

UDC 930.85 (4-12)

YU ISSN 0350-7653

ACADEMIE SERBE DES SCIENCES ET DES ARTS

INSTITUT DES ETUDES BALKANIQUES

BALCANICA

ANNUAIRE DE L'INSTITUT DES ETUDES BALKANIQUES

XXIX

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BELGRADE

1998



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TESTIMONIES TO COMMON LIFE German Writers of Travel Accounts from the 18th and 19th Centuries about the Greeks in Serbia

Abstract: Searching for testimonies to common life on the territory of South-East Europe, the testimonies freed from excessively emotional and partial views and opinions, in this paper the author has examined, on the basis of the material found in travel accounts, how foreigners saw, understood and interpreted the presence of Greeks in Serbia in the 19th century. The question at issue is primarily travel accounts, published in separate books and journals in the German language. From the chronological point of view, the paper discusses notes made on journeys starting from the first decades of the 18th century, until the time when Serbia gained independence and international recognition in the 19th century.

Such a chronologically founded survey commences with the works of an adventurer, Wilhelm Retchir from 1722; two envoys in the entourage of the ambassador, Gerar Cornelius von Driesch from 1723, and Franz Gudenus from 1741. One travel account of a military-intelligence character, written by Franz Mihanovich, dates from the 18th century as well. The description of the journey of an anonymous author, issued in a German publication in 1817, (*Journal*), is followed by a list of significant names in the 19th century travelogue literature. These are Otto Dubislav von Pirch from 1830, Ami Boué from 1840, Franz Possart from 1837, Wilhelm Richter from 1840, the Austrian consul J.Hahn from 1861, the Evangelical pastor David von Cöln from 1865, Felix Kanitz from 1868; as well as Gustav Rasch from 1873.

The material, that is the records about the Greeks in Serbia in the 18th and 19th centuries from in the texts of the aforementioned authors, can be classified into several groups.

Usage of Certain Concepts and Their Meanings

When discussing particular concepts, such as 'a Greek', 'a Serb', 'Greece', 'Serbia', 'Greek faith', 'non-Uniate Greek faith', etc., it is necessary to point out that certain German writers of travel accounts in the 18th, and many of them in the 19th century as well, made use of the concepts that had already become standard in German travel account dealing with south-east Europe. Only in the works of a few authors, did the term 'Greek' have two senses, denoting a Serb and a Greek. An example of such a usage is registered in the second decade of the 18th century, in the book written by one of the envoys in the diplomatic mission from Vienna to Constantinople, Gerar Cornelius von Driesch: „among the Greeks or *Raci*“.¹

However, even in the 19th century some authors used the term 'Greek' in the identical manner. One of them is A. Griesebach, a botanist and a physician from Göttingen, who made a tour of the entire southeast Europe. Among other things, he wrote the following about Prizren: „Man rechnet nämlich auf 4000 Häuser 500 griechische und 3500 albanische Familien, von denen die grosse Mehrzahl der letztern sich zum Islamismus bekennt“.² He even managed to write down a legend about the Nemanjićs, which he had heard from a Greek, (that is, a Serb): „Ein alter Grieche wusste die Sage davon mitzutheilen“.³

However, Cornelius von Driesch and Anton Grisebach are exceptions. Other writers did not confuse these two senses. They made a clear distinction between the Serbs and the Greeks by using two different terms.

A different picture is obtained when the terms denoting religious or ecclesiastical affiliation are discussed.

In this field, two terms are most frequently employed, of which almost all authors make use in their works, one way or another.

The term „griechische Kirche“ denoted the affiliation to the Orthodox church, regardless of whether it was Greek or Serbian. Thus Ami Boué, certainly one of the best connoisseurs of south-east Europe, wrote on several

¹ Driesch, 239.

² Griesebach, Bd. 2, 310.

³ Griesebach, Bd.2, 319.

occasions in his best-known book about European Turkey, that the Serbs belonged to the Greek Church: „Sie gehören alle der griechischen Kirche.“⁴

Similar examples can be found in the works of all German writers of travel accounts who visited these regions up to the mid-19th century. It was difficult for them, and for the German speaking public as well, to stop using the terms customarily employed throughout several centuries.

In the second half of the 19th century, the terms „serbische Kirche“ and „griechische Kirche“ were habitually applied to designate the Serbian and Greek churches respectively, primarily owing to the numerous writings of Felix Kanitz, then David Cöln and Gustav Rasch.

The situation was similar as regards the usage of the terms designating religious affiliations. In this field, as in the works of German travel-writers in the previous centuries, it was customary to employ the expressions „nicht unitem Griechen“⁵, or „griechische Religion“,⁶ as well as „Christen des griechischen Ritus“⁷ to designate the Serbs of the Orthodox religious affiliation.

In the course of the 19th century, the situation began slowly to change. The terms finally started to acquire the meanings in which they are used nowadays. For this inconsistency regarding the conceptual, and thereby meaning, fields, we quote an example from the book edited in the middle of the 19th century by Franz Heinzelmann on the basis of fragments taken from various travel accounts: „der Erzbischof von Karlowitz ist nämlich Oberhaupt der nicht unierten Griechen in den österreichischen Staaten, d. h. der zahlreichen Serben in Ungarn“⁸

Greeks as Members of a Separate Ethnic Community in 18th and 19th Century Serbia

The works of German authors contain numerous testimonies bearing on the Greeks as members of a separate ethnic community.

Enumerating the inhabitants of Belgrade that he encountered in this town in the second of the 18th century when travelling with envoys to Istanbul, Cornelius von Driesch phrased it in the following words:

⁴ Boué, bd, 1, 342.

⁵ Heinzelmann, 104.

⁶ Boué, Bd. 1, 341

⁷ Boué, Bd. 1, 341

⁸ Heinzelmann, 104.

„That town, like all others in Turkey, is peopled by the Muslims, Rascians, Greeks, Jews and Armenians“.⁹

More than one hundred years later, Otto von Pirsch was to meet the Greeks in Belgrade, too:

„An awful lot of interesting faces gathered there: the Serbs, sullen Bulgarians, Bosnians, Greeks, savage Albanians in their red garments and the Turks.“¹⁰

And the picture of numerous ethnic communities that a traveller could come across in nineteenth-century Serbian towns, is supplemented by Felix Kanitz:

„Towns are surrounded by innumerable scattered houses and spacious suburbs, where many nations live: the Turks, Jews, Greeks, Mayars, Dalamatians and others“.¹¹

Travelling around the Serbia of that time, the German writers did not go into detailed explanations concerning the nationality of particular ethnic groups. The authors seemed to be only interested in establishing the fact that members of different nations lived on this soil. For this reason, their works do not contain more precise data about the number of Greeks living and working on the territory of Serbia of that time.

The only exception is the work of one of the best connoisseurs of 19th century Serbia. It is, of course, Felix Kanitz and his book *Serbia. The land and population from the Roman period until the end of the 19th century* in three volumes. Having spent decades travelling around this principality, and subsequently kingdom, Felix Kanitz is the only German travel-writer to note down a greater number of facts about the members of different ethnic communities inhabiting, apart from the Serbs, not only in Belgrade, but also the settlements in the province. Thus, German readers could find out which of the settlements of that time were populated by Greeks.

According to the notes of Felix Kanitz, at the close of the 19th century the Greeks resided in the following towns: there were 212 Greeks and 138 Tsintsars in Belgrade, 123 Greeks in Požarevac, 121 Greeks and 112 Tsintsars in Kragujevac; 10 Greeks in Valjevo; 135 Greeks in Niš, and 27 Greeks in Prokuplje.

⁹ Driesch, 238.

¹⁰ Pirsch, 15.

¹¹ Kanitz, Bd. I. 33.

Greek clergymen and laymen in Serbia in the 18th and 19th centuries

It can be claimed that the portraits of Greeks - clergymen in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Serbia are a commonplace in the majority of German travel accounts. Of course, these are the descriptions of bishops phanariots. The pages of numerous German publications contain many bitter words addressed to them.

The best evidence related to them was left by Otto Dubislav von Pirch, who had an opportunity to observe them at close quarters during his sojourn in Serbia in 1829. In the course of the 18th and in the first decades of the 19th century, the Patriarch of Constantinople sent to Serbia the bishops, native Greeks, „whose very language“, writes Pirch, „was alien to the indigenous population, and who could never come to terms with their flock, but remained in the country as long as they wanted to, associating with the Turks rather than the Serbs, and with their squandering and debts always were more of a burden to the country, never bringing any good“.¹²

Other German authors, Felix Kanitz, David Cöln, and Gustav Rasch expressed a similar opinion. They also saw the bishops „more as accomplices in Turkish violence, than friends of the Christians entrusted to them“.¹³

The pages of German travel accounts also contain testimonies bearing on the Greeks as members of a nation involved in different business transactions in Serbia of that time.

The Greeks were most frequently described as merchants, people who could be come across in all important places in Serbia, in all fairs, markets and commercial town districts.

Greek merchants are another commonplace found in numerous German travel accounts. That occupation of theirs was not only described by German, but also by other European authors, e.g. English, French, Russian, and many others, who toured around Serbia in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Greek merchants were seen by the aforementioned authors in Belgrade *čaršija* (commercial district), then on the banks of the Danube where they transported goods by ships. The trade evolving on the Danube was divided. In the upper course it was under the control of Austrian and German companies, while in the lower course all trade was in the hands of the Vlachs, Austrians, Greeks and Englishmen.¹⁴

¹² Pirch, 6-7.

¹³ Pirch, 52

¹⁴ Boué, Bd. 2, 88.

Extensive trade transactions were also carried out in quarantines, for instance, in Aleksinac, or Zemun „which was the centre of Serbian merchants, who, together with the Greeks and Turks, ran all businesses“.¹⁵

Felix Kanitz made the most beautiful pictures of Greek merchants during his frequent visits to Serbia in the 19th century. These illustrations of his, of outstanding artistic value, can be seen today not only on the pages of his book about Serbia, but also in the publications of that time, issued in Leipzig, Dresden, Vienna, etc.

The most beautiful literary portrayal of Greek merchants is from the pen of Otto Dubislav von Pirch. His description of three merchants seems to elucidate the entire philosophy of their business success. Strolling around Belgrade, he noticed a line of „low, wooden stores with shingle roofs“, and „Serbian, Greek and Turkish merchants sitting next to each other in such stores“. The Turks were easily recognized „by white muslin wrappers around their heads, yellow sullen faces, and an indifferent, scornful look“. The Serbian merchant dressed in a modest costume „sees the person entering his shop first as a guest, and then as a customer, and his entire bearing discloses a cheerful disposition, the inheritance of his nation“. And the Greek „with his red cap trades, his eyes never keeping still, speculating, invites strangers to buy something, with the courtesy revealing the proud remembrance of his great ancestors, whom even the Greek of the lowest origin never forgets“.¹⁷

Almost all German writers of travel accounts have left notices, shorter or longer, about Greek merchants in southeast Europe and the territory of Serbia of that epoch. Other occupations pursued by members of this nation and their engagements were mentioned in a few records, a couple of meagre sentences or casual remarks.

On his journey around Serbia in the autumn of 1829, Otto von Pirch became acquainted with a Greek, the owner of an inn in Požarevac. It was Demetrios the Greek who „got the room ready“ for our author „very well“.¹⁶

In the description of one of the missions to Istanbul, we come across the account of a Greek who was a Turkish translator. „Ali-Pasha’s translator“, Gudenus writes, „introduced the Ambassador to Kapiji-Pasha“.¹⁸

¹⁵ Henzelmann, 105.

¹⁶ Pirch, 29–30.

¹⁷ Pirch, 55.

¹⁸ Gudenus, 44.

In the first decades of the 19th century, Ami Boué wrote about Greek draymen who escorted caravans in southeast Europe. With one of them, coming from Klisura, he himself travelled on Bosnian and Serbian roads.¹⁹

It is common knowledge that a lot of gardeners in 19th century Serbia either originated from Bulgaria, or were Bulgarians, but the Evangelical pastor in Belgrade David Cöln had the opportunity of meeting an occasional Greek in this profession in the second half of the 19th century.²⁰

On Culture, School System and Literature

Only a few German writers (Otto Dubislav von Pirch, Franz Possart, Felix Kanitz and David Cöln) touched upon the school system, the cultural and literary engagements of the Greeks on the territory of Serbia in the 18th and 19th centuries: only those authors who had visited all regions and managed to find persons capable of providing them with necessary information.

David Cöln noted down priceless records about Greek schools in Belgrade. At the beginning of the sixth decade of the 19th century, there were „eight primary schools“ in the capital of the Principality, of which one was Greek.²¹

In his description of Belgrade, the same author registered another interesting piece of information. The issue at question was newspapers, both in Serbian and in foreign languages, that inhabitants, or travellers, could read in the public library. The interested had at their disposal „14 Serbian, 1 Polish, 5 Russian, 1 Bulgarian, 1 Czech, 6 Greek, 7 German and 5 French newspapers“.²²

In the 19th century, the German readers could find detailed information about Serbian literature in the two books of the abovementioned authors, Otto von Pirsch and Franz Possart. In a bibliographic survey of the 18th and 19th Serbian literature, they provided a list of authors renowned for their literary work. In it, both Pirch and Possart made mention of two writers whose interests included the Greek language and literature. They were Georgije Zaharijević and Mihailo Bojadži:

„Georg Sachariewitch: Von dem Anstand der Jugend, aus dem Griechischen des Isokrates“;²³ „Georg Sachariewitch: Griechische Grammatik“.²⁴

¹⁹ Boué, Bd. 2, 479.

²⁰ Cöln, 63.

²¹ Cöln, 11.

²² Cöln, 11.

²³ Pirch, 169.

²⁴ Pirch, 176; Possart, 103.

„Mijajl Bojadschi: Gründlicher Unterricht in der Sittenlehre“.²⁵

However, in terms of literature, a text from the book of Otto Dubislaw von Pirch is of greater interest. Discussing literary creations, Otto Pirch could not disregard folk epic poems. He must have become acquainted with them when preparing for a journey around Serbia. But not only with them. He was also familiar with Greek folk epics, so that their description and comparison in the book are of extreme interest:

„The force that made them was the same, but their character is completely different“, Pirch wrote. „Greek epics were created in the epoch of the nation’s more recent struggle with the Turks, the majority of them emerging in the initial, most unfortunate period. They are permeated with a black thread of sorrow and pain, apart from bloody revenge; the colour of hope is barely visible. They are elevated, noble, they move, and frequently astound. Serbian poems, however, are mostly pictures from the beautiful past. Knightly courage, treacherous and cunning seizures, now tender love, now pleasure and riches, make up the principal components of these poems in which the people took delight, and from which they drew support in their misery. The basic tone of these poems is almost exclusively cheerful: they originated from the inexhaustible cheerful disposition of the people themselves, which is one of their most conspicuous characteristics. Work and rest, their entire life is nothing to them without poems“.²⁶

This remarkable description of folk epics and the comparison of Serbian and Greek folk poetry has been frequently reprinted from Pirch’s book in the works of other writers of travel accounts. The same text, word by word, was to appear, without quoting the author’s name, first in Franz Possart’s book *The Principality of Serbia*, Darmstadt 1837; and then in the work of Friedrich Heintelmann, *Travelling Pictures and Sketches*, Leipzig 1853.

A similar historical destiny, i.e. foreign occupation lasting many centuries, as well as the struggle for the national, political and cultural liberation in the first and the third decades of the 19th century respectively, are commonplaces in the travel accounts produced by German writers. They displayed interest in, and devoted many pages to the courage of the people who after so many centuries managed to find strength to mount a rebellion, and immediately started to work on literary and cultural enlightenment. The pages discussing the fate of distinguished personalities, such as, for instance,

²⁵ Pirch, 170; Possart, 99.

²⁶ Pirch, 176.

Rigas Pheraeus, can be grouped into the most touching and beautiful passages in German travel accounts from the 19th century.

On the pages of their books, German travel writers left invaluable records about Greek literary creations. These books contain small treatises on Serbian and Greek folk epics, on their character, nobility, sublimity and messages that they carry in themselves. The reader of that time could become acquainted with the works published by his contemporaries, the authors living in Serbia of that time.

Translated by Dragana Vulićević

СВЕДОЧАНСТВА О ЗАЈЕДНИЧКОМ ЖИВОТУ

– НЕМАЧКИ ПУТОПИСИ XVIII И XIX ВЕКА О ГРЦИМА У СРБИЈИ –

Резиме

Трагајући за сведочанствима о заједничком животу на просторима југоисточне Европе, за оним сведочанствима која су ослобођена сувишних емоционалних и пристрасних погледа и мишљења, аутор је у раду, на основу грађе коју пружају потуписи, испитао како су странци видели, схватили и тумачили присуство Грка у Србији током XIX века.

У овом случају реч је, на првом месту о путописима, објављеним у засебним књигама и часописима, на немачком језику. Хронолошки посматрано, у раду се расправља о белешкама путника насталим у првим деценијама XVIII века па све до стицања независности и међународног признања ондашње Србије у XIX веку.

Грађа, односно белешке о Грцима у Србији у XVIII и XIX веку, који се налазе у текстовима поменутих аутора, може се сврстати у неколико целина: а) употреба појединих појмова и њихова значења, б) Грци као припадници поједине етничке заједнице у Србији у XVIII и XIX веку, в) Грци као духовници и световњаци у Србији XVIII и XIX веку, г) о култури, школству књижевности.

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