapia*, have only changed slightly

in direction, while retaining their essential mixture of practical politics and imaginative romanticism.

Dr Ivo Andrić is himself a Serb and a Bosnian. These provincial and religious subtleties are still as important in presentday Yugoslavia as they were in earlier times. But in the case of Dr Andrić they have had an effect different from that on other Yugoslav writers and politicians.

Instead of intensifying the local and religious conflicts that still bedevil Yugoslavia – as was only too tragically shown during the last war – they have resulted in a deep understanding of peoples and creeds other than his own. Born near Travnik in Northern Bosnia in 1892, Dr Andrić passed much of his childhood in Višegrad. Not only is there truth, insight and sympathy in his varied range of Višegrad portraits, there is certainly also a good deal of observed and critical biography.

Dr Andrić's books are almost all about Bosnia and Bosnians. But the peculiar position of Bosnia, a storm centre for centuries on the border of the Eastern and Western worlds, saves them from the curse of detailed provincialism and gives them an interest that extends far beyond its narrow borders. It would not be too much to say that the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Gavrilo Princip at Sarajevo in 1914 was the turning point of modern history.

Dr Andrić's own career widened the field of his observations and his sympathies in a manner possible only in a vigorously growing society and a century of conflict. He studied first at Sarajevo and later at the universities of Zagreb, Vienna, Kracow and Graz, where he took his degree. Of a poor artisan family, he made his way largely through his own ability. As other gifted students of his race and time, and as his own

students in *The Bridge on the Drina*, he belonged to the National Revolutionary Youth Organization, and experienced the customary cycle of persecution and arrest. After the First World War he entered the Yugoslav diplomatic service and served in Rome, Bucharest, Trieste and Graz. At the outbreak of World War II he was Yugoslav Minister in Berlin, when Yugoslavia was desperately playing for time, hoping to postpone the invasion of Hitler and at the same time consolidate her forces to resist it when it inevitably came. I recall waiting tensely in Belgrade for Dr Andrić to return from Berlin, the one sure sign that an invasion was immediate. He came back only a few hours before the first bombs fell on Belgrade. My only contact with him was when the Yugoslav Government was already in flight.

During the war, Dr Andrić lived in retirement in Belgrade, and during the German occupation took no part in public affairs. Therein we are the gainers, for at that time he wrote his most important works, including what may be called his Bosnian trilogy: *Miss*, *The Travnik Chronicle* and, the greatest of them all, *The Bridge on the Drina*.

The experiences of the war and the German occupation gave Dr Andrić sympathy with the Yugoslav Liberation Movement. Since the war, he has been associated with it and has been a member of the National Assembly for many years.

The Bridge on the Drina is not a novel in the usual sense of the word. Its scope is too vast, its characters too numerous, its period of action too long; it covers three and a half centuries. Dr Andrić himself calls it a chronicle; let us accept his word.

It has been awarded the highest literary award of postwar Yugoslavia and has been translated into several languages.

It is always an insidious task for a translator to comment on an author's style. It should be – and I hope it is – evident in the translation. Andrić's style has the sweep and surge of the sea, slow and yet profound, with occasional flashes of wit and irony. One subtlety cannot, however, be conveyed in translation; his use of varying dialects and localisms. I have conveyed them in the best manner that I could, since a literal use of dialect would, even were it possible, be pedantic, dull and cumbersome. For the information of purists, the occasional Turkish words that are used are used in their Bosnian sense and spelling which often differs considerably from modern literary Turkish.

LOVETT F. EDWARDS

NOTE

on the pronunciation of Serbo-croat names

Andrić's novel is published both in the Cyrillic and Latin (Croat) alphabets. I have used the Croatian spelling throughout. The language is strictly phonetic. One sound is almost always designated by one letter or (in Croat) combination of letters.

Generally speaking, the foreigner cannot go far wrong if he uses 'continental' vowels and English consonants, with the following exceptions:

c is always ts, as in cats.

č is ch as in church.

ć is similar but softer, as t in the Cockney pronunciation of tube.

Many family names end in ć. For practical purposes, the foreigner may regard č and ć as the same.

dj is the English j in judge – the English j in fact.

dž is practically the same, but harder. It is usually found in words of Turkish origin.

j is always soft, the English y.

r is sometimes a vowel, strongly rolled. Hence such strange looking words as vrh (summit),

š is sh as in shake.

ž is zh as z in azure.

Other variations do not occur in this book. In a few cases I have left the conventionally accepted English spelling, instead of insisting pedantically on Serbo-Croat versions: e.g. Sandžak (Serbo-Croat: Sandžak), Belgrade (Serbo-Croat: Beograd), etc. In the case of purely Turkish names, I have sometimes transliterated them phonetically, as the Croat version is equally arbitrary.

The use of the original names retains dignity and flavour. Attempts to adapt them to English phonetics (in itself an ungrateful task) results in such monstrosities as Ts(e)rnchefor Crnče.

LOVETT F. EDWARDS



For the greater part of its course the river Drina flows through narrow gorges between steep mountains or through deep ravines with precipitous banks. In a few places only, the river banks spread out to form valleys with level or rolling stretches of fertile land suitable for cultivation and settlement on both sides. Such a place exists here at Višegrad, where the Drina breaks out in a sudden curve from the deep and narrow ravine formed by the Butkovo rocks and the Uzavnik mountains. The curve which the Drina makes here is particularly sharp and the mountains on both sides are so steep and so close together that they look like a solid mass out of which the river flows directly as from a dark wall. Then the mountains suddenly widen into an irregular amphitheatre whose widest extent is not more than about ten miles as the crow flies.

Here, where the Drina flows with the whole force of its green and foaming waters from the apparently closed mass of the dark steep mountains, stands a great clean-cut stone bridge with eleven wide sweeping arches. From this bridge spreads fanlike the whole rolling valley with the little oriental town of Višegrad and all its surroundings, with hamlets nestling in the

folds of the hills, covered with meadows, pastures and plum-orchards, and criss-crossed with walls and fences and dotted with shaws and occasional clumps of evergreens. Looked at from a distance through the broad arches of the white bridge it seems as if one can see not only the green Drina, but all that fertile and cultivated countryside and the southern sky above. On the right bank of the river, starting from the bridge itself, lay the centre of the town, with the market-place, partly on the level and partly on the hillside. On the other side of the bridge, along the left bank, stretched the Maluhino Polje, with a few scattered houses along the road which led to Sarajevo. Thus the bridge, uniting the two parts of the Sarajevo road, linked the town with its surrounding villages.

Actually, to say 'linked' was just as true as to say that the sun rises in the morning so that men may see around them and finish their daily tasks, and sets in the evening that they may be able to sleep and rest from the labours of the day. For this great stone bridge, a rare structure of unique beauty, such as many richer and busier towns do not possess (There are only two others such as this in the whole Empire,' they used to say in olden times) was the one real and permanent crossing in the whole middle and upper course of the Drina and an indispensable link on the road between Bosnia and Serbia and further, beyond Serbia, with other parts of the Turkish Empire, all the way to Stambul. The town and its outskirts were only the settlements which always and inevitably grow up around an important centre of communications and on either side of great and important bridges.

Here also in time the houses crowded together and the settlements multiplied at both ends of the bridge. The town

owed its existence to the bridge and grew out of it as if from an imperishable root.

In order to see a picture of the town and understand it and its relation to the bridge clearly, it must be said that there was another bridge in the town and another river. This was the river Rzav, with a wooden bridge across it. At the very end of the town, the Rzav flows into the Drina, so that the centre and at the same time the main part of the town lay on a sandy tongue of land between two rivers, the great and the small, which met there and its scattered outskirts stretched out from both sides of the bridges, along the left bank of the Drina and the right bank of the Rzav. It was a town on the water. But even though another river existed and another bridge, the words 'on the bridge' never meant on the Rzav bridge, a simple wooden structure without beauty and without history, that had no reason for its existence save to serve the townspeople and their animals as a crossing, but only and uniquely the stone bridge over the Drina.

The bridge was about two hundred and fifty paces long and about ten paces wide save in the middle where it widened out into two completely equal terraces placed symmetrically on either side of the roadway and making it twice its normal width. This was the part of the bridge known as the *kapia*. Two buttresses had been built on each side of the central pier which had been splayed out towards the top, so that to right and left of the roadway there were two terraces daringly and harmoniously projecting outwards from the straight line of the bridge over the noisy green waters far below. The two terraces were about five paces long and the same in width and were bordered, as was the whole length of the bridge, by a stone parapet. Otherwise, they were open and uncovered.

That on the right as one came from the town was called the sofa. It was raised by two steps and bordered by benches for which the parapet served as a back; steps, benches and parapet were all made of the same shining stone. That on the left, opposite the *sofa*, was similar but without benches. In the middle of the parapet, the stone rose higher than a man and in it, near the top, was inserted a plaque of white marble with a rich Turkish inscription, a *tarih*, with a carved chronogram which told in thirteen verses the name of the man who built the bridge and the year in which it was built. Near the foot of this stone was a fountain, a thin stream of water flowing from the mouth of a stone snake. On this part of the terrace a coffee-maker had installed himself with his copper vessels and Turkish cups and ever-lighted charcoal brazier, and an apprentice who took the coffee over the way to the guests on the *sofa*. Such was the *kapia*.

On the bridge and its *kapia*, about it or in connection with it, flowed and developed, as we shall see, the life of the townsmen. In all tales about personal, family or public events the words 'on the bridge' could always be heard. Indeed on the bridge over the Drina were the first steps of childhood and the first games of boyhood.

The Christian children, born on the left bank of the Drina, crossed the bridge at once in the first days of their lives, for they were always taken across in their first week to be christened. But all the other children, those who were born on the right bank and the Moslem children who were not christened at all, passed, as had once their fathers and their grandfathers, the main part of their childhood on or around the bridge. They fished around it or hunted doves under its arches. From their very earliest years, their eyes grew accusto-

med to the lovely lines of this great stone structure built of shining porous stone, regularly and faultlessly cut. They knew all the bosses and concavities of the masons, as well as all the tales and legends associated with the existence and building of the bridge, in which reality and imagination, waking and dream, were wonderfully and inextricably mingled. They had always known these things as if they had come into the world with them, even as they knew their prayers, but could not remember from whom they had learnt them nor when they had first heard them.

They knew that the bridge had been built by the Grand Vezir, Mehmed Paša, who had been born in the nearby village of Sokolovići, just on the far side of one of those mountains which encircled the bridge and the town. Only a Vezir could have given all that was needed to build this lasting wonder of stone (a Vezir – to the children’s minds that was something fabulous, immense, terrible and far from clear). It was built by Rade the Mason, who must have lived for hundreds of years to have been able to build all that was lovely and lasting in the Serbian lands, that legendary and in fact nameless master whom all people desire and dream of, since they do not want to have to remember or be indebted to too many, even in memory. They knew that the *vila* of the boatmen had hindered its building, as always and everywhere there is someone to hinder building, destroying by night what had been built by day, until ‘something’ had whispered from the waters and counselled Rade the Mason to find two infant children, twins, brother and sister, named Stoja and Ostoja, and wall them into the central pier of the bridge. A reward was promised to whoever found them and brought them hither.

At last the guards found such twins, still at the breast, in a distant village and the Vezir's men took them away by force; but when they were taking them away, their mother would not be parted from them and, weeping and wailing, insensible to blows and to curses, stumbled after them as far as Višegrad itself, where she succeeded in forcing her way to Rade the Mason.

The children were walled into the pier, for it could not be otherwise, but Rade, they say, had pity on them and left openings in the pier through which the unhappy mother could feed her sacrificed children. Those are the finely carved blind windows, narrow as loopholes, in which the wild doves now nest. In memory of that, the mother's milk has flowed from those walls for hundreds of years. That is the thin white stream which, at certain times of year, flows from that faultless masonry and leaves an indelible mark on the stone. (The idea of woman's milk stirs in the childish mind a feeling at once too intimate and too close, yet at the same time vague and mysterious like Vezirs and masons, which disturbs and repulses them.) Men scrape those milky traces off the piers and sell them as medicinal powder to women who have no milk after giving birth.

In the central pier of the bridge, below the *kapia*, there is a larger opening, a long narrow gateway without gates, like a gigantic loophole. In that pier, they say, is a great room, a gloomy hall, in which a black Arab lives. All the children know this. In their dreams and in their fancies he plays a great role. If he should appear to anyone, that man must die. Not a single child has seen him yet, for children do not die. But Hamid, the asthmatic porter, with bloodshot eyes, continually drunk or suffering from a hangover, saw him one night and

that very same night he died, over there by the wall. It is true that he was blind drunk at the time and passed the night on the bridge under the open sky in a temperature of -15°C . The children used to gaze from the bank into that dark opening as into a gulf which is both terrible and fascinating. They would agree to look at it without blinking and whoever first saw anything should cry out. Openmouthed they would peer into that deep dark hole, quivering with curiosity and fear, until it seemed to some anaemic child that the opening began to sway and to move like a black curtain, or until one of them, mocking and inconsiderate (there is always at least one such), shouted 'The Arab' and pretended to run away. That spoilt the game and aroused disillusion and indignation amongst those who loved the play of imagination, hated irony and believed that by looking intently they could actually see and feel something. At night, in their sleep, many of them would toss and fight with the Arab from the bridge as with fate until their mother woke them and so freed them from this nightmare. Then she would give them cold water to drink 'to chase away the fear' and make them say the name of God, and the child, overtaxed with daytime childish games, would fall asleep again into the deep sleep of childhood where terrors can no longer take shape or last for long.

Up river from the bridge, in the steep banks of grey chalk, on both sides of the river, can be seen rounded hollows, always in pairs at regular intervals, as if cut in the stone were the hoofprints of some horse of supernatural size; they led downwards from the Old Fortress, descended the scarp towards the river and then appeared again on the farther bank, where they were lost in the dark earth and undergrowth.

The children who fished for tiddlers all day in the summer along these stony banks knew that these were hoofprints of ancient days and long dead warriors. Great heroes lived on earth in those days, when the stone had not yet hardened and was soft as the earth and the horses, like the warriors, were of colossal growth. Only for the Serbian children these were the prints of the hooves of Šarac, the horse of Kraljević Marko, which had remained there from the time when Kraljević Marko himself was in prison up there in the Old Fortress and escaped, flying down the slope and leaping the Drina, for at that time there was no bridge. But the Turkish children knew that it had not been Kraljević Marko, nor could it have been (for whence could a bastard Christian dog have had such strength or such a horse!) any but Djerzelez Alija on his winged charger which, as everyone knew, despised ferries and ferrymen and leapt over rivers as if they were watercourses. They did not even squabble about this, so convinced were both sides in their own belief. And there was never an instance of any one of them being able to convince another, or that any one had changed his belief.

In these depressions which were round and as wide and deep as rather large soup-bowls, water still remained long after rain, as though in stone vessels. The children called these pits, filled with tepid rainwater, wells and, without distinction of faith, kept the tiddlers there which they caught on their lines.

On the left bank, standing alone, immediately above the road, there was a fairly large earthen barrow, formed of some kind of hard earth, grey and almost like stone. On it nothing grew or blossomed save some short grass, hard and prickly as barbed wire. That tumulus was the end and frontier of all the children's games around the bridge. That was the spot which

at one time was called Radisav's tomb. They used to tell that he was some sort of Serbian hero, a man of power. When the Vezir, Mehmed Paša, had first thought of building the bridge on the Drina and sent his men here, everyone submitted and was summoned to forced labour. Only this man, Radisav, stirred up the people to revolt and told the Vezir not to continue with this work for he would meet with great difficulties in building a bridge across the Drina. And the Vezir had many troubles before he succeeded in overcoming Radisav for he was a man greater than other men; there was no rifle or sword that could harm him, nor was there rope or chain that could bind him. He broke all of them like thread, so great was the power of the talisman that he had with him. And who knows what might have happened and whether the Vezir would ever have been able to build the bridge, had he not found some of his men who were wise and skilful, who bribed and questioned Radisav's servant. Then they took Radisav by surprise and drowned him while he was asleep, binding him with silken ropes for against silk his talisman could not help him. The Serbian women believe that there is one night of the year when a strong white light can be seen falling on that tumulus direct from heaven; and that takes place sometime in autumn between the greater and lesser feasts of the Virgin. But the children who, torn between belief and unbelief, remained on vigil by the windows overlooking Radisav's tomb have never managed to see this heavenly fire, for they were all overcome by sleep before midnight came. But there had been travellers, who knew nothing of this, who had seen a white light falling on the tumulus above the bridge as they returned to the town by night.

The Turks in the town, on the other hand, have long told that on that spot a certain dervish, by name Sheik Turhanija, died as a martyr to the faith. He was a great hero and defended on this spot the crossing of the Drina against an infidel army. And that on this spot there is neither memorial nor tomb, for such was the wish of the dervish himself, for he wanted to be buried without mark or sign, so that no one should know who was there. For, if ever again some infidel army should invade by this route, then he would arise from under his tumulus and hold them in check, as he had once done, so that they should be able to advance no farther than the bridge at Višegrad. And therefore heaven now and again sheds its light upon his tomb.

Thus the life of the children of the town was played out under and about the bridge in innocent games and childish fancies. With the first years of maturity, when life's cares and struggles and duties had already begun, this life was transferred to the bridge itself, right to the *kapia*, where youthful imagination found other food and new fields.

At and around the *kapia* were the first stirrings of love, the first passing glances, flirtations and whisperings. There too were the first deals and bargains, quarrels and reconciliations, meetings and waitings. There, on the stone parapet of the bridge, were laid out for sale the first cherries and melons, the early morning *salep* and hot rolls. There too gathered the beggars, the maimed and the lepers, as well as the young and healthy who wanted to see and be seen, and all those who had something remarkable to show in produce, clothes or weapons. There too the elders of the town often sat to discuss public matters and common troubles, but even more often young men who only knew how to sing and joke. There, on

great occasions or times of change, were posted proclamations and public notices (on the raised wall below the marble plaque with the Turkish inscription and above the fountain), but there too, right up to 1878, hung or were exposed on stakes the heads of all those who for whatever reason had been executed, and executions in that frontier town, especially in years of unrest, were frequent and in some years, as we shall see, almost of daily occurrence.

Weddings or funerals could not cross the bridge without stopping at the *kapia*. There the wedding guests would usually preen themselves and get into their ranks before entering the market-place. If the times were peaceful and carefree they would hand the plum-brandy around, sing, dance the *kolo* and often delay there far longer than they had intended. And for funerals, those who carried the bier would put it down to rest for a little there on the *kapia*, where the dead man had in any case passed a good part of his life.

The *kapia* was the most important part of the bridge, even as the bridge was the most important part of the town, or as a Turkish traveller, to whom the people of Višegrad had been very hospitable, wrote in his account of his travels: 'their *kapia* is the heart of the bridge, which is the heart of the town, which must remain in everyone's heart'. It showed that the old masons, who according to the old tales had struggled with *vilas* and every sort of wonder and had been compelled to wall up living children, had a feeling not only for the permanence and beauty of their work but also for the benefit and convenience which the most distant generations were to derive from it. When one knows well everyday life here in the town and thinks it over carefully, then one must say to oneself that there are really only a very small number of people

in this Bosnia of ours who have so much pleasure and enjoyment as does each and every townsman on the *kapia*.

Naturally winter should not be taken into account, for then only whoever was forced to do so would cross the bridge, and then he would lengthen his pace and bend his head before the chill wind that blew uninterruptedly over the river. Then, it was understood, there was no loitering on the open terraces of the *kapia*. But at every other time of year the *kapia* was a real boon for great and small. Then every citizen could, at any time of day or night, go out to the *kapia* and sit on the *sofa*, or hang about it on business or in conversation. Suspended some fifteen metres above the green boisterous waters, this stone *sofa* floated in space over the water, with dark green hills on three sides, the heavens, filled with clouds or stars above, and the open view down river like a narrow amphitheatre bounded by the dark blue mountains behind.

How many Vezirs or rich men are there in the world who could indulge their joy or their cares, their moods or their delights in such a spot? Few, very few. But how many of our townsmen have, in the course of centuries and the passage of generations, sat here in the dawn or twilight or evening hours and unconsciously measured the whole starry vault above! Many and many of us have sat there, head in hands, leaning on the well-cut smooth stone, watching the eternal play of light on the mountains and the clouds in the sky, and have unravelled the threads of our small-town destinies, eternally the same yet eternally tangled in some new manner. Someone affirmed long ago (it is true that he was a foreigner and spoke in jest) that this *kapia* had had an influence on the fate of the town and even on the character of its citizens. In those endless sessions, the stranger said, one must search for the key to the

inclination of many of our townsmen to reflection and dreaming and one of the main reasons for that melancholic serenity for which the inhabitants of the town are renowned.

In any case, it cannot be denied that the people of Višegrad have from olden times been considered, in comparison with the people of other towns, as easy-going men, prone to pleasure and free with their money. Their town is well placed, the villages around it are rich and fertile, and money, it is true, passes in abundance through Višegrad, but it does not stay there long. If one finds there some thrifty and economical citizen without any sort of vices, then he is certainly some newcomer; but the waters and the air of Višegrad are such that his children grow up with open hands and widespread fingers and fall victims to the general contagion of the spendthrift and carefree life of the town with its motto: 'Another day another gain.'

They tell the tale that Starina Novak, when he felt his strength failing and was compelled to give up his role as highwayman in the Romania Mountains, thus taught the young man Grujić who was to succeed him:

'When you are sitting in ambush look well at the traveller who comes. If you see that he rides proudly and that he wears a red corselet and silver bosses and white gaiters, then he is from Foča. Strike at once, for he has wealth both on him and in his saddlebags. If you see a poorly dressed traveller, with bowed head, hunched on his horse as if he were going out to beg, then strike freely, for he is a man of Rogatica. They are all alike, misers and tight-fisted but as full of money as a pomegranate. But if you see some mad fellow, with legs crossed over the saddlebow, beating on a drum and singing at the top of his voice, don't strike and do not soil your hands

for nothing. Let the rascal go his way. He is from Višegrad and he has nothing, for money does not stick to such men.'

All this goes to confirm the opinion of that foreigner. But none the less it would be hard to say with certainty that this opinion is correct. As in so many other things, here too it is not easy to determine what is cause and what effect. Has the *kapia* made them what they are, or on the contrary was it imagined in their souls and understandings and built for them according to their needs and customs? It is a vain and superfluous question. There are no buildings that have been built by chance, remote from the human society where they have grown and its needs, hopes and understandings, even as there are no arbitrary lines and motiveless forms in the work of the masons. The life and existence of every great, beautiful and useful building, as well as its relation to the place where it has been built, often bears within itself complex and mysterious drama and history. However, one thing is clear; that between the life of the townsmen and that bridge, there existed a centuries-old bond. Their fates were so intertwined that they could not be imagined separately and could not be told separately. Therefore the story of the foundation and destiny of the bridge is at the same time the story of the life of the town and of its people, from generation to generation, even as through all the tales about the town stretches the line of the stone bridge with its eleven arches and the *kapia* in the middle, like a crown.

Ivo Andrić
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