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From Exotic Setting to Familiar Themes. Perceptions of Serbs in Poland in the Nineteenth and the First Half of the Twentieth Century

*Od egzotycznych opisów do tematów znanych. Postrzeganie Serbów
w Polsce w XIX i w pierwszej połowie XX wieku*

Summary: The article deals with the subject of knowledge about Serbia and the Serbs in Poland at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. This knowledge was reconstructed on the basis of travel reports, memoirs, notes published both in the press and the books. The collected materials allow us to observe the slow evolution of the representations of the Serbs. The first reports and news can be counted as exotic presentations in the orientalizing mode of the Balkans, but over time new motifs were emerging, highlighting certain similarities between the Poles and the Serbs, such as history, slavic origin, and peculiar combative features of character. The aim of this article is to present to contemporary audience the unknown images and perceptions of the Serbs in the Polish press.

Key words: alterity, representations, travel reports, Serbia, the Balkans

Streszczenie: Artykuł podejmuje temat wiedzy o Serbii i Serbach w Polsce na przełomie XIX i XX wieku. Wiedza ta została zrekonstruowana na podstawie opisów podróży, wspomnień, notatek publikowanych zarówno w ówczesnej prasie, jak i książkach. Zebrane materiały pozwalają zaobserwować ewolucję w przedstawianiu Serbów. Pierwsze relacje można zaliczyć do przedstawień egzotyki w nurcie orientalizacji Bałkanów, jednak z czasem pojawiają się nowe motywy podkreślające pewne podobieństwa między Polakami i Serbami, np. historię, słowiańskie pochodzenie oraz specyficzne wojownicze cechy charakteru. Celem artykułu jest przybliżenie współczesnemu odbiorcy nieznanych ówczesnych obrazów i percepcji Serbów w polskiej prasie.

Słowa kluczowe: odmiennosc, reprezentacje, sprawozdania z podróży, Serbia, Bałkany

Tłumaczenie: Autor

The discovery of the Balkans falls within the general rubric of how people deal with difference.

(M. Todorova, *Balkany wyobrażone*)

Are the Balkans close or distant when seen from Poland? Today, this question seems to be simple and the answer positive. While Asia and India, although fascinating, still largely remain beyond the limits of familiarity for Poles, in the case of the Balkan countries the doubts are not as grave. Certain boundaries of otherness in imagination have been overcome.

The questions to pose concern the past. When did the Southern Slavs, or Serbia in particular, first appear in the Polish imagery? How was Serbia represented? I will try to answer them using the body of data describing the Serbs derived from Polish written sources of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. These depictions accompanied distinct historical, political and social events of the time. I will take into account travel memoirs, correspondence, articles, texts published mostly as shorter or longer articles in magazines and journals dedicated to culture, science, social life and published in Warsaw (“Biblioteka Warszawska” (1841–1914), “Prawda” (1881–1915), “Biesiada literacka” (1876–1917), “Tygodnik Mód i Powieści” (1871–1912), “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” (1859–1939), “Tydzień Literacko Artystyczny” (1874–1879), “Przegląd Tygodniowy” (1866–1904), “Wędrowiec” (1863–1906), “Ognisko domowe” (1883–1888), “Kronika Rodzinna” (1867–1914), “Niwa” (1872–1905), “Ogniwo” (1902–1905), “Świat” (1888–1895), “Mucha” (1868–1952)), Krakow (“Nowa Reforma” (1882–1928), “Krakus” (1905), “Przegląd Powszechny” (1884-), “Liberum Veto” (1903–1905), “Świat słowiański” (1905–1914)), Lviv (“Przyjaciół domowy” (1859), “Mrówka” (1869–1870)) and Poznań (“Dziennik Poznański” (1859–1939)), but also in St. Petersburg or Leipzig. Owing to such records presented chronologically, I have been able to formulate some general remarks about perception of Serbs in Poland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The image of the Other is shaped as a result of some differences being perceived. The stranger and the less common the Other is, the more distant he/she seems. If the known traits are mixed with the unknown, the emerging image tends to be polymorphous. This is the case of the Balkan countries. To highlight the problem, more questions seem to be relevant. How did the Poles perceive the Serbs in terms of differences and similarities? Whom did they see when they encountered local people? Whether and how was these representations changed as a result of travels, and what breakthrough events seemed to be crucial in constructing the images of the Serbs in Poland? What internal or external factors were the most influential in this respect?

In my interpretation, I will mainly deal with how the differences and contexts of written representations are perceived and what makes them dissimilar and why. In his study on humour, Elliott Oring (2010) describes a concept he called incongruity, proposed by James Beattie. As he points out, it arises when two or more inconsistent, unsuitable or incongruous parts or circumstances are considered as united (Oring 2010: 2). According to him, incongruity theories of humour are structural theories in that they are based on the way elements of things, including words, objects and behaviours, are arranged. In other words, they exist only in the minds of individuals (Oring 2010: xii). To understand a joke, etc., an appropriate perception of the interrelationship of its constituents is necessary. In a wider frame of reference, in case of an encounter with the unknown or the unfamiliar (where the other party is not known or known only superficially), we cannot talk about appropriateness; we can compare only the extent of the appropriateness of the other culture. Most accounts about Serbia are based on the authors' own knowledge and experience. Most of the authors relied on their personal experience and prior knowledge about their own country, society or life in general. Others discovered external or Southern Slavic local contexts which also expanded their understanding of themselves. I claim that the concept of appropriateness can be applied to every type of relations.

As a result of this approach, this paper is at first a selection of accounts from travels to Serbia, and it is worth because this kind of data is unknown not only to the foreign, but also to the Polish readers. The relevant questions concern the travellers' perceptions. What seemed interesting or even meaningful to them and what did they pay attention to in their accounts? How did they represent what they noticed? On the other hand, my aim is to show how these particular objects of attention encapsulated in specific representations were linked with reality; what was neglected, demonised, ignored, and what (if anything) seemed to be fascinating and attractive to the authors of these reports. Following Nicholas Mirzoeff (2015), I understand representation as a way these authors showed the events and experiences, giving them various forms. In this way, cultural collective representations can be a template to direct and organize action by providing it with its own logic instead of reality. We are certainly dealing with the Balkans imagined here; however, in order not to be blamed for repeating general theories, I ask what this meant in this period in Poland. I put forward examples of such way of thinking to make readers familiar with Polish material. This approach can be relevant for understanding of Polish-Serbian relations.

The data are divided into three blocks, each covering a distinct period, i.e. before the Berlin Congress of 1878, the period between the Congress and the end of World War I (1878–1918), and the interwar period (1918–1939). This division reflects the external

factors shaping the political situation in Serbia and the Balkans (i.e. both the Congress and World War I). The latter event also exerted some influence on the regions Poland and Serbia. Each of these three periods had its unique political and historical character, exerting a strong influence on the Serbs and the Poles, and therefore on the perceptions of the Serbs among Poles.

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In the first period, Serbia was part of the Ottoman Empire, which strongly determined its character. In the Polish sources, we can find references to Serbs as Southern Slavs or to the people of Serbia. Sometimes the fact of gaining independence by Serbia in 1815 was underlined. We come across the first references to Serbs and Serbia in the nineteenth century, in “Przyjaciel domowy” (1859) and “Jutrzenka” (1843), where Serbian folk songs, viewed as an expression of national awareness, were translated, and published earlier: in 1826 in “Dziennik Warszawski” (1826), in 1834 – in “Marzanna, noworocznik” (1834), and in “Dniestrzanka” (1841) and “Przyjaciel ludu” (1837).

Travels Reports and Main Themes in Texts Published before 1878

The first travel account worth mentioning here is a book by Aleksander Sapieha (1802–1803) about the Adriatic Sea coast, even though its author did not reach Serbia. He was probably on a mission, but he was also driven by the curiosity of an aristocrat. His focus (expressed also in his lectures in Paris in 1806) was limited to the issue of the origin and division among the Slavic nations, which seemed to be characteristic of the Slavophile attitude of the time.

Another person of significance in this context was Teodor Tomasz Jeż (pen name of Zygmunt Miłkowski), who was well known as an expert of the Balkans. During the Crimean War he stayed in the Balkan Peninsula, where he attempted to form a Polish legion. He was also an observer attached to the Turkish army. Later, he stayed in several regions of Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria. During the years 1855–1858 he lived in Turkey, in Istanbul. After the outbreak of the January Uprising in Poland in 1863, he became a commander of the army in Ruthenia and was promoted to colonel by the National Central Committee. After the collapse of the January Uprising, he tried to bring about the outbreak of a Slavo-Hungarian uprising against Austria. For some time, he was imprisoned by the Austrians in Lvov. During the years 1864–1866 he stayed in Belgrade; afterwards, he moved to West Europe. He was an adventurer and soldier who fought (against Russia) in several wars in Turkey, the Austrian Empire and the Balkans, and who later, in 1869–1971, wrote a cycle of eight Balkan novels, which are an interesting example of the

Polish perspective on the topic. His books were quite well known at the time. In addition to novels, he wrote many articles on Southern Slavs.

The question which arises here is what emerged from his perspective of a former mercenary soldier engaged in military struggles against Russia, mostly in the service of Turkey. He drew a complex picture, its dominant components being the Serbian war for independence, injustice, bravery, the boundaries of the Christian and Muslim cultures, patriarchal society, and Slavic peasant culture. His contribution to literature is enormous, but this lies beyond the scope of the present paper.

In *Słownik języka polskiego* (*Dictionary of the Polish Language*, 1859) by Samuel Bogumił Linde, two meanings of the word “Serb” were given: 1) an inhabitant of Serbia, and 2) member of a nomadic population such as the Wallachians and the Gypsies (Linde 1895: 243). By that time, no event in the Balkan area had been of such a proportion as to affect these broad and generalised categories.

Travel accounts from journeys to Serbia appeared in larger numbers later on. These included: “Ojczyzna” (1864, 1865), Roman Zmorski (1865), Krzysztof Kaszewski (1867), Władysław Kozłowski (1869), “Ognisko domowe” (1875), Juljan Ochorowicz (1876), “Biesiada literacka” (1876), “Z pod Bałkanów” (1877), Alfred Szczepański (1881), Eugeniusz Lipnicki (1883), Jan Grzegorzewski (1885), Jan Badeni (1891), Róża Winawerowa (1890, 1891). I used them as the basis for my study, ignoring those which were historical comments, mostly from third-hand sources translated into the Polish language.

Among travel accounts published before 1878, several deserve special attention. One of such early accounts was published in the journal “Biblioteka Warszawska” as a translation from Andrew Archibald’s Paton’s (1862) journey from Turkey to Belgrade. The Englishman’s account is included here as an example of the wider current of Western accounts well discussed by Maria Todorova (2008). It shows that this kind of view was present in Polish journals as well. What should be stressed is that the translators left out passages concerning the Hungarians, which they considered unfair (because the Hungarians were treated as an inferior nation there), and gave attention to the Slavic peoples who were considered as real and treated with compassion (Biblioteka Warszawska 1862: 92). From 1839 onwards, Belgrade had the shape of a Turkish city (Biblioteka Warszawska 1862: 97). The German element which was common in Transylvania and Banat could not take root in Serbia (Biblioteka Warszawska 1862: 101). Translations were replaced by a rising number of various Polish accounts of different origin.

In the years 1864 and 1865, the magazine “Ojczyzna” included some anonymous correspondence from Belgrade. In these letters, there appeared threats referring more or less obliquely to Russia and its politics. It was a year after the fall of the January

Uprising in Poland, a year of a large wave of Polish emigration, so these circumstances in Poland influenced individual matters that were discussed. The author wrote about the Russian slogans addressed to the Southern Slavs, concerning such matters as the Eastern Orthodox church, nationality, freedom, or independence. According to him, these slogans were a moral weapon against Turkey; they made rebels out of the subordinates and vassals of the High Porte, promising secret aid and support of St. Petersburg. As he noted, faith and origin meant nothing in the face of the reason of the state. By weakening the power of Turkey through using the Serbs, Russia paved the way for its rule and made an easy conquest of the Slavic people. The author predicted that when Russia seized power, the propaganda would change its tone from advisory to imperative. For this reason, he asserted, the Slavs should learn the lesson of Poland (*Ojczyzna* 1864: 3). As he commented, the Serbs were mainly traders, so they believed in slogans, and now had to trust in the “Russian signboards” (*Ojczyzna* 1864: 2–3).

The image of Southern Slavs was modified by the political situation in Poland: a lost uprising and the fact that so many Poles had had to emigrate. All in all, what in the author’s opinion struck a newcomer to Belgrade was that the Serbs were a nation in the making, which could not be held liable either for its intentions or for its actions. It still could not assume responsibility for itself; it is those who sing false songs at its cradle who should be held responsible (*Ojczyzna* 1864: 2–3).

The author of the report could not understand how one and the same state could rob the Poles, shoot and hang them and populate Siberia with deportees on the one hand, and on the other support the Serbs (*Ojczyzna* 1864: 2–3). He gave an example of Izydor Kopernicki (author of various ethnographical notes, participant of the uprising), who was refused a job in Belgrade because he was regarded as a revolutionary (*Ojczyzna* 1864: 3).

According to him, progress in Serbia was favourable for Poland. He explained that the Russians accused Poland of favouring Turkey, as a state that the Poles wanted to see strong since they expected it to win with Russia. The Russians said that whoever supported the Turks could not prevent the Slavs from being conquered and subordinated by the Turks. In the author’s view, this would be true if the Poles were not convinced that the current relations between Turkey and the Slavic nations deprived it of the forces which could be used against Moscow. Any dispute with Montenegro would directly engage the military troops and financial resources of the High Porte. Each of its triumphs would be “irremediable impairment, requiring new troops and new funding to maintain the conquest” (*Ojczyzna* 1865, no. 29: 3).

All the civilised nations of the world showed compassion to Poland after the fall of the January Uprising – all, that is, except the Southern Slavs; all nations had wished Poland

success save for the Southern Slavs, who did not support the Polish point of view. Journalists on both banks of the River Sava condemned the Polish struggle for independence. Several Serbs lost their lives fighting for the Polish cause, but nobody honoured their memory in Serbia. For the Serbs, the Polish troops were bands of robbers, the Polish uprising was but an attempt to thwart the beneficial intentions of the liberal, pro-Slavic government in St. Petersburg. The brotherly Slavs in the south turned away from the Polish cause (*Ojczyzna* 1865, no. 51: 3). These impressions were different from those formed by other nations. Serbia was perceived in the light of politics and the decisive role of Russia in East Europe. The political framework did not allow for the perception of topics more relevant to the characteristic Orientalization of Western Europe. Politics sometimes obscured cultural differences.

On his visit to Belgrade a few years later, Władysław Kozłowski (1869), a nobleman from Galicia, paid attention to a different issue. He spent six weeks on the River Danube. As he said, the reason for the voyage was to see by himself what he had learnt from books and some random stories, and to write down his impressions and perceptions. This was a classical European exotic report, classified as aristocratic view by Todorova (2008). It is an interesting account, in which several themes and comments refer to distinct peoples, objects and events. Kozłowski noticed signs of modern changes (e.g. the existence of the liberal party). He made notes about ancient Roman ruins (e.g. a road from the times of Trajan) and historical events (e.g. Smeredovo as the place where King Władysław crossed the River Danube on his way to fight the Turks, the place of death of the famous Polish knight Zawisza Czarny, known as the Black Knight, or traces of Emperor Sigismund). He made observations on the patriarchal system and the subordinated position of women (Kozłowski 1869: 11), and included references to Juliusz Słowacki's *Podróż na Wschód* (*A journey to the East*), saying that everyone made his own, mythical and practical, journey to the East. He discovered some common traits of Serbs and Poles, e.g. the Slavic individualism, which made people observe the law adopted by themselves, but not one enforced by some external power (Kozłowski 1869: 9). As he stated, apart from officials, traders were the only Serbian intelligentsia, while the peasants lived in patriarchal simplicity.

According to his observations, the Serbs were short-tempered and the Romanians did not want to speak Serbian (Kozłowski 1869: 42); they used interpreters and, when forced by the circumstances, they spoke Serbian with reluctance. In his opinion, the Romanians had lower moral standards than the Serbs (Kozłowski 1869: 43). He advised being careful and polite in contacts with the Serbs because Serbian peasants had a sense of dignity. The Romanians could withstand anything, but when an opportunity came they would take a secret revenge (Kozłowski 1869: 102), while the Serbs committed crimes because of quarrels

or out of rage (Kozłowski 1869: 103). As he claimed, individualism was a trait which the Serbs and the Poles had in common; they did not display the Anglo-Saxon egoism that denied any moral solidarity without economic gain. Owing to their individualism, the Slavic nations observed the laws imposed by themselves, but would not obey any external rule. The Russians were not Slavs, but they valued the heroism of slavery. He discovered some Poles living in Maidan Pek (Majdanpek) and thought it a pity that so many Poles living around the world had left no written memoirs (Kozłowski 1869: 151). This travelogue initiated a series of similar articles presenting specific attitudes to an unfamiliar content – a process which Edward Said (2005) dubbed Orientalism, and which in reference to this particular region is even more adequate as Balkanisation, a term coined by Maria Todorova (2008). Travellers noticed two parts of reality, the civilised versus the uncivilised, and in their opinion a situation more or less fitted one of these categories every time.

Later texts can serve as an example of this perspective. The magazine “Niwa” published the correspondence of Juljan Ochorowicz (1876), who went on a journey looking for a first-hand experience, saying that people would write down what they had heard from third parties (Ochorowicz 1876: 226). He drew attention to the poverty of the population in Belgrade and noted that there were no women on the streets, only young Albanians and Bulgarians with dark faces, some children and very few gendarmes (Ochorowicz 1876: 227). By observing the recruits, he claimed that marching posed the greatest difficulty for the Serbs in the army, as they did not have to learn anything more, being already able to shoot (Ochorowicz 1876: 229). As he noticed, the Turks always reported the defeat of the enemy troops, and the Serbs always announced victory at first, and later, when the enemy reinforcements arrived, they would return to the positions previously held. According to the Serbs, ten Turks were killed for one Serb, while the Turks claimed that the death of one Turk was accompanied by the death of forty Serbs (Ochorowicz 1876: 229). The Turks attacked furiously but in disorder; as a rule, they could not withstand quiet but strong resistance and they often scattered before they dared to attack, especially if there was an empty field or the mountains, and no prospects for robbery (Ochorowicz 1876: 283). According to Ochorowicz, there was a noticeable lack of officers in the Serbian army. As the foreigners reported, the Russians and Poles would gladly be enlisted and immediately sent to the battleground. He listed names of over twenty Poles in service as military officers and medical doctors (Ochorowicz 1876: 285). That his perception is Orientalised cannot be denied; however, my point is that within the frame of the process of Balkanisation there were some distinct accents presenting images in more details. Another theme present in Ochorowicz’s account is that of a commonality between Southern Slavs and Poles.

In the same year, Kazimierz Burzyński (1876) published his interesting account about the Southern Slavs, as well as the Slavic lands and peoples. His article referred to the ongoing Serbian uprising. He sketched the characteristics of the Serbs, Bulgarians and Bosnians, full of details illustrating the differences between these nations (Burzyński 1876: 180–186). He worried why Serbs had started the war, and what chances Serbia had to win it. He thought of the Serbian uprising that the lack of strength to defeat the enemy would not affect the future of the Southern Slavs (Burzyński 1876: 395).

“Biesiada literacka” from 1876 provided information that seemed to be a compilation from foreign sources. It included basic information about the contemporary life in Serbia, efforts of the Serbs to erase all traces of the former Muslim rule, the ‘disappearance’ of Turkishness in Belgrade, the process of replacing the narrow streets with new and wide boulevards (Burzyński 1876: 474).

Z pod Bałkanów (*From the Balkans*, 1877) printed in “Kronika rodzinna” was a short history of Serbia written by an anonymous writer. An increasing amount of correspondence, letters and messages demonstrate the interest in Serbia on the eve of the Berlin Congress.

From this period came the comments in satirical journals (“Mucha” from 1870). It can be said that in the 1870s, accounts about the Southern Slavic countries were relatively frequent in the Polish press. The prevalent motifs were their efforts to gain independence. Some examples, in the form of drawings and comments, are presented below.



Fig. 1 Europe and Asia; “Mucha” (1876)



Fig. 2 Dress change; “Mucha” (1876)

Travel Reports 1878–1918

The usually short correspondence was published in addition to descriptions of the political and social situation in Serbia. The latter were as a rule derived not from individual experience, but from Western publications. The reason for this was that external events attracted the attention of the entire Europe to local conflicts such as the Balkan wars. As a result, comments on the political situation made headlines.

Two perceptions prevailed: the end of the Turkish state versus the beginning of a new one, and “the European” versus “the Eastern barbarian”. Alfred Szczepański wondered in “Dziennik Poznański” (Szczepański 1881) that so much attention was drawn to Serbia across Europe and worldwide. To explore this issue, he travelled to Serbia to personally find out the reasons for this interest. He noted that there was no communication between Austro-Hungary and the East (Szczepański 1881: 1). He reflected on the Romanians and the Turks, concluding that the reason why Southern Hungary was in such disorder was to be found in the successive waves of refugees. The Serbian side, in his view, had few monuments of human civilisation. On the northern side, he could see well-farmed fields. He thought that Belgrade, despite its many shortcomings, had a promising future. He noted that bricks from demolished mosques and minarets were used for

practical purposes, such as the construction of a factory. There were no sidewalks, no water, little light, but a large number of hotels. He viewed Serbia as similar to Piedmont, and most of the things he found there were crafted in the Eastern fashion. The National Museum was under construction and was being built with a view to collecting traces of the past, the period of bondage and the battles fought. For Poles, the Serbs were a fine nation; the author wished them all the best and hoped that not all of its national characteristics would be wiped out by European progress. He expressed pity that no tourist guide existed in any language. In his opinion, the Poles were not sufficiently concerned with Serbia. But now, when it had become a free country, he concluded that, for Poles, the Southern Slavs had ceased to be a myth of the past nor carried an uncertainty of the future (Szczepański 1881: 1). This statement confirms Todorova's view that Orient continued in a standstill (Todorova 2008: 280).

The following accounts also argued that the Balkans were subject to universal laws of evolution, but they were culturally backward. In the journal "Biblioteka Warszawska", Eugeniusz Lipnicki (1883) told the story of his voyage on a steamer-boat along the River Danube. He viewed the process of the Hungarian population's settling in the area as the cause of the Slavs' defeat. On the other hand, he acknowledged that if not for the Hungarians, the Germans would have reached far beyond the River Danube (Lipnicki 1883: 34). He stressed the "hubbub" made by the Serbs. Zemun and Belgrade made a good impression on him, but from the water only, since after landing all the poverty, dirt and absence of trams or omnibuses became visible. He noted that the Serbs constructed a new royal palace because the former public buildings, e.g. the Parliament, looked like barns. The most splendid construction was the Orthodox cathedral. He observed that the Serbs worked zealously to utterly destroy the old aspect of the city and did not want to listen to arguments about preserving it for archaeological or tourist reasons (Lipnicki 1883: 50). The citizens of Belgrade and the Serbs looked to him like traders and salesmen (Lipnicki 1883: 51).

In one of his letters to the monthly "Kraj", Jan Grzegorzewski (1885) gave an overview of politics in Serbia, in general terms viewed as a clash between two styles and personalities, the Oriental and the European (Grzegorzewski 1885: 7). He also opined that the Serbs should not take possession of the Black Sea, but only of the Adriatic as far as the coastline of the Aegean.

In the same year, Grzegorzewski went on a trip to Croatia and wrote an interesting comment in his *Podróż do Chorwacji (A journey to Croatia, 1885)*, and *Za Dunajem (On the other side of the Danube, 1904)*. As he looked for common ties with the Croats, his main themes were as follows: the Croats welcomed the Poles as brothers and called

themselves Poles of the South (Grzegorzewski 1885: 6). The cultural landscape of the Southern Slavs which he painted was based on politics and religion. He noticed the difference between the Serbs and the Bulgarians: the Serbs were more Western, taller and healthier, while the Bulgarians were calm, prudent and cautious, persistent in their enterprises, but sometimes vindictive. He found more common traits with Serbs. According to him, the Serbs were open-hearted and short-tempered; their enthusiasm was similar to that of Poles; the Serbs too could perform miracles of valour and sacrifice, but also, like Poles, they were not persistent and tended to be discouraged by adversity. Generosity beyond measure and a tendency to live beyond their means, profligacy and failure to retain their property were some other features that he noticed (Grzegorzewski 1885: 89). He posed the question: how did the Slavic nations cope with the Turkish invasion? And the answer was that the bravest battles were fought by Poland (Grzegorzewski 1885: 107). He also paid attention to *zadruga*, or neighbourly support (Grzegorzewski 1885: 127), as a thing of the past in the case of Slavs in Poland.

The search for common traits continued, based on, first, a common Slavic background, and, second, on similar historical and political circumstances and the general context – the Serbs' fighting on two fronts against both the Austro-Hungarian empire and the Turks, as compared to the Russian and German frontlines of Poland.

Reports from the fronts of the Balkan Wars were written from a perspective known as 'Balkanisation', popular in many other European journals and magazines. In the same year, letters from the Serbian-Bulgarian War came out, and the news from the frontline, focused on such matters as the role of the railway connecting Belgrade with Niš. This subject was tackled in *Wspomnienia naocznego świadka wojny bułgarsko-serbskiej* (*Memoirs of an eyewitness of the Bulgarian-Serbian war*), a series in "Wędrowiec" written by Antoni Piotrowski (1886).

In the Krakow magazine "Przegląd Powszechny", Jan Badeni (1891) described his voyage on the River Danube, which he started from Zemun, a city regarded as the gate to the Eastern world. As he said, behind it, one could trip into puddles of mud, small cottages stood all around (Badeni 1891: 238), all possible languages could be heard, with signboards in Serbian, German, sometimes in Romanian and Hungarian (Badeni 1891: 240). From the water, Belgrade looked fabulous, but the streets were dirty; one could not see the difference between the famous Belgrade and a small town in Galicia, such as Dukla. There were also very few churches (Badeni 1891: 247).

The Serbian social life attracted more and more interest in the end of the nineteenth century. "Przegląd Tygodniowy" published a very interesting account from Serbia written by Róża Winawerowa (1890a), which had a slightly different nature than other reports.

Her reflections seemed more mature and belonged to the current of reports written in the spirit of the Enlightenment. She stressed that the Serbian society was young and had recently come out of barbarism. It did not have many people with organisational skills, who would be able to draft laws and build schools and institutions. Therefore any such society needed to borrow from others and had to become almost a reflection of its more civilised neighbours. However, argued Winawerowa, these foreign borrowings altered their character over time, being adapted to the conditions of the receiving country. Yet at the bottom of these laws and institutions, one could always find a foreign element. As she claimed, the opposite was true for the moral life of the nation. For it, the rites and customs were the blood and bones of each member of the community, passed on from father to son, thus becoming a tradition that persisted for a long time and in its original form. Nowhere did this phenomenon, natural and historical, get a more manifest representation than in Serbia. As an example, Winawerowa mentioned the custom of glorification, or celebrating the day on which the ancestor, a pagan, adopted the Christian faith. It had remained as the day of commemoration and was duly worshipped by the male descendants of the family. Since baptism was not done for everyone individually, but for whole groups, it is not surprising that often the entire villages, and dozens people in towns, celebrated *slava* on the same day (Winawerowa 1890a: 24).

Another topic for her were the Serbian women. She wrote that their tasks were to give their men comfort and pleasure, to bear children and to do the chores. They married early and received their husbands' support in return for unlimited obedience, discipline and work. Women did not go outside the house and on holidays, dressed in their best clothes, they visited their kinsfolk (Winawerowa 1890b: 76).

Men spent their life outside of home, and women were busy working at home. No country had such a big number of crowded cafes, where men drank wine and listened to loud music sung by seductive singers or Gypsy bands that never changed their repertoire, producing bizarre and monotonous Serbian dances and songs. Women rarely visited cafes on Saturdays or Sundays, drinking black coffee and, heavily, wine. Most women were not particularly well-educated, which seemed strange because of the promising conditions for their growth and education. Secondary schools were mixed, for boys and girls. Women could be educated abroad, mostly in medical studies, and after returning home they would get a good job, normally in women's wards in hospitals. She noted that the concepts of women's emancipation, which were so vigorous in the "civilised" European states, had also penetrated to this corner of the Balkans (Winawerowa 1890c: 87).

She paid special attention to some of the peculiarities of the Serbian social life. The case of peasants in Serbia seemed most unfamiliar, and to some extent fascinating. As Winawerowa stated, the question of the peasant masses in Poland was now a vital one. From this point of view, she concluded that it should be interesting for Polish readers to learn more about peasants in Serbia. Their situation developed differently in Serbia and in Poland. In Serbia, the Poles were struck by a fact that could hardly be encountered elsewhere in Europe: there was no aristocracy. Every countryman remembered how their grandfathers fought for the freedom of Serbia, so everyone felt equal to other Serbs, no matter what their status was. Most peasants owned land, rarely going to work as hired hands. At the balls, it was surprising how many peasants danced next to the smartest or the richest people. According to Winawerowa, Serbs were accustomed to equality and regarded it as a completely natural phenomenon. Every peasant read a newspaper and would often be its contributor. Her observations concerned the mental occupation and eating habits of peasants. Serbian peasants worked using their mind more than Polish farmers, but had different diets. Meat was rare on the Polish peasants' tables, and the Serbs daily ate soup, meat, vegetables, milk, drank a litre of wine and 4–5 cups of coffee per day. Serbian peasants had outstanding social and intellectual skills, so it should not be found surprising that most of the country's ministers were of peasant origin (Winawerowa 1891: 483). These details kindled interest in Serbia even more.

A different issue captured the attention of the correspondent for "Kraj". The author signed as Czetnik (1906) wondered to what Southern Slavic tribes the people living in the mountains belonged. As they incessantly fought against the Turkish army and against one another, their own identity was not obvious. National awareness was very low. All they knew for sure was that they were not Greeks or Turks (Czetnik 1906: 7).

More anniversaries and celebrations from Serbia were noticed and discussed. Letters from Serbia were printed in "Nowa Reforma" published in Krakow. These were brief statements commenting on current events such as political elections or examples of anarchy. The subject of the Balkans appeared in the journal "Świat Słowiański". Zygmunt Stefański (1907) outlined historical and contemporary relations in connection with the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Kingdom of Serbia.

Individual recollections were yet another genre. In 1918, Stefan Wojstomski published his memoirs of personal encounters with Serbian soldiers fighting against the Bolsheviks in Russia. He depicted the Serbs he encountered as captives from the former Austro-Hungarian army and the Serbian regular troops, and commended the bravery of the tall, black-bearded, good-looking soldiers who, like Poles, tried to reach their homeland in scattered groups and only few of them reached home.

Wojstomski read all available books and journals about Serbia and the Balkan wars in 1912. As he wrote, he met Serbs for the first time in 1918 when he was coming back to Western Europe following the Brest Peace Treaty and encountered the Czech legions fighting on the Russian side. The Germans wanted the Bolsheviks to disarm the Czechs, but they continued fighting as part of the anti-Bolshevik front along the River Volga. Other Slavic troops, both Polish and Serbian, started to join them. Among them, there were soldiers – former POWs from the Austro-Hungarian army, but also Serbian regular troops. The Czechs captured Samara from the Bolsheviks and the author heard stories how a small Serbian unit had captured another city, Simbirsk, and joined the Czechs. Two battalions, owing to their height and black beards, looked considerably different than the Czechs and, in fact, attractive. The author was in the Polish troops. He met Serbs later on during the retreat of all the troops with the Czech soldiers and Poles. While in the rear guard near Krasnoyarsk, he met the Serbian soldiers for the last time. The Polish troops were defending a railway station when he saw a horseman charging towards them along the street; he was a Serb. He stayed with them for a few days. Later on, after the surrender due to the Czechs' betrayal, Wojstomski saw scattered groups of soldiers. It was the last time when he saw the Serbs, who, just like the Poles, were fighting for their homeland. Only few of them reached the goal (Wojstomski 1918: 5–6).

After the Berlin Congress of 1878, the frequency of press reports about Serbia seems to increase. Articles and books commenting on the political situation, conflicts and wars hit the front pages. Serbia was regarded as an ally of Russia, which in turn was regarded as the defender of Serbia. Kasper Wojnar stressed that the vitality of the Balkan nations could be compared with the vitality of the Polish nation, where the number of the population would rise faster than that of its neighbours (Wojnar 1913: 40). Political matters were also discussed, and the rising power of Bulgaria noticed, by Adam Krzyżanowski. He underlined the antagonisms between Serbia and Austria, long-lasting conflicts and betrayals by the Austrian side, and the Serbian Uprising of 1804, intended to win the support of Austria; the Austrians' response was to follow the lawful ruler, not support the rioters. The Serbians lost their respect for the Austrians at that time (Krzyżanowski 1913: 73). Krzyżanowski paid attention to the long-lasting Serbian tradition of fighting for independence on two fronts, against Austro-Hungary and Turkey (Krzyżanowski 1913: 83), in which Serbia was similar to Poland.

Cartoons commenting on the Balkan Wars were also frequently published and the perception of the Serbs and the neighbouring nations took on a new dimension – as fratricide and in-fighting that divided the communities into smaller entities.

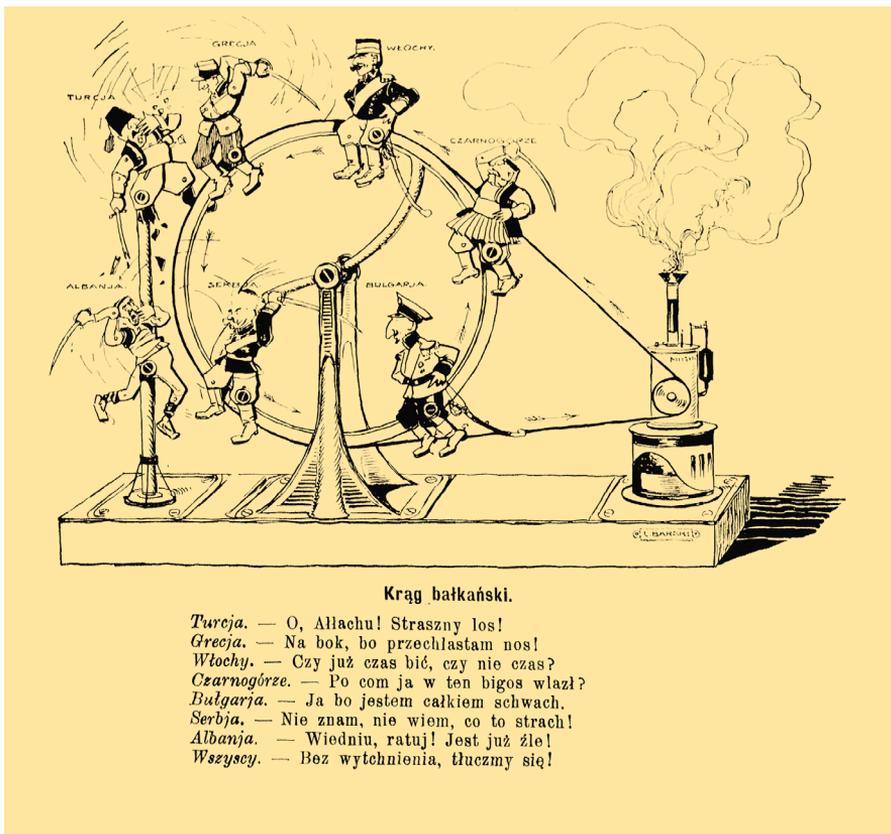


Fig.3 The Balkan carousel; “Mucha” (1913)

Turkey: Oh Allah, what a terrible fate!
 Greece: Go away, otherwise I’ll punch you on the nose!
 Italy: Time to strike or not?
 Montenegro: Why have I stepped into this mess?
 Bulgaria: Me, because I am quite weak.
 Serbia: I don’t know what fear is!
 Albania: Vienna, help! It’s already bad!
 All: No mercy, let’s strike one another!

Travel Reports and New Themes 1919–1939

The end of World War I brought many changes to this region of Europe. Collapse of the empires made political change possible. Poland regained independence, while several smaller nations gained it for the first time. The biggest beneficiaries were Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, which emerged as larger states. These changes of the political and historical situation, the reshuffles in the European alliances, were also reflected in the publications. The Polish perception of the Balkans, now Yugoslavia, was modified and new

themes concerning Serbia were tackled. And, once again, mutual relations between Poland and the Soviet Union influenced the shaping of the image of the Serbs in Poland. The aim was to try to shape the Polish relations and view of history in a new way.

The accounts published by Irena Kosmowska served certain interests and purposes of looking for a common ground between the newly created states of Eastern Europe. As an introduction to her book, she showed a new way of looking at the Southern Slavs and indicated how to establish better relations with Yugoslavia, a new independent state. New themes emerged, such as Serbia's bloody past, as well as the folk songs and legends, owing to which the Serbs had preserved knowledge about their origins and which gave them a distinct sense of identity.

According to Kosmowska, Serbia survived thanks to the faithfully and carefully preserved folk songs and legends which conveyed the knowledge of the Serbs' origin, supported their sense of community and protected them against foreign influences (Kosmowska 1922: 6). She reminded her readers that the Turks used to treat the dominated nations in a different way than the Russians. They ruled the country in a military way, but without imposing their faith or language. The land was divided among the warriors of the sultan, who collected tribute from peasants and local communities. The higher classes were destroyed (Kosmowska 1922: 9). To get better treatment, the nobility often converted to Islam and adopted a Turkish lifestyle, but the free peasants kept their faith and traditions. The Bulgarians were more accustomed to slavery than the Serbs, who were brave and had fought in several uprisings. This was regarded as similar to Poland. Kosmowska acknowledged that the Poles knew that from the novels by Teodor Tomasz Jeż, who had left the Balkans post 1848 (Kosmowska 1922: 10). This article shows that there were more publications about the Balkans. The Kościuszko Uprising in Poland was compared to the uprising of Karadjordjevic (Kosmowska 1922: 11). As Kosmowska claimed, the Slavic peaceful disposition was polluted, poisoned by the bitterness of slavery and relentless defensive battles. There was no fratricidal battles among the Slavs, with Serbia an exception to this as a result of the long Turkish rule (Kosmowska 1922: 13). Smaller states were in an unfortunate position, as their stronger neighbours would look unfavourably at their speedy development (Kosmowska 1922: 14).

Kosmowska continued with more contemporary times, claiming that Poland should come closer to Yugoslavia, because unfortunately it could not depend on the Czech Republic whose whole attention was oriented toward a reconstruction of the power of Russia. Poland needed to look at the Southern Slavs and attempt an impartial evaluation of its relations with them. During the invasion of the Bolsheviks, some Yugoslavs supported Poland in battle (Kosmowska 1922: 122).

More publications about Yugoslavia could be found. Just as before, they mostly dealt with the political, historical and cultural situation. However, more Serbian writers were translated into Polish. New books and articles presenting Polish studies on the history of the Balkan states trying to shape new relations and view of history were published by Henryk Batowski, as well as some translations of literature into Polish and of tourist guidebooks (Lubaczewski 1935).

In satirical representations, concern about “Balkanisation” was replaced by the idea of the Polish-Yugoslavian friendship. There was no shortage of favourable feelings expressed in various forms, though it was remembered that Yugoslavia was a part of the Little Entente, in which a crucial role was played by Czechoslovakia. One obstacle hampering the development of good relations was the question of Cieszyn Silesia.

Well, are we going to sign a pact of eternal friendship? Yes. And Mussolini will not disturb us, neither will the Hungarians.



Fig.4 Yugoslavia and Poland; “Mucha” (1928)

Conclusions

In traditional anthropological thinking, “other” cultures (which means, other than the Western one) are usually seen as less developed. Who was “the Other” for Poles? The question is whether ‘the other’ culture was one different than the Western one or also different than the Polish one. Both ways of thinking were relevant. As it has already been mentioned, two points must be considered here, namely what seemed to be interesting or meaningful in various authors’ accounts from Serbia and how they represented what they had seen.

It shows how these particular objects of attention, encapsulated in specific representations, were linked with reality; what was neglected, demonised, ignored, and what, if anything, seemed to be fascinating, attractive and to be learnt. As Edward Said (2005: 8) put it, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner or the other reporter in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without him ever losing the relative upper hand.

Three periods of time, divided by momentous events such as the Berlin Congress (1878) and the end of World War I (1918), can be differentiated by their distinct characteristic circumstances and features. All of them more or less influenced both sides – the Polish account writers and the Serbian objects of description. Also, accounts about Serbia can be distinguished from each other owing to the dominating themes and emergence of a new content. Issues of interest to the Polish public/readers included Slavophilia, the romantic unity or the disunity of the Slavs, wars for independence, the unjustness of fate, bravery, the spirit nascent in Belgrade, Russia’s false promises, favouring Turks against Russia, but not against the Southern Slavs, Orientalist themes, realities alien to Polish people, the patriarchal society, the position of women in the society, the Slavic peasant culture, poverty, disorder, the boundary between the Christian and Muslim cultures, modern changes, the disappearance of Turkishdom, ancient Roman ruins, historical places related to Polish history, common traits of Serbs who like Poles shunned being ruled by foreign powers. All these topics were used frequently in descriptions prior to 1878 and later to some extent were replaced by the issues of differentiating the Serbs from other nations, ‘Balkanisation’ versus a wider unifying order, civilisation versus barbarity, and the processes of discovering social hierarchy versus social equality. Owing to more frequent journeys, old myths were replaced by direct contacts. In the third period, the historical past with the motif of dominance was replaced by the prospect of freedom in a new country. This new context encouraged efforts to close the gap in the traditional, chilly relations and develop a closer friendship between Poland and Yugoslavia. This found expression in the new themes, among which were the realisation that Turkish

dominance differed from the Russian one; the destruction or Islamisation of the upper class versus the preservation of traditional customs and beliefs by the peasants; the exploration of the unknown world of Islam, the search for common traits of Serbs and Poles (for instance their brave struggle in uprisings); Balkanisation was replaced by the idea of Polish-Yugoslav friendship, and the debate on elements that shaped national consciousness and differentiated nations from one another.

The criterion by which I chose this set of the travel reports was the topic of Serbia, and the text being by an eyewitness. Short notes in the daily journals were not considered. The perception of Serbs reflected in this selection of Polish reports made a long route from classic 'Otherness', in the sense of noticing the unfamiliar, to discovering more recognisable themes common to both cultures. Gaining knowledge of the Other paved the way for a better understanding of the past and of those cultural elements which were not acceptable earlier. An increase in the interest in Serbia depended on the political situation and cultural interests of the public. Both societies ultimately adopted the Western orientation, though Serbia did so much later. The West-oriented Polish culture paid less attention to Serbia, perceived as more Eastern than Poland.

I do not think that Polish accounts noted that transient aspect of the Balkans which Maria Todorova (2008: 45) explained in connection with the Western views. Beside this vision, and apart from other popular wider perspectives dealing with the Serbian reality, one seems to be typical of the Polish perspective, namely to identify the differences and the aspects shared by the two. Looking from the perspective of Orientalism, categories that should be taken into account are the state of being uncivilised, barbarity, dirt, patriarchal society, friendship with the Russians, the Eastern religion, Islam, and so on.

Apart from the general ways of dominating, restructuring and controlling the Orient, in some cases the question of what the two nations had in common was posed as well. The issues mentioned in reference to this were the two nations' long struggle for independence against two enemies, the military uprisings, their fighting spirit and vitality. The aristocratic and enlightened approaches to the Balkans discovered by Todorova are also present. Representations of what was common showed the intentions of the Polish writers of the time to establish some Eastern European categories shared by the two nations; categories which could at least to some extent obliterate the existing religious, ethnic, political, historical, social and cultural differences. Some authors dealt with otherness based on their own knowledge and experience, which made a difference for their vantage points. Most authors depended on their internal contexts, or what they knew about Poland and life in general. Some others discovered external or local contexts which expanded their understanding (such as Róża Winawerowa's interest in the phenomenon of social equality in Serbia).

Ideas regarding the Serbs, being a result of the dominant ideologies and values, evolved slowly, from the exotic Other and the idealistic Slavic brother in the past, from what was expected, towards what actually occurred. They shifted, ultimately resulting in the establishment of new relations between the categories shared by both sides, such as the common traits, such as a long tradition of fighting for independence against two external enemies, uprisings, etc. As a land depicted by most of the Polish travellers, Serbia was not a country where one could learn about modernity or civilisation, but rather about keeping traditions, bravery, and also social equality that made the society strong, about education and literacy of the masses.

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