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REVIEWS

VESELIN KOSTIĆ, *BRITANIJA I SRBIJA: KONTAKTI, VEZE I ODNOSI 1700–1860*
[GREAT BRITAIN AND SERBIA: CONTACTS, CONNECTIONS AND RELATIONS
1700–1860]. BELGRADE: ARHIPELAG, 2014, 536 P.

Reviewed by Miloš Vojinović*

Even a quick glance at the list of the awarded history books in the last decade reveals that those that cover long periods are not too popular. At a time in which historians tend to choose a narrower approach to the subject more often than before, Veselin Kostić published a book that makes an attempt to encompass more than a century and a half of relations between Great Britain and Serbia. This book is a continuation of the author's lifelong interest in British history and connections between the Serbs and the residents of the British Isles.¹

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¹ Veselin Kostić is a renowned Serbian scholar of English literature, Shakespeareologist, historian of literature and culture. Until his retirement in 1996 he was Professor of English literature at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade. His most important works include: *Kulturne veze između jugoslovenskih zemalja i Engleske do 1700* (1972),

It is evident from the first pages that Kostić did an impeccable heuristic work. As a result of his diligent research in archives and libraries in Great Britain, this book is a meticulous piece of work. Be it a little known travelogue from the beginning of the eighteenth century or family letters of Irish mercenaries who fought for the Austrians, Kostić managed to discover all of them, so much so that it seems that no evidence escaped his careful eye. The book is organised into four extensive chapters. Each of the first three is devoted to the British of a particular walk of life who had contact with Serbia, namely soldiers, travellers and diplomats, and the last one discusses literary influences.

I am inclined to say that this book, apart from its scholarly merit, is first and foremost a good read. It is a story of many destinies, of mercenaries in search of a job, spies who wandered between empires,

Dubrovnik i Engleska 1300–1650 (1975) and *Šekspirov život i svet* (1978).

priests on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, merchants looking for new markets, and all sorts of adventurers who happened to tumble into Serbian lands.

Many readers will find the first chapter about soldiers the most interesting. Kostić's narrative flows smoothly between general conclusions and vivid details offered in corroboration of his assumptions. He shows that several generations of some British families served as mercenaries on the southern borders of the Austrian Empire. Major General Olivier Remigius Count von Wallis served under General Ernst Gideon von Laudon in the Austro-Turkish war of 1787–91, when Belgrade was taken. His grandfather George Wallis had fought near Belgrade exactly one hundred years earlier, in 1690. His father Francis fought alongside Eugene of Savoy and his uncle George Olivier was commander-in-chief during the war of 1737–39. The chapter on soldiers provides fascinating data regarding cooperation between British officers and local Serbs in wars against the Ottomans. According to the testimony of a British soldier about the war of 1735–39, he encouraged Serbs with the words "Heide, Heide", "an animating word used by the Rascians on the commencement of an attack".

It is unfortunate that the publisher did not take the trouble to furnish the book with illustrations because readers would definitely love to be able to see, for example, Sir Godfrey Kneller's painting *General Michael Richards and his brother John Richards with a view of the Battle of Belgrade in 1688*.²

² Kneller was among the most prominent portrait painters of his era. He was court painter from Charles II to George I, and his are also famous portraits of John Locke and Isaac Newton. The painting in question is now in the Slovak National Gallery.

If the chapter about soldiers is predominantly about the eighteenth century, the one devoted to travellers is mostly about the nineteenth century, when travelling through the Ottoman Empire became a little safer. Kostić does not simply retell the accounts of some thirty travellers but tries instead to explain the context of their occurrence against the background of the *Grand Tour* culture when the upper classes considered travelling as a school, a "moving academy".

The author presents numerous anecdotes from the writings of British travellers. For example, one of their most common complaints was that Serbs had too many days when they abstained from meat. On the other hand, Edmund Spenser's writings attest to the importance of folk epic for Serbs. He claims that shepherds from the environs of Mt Kopaonik told him that they were descendants of Miloš Obilić and other medieval Serbian noble families.

Readers interested in imagology will definitely be drawn to the pages that Kostić devotes to the phenomenon which he calls the "rite of crossing", a sort of a rite of passage. Many travellers crossing the river from Zemun to Belgrade had a distinct feeling of leaving one region and entering another. John Harwood describes his feeling before setting off across the river: "It was the first Turkish—the first Oriental city I had ever seen and I could hardly tear myself away from the prospect." In the middle of the nineteenth century another traveller wrote: "Europe and Asia in reality, if not geographically, meet one another here for the first time."

Harwood also gives his impressions about the relationship between British travellers and local Serbs: "Whenever we wanted anything in a Servian house, we ... imperatively demanded the first person we met to get it for us; and I must admit that they always executed our behests with unobtrusive alacrity. In the East, if

you do but usurp authority, the Orientals instantly, and as a matter of course, obey.”

The third chapter of the book is devoted to diplomats and deals with the first part of the nineteenth century. Even though Kostić makes use of some new sources, this chapter does not bring as much as the previous ones in terms of new ideas and new perspectives on the period that the book covers. The fourth and final chapter is about literature. Kostić starts with Dositej Obradović and his connections with Great Britain, but by far the most interesting section is the one about Petar Petrović, the Serbian Orthodox bishop of Timisoara in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Kostić’s analysis of the content of Petrović’s library introduces readers to the intellectual world of an Orthodox bishop whose library contained more than one thousand volumes, including Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man*. As far as is known, he was also the first Serb who had William Shakespeare’s works in his library. Kostić pays attention not only to British influences on Serbs but also to Serbian motifs in British poetry and prose which, consistent with contemporary political developments, were mostly motifs of wars and battles.

Overall, the book reviewed here is a significant contribution to scholarship, especially to historiography on the eighteenth century. What seems to be its only flaw is its title. It is by no means a history of bilateral relations between two countries. It is unclear what Serbia was in, for instance, 1700 or in 1800? Contemporary cartographers did not have a clear answer.³ What adds to the confusion is the author’s statement that he had in mind Serbia in its present-day borders and, therefore, there is no reference to Serbs in Montenegro, Dalmatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, etc. Readers should also be aware that the index, compiled with little care, is imprecise and that some names are missing.

³ E.g., in 1734 the British cartographer Herman Moll drew “A general map of Turkey in Europe” where Serbia, as a historic region, included areas as far south as Skopje. See *Belgrade above the Danube: According to European Cartographic Sources between XVI and XIX Century* (Belgrade City Library, 2008), xlvii, xlvi.

BILGIN ÇELİK, *İTTİHATÇILAR VE ARNAVUTLAR. II. MEŞRUTİYET DÖNEMİNDE ARNAVUT ULUŞÇULUĞU VE ARNAVUTLUK SORUNU* [THE UNIONISTS AND THE ALBANIANS. ALBANIAN NATIONALISM AND THE ALBANIAN QUESTION IN THE SECOND CONSTITUTIONAL PERIOD]. ISTANBUL: BÜKE KİTAPLARI, 2004, 537 p.

Reviewed by Ognjen Krešić*

The author of the book reviewed here, Dr Bilgin Çelik, is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Literature of Dokuz Eylül University in İzmir, Chair in Modern History, and head of the Balkan Region Research Centre. His main area of interest is Ottoman politics during the last

decades of the Empire, and especially the Albanian component in the complexity of Ottoman politics and society.

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