The Lexicon of Bosniak Ulema was published in the framework of the publishing activities of the Gazi Husrev-bey Library in Sarajevo in 2018. The author of this work is Ahmed Mehmedović, a long-term employee of the Gazi Husrev-bey Library. The book opens with a preface by Enes Karić, in which a brief, general overview of the role of the Ulema in the history of Muslims is offered, with a special focus on Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims. In the introduction, Mehmedović states that the Lexicon includes 1,859 entries, and explains the process of creating the Lexicon, as well as the problems he encountered during its creation. This text will pay special attention to the author’s review of several significant personalities who lived and worked at the end of Ottoman rule and in the first decades of the post-Ottoman period in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The end of Ottoman rule over the territory of the Bosnian vilayet and the Austro-Hungarian occupation posed numerous challenges to the Muslim population. A significant number of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims migrated to those parts of the Ottoman Empire that were both de facto and de jure under the rule of Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II. Others remained in Bosnia and Herzegovina and witnessed the changes brought about by the occupation. The opinions of the Ulema on this issue also varied, and one of the key moments was certainly the Risala on Hijra by Mehmed Teufik Azabagić, which advised Muslims to stay in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1886. This would be followed by decades of struggle for the religious and Waqf-Mearif autonomy of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims, in which numerous Ulema would stand out. Over 300 entries in the Lexicon refer to people who lived and worked in this period. Texts about them vary in scope, according to the availability of data and the individual’s importance.

In this context, we will pay special attention to the author’s review of the activities of several key individuals in the political and religious life of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims of that period, namely Mehmed Teufik Azabagić, Ali Fehmi Džabić, and Džemaludin Čaušević. About Azabagić, the author writes that he was born in 1838 and that after completing his Islamic studies in Istanbul, he returned to Bosnia where he supported the occupation in 1878. In addition to being known for the aforementioned Risala on Hijra, Azabagić was elected as Reis-ul-Ulema in 1893. Continuous criticisms due to his closeness to the Austro-Hungarian authorities were one of the reasons for his resignation in 1909. The author of the Lexicon believes that Azabagić was a supporter of Džabić’s movement for religious-educational autonomy but could not officially express this due to his relationship with the authorities. An important place in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina is held by Ali Fehmi Džabić, the mufti of Mostar, who was dismissed from service by the Austro-Hungarian authorities because of his fight for religious and Waqf-Mearif autonomy. The author add that Džabić was one of the members of the delegation who sought help from the Porte in Istanbul, after which his return to Bosnia was forbidden. Mehmedagić also added that Džabić was a candidate for Reis-ul-Ulema in 1909 and briefly outlines his bibliography. Džabić died in exile, in Istanbul in 1918. One of the first people who comes to mind when the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Ulema is mentioned is Džemaludin Čaušević, one of the most important figures among Bosnian Muslims in the first half of the 20th century. Mehmedović provide basic information about Čaušević’s education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Istanbul, as well as his correspondence work in Arab countries. The author mentions that Čaušević, after completing his law studies,
declined a job offer in Istanbul and returned to Bosnia. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, he held several significant positions, before being elected Reis-ul-Ulema in 1914. He held this position until 1930. During a politically very difficult and unfavorable time for Muslims, he stood at the helm of the Muslim community and made great efforts to preserve it. As Mehmëndoviç points out, Čaušević will also be remembered for the reform of the Arebica, i.e., the adaptation of the Arabic script to the Bosnian language, which facilitated the education of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims. From this Lexicon, it is clear that the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Ulema in the second half of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries had an extremely significant role in the lives of many Muslims who were still living in occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina. Interestingly, despite the fact that the Ulema were mostly educated in Muslim cities in the east, more and more men obtained their diplomas in European cities outside the Ottoman Empire.

The Lexicon of Bosniak Ulema serves as an extremely important starting point for those wishing to learn about or conduct research on the local Ulema of past centuries. The author’s effort to succinctly offer all important and accessible data relevant to the personalities he writes about is notable. In addition, users are provided with a short list of sources and literature related to the personalities described. The work would have been even more useful for researchers if a chronological division had been offered along with the alphabetical one. It is perfectly clear that in writing such a work, some people are bound to be unintentionally omitted, so at this point, I will mention that the Lexicon does not contain information about Hilmi Šariç and Čamil Efendiç. Certainly, it should be kept in mind that the number of entries would have been significantly higher if the Serbian army had not burned the archives of the Oriental Institute at the beginning of the aggression towards Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. On that occasion, documents and manuscripts testifying to the activity of numerous Ulema were permanently destroyed. However, recently a book has been published and two doctoral dissertations have been defended which collectively represent a significant contribution to the study of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Ulema in the 18th, the 19th, and the first decades of the 20th centuries.1 Such research is extremely important due to the complexity of the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina at that time. The publisher should certainly consider publishing an English translation of the Lexicon of Bosniak Ulema, thereby making it accessible to a wider circle of researchers interested in the activities of the Ulema in the Ottoman and post-Ottoman periods.

Amer Maslo, Oriental Institute, University of Sarajevo.