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## Herbert Vivian A British Traveller in Late Nineteenth-Century Serbia

*Beautiful Serbia! my soul will always linger  
amid the rapture of thy purple hills.*

(H. Vivian, Brighton, Michaelmas Day 1897)

**Abstract:** The famous British journalist and author Herbert Vivian (1865–1940) visited Serbia twice (1896 and 1903). On his first visit he stayed for several months in order to research into everyday life, customs, political situation and economic potentials of Serbia, which were little known to the British public. His famous book *Servia. The Poor Man's Paradise* (1896) was a major contribution to British travel writing about Serbia with its in-depth analysis and rather objective portrayal of the country's political system, religious practices and economic situation. He was convinced that his book would have an effect on the British attitude towards Serbia by drawing attention of British high society to this country. Vivian was highly impressed by the simple life of Serbian peasants, an idealised self-sufficient social group that was satisfied with the land they tilled. After the 1903 regicide, Vivian, an admirer of the late King Alexander Obrenović became disappointed with Serbia's elite, but remained enchanted with the simple life of Serbian peasants. This article analyses the accuracy of his account and provides a fresh insight into Vivian's attitude towards Serbia.

**Keywords:** Serbia, nineteenth century, Herbert Vivian, British public opinion, travel writing, Serbian society, Serbian peasantry

### *Image de l'Autre: Western perspective on the Balkans*

After the students protests of 1968, which had a resounding effect in Paris and, later, in the rest of Western Europe, the values of the whole Western world were brought under close scrutiny. The intention was, in short, to create a more objective and more balanced picture of the past, undistorted by the shortsighted Eurocentric perspective. As part of these reforms, the way in which Europeans judged other cultures was also brought under the magnifying glass of researchers and scholars. These changes were primarily brought about by experts in the fields of ethnology, anthropology and sociology, and were later compounded by an interdisciplinary approach in modern historiography.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. e.g. the classical studies of Traian Stoianovich, *A Study in Balkan Civilization* (New York: Knopf, 1967), and *Balkan Worlds. The First and Last Europe* (Armonk & London: M.E. Sharpe, 1994); for the most recent approach see Andrew Hammond, "The Uses

With the combined perspectives of history, social psychology and other disciplines in the area of social studies, a new discipline, known as *imagologie*, was born, concerned with how one views the other (*image de l'autre*); in this particular case, it studied how Western cultures have been viewing non-European cultures and their historical heritage. Such studies, increasingly popular in the 1980's, have become quite relevant to the Balkans, a meeting place of many different cultures, civilisations and religions.

The collapse of communist Yugoslavia in 1991 and the ensuing wars of succession (1991–1995, 1999) revived all the negative stereotypes associated with the Balkan nations, in particular those from the former Yugoslavia. Thus, the term “Balkanisation” was re-introduced into political discourse to denote the endless, and often violent, fragmentation of larger political units, and armed conflicts between different nations of the region were often superficially described as a “return to tribal life, to the primitive, to barbarism.”<sup>2</sup> That is why Maria Todorova convincingly argued in her classic study *Imaging the Balkans* that the Balkan bogymen in contemporary Western culture was, in fact, just a revived stereotype. Unlike Eli Skopetea and Milica Bakić-Hayden, who claim that Balkanism is essentially a sub-theme of Orientalism, Todorova seeks to prove that Balkanism is more than a mere variation of Orientalism.<sup>3</sup> As for the terms of post-colonial criticism and Balkanism, Andrew Hammond concludes that “the study of Balkanism [...] entails both the analysis of *non-colonial relations* of power, and the analysis of these relations *within Europe*, topics that have rarely been addressed in post-colonial criticism.”<sup>4</sup>

### *The image of Serbia in British travelogues in the nineteenth century*

The British began travelling through the Balkans relatively early, in the Middle Ages, either as pilgrims or crusaders on their way to the Middle East, but not much of their writings survived – and most of that is frag-

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of Balkanism: Representation and Power in British Travel Writing, 1850–1914”, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 82, No 3 (July 2004), 601–624.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Todorova, *Imaging the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Cf. also Eli Skopetea, “Orientalizam i Balkan”, *Istorijski časopis XXXVII* (1991), 131–143; Milica Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalism. The Case of Former Yugoslavia”, *Slavic Studies* 51 (Spring 1995), 917–931. For more on Orientalist studies in the Middle East and the Balkans see Peter Jeffreys, *Eastern Questions. Hellenism and Orientalism in the writings of E. M. Forster and C. P. Cavafy* (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 2005), and Daniel Martin Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: said and unsaid* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Hammond, “The Uses of Balkanism”, 624.

mented. Later, with the establishment of diplomatic relations between Britain and the Ottoman Empire, British diplomats and merchants often travelled those same paths and produced some good accounts of their travels and impressions. It was not until the nineteenth century that English travellers became fairly frequent in the Balkans. However, even during the previous centuries marked by war and unrest, there were bold people who traversed Europe in order to visit the Balkan lands.<sup>5</sup>

Until the 1840's and early 1850's, the Serbian lands were *terra incognita* for most British travellers passing through on their way to the Asian part of the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East. They referred to them as European Turkey and called local people "Christian Turks"; they were more familiar with the ancient Roman names of the settlements than those from the time of Serbia's medieval heyday. In British travel literature it was not until the 1930's that accurate facts concerning the Balkan peoples and cultures began to replace superficial impressions lacking any wider historical and cultural context.<sup>6</sup>

Until the Crimean War (1853–1856), the Balkans had been of little interest to the British Empire. When the war broke out in 1853, the Balkans suddenly became an area where, as London firmly believed, the fate of the whole of Europe was to be decided.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of the fact that the preservation of the decaying Ottoman Empire had been one of Britain's primary political goals for the most of the nineteenth century, the British political public knew little of the Balkans. The history of Serbia, both modern and medieval, was well illuminated by certain British historians and writers, and scholarly interest was not insignificant, although lagging far behind the enthusiasm of many Philhellenes for the restored Greece.<sup>8</sup>

British intellectuals had a very limited and superficial knowledge of Serbia, her political and national ambitions, and her medieval and modern history. The influence of the ever-increasing number of travelogues was not

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<sup>5</sup> Čedomir Antić, *Zemlja praznika i grad spomenika. Srbija i Britanija polovinom 19. veka / A Country of Holidays and a City of Monuments: Great Britain and Serbia in the mid-19th century* (Velika Plana: Naš Trag, 2004), bilingual Serbian-English edition.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. more in: Sanja Lazarević-Radak, *Otkrivanje Balkana* (Pančevo: Mali Nemo, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Čedomir Antić, *Neutrality as Independence. Great Britain, Serbia and the Crimean War* (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, SASA, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> In contrast to Serbia and rare supporters of her independence and national goals, the Philhellenes enjoyed wide support of both political and intellectual elites throughout Europe: C. M. Woodhouse, *The Philhellenes* (Fairleigh: Dickinson University Press, 1971); Douglas Dakin, *British and American Philhellenes during the War of Greek Independence, 1821–1833* (Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1987).

considerable either. Books dealing with Serbs from Serbia or those within Turkey-in-Europe were, with rare exceptions, printed in limited editions.

In 1842, an article on “Servia” was published in the seventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. This meant that the existence of a new state – although it was an autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty – was acknowledged in the most prestigious publication in Britain intended for both experts and the general public. However, it would take half a century for the official name, Serbia, to come into use in Britain.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most interesting Britons who showed interest in Serbia was, without a doubt, the eccentric David Urquhart, a diplomat, journalist and traveller.<sup>10</sup> According to the available sources and most of the authors who have written about Serbia, Urquhart was the first to indicate the importance of Serbia and suggest that the British consul should direct his attention towards her capital. Urquhart was the author of the first, fragmentarily preserved, history of modern Serbia in English language. It was also one of the first history books on Serbia published in the Western world. The first edition of *A fragment of the History of Servia* (1843) can be found in the British Museum Library, and there also is a copy in the National Library of Serbia in Belgrade.<sup>11</sup> The book had 96 pages, but some of them are missing. Given that Urquhart was an author, not a scholar, his knowledge of the Balkans, and especially Serbia, was quite impressive. Like Leopold von Ranke’s monumental synthesis, *The Servian Revolution*, Urquhart’s study contains some inaccuracies,<sup>12</sup> but the similarity between the two ends there: their methodologies in explaining the history of Serbia are different, and that of Urquhart is less scholarly. Regardless of whether it is viewed as a scholarly study or a piece of journalism, designed to present Serbia as Circassia of the Balkans that might be used against imperial Russia in the future, Urquhart’s work was important for making British public opinion aware of Serbia’s politics, economy and culture.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *The Encyclopaedia Britannica of Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and General Literature*, vol. VII (Edinburgh 1842).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. his biography by Gertrude Robinson, *David Urquhart. Victorian Knight Errant of Justice and Liberty* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1920), on Serbia: pp. 48, 68, 197–198. (Reprinted by Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, New York 1970.)

<sup>11</sup> D. [David] Urquhart, *A Fragment of the History of Servia* (London, 1843). Devid Urkart, *Fragment iz Istorije Srbije 1843* (Belgrade: Arhiv Srbije, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Leopold von Ranke, *Die serbische Revolution* (Hamburg: Perthes, 1829). An English translation: Leopold von Ranke, *A History of Servia and the Servian Revolution*, transl. by Mrs. Alexander Kerr (London: J. Murray, 1847).

<sup>13</sup> Detailed analysis in Jelena Paunović-Štermenski, *Urkvartovo vidjenje međunarodnog položaja Srbije* (Belgrade: Akademska misao, 2007).

Although poorly informed about Serbia, the British public did not consider the autonomous Principality of Serbia an alien country altogether, despite her “barbarisation” under Ottoman rule and her different brand of Christianity. Unlike the Ottomans, the people of Serbia were of European descent and were not acknowledged as such until their refusal to take part in the Crimean War against Europe’s centuries-old ally, Russia. Although the autonomous Principality of Serbia had long been counted amongst the countries of the Near East, the Serbs were not considered an uncivilised nation altogether, and some comparisons between their and British lifestyle could be made. Of course, the differences were evident, particularly in the highest strata of their respective societies.<sup>14</sup>

Following Urquhart’s book, whose real influence on British public opinion has remained a matter of scholarly debate to this day, it was Andrew Archibald Paton’s famed travelogue that inspired many fellow travellers to visit Serbia and her neighbours in the decades that followed. These curious travellers came from all sections of society – some were literarily talented and ready to face all manner of adventures and perils.<sup>15</sup>

Andrew Archibald Paton was a great adventurer, who had already travelled on foot from Naples to Vienna. At the beginning of the Constitutionals’ rule in Serbia (1842–1858), he was appointed general consul of Great Britain. During his term of office, he ceaselessly travelled the length and breadth of Serbia, writing down everything he saw and heard from the people he encountered. This resulted in the book *Servia, the Youngest Member of the European Family* published in 1845. His main work, however, is a more detailed book titled *Researches of the Danube and the Adriatic* published in 1861, a collection of his earlier works on the Balkans, the Danube area and the Adriatic coast, all of which he came to know better than any other contemporary British traveller.<sup>16</sup> In 1862, he was appointed consul in Du-

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Forester, *Danube and the Black Sea* (London: Edward Stanford, 1857); William Forsyth, QC., LL.D., M.P., *The Slavonic Provinces South of the Danube. A Sketch of their History and Present States in Relations to the Ottoman Porte* (London: John Murray, 1876); on Serbia, pp. 17–71. Forsyth was the first British author to suggest that “Servia ought to be pronounced Serbia”. He explained that the term was related to the Latin word *Servus* with a derogatory meaning, but that it features in all consular reports from Belgrade, and so (ibid. 18): “I shall therefore use the word Servia, although under protest.” Cf. also a general overview in James Baker, M.A., *Turkey* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1877), on Serbia, pp. 240–257.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. for example: Alfred Wright, *Adventures in Servia, or the Experience of the Medical Freelance among the Bashi-Bozouks* (London & New York: Soonschein & Co., 1884).

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Archibald Paton, *Researches on the Danube and the Adriatic, or Contributions to the modern history of Hungary and Transylvania, Dalmatia and Croatia, Servia and Bulgaria*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1861).

brovnik. His sympathetic book on Serbia remains a major contribution to the British literature on Serbia.<sup>17</sup>

However, as Patton pointed out, Serbia was becoming more Europeanised, slowly leaving her Oriental customs, traditions and behaviours behind. His works are considered a treasure trove for researchers as they contain valuable information for many disciplines, from geography, history and economy to architecture, culture, transportation, folklore etc. The 230-page book *Servia and the Servians* (1862) written by the British pastor, vicar of St. Bartholomew, Rev. William Denton had a similar, if not even greater, influence on British public opinion. It was a detailed survey of Serbia's institutions, customs and national aspirations, and it served the purpose of supporting Serbia's national claims after the Turkish bombardment of Belgrade in 1862. It aimed at alerting British public opinion to the difficult position of the Christian Orthodox Serbs who were suffering under "despotism of Turkey".<sup>18</sup> Highly critical of English indifference to the Eastern Christians, Denton stressed in the introduction:

No one can know much of the people who inhabit the southern bank of the Danube without seeing in them all the elements which make up national greatness. No one can travel through the countries inhabited by the Servians, without respect and admiration for the people whose virtues have not been destroyed by four centuries of oppression, and without an assurance that for such a race a splendid future is in store.<sup>19</sup>

Denton's homage to Serbia paved the way for another important travel writing that encompassed other Serb-inhabited areas of Turkey-in-

<sup>17</sup> Paton had a wide range of interests. He drew attention of his readers to all characteristics and curiosities of the country he was studying, from a physical description of the relief to the conditions for agriculture, from the income and formal garb of the head of the Serbian Church to detailed accounts of religious practices of the Serbian Orthodox Christians. Having spent many years in the East, Paton was sufficiently prepared for his encounter with a semi-eastern civilisation. Having studied reliable literature, which he often quoted, and having done hands-on research, Patton was able to draw a comprehensive picture of the social, political and economic conditions in the country. Andrew Archibald Paton, *Servia. The Youngest Member of the European Family: or, a Residence in Belgrade and Travel in the Highlands and Woodlands of the Interior during the Years 1843 and 1844* (London: Longman, 1845); see also Branko Momčilović, *Britanski putnici o našim krajevima u 19. veku* (Novi Sad: Matica Srpska, 1993), 185.

<sup>18</sup> Rev. William Denton, M.A., *Servia and the Servians* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1862). Denton published two more books dealing with Serbia and the Balkans: *The Christians of Turkey. Their condition under Mahomedan Rule* (London: Daldy, Isbiter & Co., 1876), and *Fallacies of the Eastern Question* (London, Paris & New York: Cassel, Petter & Galpin, 1878).

<sup>19</sup> Denton, M.A., *Servia and the Servians*, vii-viii.

Europe. The exhaustive travelogue of Georgina Muir Mackenzie and Adeline Pauline Irby resonated across the Western publics. Their humanitarian work made them famous not just in official circles, but also amongst the Serbian people at large. Pauline Irby was, according to *The Eagle* magazine, “The mother of the poor of Serbia”. Mackenzie and Irby travelled through Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Old Serbia, Montenegro and northern Albania, Dalmatia, Croatia, Slovenia and Fruška Gora Mountain (region of Srem). These two heroines rode through Turkey-in-Europe on four occasions and spent many months learning local languages, customs and history.<sup>20</sup> Their impressions were published in several works, of which the most famous and detailed one – *Travels in the Slavonic Provinces of Turkey-in-Europe* (1867) – had several editions and soon became a classic handbook for exploring European Turkey. The Serbian translation by Čedomilj Mijatović was published in Belgrade only a year later. After the death of G. Muir Mackenzie in 1874, the second revised edition was enlarged in 1877 was appended with several chapters by A. P. Irby. This edition coincided with the growing interest of the British public in the Balkans when, in 1875, the Serbs in Herzegovina and Bosnia rose to arms against Ottoman rule, and thus reopened the Eastern Question. Miss Irby also added a survey of Serbia’s history (chapter “The Story of Serbia”) from the medieval period to the 1804 insurrection under Kara George. Following the political developments in the Principality of Serbia, she noted that Serbia in 1875 was “one-fifth smaller than Scotland”.<sup>21</sup>

It should be noted that any Briton travelling in the nineteenth century was a privileged traveller no matter where he went. A British passport was a recommendation that opened many doors. With an additional recommendation from the influential Interior Minister, Ilija Garašanin, A. A. Paton was warmly welcomed everywhere. With such treatment, and along with his natural energy and curiosity, Paton was privileged enough to travel farther and see more than any other British traveller of the time. That was all the more important given the difficulties of travelling through Serbia

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<sup>20</sup> First published in 1867: G. Muir Mackenzie & A. P. Irby, *The Slavonic Provinces of Turkey-in-Europe* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1867); a second, considerably enlarged and updated edition, prefaced by The Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, M.P. (London: Daldy, Isbiter and Co., 1877).

<sup>21</sup> After the death of M. Mackenzie in 1874, A. P. Irby continued to take care of the Christian school for female children the two of them had founded in Sarajevo. After the Serb uprising in Herzegovina (1875), Miss Irby continued her humanitarian relief activity in Dalmatia and Slavonia, where she provided aid to Serb refugees from Bosnia and opened new schools attended by many Serbian children. She continued her charitable work until her death in Serbia in 1911. Cf. Ivo Andrić, “Miss Adeline Irby”, *The Anglo-Yugoslav Review* 3–4, (1936), 85–90.

due to the lack of decent roads in the areas distant from the main road to Constantinople. Therefore, not all British travellers were as well informed as Paton. Some of them, like Spencer, could not tell the difference between Serbia, Bulgaria and Bosnia, or between Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks, and used old and archaic terms for Serb-inhabited provinces, “which shows how long we [Serbia and the Serbs] had been left out of Europe, for which we were still a mystery.”<sup>22</sup>

The significance of these travelogues should not, however, be underrated or inflated. They are very valuable, especially for the first half of the nineteenth century: they contain eyewitness accounts of the events that might have been missed or neglected in Serbian historiography. These accounts are also appreciated because they frequently offer different perspectives, varying from biased to objective, and some rather insightful and original comments, as well as useful comparisons between Serbia and the surrounding areas, a sort of comparison rarely made by a Serb at the time. These travelogues brought an unknown or little-known area of South-East Europe, at the crossroads of West and East, closer to British publics.

The role of these foreign travellers as intermediaries between the two cultures was important in many respects. At the time when diplomatic relations between the Principality of Serbia and Great Britain had just been established (1837), British travellers were perceived as genuine representatives of their Empire and as potential promoters of Serbia back in their homeland.<sup>23</sup> However, what stood behind the revived interest in Serbia was the British policy of drawing her into a network of allies acting as a bulwark to Tsarist Russia’s aspirations in the Balkans.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, foreign travellers, including British, did much to help present Serbia to European publics. They fairly reliably described the state of the country, road conditions, the position of the cities and fortresses. Furthermore, their encounters with many prominent residents and description of various local customs are important records of everyday life, something that the locals deemed too insignificant to be recorded. Many travellers left fascinating accounts of the landscapes they saw and the people they met observing a rapid transformation of an Ottoman province into a modern European state. They were often fascinated by the mixture of Western

<sup>22</sup> Momčilović, *Britanski putnici o našim krajevima u 19. veku*, 186.

<sup>23</sup> Mihailo Gavrilović, “The Early Diplomatic Relations of Great Britain and Serbia”, *The Slavonic Review* 1 (1922), 86–109; 2 (1922), 333–352.

<sup>24</sup> In 1837, the first British diplomatic representative, Colonel George Lloyd Hodges, presented his consular credentials to Prince Miloš Obrenović. For more see Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Serbia. The Mission of Colonel Hodges 1837–1839* (La Haye & Paris: Mouton & Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes, 1961).

and Oriental cultures which marked the process of gradual modernisation, Europeanisation and eventually Westernisation that paved the way for Serbia's political development from an autonomous principality (1830–1878) within the Ottoman Empire to an independent country, Principality of Serbia (1878), to the Kingdom of Serbia (1882).<sup>25</sup>

In spite of all the credits Serbia was given for her efforts to catch up with contemporary European institutions and her visible cultural advances, some still perpetuated the stereotype of “good savages” from the Balkans and wrote about Serbia in a distinctly negative, even belittling manner. A good example of this kind of attitude is associated with the regicide and the ensuing change of dynasty in Serbia in 1903. The coup organised in 1903 by a group of military and civilian conspirators brought about the end of the Obrenović dynasty's rule. It was the brutal murder of the royal couple (King Alexander and Queen Draga Obrenović) in the Palace that had a particularly devastating impact on Serbia's international image. The regicide reignited the negative stereotypes which would haunt Serbia, notably in Great Britain, for a long time to come. The assassination of King and Queen was described as a “despicable piece of medieval barbarism”.<sup>26</sup> The reappearance of certain stereotypes regarding the Balkans in general and Serbia in particular fortified the prejudices apparent in the writings of various British travellers: “A certain intolerance towards Christian Orthodoxy and Byzantine heritage, combined with aversion to the ‘wild peoples of the Balkans’, found its way into certain sections of the British press as a stereotype resistant to many significant changes that had occurred in the meantime”.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The first official document submitted to Great Powers by the government of the Principality of Serbia in 1854 was published in the proceedings of the British Parliament: *Memorandum Addressed by the Servian Government to the Sublime Porte Respecting the Occupation of That Principality by Austrian Troops; Presented to the House of Commons by Command of Her Majesty, in Pursuance of Their Address of June 22, 1854*. After the 1856 Treaty of Paris, Great Britain became one of the six powers that guaranteed the autonomous rights of the Principality of Serbia. Serbia's aspirations became better known after the publication of Vladimir Jovanović's essay *The Serbian Nation and the Eastern Question* (London: Constable, 1863). The first Serbian minister to the Court of Saint James was appointed in 1882, four years after Serbia's independence. For more see Vojislav M. Jovanović, *An English Bibliography on the Near Eastern Question, 1481–1906* (Belgrade: Serbian Royal Academy, Spomenik SKA Series XLVIII, 1909); second updated edition: Vojislav M. Jovanović, *Engleska bibliografija o Istočnom pitanju u Evropi*, ed. Marta Frajnd (Belgrade: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 1978).

<sup>26</sup> Robert Lafan, *Srbi-čuvari kapije* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1994), 69.

<sup>27</sup> Dušan T. Bataković, “Jedno britansko vidjenje srpskog pitanja”, in Robert Lafan, *Srbi-čuvari kapije*, 307. Typical examples of this approach are Harry de Windt, *Through Savage Europe, Being the Narrative of a Journey (Undertaken as Special Correspondent of the*

Although Orientalism was not a major feature of the way in which the British saw modern Serbia, the period between 1903 and 1906 witnessed a case of “re-Orientalisation” – Serbia was pulled back from Europe and placed into the Near East, i.e. Asia with all the negative connotations reserved for Orientalist discourse.<sup>28</sup> In a rare attempt to dispel such a negative image, the book *Servia by the Servians* by a British journalist endeavoured to convince suspicious British public opinion that Serbia was heading to economic progress, political stability and democratic order.<sup>29</sup>

At any rate, the British travelogues drew attention of international publics to Serbia. Her image underwent considerable change over time: neutral and critical remarks turned into praises after the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. It was then that the rather pejorative name *Servia* was finally changed to *Serbia*. The famous author and journalist, Herbert Vivian (1865–1940), made a major contribution to British travel writing about Serbia due to his in-depth analysis and rather objective portrayal.

### *Herbert Vivian in Serbia*

It is common knowledge that reporting on Serbia, apart from a few random travellers such as Herbert Vivian, originated with Viennese correspondents of various European newspapers and that it, therefore, reflected often tense relations between the two countries. Consequently, Serbia’s reputation was often tainted by Austro-Hungarian propaganda. Serbia’s international position at the end of the nineteenth century was affected by various internal problems (autocracy of the last two Obrenović rulers, the royal family’s scandals) as well as by her growing difficulties in foreign relations. Austria-Hungary’s dominance over both her internal and foreign affairs prevented Serbia from pursuing a more active and independent policy. Serbian historiography does not provide many details on Herbert Vivian’s connection with the Kingdom of Serbia towards the end of the nineteenth century. Some authors (Dimitrije Djordjević, Slobodan G. Marković) have made mention of Vivian’s impressions about Serbia in the reign of King Alexander Obrenović. Until recently, however, of all Vivian’s works only the chapter on Belgrade from his famous and well-received travelogue *Servia: A Poor*

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“*Westminster Gazette*”) through the Balkan States and European Russia (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907).

<sup>28</sup> Slobodan G. Markovich, *British Perceptions of Serbia and the Balkans, 1903–1906* (Paris: Dialogue, 2000), 15.

<sup>29</sup> Alfred Stead, ed., *Servia by the Servians* (London: William Heinemann, 1909).

*Man's Paradise* was translated into Serbian:<sup>30</sup> a complete translation of the book was only published in 2010.<sup>31</sup>

His biography, however, clearly indicates that Vivian was a man of broad liberal horizons and vast multi-cultural experience. He was born on 3 April 1865 into a Cornish priest family. Having completed his elementary education, he went on to graduate from renowned Trinity College, Cambridge, where he majored in history, and finished his magisterial studies as *magna cum laude* in 1889. Vivian was an exceptional student, even by the standards of such a prestigious institution, as evidenced by the fact that he was vice-president of the Keriton Club as well as co-editor of the short-lived but well-received magazine, *The Whirlwind* (1890).<sup>32</sup> His excellent education allowed him to embark on a political career.

After a failed candidature at the East Bradford elections (1891), Vivian dedicated himself to journalism. He was travelling around the globe depicting his travels and various experiences in the wide area between Russia and Africa. Vivian reported for prestigious London newspapers, such as the *Morning Post* (1898–1899), the *Daily Express* (1899–1900) and the very popular *Wide World Magazine*, from places such as Russia, Scandinavia, Morocco, Abyssinia etc. He did not wait long before trying to dabble in editorship as well, by briefly bringing back to life the esteemed magazine *Rambler*.<sup>33</sup>

In 1902, Herbert Vivian was awarded the title of “Officer of the Royal Order of Takovo” for his first book on Serbia (*Servia: A Poor Man's Paradise*) which was extensively promoted in the Anglo-Saxon world.<sup>34</sup> He was immensely proud and often boasted about his prestigious decoration. As he often stated himself, Vivian stumbled upon Serbia during one of his wanderings. He found himself in Belgrade at a particularly festive moment in 1896 when the Serbian capital was preparing the most cordial welcome for the Montenegrin Prince Nikola Petrović-Njegoš. Having witnessed this solemn event, he decided to stay in Serbia for a few months, and he spent his time learning about the customs, the people, the political system, religious practices and the economic situation.

Vivian rightly pointed out that for almost thirty years prior to his travel book (i.e. from William Denton's book in 1862), nothing of rele-

<sup>30</sup> A Serbian translation of the chapter on Belgrade in Nada Andrić et al., *Beograd u XIX veku* (Belgrade: Muzej grada Beograda, 1967), 149–181.

<sup>31</sup> *Srbija. Raj siromašnih ljudi* (Belgrade: Službenik glasnik, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> *Who was Who*, vol. III, 1929–1940 (London 1967), 1393.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Herbert Vivian, M.A. (Officer of the Royal Order of Takovo), *Servia. The Poor Man's Paradise* (London, New York & Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1897).

vance had been published about contemporary Serbia in Britain.<sup>35</sup> In the foreword, Vivian stressed that Great Britain was wrong in its approach to Serbia, whose interests as well as political and economic potential had been inexplicably and inexcusably neglected in the past few decades of the nineteenth century. He was convinced that his book would draw attention to Serbia and have an important effect on the British attitude.

On his frequent travels through Serbia, Vivian became enamoured with the simplicity of life, the vitality and energy of Serbs who, as he often stressed, revived his faith in modern civilisation and motivated him to embark on an in-depth analysis of various aspects of life in this picturesque kingdom in the Balkans. He was impressed that all the Serbs that he met consented to his writing his impressions, which showed him that they wanted to be portrayed in as true light as possible: "The Servians have said to me, over and over again 'we want merely justice; relate only what you have seen.'" Vivian was particularly impressed by the frankness and simplicity of the ordinary people, from Belgrade to Pirot, from modest peasants to influential district prefects. He was also surprised by what he saw as a dark-humoured Serb view of the world and the hospitality of virtually everyone he met during his weeks-long travels across Serbia in 1896.

Before setting to write *Servia. The Poor Man's Paradise*, Vivian did a meticulous and diligent background research, as any good historian should, unlike his predecessors who had merely laid out some general facts about Serbia and then stated their opinion. He studied all available literature in English, French and German, from Leopold von Ranke and William Denton to Edouard Labouleye, Auguste Dozone and Felix Kanitz; he also consulted the available reports in the Foreign Office. Vivian underlined that *Geschichte der Serben* by Benjamin von Kállay "gives one of the brightest and most sympathetic accounts of Servia to be found anywhere. But the author, having donned the livery of Austria, has repented to his conclusions and suppressed his book, which is now difficult to obtain."<sup>36</sup> Apart from the entire literature on Serbian culture and art in major European languages, he read the brochures written since the 1840's by Serbian intellectuals with the explicit purpose of informing foreigners, primarily Western Europeans, about Serbia's political and national aspirations. Vivian appears to have been in close contact with the Serbian Minister in London, Ćedomilj Mijatović,

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<sup>35</sup> A notable exception was Elodie Lawton Mijatovits, *History of Modern Serbia* (London: W. Tweedie, 1872).

<sup>36</sup> Vivian, *Servia. The Poor Man's Paradise*, xvi. As for William Denton, Vivian asserts that "Mr. Denton's visit is still remembered in Servia, and his book deserves most careful perusal. He views the country mainly from the ecclesiastical aspect, but his reflections on all subjects are vivid and entertaining."

who probably influenced Vivian's view of Serbia, particularly her political scene and national politics.<sup>37</sup>

Herbert Vivian encountered Serbia at the time when the three major political parties (Liberals, Progressives and Radicals) had already been formed and highly active: "Now, as heretofore in Servia, as always has been and always will be in all countries, the issue remains one between authority and faction, between loyalty and disorder. Party names are as misleading in Servia as elsewhere."<sup>38</sup>

Very inclined to the King, and probably in contact with local political leaders, Vivian was quite accurate when describing the ideological and social profile of major political parties with opinion on leading political figures, their ideologies and their supporters. His favourite was the Progressive Party, the royal party with a strong influence on the young King Alexander Obrenović: "The Progressists were really a species of Conservatives, and made it their first principle to support the Crown against all comers. Their main strongholds were the towns, but they possessed an extensive organisation throughout the country, and had attracted the majority of the orderly and well-to-do."<sup>39</sup> The reasons for the dissolution of the Progressive Party were explained to Vivian by its former leader, Milutin Garašanin, "a man of culture and ability, more perhaps of the diplomat than the party man, and inclined to use *finesse* rather than force". Vivian shared his view that "the multiplication of parties was a mistake, and that the country could be better served by the various disciples of order sinking their minor differences and working together to defeat a common foe."<sup>40</sup>

Vivian noted that some politicians close to the Court in fact had autocratic tendencies. "Other politicians more frankly conservative, though never openly admitting the name of Conservative, which causes alarm in a young country, are Mr. [Svetomir] Nikolajević who was Premier immediately before Mr. [Stojan] Novaković, and Mr. [Nikola] Hristić, or 'iron Hristić', who has again and again been called in, as *deus ex machina*, when affairs looked parlous. Either of these men may at any time be summoned to the helm, should the good ship threaten to prove too much for the young

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<sup>37</sup> The book is actually dedicated to Mijatović and a few other friends: "To my kind friends, their Excellences MM. Steva D. Popović, and Chedo Mijatović; to my good *pobratim*, Captain Ljubisavljević; and to all the charming acquaintances who lavished countless courtesies upon me during my visit to smiling Servia, I most gratefully and affectionately dedicate these pages."

<sup>38</sup> Vivian, *Servia. The Poor Man's Paradise*, 15.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 18.

King's control. Of the two, M. Hristić is the more open advocate of autocracy, and is by no means popular."<sup>41</sup>

Liberals, as Vivian rightfully observed, "answer in numbers and influence to our own Whigs, and while concurring with other anti-Radicals in upholding authority, desire to be its only exponents. They have no very definite principles, unless it be to support their leader M. [Jovan] Ristić, through thick and thin, and further all his ambitions in the hope of one day sharing his triumphs. They would oppose King and people alike with something of a Venetian oligarchy."<sup>42</sup> Vivian's weakness was that his information on certain personalities came from one-sided sources, usually his friends who saw eye-to-eye with the Progressives. Thus, Vivian took a dim view of Jovan Ristić, the former Regent and life-long leader of the Serbian Liberals: "As for the Liberal leader, M. Ristić, he is a man of parts and craft; but he has overreached himself, and is almost as unpopular with his own party as with the people at large. Many Liberals are in open revolt against him, and will continue to vote against their party as long as he remains leader." His stature and character, as portrayed by Vivian, were described as follows: "He is a stout, ill-favoured individual, wears 'Piccadilly weepers' and recalls the typical Englishman on the French stage. His manners are deplorable, and his undoubted abilities have invariably been confined to furthering his own personal interest."<sup>43</sup>

As for the largest and best organised party in Serbia, the Popular Radical Party led by Nikola P. Pašić, Vivian's views reflected those of the Progressive Party: "The Radicals are the most elaborately organised, and have contrived to secure at least the nominal adherence of all the poorest, lasiest and the most ignorant peasants in the realm. Whenever their leaders desire to hold a great popular demonstration, they can always count upon the presence of several thousand peasants, who gladly accept a holiday at the expense of the party funds, and will carry by acclamation any resolution which may be submitted to them. A friend of mine, who was present at the great radical meeting in 1896, told me that out of some 14,000 demonstrators present, only thirty to forty listened to the speeches, while all the rest ate melons. He added that each demonstrator had received three dinars [francs] for his trouble."<sup>44</sup>

This rather biased impression was further strengthened by his distaste for the Radical leader to whom he contrasted other prominent party

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 20. On Stojan Novaković see Mihailo Vojvodić, *Stojan Novaković u službi nacionalnih i državnih interesa* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 2012), 230–242.

<sup>42</sup> Vivina, *Servia. The Poor Man's Paradise*, 16.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 16.

members: "The Radical Party, as usual, is hydra-headed. The titular leader is M. Pašić, an engineer of small parts and no manners. The best of his colleagues or rivals is Mr. [Dimitrije] Katić, a real son of the soil, who returns as Cincinnatus or Kara George, to his plough in the intervals of action. In a great emergency, he might do great things. He is sure of himself, and, though impregnated with current theories about 'the voice of the people', is otherwise a model of moderation and good sense. So long as his authority is accepted by the masses, no excesses need be feared. [...] He is very different man from the ordinary Radical leaders. These, I am told, are men without visible source of income, and living from hand to mouth, and obtaining credit from their party coffee-houses, against the turn of the wheel which may one day bring them into office."<sup>45</sup> Influenced by the assessment of his friends and acquaintances, Vivian no doubt underestimated the impact of Pašić – still discredited in 1896 by his opportunist concessions to the Crown – and overestimated the impact of a peasant tribune such as Katić who fitted too well into his general perception of Serbia, a paradise for the poor but happy people whose leaders were simple villagers themselves.<sup>46</sup>

True to his conservative principles, Vivian also underestimated the importance of the ideas within the Radical social movements. He is however right in the assessment that there was no real risk of classical socialism: "I do not think that Serbia has really much to fear from her Radicals. Socialism is almost non-existent and the small taint of it there may be exotic, being imported by Servian immigrants from Austria-Hungary taking no permanent roots. The disease of Radicalism assumes therefore a mild form in Serbia; and so long as the army remains faithful to the Crown and the cause of authority, there is little to be feared."<sup>47</sup>

Herbert Vivian's main preoccupation during his prolonged visits to Serbia (in 1896 and 1903) was whether Serbia was self-sufficient in the agricultural sense, and whether her predominantly rural population were able to live in a relative prosperity from the land they tilled. Vivian's somewhat idealised portrayal of agrarian harmony in Serbia was supported not just by his thorough analysis of the peasantry, but also by his insight into the incomes, expenditures, customs, aspirations and lifestyle of the Serbian people.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 23–24.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. the only biography Pašić available in English: Alex N. Dragnich, *Serbia, Nikola Pašić and the Creation of Yugoslavia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1974), 23–55.

<sup>47</sup> Vivian, *Servia. The Poor Man's Paradise*, 24.

During his stay in Serbia, Vivian studied all the available statistical data and formed a reliable picture of the economic situation.<sup>48</sup> However, what surprised him most was the relatively humble lifestyle of Serbian farmers and their families and yet they lived in relatively happy communities whose basic needs were largely satisfied:

Servia is essentially an agricultural country, and it is more than doubtful whether she may wisely be advised to dabble in manufactures. At present the vast majority live upon the land in more or less patriarchal fashion, providing amply for all their needs by means of healthy outdoor pursuits, and poverty is practically unknown.<sup>49</sup>

The pillar of society in modern Serbia was, of course, the Serbian peasant. However, Vivian did not view him as a bearer of revolutions and antibureaucratic rebellions, as most other Serbian apologists did at the time. To his mind, he was the perfectly preserved model of the medieval peasant. He was not, however, a humble peasant dependent on his feudal lord, but rather a free man with his small land holding content with what he possessed and focused on his own affairs.

Like most Westerners and despite his familiarity with the free Balkan peasantry, Vivian was under the strong influence of a romanticised view of the middle ages. In this view, patriarchal harmony and stable agrarian conditions were favourably compared to the harsh and cruel challenges of the modern world dominated by trade and industrial expansion, which thrived at the expense of economic interests and social status of the peasantry. Vivian's idyllic image of the Serbian peasantry must have been re-enforced by what was going on in his own homeland, where British peasants gave way to the rapid industrial growth:

To sum up the Servian peasant, who after all is the backbone of the nation: he is sturdy, good-looking, brave, healthy, hospitable and merry, devoted to the traditions of his race but careless of modern politics; rich in everything but money; simple, superstitious, thoroughly mediaeval. No one could dislike him, but he must be judged from a standpoint which is almost unattainable by the man of the West. If we could go back four or five hundred years and live among our forefathers, they would probably tax our forbear-

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<sup>48</sup> Vivian (*Servia. The Poor Man's Paradise*, 111, fn. 1) was both accurate and detailed when presenting Serbia's economic data: "The Department of Krushevatz produces two-thirds of the tobacco of Serbia, but the Department of Vranje is more fertile and that of Uzhitce produces more valuable tobacco. In 1893 there were 1,527 hectares under cultivation, and 903,243 kilogrammes were sold to the factory at an average price of 78 paras the killogramme ... The total receipts from the sale of tobacco during 1893 were 9,389,731 dinars, and more recent Budgets show scarcely any divergence from that figure down to October 1896..."

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 110.

ance in much the same way as the Servians do today. Yet, if we could divest ourselves of the arrogance of our civilisation, we should probably concede to them many virtues which we certainly lack.<sup>50</sup>

In order to paint a perfect picture of a self-sufficient farmer for his British public, Vivian appealingly described his mistrust of modern institutions such as banks. That was no wonder in a society where financial reserves were still made by keeping precious metals and gems in a storage, and peasants were rather reluctant to live and work in a town especially in the service sectors. This stemmed from their affection for their village estate, no matter how small, and freedom they were immensely proud of:

The Servian peasant nearly always has more land than he can cultivate; he can boast of savings, either banked in an old stocking, exhibited in the headgear of his women-folk, or capitalised in the form of gold embroideries; and nothing will ever induce him to go into dependence. There are no Servian servants. Belgrade must import from Hungary, Austria, Germany, and even Italy. If you find servants of Servian race, you may be sure that they are either foreign subjects or have been recently naturalised.<sup>51</sup>

Industrial production, as vital for modernisation, was still in its early stages: “Practically the only other serious factories in Servia are a tannery with 30 hands and a capital of 300,000 dinars, three foundries with a combined capital of over 110,000 dinars and 123 hands – all at Belgrade – a cement factory at Nish, and several pork-curing establishments in various parts of the country.”<sup>52</sup> Vivian thought that great potential lay in the exploitation of Serbia’s mineral wealth and made a point of drawing attention to potential British investors: “Besides her industry and commerce, the mines of Servia afford a tempting field for British enterprise.”<sup>53</sup>

Vivian also observed the phenomenon of brigandage as another remnant of medieval times:

Servia, with mountains and inaccessible forests, is an ideal refuge for outlaws; and whole regiments may pursue a handful for weeks through pathless tracts in vain. During Turkish times the *hajdutsi* were deemed patriots by the Servians, many of them having been outlawed for insurrectionary acts. There is a large coffee-house in Belgrade dedicated to one of these historical hajdutsi. Anyone who spent his life in harassing the Turks had a

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<sup>50</sup> Herbert Vivian, M.A. (Officer of the Royal Servian order of Takovo; Author of ‘Servia. The Poor Man’s Paradise’; ‘Tunisia and the Modern Barbary Pirates’; ‘Abyssinia’; etc), *The Servian Tragedy with Some Impressions of Macedonia* (London: Grant Richards, 1904), 252.

<sup>51</sup> Vivian, *Servia. The Poor Man’s Paradise*, 150–151.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 116.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 138.

claim upon their sympathy. But since the political emancipation hajdutsi have grown rarer and rarer, and it is a frequent complain that common criminals should usurp the old honoured title. [...] Very often they will save their consciences by giving money to churches, or by helping their poorer neighbours in the approved Robin Hood fashion.<sup>54</sup>

*Military and the Church: moral and patriotism*

Vivian rightfully noticed that the military profession was prestigious in Serbia and that, since the formation of regular armed forces, a huge effort had been made to bring this profession up to the standards obtaining in other European countries. Vivian's keen eye did not miss the enviable general education of the officer corps, with the exception of their unsatisfactory knowledge of foreign languages, nor the fact that most of the officers in the Serbian army were recruited directly from the countryside, which meant that they had the same outlook as their soldiers. However, Vivian did not notice that the rural origins of the officer corps made it inclined to democratic ideas:

I saw much of the Servian officers during my stay in the country, and found them, with scarcely an exception, excellent company, smart in appearance, and agreeable in manners. All of them understand, even if they do not speak, French, German, and Russian. They are ready to impart information on any subject, and do so with culture and intelligence. Like all their countrymen, they are lavish in their hospitality, and there are no limits to the trouble they will give themselves to serve a stranger.<sup>55</sup>

Vivian perfectly understood the fact that the peasant, the soldier and the priest were the triad which had encompassed the traditional values of Serbia since the 1804 Serbian Revolution, and the values on whose base Serbia entered the modern epoch. "It is claimed for the Servian army that it is the Servian people under arms. Even more truly may it be said that the Servian Church is the Servian people in the ecclesiastical aspect. Assuredly, among the many blessings which Servia enjoys, not by any means the least is that she is not pestered by any dissenters. The Servian church is the National Church in the fullest sense of the words."<sup>56</sup>

Vivian pointed out several times that the Serbian Church was a national institution rather than a proper religious organisation or the Western-like mixture of a religious and a social institution. With some typical Western critical remarks on the practices of Serbian Orthodoxy, and the

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 178–179.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 65.

Christian Orthodox faith in general, Vivian acknowledged the unifying role of the Serbian Orthodox Church (i.e. Patriarchate of Peć, 1557–1766) as the main guardian of national and cultural identity under the Ottomans, and its integrative role in the national emancipation of Serbia after 1804: “A Church should be the soul of a nation, and it is so most emphatically in Servia. The whole history of the Servian Church bears out this contention.”<sup>57</sup> Not being particularly religious himself, Vivian had no interest in the doctrines of the Serbian Church, but he observed the popular elements in its daily rituals.<sup>58</sup>

The Servians are proud of their Church, not because they deem acceptance of its doctrines a proof of superior shrewdness, but because they know it has been the most important factor in maintaining their national identity. Religions which have private judgment for their basis divide and weaken the national spirit, but Servian Orthodoxy has welded and kept Servia together as no other sentiment could do. It is in no sense corybantic Christianity; it is not an emotional religion, though a gorgeous ritual, jeweled icons, and incense are there to appeal to the imagination; it is perhaps, in a sense, not a spiritual religion. But it has a wonderful hold upon the people; not upon the women and children only, but equally upon the men. And it exercises a civilising influence without any of the terrors of priestcraft.<sup>59</sup>

Vivian also noted that the relationship between the Serbian Orthodox bishop and the Islamic imam in the town of Niš was good, serving as an example of religious tolerance that he had rarely met in other, more developed, societies. Contrary to religion as a whole, his opinion on Serbian bishops was quite negative. He pointed to their corruption, but he also noted the following: “Servian bishops are poorly paid and live simply, but they have immense influence in the country and they appoint all the clergy in their dioceses.”<sup>60</sup>

*Modernisation vs. traditional way of life: “Delightful medieval country”*

Vivian attached great importance to the improvements in the educational system which were a tangible sign that Serbia was well on her way to mod-

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 93.

<sup>58</sup> “It is said that the Servian popes are ignorant, but that is to convey a wrong impression. No doubt they are not steeped in book learning, but they possess – what is far more important – plenty of common sense, and, I fancy, know as much as they need to know. All candidates for Orders are required to go through a four years’ course at the Belgrade Seminary, where they find ample opportunities of culture (*Servia. The Poor Man’s Paradise*, 71–72).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 66–67.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 93.

ernisation: “By the middle of this century the dawn of Servian letters had coloured the horizon; and now, with the feverish educational aspirations of the country, a full classical effulgence cannot be far off.”<sup>61</sup> Somewhat surprising was Vivian’s impression about the quality and influence of the Serbian press, which, given the language barrier, he probably formed through his Serbian acquaintances. He certainly exaggerated when he claimed that, in accordance with tradition in patriarchal societies, personal attacks in political discussions were avoided:

There is an impression abroad that Servian newspapers are all of the *Skibbereen Eagle* complexion; but though they can give each other some hard knocks in the matter of politics, they set the press of other countries, not excepting our own, admirable example in their avoidance of personalities. There is a tacit understanding that the domain of private life shall not be invaded, and I was told that nothing more disagreeable can be said of a Servian lady than that she has even been spoken about in the newspapers’. The Servian journalists are among the most interesting and best informed of their countrymen.<sup>62</sup>

With equal enthusiasm, Vivian wrote of the future of Serbian literature and its significance to her culture as a means of suppressing widespread superstitions and furthering national emancipation. Offering a representative list of modern Serbian authors and their works, which unsurprisingly included his dear friend Čedomilj Mijatović, Vivian drew the following conclusion: “Confidence in the future of Servian literature is justified by the dreamy poetic nature of the people on the one hand, and by the elaborate nature of the system of education on the other. All sorts of old superstitions die very hard in this delightful medieval country. All except a few lawyers and bagmen believe in vampires, who may be charmed with an amulet of garlic; and in the *vile* or spirits of the mountains, rivers, earth, and air.”<sup>63</sup>

During his weeks-long travels around Serbia, Vivian had ample opportunities to acquaint himself with popular customs, which, judging by the older travel guides (by Paton, Denton, Muir Mackenzie and A. P. Irby), had not changed much. Having travelled further to the south – to the regions integrated with Serbia after two successive Serbian-Turkish wars in 1876–1878 (the former Sanjak of Niš) – Vivian had the impression that he was in the Orient. These areas missed the decades of modernisation that the Principality of Serbia had undergone from 1830, in particular during the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 185.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 187.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 188. In his memoirs, Čedomilj Mijatović mentions his friendship with Vivian more than once. Cf. Chedomille Mijatovich, *Memoirs of Balkan Diplomatist* (London: Cassel & Co., 1917).

rule of the Constitutionals (1842–1858), and contrast with the northern parts of the country was conspicuous.

A certain difference could be found in the comparisons of the quality of life between villages and towns. The towns at the time were in fact little more than urbanised villages, while the main industrial hub of Serbia, Kragujevac, “seems like a garden” to Vivian.<sup>64</sup> The growth of towns in Serbia did not stem from their economic or military power, but rather depended on old customs and local tradition. That is why Vivian described Šabac, the central town of the wealthy region of Mačva, in an unflattering fashion:

I probably learned more about Serbia, her institutions, her agriculture, and her commerce during my tour in the Machva [Mačva] and western Serbia generally; but I shall always look back upon my travels in the eastern and central districts with keener satisfaction. This is probably because I saw them first, and found them less sophisticated.<sup>65</sup>

Towns in the country were semi-urbanised areas due to the structure of their agrarian population and the dominant egalitarian mentality of their inhabitants which characterised the entire Serbian society in the nineteenth century:

There is little luxury in Servian home-life, and the lack of servants makes comfort out of the question. As Servians are too independent to enter domestic service, servants have to be imported beyond the Sava, and they possess or quickly acquire impossible notions or equality. I imagine it cannot be very much worse in America. And the ladies of a Servian household spoil their servants by doing much of work themselves.<sup>66</sup>

Vivian especially noted handicraft in the town of Pirot, in south-eastern Serbia, where entire families, including the youngest members of the household, were engaged in manufacturing Serbian woven carpets: “Nearly every woman and child in the place is engaged in weaving the bright red carpets which adorn every Servian home. There are no factories, but each family, or group of families, has its own private loom, which six or eight females work in little recesses or cupboards within view of the streets. The carpets are extraordinarily durable and very cheap. I wonder that some enterprising contractor does not go over and buy up the whole stock every year.”<sup>67</sup>

An analysis of life in rural areas indicated that there was no considerable economic improvement or change in worldview, which was, according to Vivian, still unfazed by modern civilisation and grounded in the old

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<sup>64</sup> Vivian, *Servia. The Poor Man's Paradise*, 198.

<sup>65</sup> Vivian, *Servian Tragedy*, 202.

<sup>66</sup> Vivian, *Servia. The Poor Man's Paradise*, 221.

<sup>67</sup> Vivian, *Servian Tragedy*, 201.

patriarchal values with the Kosovo tradition as the main pillar of national identity:

The Servians love simple pleasures. They are always ready for a dance, and impart mysterious expression to the measures of the *kolo*. They are intensely musical and can always while away an evening with interminable songs, generally of a sad, dreamy strain. The favourite topic of their songs is some episode in the history of their old [Stefan Dušan's medieval] Empire: either the prowess of Marko Kraljevič (king's son), or a narrative of the great battle of Kosovo, where their last Tsar [Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović] was defeated by [Ottoman] Turks. History is their one passion and replaces the interest in politics, which we find further west.<sup>68</sup>

While praising the hospitality of the Serbian people as their best quality, Vivian was in fact praising the traditional, patriarchal culture, a remnant of the Ottoman period. Another feature of the patriarchal way of life was an absence of privacy, which was so important in urban areas of the Western world. In general, Vivian observed both the major improvements in the quality of life and the remaining difficulties with which a traveller had to contend:

In 1896, when I overran Serbia, I had to find compensation in the natives' overflowing hospitality for rugged roads, bridgeless rivers and some unsavoury inns. Since then the corvée has been out and there are excellent highways everywhere; the streams have all been spanned by neat viaducts and the sanitary authorities have insisted upon the extermination of unnecessary smells. Now, as hitherto, good substantial fare is to be found in villages as well as towns. The only remaining drawback is the absence of baths. Even in a big town like Kragujevats [Kragujevac] or a thriving one like Šabats [Šabac], they stare in the best hotels if you hint at a hip bath. They are quite ready to spend thousands of dinnars on buildings and servants and such luxuries as they understand; but it does not occur to them, even in the dog days, that a traveller might crave a cold plunge.<sup>69</sup>

Vivian also pointed out that Serbs did not have understanding of the exploitation of natural resources, nor could they grasp the necessity of making priorities by Western standards. Like most foreign travel writings of the time, special attention was paid to the description of accommodation for travellers:

Food is abundant here, and the expenditure of two or three pounds by each hotel would supply a sufficiency of tubs. Water is already abundant and the Servians drink it recklessly, but their facilities for its external use are mediocre. Until this deficiency can be remedied a traveller must have recourse to tin or India rubber. Then he may treat himself, at an absurdly low cost,

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 249–250.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 184.

to an acquaintance with a smiling people which possesses all the Oriental instinct of hospitality, to a sight of historical scenes and wondrous scenery and marvelous monasteries; in fact, to all the delights of the Middle Ages crystallised amid modern aspirations and a headlong prosperity.<sup>70</sup>

Vivian also spoke of proneness to superstition in the Serbian countryside. The fear of sorcery and vampires was far from unusual in the Serbian villages in the nineteenth century: “Stories of vampires are innumerable, and all except a few lawyers and bagmen believe in them implicitly. The vampires assume human form and are remarkable for their grace and beauty.”<sup>71</sup>

Scrutinising the national character of the Serbs, and in accordance with the widespread impression, Vivian noted a certain surge of aggression in tough times, which could transform one’s dedication to work into a strong will to fight and do great deeds. Vivian’s opinion on this matter bore the imprint of the dramatic 1903 coup and its brutal regicide: “Serbian is full of devoted enthusiasm for his friends, but so soon as his enmity has been aroused he sticks at no enormity. Most of his national heroes are swashbucklers, who, in peaceful times, would be called brigands.”<sup>72</sup>

Among the many books about the Balkans, Turkey-in-Europe and the Ottoman Empire at large written by British travellers and historians, Vivian’s first book on Serbia, a mixture of detailed political and economic analysis and appealing travel writing, presented Serbia as a new European state emerging from the decaying Ottoman Empire. There is, however, a distinct difference between his idealisation of Serbs as poor and hard-working people, full of energy, enthusiasm and confidence in the future typical of his writing in 1896 and his sharp, at times bitter criticism in 1903 when the reputation of the Serbs suffered a heavy blow due to the assassination of the royal couple. On the whole, in his acclaimed book *Servia. The Poor Man’s Paradise*, Herbert Vivian provided a quite interesting and, apart from some idealised passages on the peasantry, mostly objective review of Serbian society at the turn of the century.

### *The 1903 Coup drama*

The 1903 Coup, condemned by the whole of monarchist Europe as a despicable act, degraded Serbia in Vivian’s eyes. He considered the regicide an act of political madness, a product of conspirators who had little or no influence and respect amongst the people. Therefore, Vivian’s description of

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 185.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 251.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 252.

the causes and culprits of the assassination of King Alexander and Queen Draga was very personal, biased and singularly sympathetic to the unfortunate royal couple.

According to Vivian, the question of succession to the throne sealed the royal couple's fate. Rumours were rife that one of Queen Draga's brothers would be designated an heir since the royal couple was childless. Hence, Vivian spared no effort to dispel all doubts that such a solution was ever considered, although he did not have much evidence to prove his point, apart from his personal experience.

In his attempt to defend the knightly virtues of the Serbian people that he portrayed so passionately in his *Servia. The Poor Man's Paradise*, Vivian blamed foreign influence for the series of unfortunate events which had befallen Serbia since May 1903. In doing so, he was obviously mistaken.<sup>73</sup> The conspiracy led by army officers and several, mostly Liberal, politicians, such as Djordje Genčić, was an exclusively Serbian affair. Vivian seems to have overlooked the fact that there was neither civil unrest, nor any public protests following the regicide and change on the throne. In fact, the murder of the last Obrenović was met with an overall sense of relief. Vivian, who remained very close to the circle of Alexander's supporters amongst the Serbian elite, and kept contact with Čedomilj Mijatović, became very one-sided in his approach to post-1903 developments in Serbia. It remains unclear to what extent Mijatović influenced Vivian's views.<sup>74</sup> Being the Serbian Minister in London, Mijatović was an avid supporter of the Obrenović dynasty and a close friend of Vivian's. There is no doubt, however, that the sharpness of Vivian's criticism also stemmed from his personal sympathy for the late King Alexander as well as from the outrage which the regicide stirred in Great Britain. Mijatović most probably co-authored with Mrs. F. Northesk Wilson a rather bitter account of the tragic events in Serbia published some weeks after the regicide under the title *Belgrade. The White City of Death, Being A History of King Alexander and Queen Draga*.<sup>75</sup> It has been noted ever since that "if the metaphor for Serbia before 1903 was *Poor*

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<sup>73</sup> The chapter "Treason and Plot" in *The Servian Tragedy with Some Impressions of Macedonia*, 88–103.

<sup>74</sup> Chedomille Mijatovich, *A Royal Tragedy, Being the Story of the Assassination of King Alexander and Queen Draga of Servia* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1907). For an excellent biography see Slobodan G. Markovich, *Grof Čedomilj Mijatović. Viktorijanac medju Srbima* (Belgrade: Dosije & Pravni fakultet, 2006); cf. also Slobodan G. Markovich, "Count Čedomilj Mijatović, a Leading Serbian Anglophile", *Balcanica XXXVIII* (2008), 105–132.

<sup>75</sup> Mrs. F. Northesk Wilson, *Belgrade. The White City of Death Being A History of King Alexander and Queen Draga* (London: R. A. Everett & Co., 1903).

*Man's Paradise* [...] the metaphor for the country's capital after 1903 became *White City of Death*".<sup>76</sup>

During the first few months of King Peter I Karadjordjević's reign, Vivian added new details to his dim view of the new regime in Serbia: he described in detail the royal tragedy through vivid description of the chambers of the assassinated King Alexander, and the hectic search of the military conspirators for a royal couple hidden in the secret room. He portrayed the new King, Peter Karadjordjević, as an intruder who allegedly liked to dress up as a peasant and mingle amongst the people in order to find out their opinion on the new government. Comparing sarcastically king Peter I of Serbia to Harun-al-Rashid, Vivian concluded that the new ruler surely had the chance to hear many uncomfortable truths about himself during these excursions. Yet, Vivian failed to acknowledge that the ousted dynasty had lost sympathies among the population on account of its autocratic rule and family scandals which had harmed the international image of Serbia. Vivian thus joined several British authors, to mention but Mary Edith Durham, who, after having been disappointed with Serbia for one reason or another, became inimical to their former object of affection.<sup>77</sup> In contrast to Mary Edith Durham, however, who came to depict Serbia as such as a symbol of whatever was going wrong in the Balkans, Vivian blamed the wrong policy of the post-1903 regime for numerous difficulties in the region.

### *Conclusions*

Through his analysis of political and cultural developments in Serbia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Vivian put forward some characteristic views. In both books on Serbia – *Servia. The Poor Man's Paradise* and *The Servian Tragedy with some Impressions of Macedonia* – Vivian admired the patriarchal way of life of Serbian rural communities, their simple worldview and traditional values, but his views on the Serbian political elite and the future of the country differed greatly. In the years between the publication of the two books the 1903 Coup took place with a devastating effect on Serbia's reputation in the Anglo-Saxon world.

Britain was not particularly interested in the Balkans throughout the nineteenth century, but nevertheless the books of A. A. Paton, Muir-Mackenzie and Irby, Rev. Denton and Vivian helped elicit some sympathy

<sup>76</sup> Markovich, "Count Čedomilj Mijatović", 119.

<sup>77</sup> Mary Edith Durham wrote a sympathetic book *Through the Land of the Serb* (London: Edward Arnold, 1904), but in 1910 she moved to Albania and became a fervent supporter of that country and intensely hostile to Serbs and Serbia. Cf. Rebecca West, *The Black Lamb and the Grey Falcon* (London: Penguin, 1984).

for the Serbs and their national aspirations. A mixture of history, geography and travel writing, Vivian's extensive study was long considered the most complete work on Serbia available to the British public.

The reputation of the author, as well as his affection for the country and the people he was writing about, made this book a significant step forward in presenting a more complete picture of the Kingdom of Serbia. At the same time, it counteracted the effects of the venomous Austro-Hungarian propaganda, which seized on every opportunity to take advantage of family and political scandals during the reign of King Milan Obrenović. Apart from his affection for Serbia, Vivian had a very good opinion about the young monarch, King Alexander Obrenović, King Milan's son. He respected King Alexander's intellect and believed his policy to be imperative for a country undergoing massive social changes.

Vivian's change of heart came on the heels of the 1903 Coup, when the young Serbian ruler and, in his view, symbol of modernisation, was assassinated. From that moment, Vivian saw Serbia as a thoroughly problematical political entity, a country whose throne was usurped in blood by an impostor from a rival dynasty.<sup>78</sup> Vivian even suspected that the coup had been planned abroad (alluding to some unspecified companions of Prince Peter Karadjordjević and the involvement of one of the Great Powers, probably Tsarist Russia) and that, apart from a handful of upstarts, conspirators and politicians, there was not much support for the coup among the people.

Such interpretation, unsupported by evidence, was imperative for Vivian in order to explain the marked difference in his views on Serbia that existed in his two books. Nevertheless, Vivian's first book was a major contribution to the spread of a quite positive image of Serbia in the influential Anglo-Saxon world. He seems to have needed to stand for a cause, which is quite visible in his two other books, the one that campaigned for the restoration of the defunct Austria-Hungary and the other in which he recounted his decade-long adventures in various parts of the world.<sup>79</sup>

Both Vivian's books on Serbia as well as his numerous articles abound in astute observations, accurate facts and picturesque details, and serve to

<sup>78</sup> Herbert Vivian, "The King of Servia and his Court", *The Pall Mall Magazine* 29 (April 1903), 509–518; idem, "Glorious Revolution", *The Fortnightly Review* 74 (July–December 1903), 65–75; idem, "The Future of Balkistan", *The Fortnightly Review* 74 (January–June 1904), 1038–1047.

<sup>79</sup> Herbert Vivian, *The Life of the Emperor Charles of Austria* (London: Grayson & Grayson, 1932); this book dedicated to Otto von Habsburg, the last Emperor of Austria-Hungary. See also Herbert Vivian, *Myself not Least, Being the Personal Reminiscences of "X"* (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd., 1925).

this day as a rich source of information regarding different aspects of life in Serbia and the perception of Serbia in the British press at the turn of the twentieth century.

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