GAZI HUSREV-BEG LIBRARY
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The Gazi Husrev-beg Library

The Gazi Husrev-beg Library (GHL) in Sarajevo is the oldest cultural institution in Bosnia-Herzegovina and has served its purpose continuously ever since its foundation. In the endowment charter for his madrasa, the Bosnian governor Gazi Husrev-beg stipulated that “whatever money remains from the construction of the madrasa shall be used for purchasing good books, which will be used in the madrasa by readers, and for copying from them by those who engage in science.” Gazi Husrev-beg himself bequeathed several manuscripts to the madrasa library, some of which are still kept at the GHL. Thus, the year of the madrasa’s foundation (1537) is also considered as that of the library’s foundation.

The library functioned within the madrasa until 1863 when, on the initiative of the Bosnian governor Topal Osman-pasha, the Gazi

1. Kuršumlija madrasa: the birthplace of GHL.
Husrev-beg endowment built a large room next to the Gazi Husrev-beg Mosque, right below its minaret, to which the Library was moved.

The Library remained there until 1935 when, due to the increase in its holdings and in the number of users, it was moved to the basement of the Sarajevo Mufti's office outside the Careva Mosque. The Library continued to grow while housed in the former Ulema-medžlis building, also located in front of the Careva Mosque. Soon, the whole building of the former mufti's office was used for housing the library's holdings.

The library remained on these premises until April 1992, when it had to be moved out because of a concern for its safety following the launch of the attack on Bosnia. The printed books were transferred to the Careva Mosque, and the manuscripts were moved eight times throughout the siege of 1992-1995 to various locations in the city. The 500 most valuable manuscripts were placed inside the vaults of the Privredna Banka, where they remained until the end of the siege. Thanks to these precautions the Library's holdings were saved in their entirety.
Library fund

The raid of Sarajevo by the Austrian general Eugene of Savoy in 1697 was a catastrophe that resulted in the pillaging and burning of Gazi Husrev-beg's endowments. At the time a lot of books were either looted or burned. Among other important historical documents, the Sarajevo Court registers disappeared, as well.

At present the holdings of GHL consists of some 100,000 volumes of manuscripts, printed books, periodicals and documents in Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Bosnian and other, primarily European, languages. Out of this number there are over 10,050 library units consisting of manuscripts, which comprise about 20,000 texts of varying length in the fields of Islamic sciences, Oriental languages, belles-lettres, philosophy, logic, history, medicine, veterinary science, mathematics, astronomy, and others.

Over the years the GHL manuscript holdings have increased in different ways. A significant number of manuscripts were copied in the Gazi Husrev-beg Madrasa and Hanikah (Sufi hospice), as evidenced by the notes found on many manuscripts. This shows that the Madrasa and the Hanikah served as important centres for manuscript copying.

The manuscript holdings have also been enlarged, especially in later times, thanks to bequests and donations of books or, in some