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Unveiling Bosnia-Herzegovina in British Travel Literature (1844-1912)

Neval Berber

The first evidence of an English travel interest in Bosnia-Herzegovina emerged at the end of the 16th century, an interest, however, that was short-term in the extreme and came to a quick end in the first years of the 17th century. For early travellers Bosnia-Herzegovina was just one stage in a much longer journey with Istanbul as the final destination. When they did not travel exclusively by sea, one of the routes that the English, and later British, travellers chose to reach this city, full of enchantment and fascination, but which also represented an Ottoman Empire seen as a military threat, was via Venice, along the Dalmatian coast and across the mountainous interior of the Balkan Peninsula. This route obliged travellers to stop temporarily in Bosnia-Herzegovina. As Bosnia did not represent the final destination of British travellers in these early Balkan trips, and due to the brevity of their Bosnian stay, travellers who wrote the first accounts of this region offered very nebulous testimonies, accounts that were rather imprecise and inaccurate, even when reporting the travel routes of the journey.

In the 17th century, as more travellers journeyed to Istanbul and occasionally to the Holy Land over land, the need to travel through the Bosnian lands came to an abrupt end: instead of taking the Dalmatian and Bosnian roads, often over mountain passes and for that reason difficult to cross, British travellers preferred to take a northern route to Istanbul, via Vienna and Budapest and then southward, across the Pannonian Plain, Serbia, Bulgaria and Tracia. It was an itinerary that became quite popular during the next centuries, as merchants, diplomats and their retinue moved east, bypassing the Bosnian-Herzegovinian provinces. For this purely practical reason, it seems, until 1844 no British travellers journeyed to Bosnia-Herzegovina, and, if they did so, they left no written testimonies.

After a gap of two centuries, the year 1844 marked the modern revival of British travellers' interest in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This was determined, in the course of the 19th century, by an increase in British public interest in 'European Turkey', prompted, on the one hand, by the new approach in British foreign policy towards the Ottoman Empire (beginning around 1830), and, on the other, by the involvement of Great Britain in the Crimean war (1854-1856). This interest was reinforced in 1856 with the Treaty of Paris, when Britain also became officially involved in the Eastern Question. Only one year later, in 1857, Sarajevo also became the seat of a British consul in the Balkans¹.

If this interest took hold between the 1840s and 1850s, also due to the new orientation in British foreign policy, it intensified in the years of the Bosnian peasant revolts (1875-1878). In fact, the

latter renewed the interest of British public opinion in the Eastern Question, an interest that had tapered slightly in the period after 1856. Unlike the previous periods, in these years the phenomenon of British travellers in Bosnia-Herzegovina assumed a certain regularity. Moreover, henceforth this travel depended largely upon events linked to the Bosnian context, giving rise to travelogues that were not only political, but, progressively, also scientific and, in the last period, even touristic in scope. Therefore, this trend, originating in the mid-19th century and developing further over the next decades, continued down to 1912, when it was suddenly interrupted by the outbreak of the First Balkan War. [...]

The relationship that the travellers established with Bosnia was determined by political, social and cultural conditions both in their native country, and in the country they visited. Besides, the relationship between these two different geo-cultural poles was further enriched by travellers' personal vicissitudes. Travellers' gender and ethnic background, as well as their cultural baggage and political orientation, influenced their descriptions of Bosnia-Herzegovina, a country generally perceived as geographically close but culturally far from home.

The British who travelled to 'Ottoman Bosnia', between the 1840s and 1860s, first 'discovered' this country in geographical terms. Their successors, in the 1870s, were also interested in analysing the socio-cultural phenomena they encountered. In the process of the discovery of Bosnian society travellers selected their material, favouring some aspects over others, applying their own parameters of assessment and consciously or unconsciously using their pre-existing cultural reference points to do so; in short, they transmitted a very complex fresco of Bosnia-Herzegovina and its people. This study aimed to deconstruct this picture, investigating the factors that determined British travellers' representations of Bosnia. It also attempted to reconstruct British stereotypes and prejudices regarding Bosnia-Herzegovina, once again by focusing on British travel texts.

Western imaginary spaces and Bosnia-Herzegovina

As some recent post-modern scholarly work in geography has demonstrated, space, conceptualised as a product of social relations, can be perceived as a dimension of human existence full of power and symbolism ². [...] This post-modern geographical awareness, elsewhere known as a special "power geometry", can also be found in studies that have recently explored cultural and political power relations within Europe. Among the first to work in this field of studies was Larry Wolff, in *Inventing Eastern Europe*.

Despite numerous critics, Wolff's work remains a valid point of departure for all who undertake an investigation of the Western collective representations relative to European geographical space in the last three centuries. Applying the theoretical model developed by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, Wolff, working mainly on the writings of French philosophes and voyageurs, demonstrated that, in the 18th century, Western Europe "invented" Eastern Europe as its "complementary other half". From then on, according to Wolff, Western Europeans opposed an image of the East as backward and barbarous, inhabited by savage and primitive peoples, perceived as culturally and civilly inferior to an image of the West as a space imbued with high moral and civil values. With this process of construction of an Eastern European savage space, Enlightenment-influenced authors also re-wrote Western-European mental maps, leading to a reorientation from a North/South to an East/West divide.

Significantly, Wolff locates the origins of a new mapping of Europe at the time of the invention of

the Western notion of civilization, an 18th-century neologism that the West used with regard to itself, facilitated by the contemporary construction of Eastern European as the West's negative complement. Yet, it is not only the evolution of the concept of civilization that is singled out as a crucial element for the birth of this positive-negative polarity within Europe; much importance is given to the geographical positioning of Eastern Europe as "Europe but not Europe". According to Larry Wolff, it was this geographical "ambiguous location" of Eastern Europe, often identified with the concept of the frontier, which rendered possible among Western Europeans the invention of a backward and undeveloped space that would mediate between the poles of civility and barbarity. [...]

The same concept of 'in-betweenness' that Wolff pointed out referring to Eastern Europe, was further explored in 1997 by Maria Todorova, who studied the prevalent Western images of the Balkans and its people, thus significantly moving the investigative focus relative to the social and power relations of European space with respect to Wolff. While placing the Balkans in opposition to Said's Orient, Todorova also emphasized that even though the principal discourse that constitutes the Balkans as an 'Otherness' within Europe originated at the same time as the modern Orientalism analysed by Said, it needs not be considered as its sub-set, but as a discourse that evolved independently. Among the different characteristics that distinguish 'Balkan Otherness' from the Oriental is also the "transitory status" of the Balkans, an aspect that evokes Wolff's thesis on Eastern Europe. So, if, on the one hand, Orientalism perceived the West and the East as two "incompatible entities, antiworlds, but completed antiworlds", Balkanism, on the other, relying on a figurative language, conceived the median nature of the Balkans as a bridge or a crossroad: "The Balkans have been compared to a bridge between East and West, between Europe and Asia".

The presence of British travellers in Bosnia has already been considered with relation to the Eastern Question, as well as with regard to internal turmoil in Bosnia. The 1870s were the years during which Bosnia-Herzegovina, together with Bulgaria, became for the British the areas of principal interest in the Balkans, attracting the largest number of travellers.

In these years travellers arrived in the region from the North, crossing the river Sava in Gradiška, Brod or Rača and the river Una in Kostajnica, viewing these rivers as physical and administrative borders that separated the Austria-Hungarian Empire from the Ottoman, but also and above all as a symbolic border that marked the point at which Eastern barbarism came to replace Western civility. The administrative border, which the travellers crossed, was marked by rivers geographically situated in the North and North-West, thus forcing the traveller to move in a North-South direction. Yet, despite this 'vertical' movement, British travellers conceived Bosnia as an East-European region such as conceived by Wolff, as if the crossed border compelled travellers, not to a North-South but to a West-East movement.

What the travellers left behind, in 'German' Gradiška, Brod, Rača and Kostajnica, after crossing the rivers that divided the towns into their 'Austrian' and 'Turkish' parts, was, in fact, set against what was found in the 'Turkish' part of these same towns. Moreover, against a positive image of the Austrian towns through which they travelled was set an image of the Turkish towns they crossed, imbued with a sense of negativity. Indeed, 19th-century British travel accounts in Bosnia are, for this reason, a rich depository of images that indicate how the West used to construct an image of civil and moral superiority, in opposition to one of barbarity and decay in the East. Unlike what has been proposed by Wolff for Eastern Europe, the validity of these dichotomic principles in British travel writing on Bosnia is not evident prior to the 19th century. The representation of Bosnia-Herzegovina as an Eastern European land does not suggest an origin in the 17th or 18th

centuries, but rather indicates how the same discourse developed in various Western European countries at different times, arriving in Bosnia only in the second half of the 19th century.

The first traces of such attitudes can be found in 1872 and 1873, when Arthur J. Patterson and Humphry Sandwith reached Bosnia by travelling along the river Una and the river Sava, rivers that in their eyes represented a border line between the West and the East. Nevertheless, these two travellers, while never hesitating to suggest the opposition of West and East, did not describe this East in purely negative terms. Rather, their descriptions of the country are distinguished for their exoticism, offering fundamentally an image of Bosnia as a place of Oriental charm that caught the travellers' imagination with its rich repertory of highly evocative and picturesque images. Arthur J. Patterson, on seeing the images in the shops of "Turkish Kostajnica", was reminded of the scenes that could be usually seen in the illustrations of travel destinations in other Oriental guidebooks:

Between the two Kostainicas the river is divided by an island into the Unna and the Unnica [...]. Arrived on the Turkish side of the river, we passed a row of open shops, or rather, booths, for the sale of tobacco [...] and such few wares as the poor and unluxurious Mohammedan population might require. The shops were such as one sees in illustrations of Eastern travel.

Humphry Sandwith offered a description of the country in even more exotic terms. The Bosnia he found in Bosnian Brod was filtered through a well-known set of images by which travellers from Western European countries typically described some countries of Asia and Northern Africa: "We presently reached the town of Bosnian Brod; there were the once familiar figures, turbaned and cross-legged, sitting under their dilapidated verandahs, or on their little shabby shop-boards, smoking all day long, and fingering their beads".

Two years later, in 1875, soon after the outbreak of the Bosnian revolt, it was the turn of James Creagh and Arthur J. Evans. They both arrived in Bosnia-Herzegovina, entering the country from the North across the river Sava, as their fellow countryman Humphrey Sandwith had done before. Even though the two travellers never met each other, their travelogues published in 1876 testify that they visited Bosnia in the same period, both crossing the country from the North to the South. What also unites them is the similarity of the images of the country and its people that they left behind; indeed both cast the backwardness of the Bosnian towns and even the decadence of their people against the modernity and vigour of their Austrian counterparts. In the work of James Creagh, this process appears in a more explicit way, as the reader can follow step by step the journey of the traveller and his arrival first in German Brod and subsequently in Turkish Brod.

What immediately strikes the reader upon encountering the travelogue of James Creagh is the language used in describing Turkish Brod as a complementary part of the German Brod: "The town on the left bank is called German Brod, and that on the right Turkish Brod [...] and although there is little intercourse between them, the later appears a suburb of the former". Then, Creagh integrates this image with another that considers the first town as the opposite of the second, describing the landing place in German Brod as "modern": "The steamer first stops at Turkish Brod [...] and then [...] it is moored to the modern landing place at German Brod". At the end, he places the two geographical sites in opposition, comparing the "dignified easterners" of Turkish Brod with the "Austrian soldiers" of German Brod, the multi-colour of the first with the bi-chromaticism of the second:

Dignified Easterners, in flowing robes of many colours and voluminous turbans, move slowly along the path near the water; while in Christendom, although it is only separated from this Oriental picture by the narrow channel of the Save, the church steeples of a little German country town overtop the roofs of the houses, and Austrian soldiers, in white tunics and light blue trousers, lounge on the seats of an ornamental pleasure ground.

When Creagh finally lands in Turkish Brod, all his attention is focused on describing the opposition between the two realities with a significant emphasis. For him, despite geographical proximity, the difference between the two towns and their people is so strong to remind him of the situation that the English observed in Bombay: “The traveller who goes from Southampton to Bombay round the Cape of Good Hope, sees after a voyage of several months, a great difference in the appearance of those two parts, as well as in that of their inhabitants”. Eventually, the difference of the two river banks is summarized by the author with an image that orientalizes Turkish Brod and westernizes German Brod, beginning with peoples’ customs and outfit:

The contrast between German Brod and Turkish Brod is in no way less remarkable. The former, as its name imports, is a small Austrian town; but in the letter [...] the shopkeepers deal in open stalls in front of their houses, and sitting with their legs folded under them on Turkey carpets, smoke long pipes in true Eastern fashion. [...] women completely covered in long white winding-sheets, glide stealthily from house to house; the faithful, believing that cleanliness is the key of prayer, wash their beards and heads at fountains in the courtyards of the mosques. [...] A man with a hat is as much an object of curiosity as if he were in Baghdad; and the immediate neighbourhood of Christendom has no effect on the habits, manners, customs, or religion of the Turks.

Arthur J. Evans is less inclined than Creagh to oppose one area to the other, while being more explicit in describing the Bosnian cities under the Ottoman influence in openly negative terms. When the window to ‘Ottoman Bosnia’ is opened to Evans, after he has crossed the border with the Austria-Hungarian Empire at the river Sava, which he metaphorically calls the “Rubicon” (“but for better or worse our Rubicon is passed, and we land on the Turkish shore”), his Western-European mentality causes him to notice a high degree of incivility. In fact, this region is immediately imprinted on this traveller’s mind in negative terms, which can be observed in this image that puts an emphasis on the decadence of the soldier he meets on the street: “among a group of turbaned gentry, from amongst which emerges a somewhat tattered soldier, who conducts us to the square [...] and follow him into the narrow street of Turkish Brod to show our pass to the Prefect or Mudir”. This situation found on the Bosnian streets is opposed to the mode of dress of Arthur J. Evans and his brother Lewis that, even though not explicitly described, is perceived by Evans as evidently in contrast to what he finds in the place visited, as it creates confusion among the locals: “Our appearance created as great a sensation as was decorous among the big-turbans of the townlet”. Added to this are the depictions of the crowded Bosnian streets, an Ethiopian maiden, and the konak’s front room with no doors or windows, all the elements that create an image of a quite decadent and rather barbarous Bosnia:

Crowds of Bosnian gamins followed at our heels; and we caught a passing glimpse of a dusky Ethiopian maiden white-toothing us in the most coquetish fashion from behind the door. As the Mudir was not at home, we had to wait in the front room of his Konak, if indeed a place which possesses neither door nor window [...] can be called a room; and taking our seat on the platform or raised floor became the gazing-stock of a motley assemblage, who crowding round in the street, or taking reserved seats in the melon shop opposite, ‘twigged us’ at their leisure.

What Evans describes in negative terms is also perceived as diversity; on the opposite bank river he finds a completely “new world”: “We, too, obtained a breathing space in which to realise in what a new world we were”. [...]

These images presented in British travel writing on Bosnia, opposing East with West, sometimes even showing the moral and civil superiority of the West with respect to the decadence and barbarity of the East, confirm the well-known thesis of the geo-symbolical division of European space into an East and a West.

Yet, this sharp and immediate entry into this European East, embodied in these travellers’ accounts visually and physically by the river, does not seem to fit neatly within the interpretative patterns elaborated upon in Wolff’s and Todorova’s studies. If, in fact, in the case of Eastern Europe and the Balkans Western imaginaries relied on the elements of ambiguity, on border mobility and situations of liminality and progressive transition from one reality to another, in this case it is necessary to make a figurative leap. Indeed, the image of Bosnia that British travellers constructed for their home audience can be considered a singular and independent construction within the Eastern-European geographical space. The cultural physiognomy of the image of this ‘Bosnian East’ was indeed in many ways different from the one that Wolff and Todorova analysed for the European East. Even though it originated in opposition to Western Europe, in the travellers’ imaginations it had a different symbolic location, expressed by its own formulas and contents, as well as being considered culturally detached from the other countries of Eastern Europe or the Balkans.

The Bosnia of these travellers was, in fact, considered a space within Europe more eastern than its East, and its image assumed certain features that were in many ways more similar to ‘Oriental Otherness’ such as analysed by Edward Said than to Wolff’s ‘Eastern Europe’, enabling us to talk about a type of ‘Bosnian Orient’, or perhaps about a ‘European Orient’. Indeed, in contrast to the operation of mental mapping that according to Wolff came into existence among Western Europeans as they compared and contrasted Eastern Europe with Western Europe (“the operations of mental mapping were above all association and comparison: association among the lands of Eastern Europe [...] and comparison with the lands of Western Europe”), in the case of British travellers to Bosnia, even though this country was frequently compared with the countries of Western Europe, it was never associated with the other countries of European East, but rather with Turkey, Middle East, Africa and Asia. A similar leap, which pushes the imaginary from the heart of the Balkan peninsula to the core of the Orient of Saidian memory, was prevalently due to the ‘discovery’ by the British of deeply rooted Islamic tradition within this South-Eastern European country.

Bosnia is the Orient

If we consider what has just been said with regards to some 19th-century British travellers to Bosnia, it strikes us less that Bosnia-Herzegovina in their travelogues was associated with Asia or even with Africa, assuming all the characteristics of an area incompatible with the European West, partly also with the European East. There are indeed numerous examples of travellers in the 1870s who associated Bosnia with Asian and African countries, ‘creating’, from the perspective of mental geography, an ‘authentic East’ within Europe. James Creagh, for example, compared Bosnia to India, an Oriental land for British writers par excellence: “He [the traveller] might wander by land to the centre of Hindustan without seeing any great difference in a mode of life which is so much the same all through the East”. Creagh also associated Bosnia, which he called “Turkey”, with the Indian towns, particularly to Hyderabad: “that Indian fakirs often come to Brod, and feel as much at home as they do in Hyderbad”.

Paulina Irby and Humphry Sandwith were even more explicit in their associations: while observing Bosnia, they were continually reminded of Asia, the “most barbarous” country, according to Irby’s words, and “Moslem”, according to Sandwith. Thus, Irby observed that Bosnia, even though geographically very close to what she considered “European civility”, was the most barbarous of all the provinces in ‘Turkey in Europe’ as far as social conditions were concerned. “In geographical position the nearest to European civilisation, but in social condition the most barbarous of the provinces of Turkey in Europe”. In her eyes the country exhibited “a savage and Oriental aspect” and the travellers who visited it could not stop imagining themselves in “the wilds of Asia”:

Bosnia, including Turkish Croatia and Herzegovina [...] interposes a savage and Oriental aspect between the Dalmatian shores of the Adriatic and the advancing culture of Serbia, Hungary, and Croatia. Cross the frontier from these lands, and you may fancy yourself in the wilds of Asia.

For Sandwith, even the Bosnian countryside resembled Asia: “As I ride along the glens and by the slopes of the hills, I am perpetually reminded of Asia”. He also opposed Bosnia to England in cultural terms, first by associating it with Timbuktoo and then by describing it as very “Moslem”:

I scarcely exaggerate when I say that you would see hardly a greater contrast in every- thing if you were transported from an English village to Timbuktoo. I have travelled to very remote parts of the Turkish empire, amongst the Nomads of Mesopotamia, and the Kurds on the Persian frontier, yet never did I feel myself in a more Moslem and Asiatic country than now, with an exception there was a very fair road.

Arthur J. Evans also found in Bosnia the familiar sights of Asia and Africa: “Travellers who have seen the Turkish provinces of Syria, Armenia, or Egypt, when they enter Bosnia, are at once surprised at finding the familiar sights of Asia and Africa reproduced in a province of European Turkey”. And, while, on the one hand, he reported that Bosnians tended to define themselves in opposition to the other bank of the river Sava, where he thought Europe lay, on the other, he engaged in comparing in his own accounts Bosnia to Asia: “The Bosnians themselves speak of the other side of the Save as ‘Europe’, and they are right; for to all intents and purposes a five minutes’

voyage transports you into Asia”. In the same year, an anonymous traveller, writing for *The British Quarterly Review*, not very differently from Evans traced a comparison between Bosnia and Kurdistan: “The general aspect of Bosnia and Herzegovina is quite as barbarous as that of the wildest part of Kurdistan”.

What emerges from these same accounts is that British travellers did not perceive Bosnia as an Oriental space in a ‘pure’ geographical sense, by associating it with Asia and Africa; in the same years we find numerous textual examples that emphasized Bosnia as culturally Oriental, too. This was suggested by an image of this country as a region that persisted in maintaining traditional Islamic and Ottoman customs. The end result was an image of this Orient as a culturally remote country, traversed by veiled women and idle turbaned men and peppered by Muslim mosques adorned with Oriental minarets.

The process of orientalization of this still Ottoman region was already present in the name given to the entire Bosnian population: “The streets and the bazaars are crowded with Orientals of different nations; and besides Greeks, Jews, Christians, and Turks, I saw several Indian Mussulmans” (James Creagh). What placed even more emphasis on this ‘European Orient’ was an image of the country that insisted in preserving its traditional practices and beliefs, that “the immediate neighbourhood of Christendom has no effect on the habits, manners, customs, or religion of the Turks”, nor do the signs of modernization coming from the other parts of the Ottoman Empire change. Thus, the Muslim population of Bosnia was shown as hostile towards the Turkish hat, known by the name *fez*, that since 1839 acted as a symbol of the progressive modernization of the Ottoman Empire: “As to the introduction of fezzes, the Imperial order almost provoked a revolt here; and to this day among Mahometans the *fez* is almost confined to officials, the rest of the believers going about in the capacious turbans of the East”. While in this passage Evans referred to the turbans of the higher classes, Sandwith did the same when writing of the lower classes: “towards evening [we] reach the gloomy town of Tchabtji, a small place with a small bazaar, in which big turbaned Moslems sit all their lives waiting for customers who appear rarely to come”. In some cases men’s turbans were placed side-by-side with women’s veils (“women completely covered in long white winding-sheets, glide stealthily from house to house.”), or with the *maulouka*, a traditional Turkish mantle worn by men:

In no other European province of Turkey is the veiling of women so strictly attended to. It is said that not long ago the fine egg-shaped turbans of the Janissaries might still be found in Bosnia, and the *Maulouka*, the most precious of all mantels, which had died out elsewhere, long survived among these Bosnian Tories.

This image of Bosnia as a bulwark of typically Ottoman and Islamic traditions was enriched by certain Orientalist images that recalled the presumed inclination to idleness and inertia of the Bosnian Muslim population in particular. This image was probably one of the strongest, underlining the idea of Bosnia as a decadent Orient. In Creagh’s travelogue, for example, the traveller admitted feeling lazy in an ‘Oriental’ way: “I sat on a cushion in its verandah, inhaling the soothing fumes of a long hookah”; this same ‘*dolce far niente*’ of “Eastern fashion”, he also noticed in some figures of “shopkeepers” “who deal in open stalls in front of their houses, and sitting with their legs folded under them on Turkey carpets, smoke long pipes in true Eastern fashion”. A similar effect is identified in two scenes recalled by Paulina Irby, who described the “*tcharsia*, or bazaar” as a place where “were sitting turbaned Turks, cross-legged, in their shops

before the usual paltry stores of water melons, Manchester cottons [...] and little coffee cups”; Evans noticed and illustrated the same inertia and idleness in a “café” in Tešanj, whereas this same image returns in Irby:

From here I adjourned to a neighbouring café, discovered by entering another stable and climbing another ladder, leaving L... I found myself amidst a bevy of comfortable Turks, who were alternately sipping their mocha and smoking their long chibouks, – for they belonged to the old school, and were robed in flowing dressing-gowns and surmounted with pompous turbans.

The Bosnia of the second half of the 19th century, immersed in its ample Islamic context, from which emanated a whole series of Islamic customs and habits, underwent in British travel accounts a process of orientalizing. Having crossed the river Sava, travellers arrived “in Eslamiah [where] the long and graceful minarets of Turkish mosques point upwards among the trees” (James Creagh) and, in a land “of Asiatic despotism” (Humphry Sandwith).

This construction of Bosnia as an ‘authentic Orient’ within Europe evolves at the same time as the Western creation of the modern image of the Orient, which, as Edward Said and subsequent studies inspired by him have shown, takes place at the end of the 19th century, exactly when the British travellers here considered visited Bosnia. The Oriental image of Bosnia is in fact a cultural construct that reflects almost all the characteristics of the Western image of the Orient and for this reason it can not be studied as a phenomenon independent of it. [...]

‘Balkan-deflected Orientalism’

At this point it is necessary to highlight that even after the Austrian occupation of Bosnia and in the first years of the 20th century, unlike other Balkan regions characterised by a Balkanist discourse, the Orientalist component remains quite strong for Bosnia. This specific Orientalism can be attributed to the prolonged presence of the Ottoman Empire, and to the deeply rooted presence of Islam among the Bosnian population, with all its profound and ‘evident’ implications, from architecture to dress and certain daily practices. Islam, an old source of anxiety for European societies, and which was discovered in its Balkanic version in the 1870s, seems to have played the principal role in removing Bosnia from ‘European civilization’, locating it within a more Oriental and less East European or Balkanic space (the latter two, as noted, are intended as sites of ‘in-betweenness’). [...]

In any case, we should not neglect the Balkanist influences to which British Orientalism on Bosnia was subject from the 1870s. This specific aspect can be observed in the same travel texts by focusing on a certain process of westernization of the ‘Bosnian Orient’, which arose from a series of geographical, political, racial and religious factors.

In the late 1870s, the ‘Oriental Bosnia’ of British travelogues assumed certain shades of ambiguity, partly recalling the transitory status typical for the Balkans. The Orientalism that the travellers assumed for Bosnia became obviously subject to Balkanist influences; thus the ‘Bosnian Orient’ acquired some characteristics that for most contemporary Western Europeans of those years were typically Balkanic – and for us Balkanist.

To observe this from close up we might best analyse the travelogues of Evans and Sandwith, who,

while providing us with numerous examples of Orientalist rhetoric, proclaimed a ‘hybridisation’ of ‘Orientalised Bosnia’ by introducing some typically Western elements; in this way they partly westernized this area of the Orient:

Paper cigarettes!– twenty years ago they would have been narghilés, ambery, Oriental, ablaze with gold and jewels, enchantingly barbaric; but their date is fled; the West advances and the East recedes; and now, even in Conservative old Bosnia, the pipe is degenerating into the symbol of a foggy! Sic transit gloria mundi. (Arthur J. Evans)

I was offered a cigarette, and so perfectly un-Turkish did this appear that I declined it, a flagrant breach of Turkish manners. (Humphry Sandwith)

Cigarettes were a symbol, although a negative one, of Western penetration of Bosnia; in these travellers’ eyes this occurred at a very high price: through the decadence of Oriental traditions and the acquisition of degrading Western practices – that Evans and Sandwith refused to accept. A consequence of this was, as the words from Evans’s travelogue testify, that a static vision of the cultural areas’ boundaries, embodied in the idea of a river as a distinct border between the two worlds, was placed alongside an image of osmosis between them, rendered by the idea of a mobile boundary. The concept of a country with all the characteristics of the Orient was somewhat re-dimensioned and the perception of a presumed advance of the West towards Bosnia could be observed.

The same partial westernization of the Orient can be observed when Evans writes concretely about the uses and the customs of the Bosnian Muslims. Evans focussed not only on the Muslims’ conservatism, or on their fundamentalism, but on what rendered them similar to Europeans, or even different from the Turks and other Ottoman Muslims. The reference to the absence of polygamy in the Bosnia-Muslim community was, in fact, in strong opposition to the cases discussed earlier where Bosnia was presented as a bulwark of Islamic and Ottoman customs:

We learnt that polygamy was almost non-existent throughout the provinces. It has been dying out, it is true, in other parts of Turkey, but here it appears never to have taken. What is still perhaps exceptional among the wealthier Turks, the richest Bosniacs have only one wife. Some of them are said to have concubines, but public opinion here denounces the Moslem who concludes more than one marriage.

Similarly, and in contradistinction to previous examples regarding the process of orientalization of Bosnia from the point of view of the Bosnian-Muslims’ costumes and dress, a certain degree of westernization of these Muslims can be also perceived in descriptions of their way of dressing. Patterson, for example, wrote of a Bosnian Muslim who dressed in “slightly Orientalised, European clothes with a red fez on his head”. Irby’s look settled on a figure of a “cadi” “with European features”:

No one made himself more agreeable than the cadi, a personage who in other places seldom came near us at all. He was a tall, fair man, with European features, and gave

one an idea of the knights his forefathers, when they first put on the turban.

Authors in the 1870s, by writing in this way of the habits of the Bosnian Muslims, seemed to shape an idea of Bosnia as an Oriental and Islamic place moving slowly towards the European West. This operation was rendered possible by the overlapping in travellers' texts of two different discourses, the Orientalist and the Balkanist, the latter assuming a more definite form exactly when the travellers crossed in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This process of relative westernization of the Orient in the 1870s was determined also by at least two factors that originated within the Bosnian context and intersected British travellers' own prejudices: first, the geographical position of Bosnia, and its proximity to the West, embodied in British travellers' eyes by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, from which Bosnia was separated only by a river; second, the travellers' discovery of the Slavic roots of Bosnians, including the Bosnian Muslim population. As we saw in chapter two, British liberals, during the years of the Eastern Crisis, tried to re-evaluate the Slavs, emphasising their capacity to reach the highest peaks of civilization and to form nations by following the paths of the Western-European nation-states. These travellers assumed the perspective of 'progressive' evolutionism which, while preserving the idea of inferiority of the peoples at the borders of Europe, did not deny to those they considered as underdeveloped the possibility to improve in moral terms and to gradually advance towards civility, within both agrarian and political spheres.

A similar, progressive, westernization of the 'Bosnian Orient' was seen with even more clarity by the travellers who visited Bosnia in the years of the Austrian occupation. The *Balkan Peninsula*, written by the French author Emile de Laveleye, is an exemplary text in this sense. De Laveleye described the contrast between the two banks of the river Sava, the two Brods, relying on the Orientalist rhetoric ("There are two Brods, opposite to one another, on each side of the Save: Slavonic-Brod, an important fortress, as the base of operation of the Austrian armies, which occupied the new provinces; and Bosna-Brod, which belonged to Turkey"), pointing out that the river Sava represented a symbolic border between the two worlds ("Two civilizations, two religions, two entirely different modes of life and thought, are here face to face, separated by a river"); but he did not stop here, as he also announced an imminent end to this centuries-long contrast, that would be seen in the disappearance of the "Mussulman character" under the Austrians: "It is true that during four centuries this river has really divided Europe and Asia; but the Mussulman character will rapidly disappear under the influence of Austria".

A reason for this latter shift in travellers' imaginaries can undoubtedly be located in the new Austria-Hungarian administration which, after 1880, the year that saw the return to power of Gladstone, received unqualified support from Britain. The travellers who went to Bosnia in this period identified signals of civilisation almost everywhere; their descriptions of this country recounted the first steps towards modernization and progress in this 'Bosnian Orient'. Benjamin Kállay "restored to civilisation" a people which "for centuries" had been "the prey of ignorance, fanaticism, and indeed almost of barbarism". We also find frequent enthusiastic comments on the changes that, the travellers noted, had occurred in a short time:

Nowhere else in Europe has there been so rapid an increase in population and wealth, and the picturesque old towns are taking on an air of activity. While subject to the Turks Bosnia practically vanished from the current of civilization until 1875, when,

exasperated by extortion, robbery, rapine, murder, and religious persecution, the people rose in rebellion. The powers of Europe placed them under the protection of Austria, which has give the most remarkable exhibition of administrative reform known to modern history, and has demonstrated the possibility of governing alien races by justice and benevolence. (W.E. Curtis)

If between 1875 and 1878 this ‘Orientalized Bosnia’ underwent a slight process of westernization, Bosnia after 1880 seemed in the travellers’ eyes to be a country much closer to Western European countries than in previous years. The most radical change was the shift of the entire region on the collective mental map: Bosnia was no longer just an Orient associated, both geographically and culturally, with Turkey, Asia and Africa, but also, and increasingly, with Europe. This is clearly seen in the writings of the travellers who asserted that Bosnia could be visited not only “without undergoing any pleasurable privations or extraordinary sufferings”, but also “without quitting Europe”. (H.G.S.A.O. de Blowitz)

A similar overlapping of other discursive formations, such as that of Balkanism, to the Orientalist one can be explained by some recent readings of the Orientalist discourse, that arose from a relation of critical diffidence towards Orientalism conceived by Edward Said. First of all, these studies realised the limits of Said’s interpretation of the concept of discourse, which led to an interpretation of Orientalism as a ‘closed’ and ‘stable’ terrain, without any contradiction. Rather, as some scholars have asserted, in order to avoid conforming all the processes of differentiations it is necessary to re-consider both Orientalism and colonialism in the light of the Foucaultian conception of discourse as ‘ubiquitous’ and ‘inconsistent’. Lisa Lowe, for example, draws attention to the Foucaultian conception of discourse as an “irregular series of regularities that produce objects of knowledge”. According to this scholar, although the 18th- and 19th-century Western sources, in which the idea of the Orient originated can be considered substantially the same, fitting within the dimension of ‘regularity’, “the manner in which these materials conjoin to produce the category ‘the Orient’ is not equal to the conjunction constituting the ‘Orient’ at another historical moment, or in another national culture”. It is evident that Lowe is trying to return to the idea according to which neither the conditions of discursive formations, nor the objects of knowledge, are identical, static, or continuous through time. Therefore the methodological re-orientation offered by Lowe, which focuses on the fluidity of discursive conditions as well as of their objects of knowledge, ends up by conceiving the discourse not just as a ‘closed’ and ‘stable’ system, but as an open terrain or, as she writes, a “multivalent, overlapping, dynamic terrain”, within which discursive formations that are once again determined by historical and cultural factors can intersect: “I encounter the problem of what to call this nexus of apparatuses that is not closed but open, not fixed but mobile, not dominant although it includes dominant formations, and so forth”. What results from these considerations is that Orientalism is a heterogeneous and contradictory phenomenon, composed of “orientalist situations”, whose variable character depends upon the cultural and historical context and also reveals the complex and unstable nature of this discourse.

On the basis of similar considerations, we can conclude by saying that the dominant discourse in the writings of British travellers on Bosnia is a heterogeneous and complex Orientalism which, between the 1870s and the beginning of the 20th century, underwent a process of being influenced by Balkanism. Due to this, as well as because of its location in the Balkans, this discursive formation has been denominated ‘Balkan-deflected Orientalism’.

If we chose this definition, it is because it both announces the Balkanist and Orientalist elements

and emphasizes that the prevailing ones are certainly the latter. We have also seen that not only is this valid for the 1870s, but that it continues until the beginning of the 20th century: Orientalism is, in fact, a constant element of the discourse examined. Nevertheless, it is not a 'simple' Orientalism, not only because no one discourse, as we saw, is ever 'simple', but also because the one pointed out by Said, though with reference to the Middle East and Palestine, cannot be applied to the Balkans without its undergoing some change and transformation.

Furthermore, the same discourse could also undergo change due to variations of this same historical context and of the nature of relationships between western and eastern (or south-eastern) societies. In fact, the Orientalist discourse on Bosnia had some peculiar features that distinguished it from Orientalism as conceived and analysed by Edward Said. British travellers produced and applied a peculiar Balkan type of Orientalism, which, in a largely unaltered form, was further updated in the last quarter of the 19th century.

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Notes

1. The reconstruction of the here mentioned specifics related to the English travellers in Bosnia between the 16th and the 19th centuries was possible thanks to the already existing scholarly book by Omer Hadžiselimović, *Na vratima Istoka*, Sarajevo 1989. This book is also available in English translation: *At the Gates of the East: British Travel Writers on Bosnia and Herzegovina from the 16th to the 20th Centuries*, New York 2001. ?
2. Cf. D. Massey, "Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place", in Bird J., Curtis B., Putnam T., Robertson G., Tickner L. (edited by), *Mapping the Futures*, London 1993. ?

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