

**TRAVEL WRITINGS ABOUT JOURNEYS AND PILGRIMS
THROUGH OUR REGIONS DURING THE PERIOD
OF THE TURKISH REIGN**

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Abstract. *This text is an excerpt from a more comprehensive study dedicated to our regions in the travel writings of foreigners from the 16th to the 19th century. It is focused on travel writings about journeys and travelers through Serbia during the period of the Turkish rule. After an insight into the nature of traveling in the Pre-Turkish period, changes in the manner of traveling, in the way of life on journeys, in motives for traveling and in safety on the road have been determined on the basis of observations of French and English travel writers from the 16th to 18th century. Being that one of the ways of traveling through Serbia in the Turkish period was "at the Sultan's expense", at least for the ambassadors' missions of Christian rulers sent to the Sublime Porte, particular attention has been devoted to the obligations of Christian subjects concerning their "safe and comfortable" journeys. Writings about that, as well as about violence committed on Serbian population in order to extort everything needed, often resemble the tyranny described in epic poetry and heavy taxes listed in epic catalogues.*

I

Way back in the Pre-Turkish period, as pointed out by K. Jireček in his *History of Serbs*, certain routes had first become customary through the trading practice and later legally determined by caravan trade regulations. These routes lead from the coastal region - mainly the towns of Dubrovnik and Kotor, from which merchandise delivered from the West was forwarded inland - towards trading centers, fairs and bazaars in the medieval Serbia and further to the East. In the Middle Ages, the *caravan* had been institutionalized as a form of trade and public transportation. A respectable nobleman was appointed the guide, "the captain of the tour", that is the person responsible for order and safety of passengers and merchandise during the travel. The same law regulated in details

all the mutual obligations of tradesmen, merchandise owners, renters of saddle and pack horses, as well as of their escort to the agreed destinations.¹

Upon the invasion of the Turks and their overtaking of the administrative and executive authority, various changes were brought about in the nature of transportation along the existing routes, particularly concerning travelers and their safety, and in trading and traveling business in general. Those changes also affected the settlements alongside the caravan routes. Previous Christian villages, devastated and ruined in Turkish attacks, had been first turned into inns and caravansaries for the overnight stay of travelers and merchandise. Later in time, they developed into more populated places with recognizable wooden and stone structures of the oriental Islamic architecture. Former main routes, the so-called "Dubrovnik Road" leading from Dubrovnik to Niš and "Imperial Road" from Belgrade through Niš to Constantinople, remained the principal traffic "arteries", but they were "pulsating" north and westward more by Turkish army than by trading goods. Army movements were followed by periodical flourishing and fading of trading centers, but a network of other local or temporary roads was developed and attached to the main routes, depending on "particular" circumstances and different military, diplomatic or trade missions. Beside soldiers and accompanying civil servants and merchants, the travelers were most often diplomats and emissaries of western countries sent to the Turkish Sultan, ambassadors of Christian rulers appointed to the Sublime Porte, as well as other *agents*, both political and trading, who were gathering various information, either under cover of research of mineral wealth, vegetation or folklore, or as religious missionaries and adventurers. They were collecting data on our regions, roads and strategic places, on the population and their attitudes toward the Turkish governmental system, and forwarding them subsequently to their patrons in various official or private forms, such as reports, letters, journals and accounts of travels: to the rulers interested in expanding military and political influence to our regions²; to the representatives of the Catholic Church, interested in propagation of religious influence upon the population under the Turkish reign³; to trading companies interested in export and import of different goods and products; to editors of contemporary magazines, and to friends and family members, curious about unknown, exotic places and life in them.⁴

II

According to travel writings of foreigners, travelers through our regions during the Turkish period, the most important precondition for a successful travel was a reliable guide, a connoisseur of roads, languages and habits of the local population, apart from renting saddle horses or coaches where possible for passengers or pack horses and horse-drawn vehicles for merchandise. Both preconditions could hardly be fulfilled, so that the

¹ K. Jireček - J. Radonić, *Istorija Srba II* (Kulturna istorija), "Naučna knjiga", Belgrade, 1952, Chapter "Trgovina i novci".

² Cf Radovan Samardžić, *Beograd i Srbija u spisima francuskih savremenika. XVI-XVII vek*, Belgrade, 1961, Foreword, as well as the preface to the Collection of Archive Material: *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak posle Velikog zemljotresa 1667*, "Naučno delo", Belgrade, 1960.

³ Cf Jovan Radonić, *Rimska kurija i jugoslovenske zemlje*, Belgrade, SANU, 1950.

⁴ Cf Veselin Kostić, *Kulturne veze između jugoslovenskih zemalja i Engleske do 1700. godine*, SANU Special Editions, 1972 (Chapter "Putopisna književnost") and "Putovanje u Šekspirovo vreme", *Zbornik radova Katedre za engleski jezik i književnost Filozofskog fakulteta u Nišu*, Vol. III, Niš, 1984.

interested passengers had to wait for days to get fresh horses and free guides.⁵ Former nobleman, the "captain of the tour" was replaced by a guide of a smaller or larger group of passengers, so-called "caravan-bashaw", referred to by travel writers as "janissary" or "chaush". Anyhow, it was either a Turk or his loyal servant, a convert to Islam, which is the true meaning of the term "janissary", whose privileged status in the Turkish administrative and military systems, together with knowing roads and languages, represented a firm guarantee that passengers and merchandise would safely reach their destination in spite of all the dangers from contagious diseases, Turkish ruffians and Christian highwaymen. As witnessed by Edward Brown, the English 17th century travel writer, these were experienced people "who spoke different languages and saw a lot of the world". As broad-minded people, they were therefore appropriate "companions", especially during long journeys, for they could "talk of many a thing".⁶ In spite of having the same function of a responsible guide as "janissaries" and "chaushes", they differ from one another, as they are of greater or smaller competence valuable in various situations on the road. In the dictionary of Turkisms, the term "chaush" is defined as a whole scale of different professions and ranks, like, for example, the rank of an army officer or a special and privileged emissary sent to convey imperial messages in specific missions of great importance for the state. For this reason, the "chaush" appears as a guide who takes important passengers to the Turkish Sultan, usually diplomatic representatives of Christian rulers. Apart from his main task as a guide on the road, a "chaush" had to intervene in case passengers encountered any unexpected difficulties. A verdict issued by a *cadi* in the dispute between the diplomatic mission of Edward Brown and a renter of a post house on the way, in which it was stated that "no one is allowed to interrupt the travel" of a "chaush", that is of passengers guided by him⁷, clearly depicts the important role of a respectable and resourceful guide on the road. This fact was explicitly confirmed by F. Morrison, another English travel writer, in his description "of ten years of traveling through twelve countries", where he informed his readers of the necessity to engage a good guide, a "janissary", for a travel like the one he had taken in 1595 from Dubrovnik to Constantinople. According to him, this would ensure "the travel to be pleasant and without any trouble", as one of the guide's duties was to "protect a traveler from extortion and all kinds of molestation that Christians were exposed to by the Turks".⁸ Burbury, the 17th century travel writer, said that they had been protected by janissaries even in sightseeing Belgrade, "as it was dangerous for foreigners to move around by themselves".⁹

Before leaving Turkey, English travelers would usually hire such a guide, a "janissary", by the help of their ambassador to the Sublime Porte, as they thought that a formally employed guide would have to be more responsible due to his obligation towards "the payer" on one hand, and because of "the report of the travelers' safety that he had to submit to the Ambassador". These remarks point out that travelers through Turkey were disposed to many difficulties and even to hostility of Turkish officers and

⁵ Cf R. Samardžić, *Beograd i Srbija u spisima francuskih savremenika. XVI-XVII vek*, op. cit., pp 112 and 114.

⁶ E. Brown, *Kratak izveštaj o nekim putovanjima po Ugarskoj, Srbiji, Bugarskoj, Makedoniji, Tesaliji...*, in the book: Zdenko Levental, *Britanski putnici u našim krajevima od sredine XV do početka XIX veka*, Gornji Milanovac, 1989, p 134.

⁷ *Ibid*, p 135.

⁸ Cf Z. Levental, *op. cit.*, p 55.

⁹ *Ibid*, p 101.

citizens, as they were foreigners and Christians. Because of that, they had to find various ways to protect themselves from eventual trouble, like, for example, changing of clothes, as the Turks hated European clothing, and shaving their heads in order to be the least noticeable. For all these reasons, the travel writers warned their readers, eventual travelers to Turkey, of the necessity to have guides as their interpreters and their representatives in different disputes that inevitably had to occur during a long journey. Some of travelers tried whenever they could to obtain special documents from their diplomatic missions in Constantinople, which would additionally protect them and their property on the road. Henry Ostel published one of such documents together with his travel writing about his journey "inland from Dubrovnik to Constantinople in 1585". In it, Turkish officers and civil servants were ordered to provide protection to the document holders in their respective places and to enable them to buy "with their own money" everything necessary for "them and their horses", but at the same time to "take precautionary measures so that they cannot take any of (our) usable horses from (our) country".¹⁰

However, in spite of all the measures of precaution and safety, the travel through the vast Turkish Empire, especially through our regions that were far away from the direct central authorities, carried various dangers for travelers. A "janissary", as an officer of a lower rank than a "chaush", particularly if privately hired by less official passengers and thus without a stronger escort of janissaries, could not always render protection to his passengers against certain arrogant and self-willed Turks throughout such a great and anarchic empire. English travel writer Fox confirmed this in his notes about the violence that his group was exposed to by two Turks, "one of them a janissary, and the other a spahi" near Prijepolje, when they understood by the travelers' hairstyles and hats that they were foreigners and Christians. When they complained for the blows and extortion they had suffered, the identical "janissary" - their guide answered that "the only remedy is patience".¹¹

In fact, the role of a guide - "janissary" on the road was most often reduced to his skill, as a good connoisseur of local circumstances, to avoid dangerous spots: some of them dangerous "because of the plague" and some known as notorious "robbers' dens in which many larcenies and murders had been committed".¹² That way, he could help "the voyage to be more pleasant and without difficulties".

III

The most privileged travelers, who could pass most safely through our regions on their way to Constantinople as they had special escorts of the Sultan's soldiers, were numerous missions of Christian rulers sent to the Sultan. Those missions were sometimes specially and intentionally pompous in order to cover up military and political weaknesses by the exterior splendor. The chroniclers of such missions, travel writers in line of duty, usually paid much more attention to the description of the escort they belonged to and the ceremonies that were organized for them than to the people and areas they visited. Thanks to them, we now have the evidence of spectacular and pompous

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 46.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p 50.

¹² *Ibid.*

journeys through our country, with hundreds of passenger wagons and animal-drawn vehicles, saddle and pack horses, and hardly measurable official missionary personnel, whole families, but also obligatory servants, butlers, cooks, doctors, all in their court uniforms even during the travel, as well as other accompanying staff in charge of cattle, tent-pitching at overnight stays, making always rich and glorious dining tables, etc. One of the most spectacular traveling groups was the mission of count Lasly, the ambassador of the German emperor to the Sublime Porte, which was aimed to be as ceremonial as possible because both emperors were in a delicate position after a battle that had ended in a peace treaty and wanted to give greater importance to their negotiations. It was even explicitly mentioned that messengers had reported to the count not to travel in a hurry through our regions in order to leave the host enough time to organize the greatest possible welcome. "In the meantime, the ambassador was informed from Constantinople that the Grand Vizier conducted very large preparations for his sojourn, so that it might have happened that, if he hurried too much, he would not get adequately magnificent reception. The ambassador was hence advised to travel slowly, and the advice was accepted without further questioning."¹³

Narcissistic in a westerly manner and inclined toward ceremonies, Burbury carefully wrote about the spectacular landing of the mission in the Belgrade Port from a whole fleet of ships, about the dazzling caravan of passengers, enlarged in Belgrade by equally numerous escort of the Turkish pasha, who was showing various kinds of honor to them during the travel. He gave frequent descriptions of mutual receptions arranged under luxurious tents or in Arcadian-like Serbian landscape alongside the "Imperial Road". The receptions included lunches and dinners organized according to the court etiquette, with servants in livery uniforms, followed by "the ambassador's music" and different social games in leisure time. "After the lunch, some would rest in their tents, while the others would entertain themselves in playing cards or in some other games. In the evening, many would go for a walk and visit the Turks, especially our commissary who was very polite".¹⁴

Occupied with self-satisfied descriptions of his own mission, with the admiration it was arousing in Turkish barbarians and with constant emphasizing of the Christian (their, western) - Turkish antithesis, always to the detriment of the latter, the travel writer seemingly forgot the inhabitants of these regions and their role in all that splendor. Yet, the travel writers of some other diplomatic missions left marginal information which showed the sad position of a small Serb, tormented between the powerful Islamic master and his western partners. Let us mention a few of them, like the mission of Edward Burton in 1596, witnessed by the travel writer Sir Thomas Glover, the mission of the French ambassador from 1621, written about by an anonymous travel writer, or the one of the English ambassador Wortley in 1717, whose winter travel to the Sublime Porte was depicted by his wife Lady Montagu.

In describing the travel of his ambassador and his escort, Sir Thomas Glover mentions that in every overnight stay his ambassador used to send his "chaush", the authorized caravan guide, and his interpreter with the *Sultan's letter* to "the cadı of the place", in order to be provided with the "*food allowance*".¹⁵ Anonymous French travel writer from

¹³ *Ibid.*, p 102.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 103.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 60.

1621, being a member of a similarly numerous mission, explicitly states that their "chaush" was ordered to entertain whole mission during the travel "at the Sultan's expense".¹⁶ At the start of the travel in Buda, the Buda pasha ordered him to escort the mission, providing him with "all the necessary documents so that we could get *everything for free* all the way to the place where the Sultan was staying".¹⁷ The formulation "at the Sultans expense", even if followed by a letter or other document addressed to the *cadi* of a certain place, obviously meant "at the expense of the people", that is of the poor inhabitants of the villages through which the caravan route lead. Lady Montagu confirmed that, saying that the population of every place through which the ambassador was passing were obliged to provide all the necessary supplies to the whole mission: "They were ordered to *give us free of cost* (underlined by B. L.) everything that we needed, even a team of animals that we asked for our coach".¹⁸ French travel writer Quiclet pointed out that in 1658 he had a pleasant journey from Dubrovnik through Sarajevo, Belgrade and Niš to Constantinople, "at the expense of the people in accordance with the order that was issued (for me) by the pasha to my benefit".¹⁹ Of course, the arrogant Turkish escort extorted all "the expense" from the local population, often in the most brutal manner. Lady Montagu wrote to her relatives in England that she "cried almost every day because of the arrogance of the janissaries in small villages of Serbia". This drastic torturing of the poor population resulted, as witnessed by an anonymous French travel writer, in "ready lunches and dinners" for the passengers in missionary caravans at every stop on the road, even in places far away from any settlement. He was at first astonished with rich dining tables arranged far from the nearest inhabited place, but then he realized "that communities inform one another, and that the local population is more frightened to fail in doing so than the Turks are afraid not to find anything".²⁰ An approximate picture of such dining tables is suggested in Glover's enumeration of the ambassador's "food allowances" at every overnight stay: "five head of sheep, two hundred loafs of bread, five containers of wine, one haystack, as well as twenty sacks of barley"²¹, or in Quiclet's note: "Every day there were enough saddle and pack horses, oats and hay, carriages, rice, chicken, eggs, butterfat, candles, sheep, lambs, young goats, honey, wood and other needs".²²

As witnessed by the anonymous French travel writer, it happened sometimes that the inhabitants of poor villages, unable to collect such "allowances", rather run away or even permanently flee their homes, as Peter Mundy wrote²³, than suffer the rage of arrogant Turks from the ambassador's escort. Louis Gideon "The Turk" exactly described how the janissaries, guides and escorts of their mission had chased villagers after their trails in the snow in the forests near Valjevo, in order to get "various kinds of food and comfort". His description of the villagers who were taking "all the oaths" that they had nothing to give to the passengers and horses, and then, after being beaten by clubs and whips, changing the phrase "there is nothing" into the phrase "there is" or "there will be something" is

¹⁶ Cf R. Samardžić, *Beograd i Srbija u spisima francuskih savremenika. XVI-XVII vek*, op. cit., p 169.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Cf Z. Levental, *op. cit.*, p 188.

¹⁹ Cf R. Samardžić, *op. cit.*, p 192.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p 163

²¹ Cf Z. Levental, *op. cit.*, pp 60-61.

²² Cf R. Samardžić, *op. cit.*, p 192.

²³ Cf Z. Levental, *op. cit.*, p 78.

particularly noticeable: "And soon afterwards, they would abundantly serve everything we needed, especially excellent wines, the best I have ever tasted".²⁴ Certain travel writers were disgusted at the self-will of Turkish civil servants in their escort, so, respecting their readers and having in mind their own moral image, they added separate notes to such descriptions, like Louis Gideon "The Turk": "I would always take pity on those molested people, so I never missed to give them money secretly to recompense the damages they had: this should have to be done in secret for fear that our companions, who greatly enjoyed this fun, might get angry".²⁵ Lady Montagu as well, in order to show Christian compassion as the antithesis to Islamic mercilessness, remarked that her husband, ambassador Wortley, had avoided traveling "at the Sultan's expense" and that he "paid full costs to poor local villagers for everything they had got from them". However, this remark is in contradiction to her words about "arrogant janissaries", although written in anger, in a letter to a Scottish princess, where she talked about "poor wretches that gave (us) twenty vehicles from Belgrade to Niš upon the promise of rents to be paid". Lady Montagu writes that "all of them had to turn back with no payment whatsoever, although - without any compensation - some of their horses were injured, while others died. These miserable people surrounded the house and pulled out their hairs and beards in the most pitiable manner. Nevertheless, they got nothing else but punches from insolent soldiers".²⁶

In contrast to the writers who condemned such practice of exploitation of Serbian population, expressing at the same time their anger toward the Turks and compassion for helpless Christians, most often as an illustration of the position and justifiable discontent of the non-Muslim subjects under the Turkish rule, French travel writer Quiclet had no scruples at all while describing it as something absolutely normal in that part of the world: "We would take horses and vehicles on our way, without any ceremonies, whenever we needed, as the custom and command are such in Turkey: those who have an edict issued by the authorities can dispossess those met on the road of their horses and vehicles for to satisfy their own needs and continue their travel". In this respect, he started with his description of an easygoing travel through our regions, followed by musicians and occasionally interrupted for the sake of hunting, in the manner of a tourist advertisement: "I believe that there are no other destinations that could offer a happier and more amusing travel, with more leisure and pleasant time, and with less expenses".²⁷

²⁴ Cf R. Samardžić, *op. cit.*, p 177.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Cf Z. Levental, *op. cit.*, p 192.

²⁷ Cf R. Samardžić, *op. cit.*, p 192.

PUTOPISNE BELEŠKE O PUTOVANJIMA I PUTNICIMA KROZ NAŠE ZEMLJE U TURSKOM PERIODU

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Tekst je deo većeg rada o našim krajevima u putopisima stranaca od 16. do 19. veka. U njemu je pažnja usmerena na putopisne beleške o putovanju i putnicima kroz Srbiju u turskom periodu. Najpre je načinjen uvid u prirodu putovanja u predturskom periodu, a onda su na osnovu zapažanja francuskih i engleskih putopisaca od 16. do 18. veka uočavane promene u načinu putovanja, životu na putnim pravcima, pobudama putovanju i sigurnosti na putu.

Pošto je jedan od načina putovanja kroz Srbiju u turskom periodu bio "na sultanov trošak", bar kad je reč o ambasadorskim svitama hrišćanskih vladara upućenim na Portu, to je posebna pažnja obraćana na obaveze hrišćanske raje da njihova putovanja budu "sigurna i udobna". Beleške o tome, kao i o nasiqima koja su čiwena nad srpskim stanovništvom da bi bilo iznuđeno sve što je potrebno, često podsećaju na opevana nasilja u epskim pesmama i namete pobrojane u epskim katalozima.