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## David Urquhart's Perceptions of the Eastern Question *The Affairs of Serbia*

**Abstract:** At the beginning of his diplomatic career in Constantinople in 1835, David Urquhart was instrumental in promoting the British cause by endorsing its political grand design and mercantile interests in Turkey, Greece, the Caucasian region, Crimea, Serbia and adjacent Balkan principalities. While observing the complexities of the Eastern Question, Urquhart recognized the underlying importance that Serbia had attained in the context of competing imperial interests in the Balkans. His engaged commentaries on the crucial changes in Serbian political discourse elucidated as well his understanding of Serbian history and culture past and present. Urquhart discerned a correspondence between Serbian political affairs and the inherent situation in the region of the Caucasus and Circassia.

**Keywords:** Eastern Question, Ottoman Empire, Serbia, David Urquhart

The gradual decline of Ottoman dominance compelled once again the European Powers to define their own political and mercantile interests within the Balkans and in the Mediterranean. British politician and writer Benjamin Disraeli, at the outset of his public career, understood the precarious situation in the region that he considered “as the finest of Europe”. Disraeli deplored the fact that precisely this region and its populace became “a prey to civil war, in too many instances excited by foreign powers for their miserable purposes”.<sup>1</sup> The unresolved Eastern Question, dubbed appropriately as an *eternal issue*, remained the European *ordre de jour* as an underlying political reality.<sup>2</sup>

The volatile situation in the Balkans, notably Ottoman Turkey and Greece, and in the Caucasus, brought about repeated visits by the British diplomat David Urquhart to explore these regions. He diligently recorded his observations, devoting much attention to Serbia, its leaders and its his-

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, *Contarini Fleming. A Psychological Romance* (New York: Knopf, 1832), 316–317.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx commented on the reoccurrence of the Eastern Question, defining it as the ubiquitous European *ordre de jour*, and “an eternal issue”. He also discussed the uncertain fate of Turkey. Cf. “David Urquhart by Karl Marx”, compiled by Adolph Cluss from a non-existent letter of November 1853 and first published in the New York newspaper *Die Reform*, 20 November 1853; included in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Russian Menace to Europe* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1953), 121–202.

tory, past and present. Urquhart felt that the heightened awareness of Serbia's rising position was well deserved:

I look upon Serbia, next to Greece, as the most important portion of Turkey in Europe — its political independence, its future and present influence on the masses of Muslims on its western and southern side, and on the masses of Rayas (Christians) on its eastern and southern, its position between Hungary, Austria, Turkey and on the Danube, are the most important considerations combined with the spirit of the people and the riches of the soil.<sup>3</sup>

This article examines Urquhart's perception of the Eastern Question and the ensuing entanglement of Balkan states and Serbia in particular. While observing the complexities of the Eastern Question, Urquhart recognized the underlying importance that Serbia had gained in view of the competing imperial interests in the Balkans. Most of all, he discerned a peculiar correspondence between Serbian political affairs and the inherent situation in the region of Caucasus and Circassia.

At first, Urquhart was drawn to the Greek struggle for independence from Ottoman dominance. Determined to help the insurgents, he sailed with Lord Cochrane to Greece in 1827. He joined the Greek's fighters and was severely wounded in the battle of Salona. He remained in Greece for almost three years while convalescing before returning to England. He recalled his return to England in his book *The Spirit of the East. Travels through Roumeli during an Eventful Period*:

In the early part of 1830 I was in Argo returning to England from Constantinople, after spending nearly 3 years in Greece and Turkey [...] bidding adieu to a land in the destiny of which I have been deeply interested.<sup>4</sup>

All along, Urquhart felt a keen sense of respect for the embattled populace amidst the many glorious vestiges of the historic past. As a former student of Classical Studies, at St. John's College at Oxford, he was familiar with the history of these ancient settlements. His scholarly interest prepared him well for his future political and fact-finding mission in Greece and surrounding principalities serving well the British cause and its govern-

<sup>3</sup> David Urquhart, *A Fragment of the History of Serbia*, Introduction, *Diplomatic Review, Pamphlets by Mr. Urquhart* (London: James Maynard, 1843), iv; cf. also the bilingual Serbian-English edition: *Fragment iz istorije Srbije*, ed. Branislav Vuković (Belgrade: Arhiv Srbije, 1989), 14. Cf. also Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Serbia 1837–1839: The Mission of Colonel Hodges* (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1961), 20–21.

<sup>4</sup> The date of his return to England was inaccurately noted as 1828 in some biographies. Urquhart described his return from Constantinople in the quoted paragraph from his travelogue *The Spirit of the East, Travels through Roumeli during an Eventful Period* (London: Henry Colburn, 1838), vol. 1, 1.

ment. By his own admission, as a young scholar in Oxford, he often traced on the map these distant places with much yearning. He appreciated the opportunity and felt privileged to have visited these locations:

Here am I, at length, in Scodra [Scutari] ... When I look at the map, and run over Argyro, Castro, Delvino, Tepedelene, Berat, Scodra, I can scarcely congratulate myself enough on having visited these spots I have so often traced on the same map with so much longing, but so little hope to visit.<sup>5</sup>

Urquhart continued to offer support to the Greek cause often addressing the British political elite in his writings. His astute understanding of issues in the embattled region ensured him an appointment to Sir Stratford Canning's mission. In 1831 he sailed again to Constantinople, this time to resume his post on the mission addressing the disputed border between Greece and Ottomans. In the process of evaluating both sides of the issue, Urquhart distinguished himself by helping to secure a workable settlement.

Gradually, while negotiating with Ottoman officials, Urquhart became interested in Ottoman civilization and culture. He also became aware of Turkey's strategic position as a potential barrier against rising Russian colonial aspirations in the Black Sea, the Crimea and the Caucasus.

The British political elite objected to any extended Russian interference in the contested area. They feared that such a move could threaten the waterways of the eastern Mediterranean by controlling the sea route from the Black Sea. Britain aimed to keep the nominal rule of the so-called *Sick Man on the Bosphorus* as long as possible. Urquhart's own campaign, intended also to protect British mercantile interests, ultimately resulted in his appointment to a trade mission in 1833. Prior to his departure for Greece, he managed to finish the writing of, and prepare for publication, *Turkey and its Resources*.<sup>6</sup>

Urquhart's keen understanding of the key issues in the region led to his appointment to the position of Secretary of the British Embassy in Constantinople in 1835. Before leaving for the new post, he founded the *The Portfolio or a Collection of State Papers Etc.*, a periodical published in London. The first issue attracted attention by a selection of Russian state papers pertaining to the situation in Europe in 1820–1830. *The Portfolio* included other writings with an exceptional range of discussed issues. *The*

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<sup>5</sup> *The Spirit of the East* (digital version), entry of 24 December 1830.

<sup>6</sup> David Urquhart, *Turkey and its Resources: Its Municipal Organization and Free Trade, The State of Commerce in the East* (London: Saunders and Otlay, 1833).

*Portfolio* planned to publish papers that would be “*illustrative of the history of our times*”.<sup>7</sup>

On his repeated travels to Greece and Turkey Urquhart visited Serbia on four different occasions.<sup>8</sup> His visit to Serbia was prompted by his general interest in the manifest presence of Serbia, as a Slavic nation, pitted against the bordering Empires. He declared himself his set objectives:

The exposition of the condition of Slavonic population subject to Prussia, Austria, and Turkey amounting to above twenty million souls, has been one of the principle objects which we proposed to ourselves.<sup>9</sup>

In April 1833 Urquhart visited Serbia for the second time and had several opportunities to meet and talk with Prince Miloš Obrenović. He took note of Prince Miloš's comments on the current situation in Serbia and the lack of needed support from the enlightened, constitutional nations of Europe. Urquhart came to agree with the Prince's statement since he believed that the Principality of Serbia had a unique and important position in Southeastern Europe and deserved due consideration.

On his fourth visit to Belgrade, in May 1837, Urquhart conferred again with leading Serbian politicians and dignitaries. He travelled to Belgrade to attend the accreditation of the first British Consul Lloyd George Hodges to the Obrenović court. He also met with Princess Anka Obrenović, the daughter of Jevrem Obrenović and niece of Prince Miloš. Princess Anka was interested in public affairs and decided to watch the ceremonial arrival of Consul Hodges from a window in her sister's house. Later, Urquhart was introduced to the young Princess by Antun Mihanović, the Austrian Consul in Belgrade. Mihanović, a Croat by birth, was a frequent visitor in her parents' house and had an occasional opportunity to talk with her. She left a brief account of Urquhart's visit of 17 May 1837, describing him as a highly intelligent and fascinating man. She recounted the animated

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<sup>7</sup> *The Portfolio or a Collection of State Papers, Etc. Illustrative of the History of Our Times*, vol. 1 (London: James Ridgway & Sons, Piccadilly, 1836).

<sup>8</sup> Milorad Ekmečić, *Dijalog prošlosti i sadašnjosti* (Belgrade: Službeni list SRJ, 2002) points out Urquhart's visit in 1832, listing among other sources a letter that Urquhart wrote to his mother from Zemun (Semlin), and he also notes Urquhart's visit in 1833. However, Urquhart also made a visit in 1834 and, on Prince Miloš's request, met with the statesman Dimitrije Davidović to discuss implementation of law reforms in Serbia: cf. Radoš Ljušić, *Kneževina Srbija 1830–1839* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2004), 378. Urquhart was back in Serbia in 1837, and attended the accreditation of the British Consul Lloyd Hodges to the court of Miloš Obrenović. Cf. Nataša Mišković, “Između seljačkog porekla i statusa princeze: Iz dnevnika mlade Anke Obrenović”, *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju* 3/1–2 (1997), 72–83.

<sup>9</sup> *The Portfolio*, vol. 1, 498.

conversation during Urquhart's visit in her *Diary*, and regretted that she had to interrupt the conversation to join the family at dinner. To her mind, a meeting with such an enlightened man was much more important than a dinner at her sister Simka's house.

She mentioned that Urquhart had adopted the "Turkish ways" that were noticed and talked about in the social circles she frequented. It is not clear whether her remark referred to Urquhart's attire or his general demeanor. At the time, Urquhart was the Secretary at the British Embassy in Constantinople.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly enough Urquhart's preference for the Ottoman style attire was criticized in the British daily *Morning Chronicle* of 16 January 1943: "Mr. Urquhart clothed like a fashionable Frontispiece in the Ottoman garb of Daoud Pasha. It is lamentable to see how Vanity and Self Absorption, a Man of Some Ability so benumbed."<sup>11</sup>

Yet Urquhart continued to wear his Ottoman clothing ignoring adverse comments of his chosen style. According to his own admission, he preferred the style of Muslim attires while serving as a British representative in Constantinople. He claimed that this change of clothing enabled him an easier communication with the local people and authorities alike.

In 1843, at the outset of the New Series of *The Portfolio*, Urquhart proudly ascertained that his journal had attained recognition not only in England but also abroad, eventually resulting in the publication of *The Portfolio* in France.<sup>12</sup>

Urquhart included four articles dedicated to Serbian public affairs in the first issue of the New Series. He decided that the opinions of Serbian leaders should be heard to explicate the situation in their country and their prerogatives. Accordingly, he was instrumental in publishing *Projet de Memoire of the Serbian Government*. He commented on the importance of this memorandum stating that it was primarily addressed to the British King and his Court: "Such are the views which Serbia addresses to the Government of your Majesty.—Such is the principal object of the present memoir" (pp. 71–77).

<sup>10</sup> Anka Konstantinović née Obrenović (1821–1868) was the eldest daughter of Jevrem Obrenović, Prince Miloš's brother. He treated her like a son, allowing her greater liberties than usually allowed to daughters. Her "Diary" is kept in the Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, no. 14147. Cf. Mišković, "Između seljačkog porekla i statusa princeze".

<sup>11</sup> Quoted after *The Portfolio*, New Series vol. 1 (London: James Maynard, 1843), 380.

<sup>12</sup> Introduction, *The Portfolio / Le Portfolio, Collection de Documents Politiques*, New Series vol. 1 (Paris and London: Maynard, 1843).

This unique memorandum provided a concise record of the political crisis in Serbia starting in August 1842 and continuing until March 1843. The change of ruling dynasties introduced a decisive modification in many areas of political and public affairs. The election of Prince Alexander, the heir of Karadjordjević dynasty, prompted increased attention to the principality of Serbia. According to Urquhart, the *Projet de Memoir* ascertained the political orientation towards Turkey being the supreme ruler of the region. Russia was mentioned as the *nominal Protective Power*, suggesting that Russia did not provide promised benevolent protection to the Slavic population under Ottoman rule.

Furthermore, Urquhart stated that Serbian people were cognizant of the intrinsic situation in Serbia observed in a historical perspective. In conclusion, Urquhart commented again on the importance of Turkey as the ultimate ruler in the Balkans:

Serbian people have learnt [...] that the sovereignty of Turkey, far from endangering its liberties [...] can on the contrary alone shelter it against these influences, which have already caused it more than one shock, and threaten to bring upon it the greatest evil.<sup>13</sup>

Urquhart was aware that Prince Miloš Obrenović's despotic rule disregarded the necessity of governmental reforms as well as constitutional rights of the people at large. He pointed out that the failing policies of Prince Michael (Mihailo), heir and successor to the Obrenović throne, were declared to be antinational. Prince Michael and his government followed mistaken advice, in particular in foreign affairs, leading to dangerous ineptitude. It appeared that they were seduced by hopes of aggrandizement that resulted in a revolt against the Sultan. Urquhart declared that this decision proved to be erroneous. Therefore, Urquhart expressed again his affirmation of the Sublime Porte as the supreme ruler of the region.

All along, Urquhart criticized the professed Russian imperial policies perceived as harmful to the Serbian people. He claimed that the ensuing state of affairs required Serbia to summon all her energy to extricate herself from the Russian influence under the guise of the Protective Power. Urquhart apparently chose to disregard the Russophile inclination of long standing as well as the rising Pan-Slavic penchant among the Serbian people at large.<sup>14</sup>

While describing the political crisis in Serbia in 1842, Urquhart duly noted that a veritable mass movement came into existence supporting the

<sup>13</sup> *The Portfolio / Le Portfolio*, New Series vol. 1, 71–76.

<sup>14</sup> Jelena Milojković-Djurić, *Panslavism and National Identity in Russia and the Balkans 1830–1880: Images of the Self and Others* (Boulder and New York: East European Monographs, 1994), 8–53.



implementation of a liberal Constitution and a number of modern state institutions. The struggle was led by the Constitutionals (*Ustavobranitelji*) acclaimed as the Defenders of the Constitution. One of their renowned members, Ilija Garašanin, advocated a modern system of government by means of reforms carried out in an administrative manner. Garašanin, an astute politician, also proposed measures for strengthening the state by introducing an open-minded and progressive orientation in Serbian foreign affairs.<sup>15</sup>

Apparently, Prince Alexander Karadjordjević shared all these concerns and convictions of the Serbian people. He possessed moderate inclinations embracing national and peaceful tendencies. His objectives were “to attach himself unreservedly to the Ottoman sovereignty and reciprocal conventions concluded between the Porte and Serbia.” In essence, the Serbian people remained under Ottoman rule while preserving independence in internal affairs.<sup>16</sup>

The good offices of the incumbent British ambassador in Constantinople were recognized with gratitude. Moreover, the British government was urged to appoint a political agent to provide advice and support to the Serbian people and the new government of Prince Alexander. Historian Milorad Ekmečić argued that the *Projet de Memoir*, in spite of its brevity, had far-reaching consequences and ought to be considered as the first version of the famed *Načertanije* (Draft). Ultimately the *Načertanije* presented the national and political program of the newly established Serbian government formally compiled by the statesman Ilija Garašanin. Moreover, Ekmečić suggests that the essential ideas presented in *Načertanije* were in reality dictated by the interests of the Great Powers considering the contested region of the Balkans.<sup>17</sup>

Urquhart followed closely the evolving political situation, conferring at time with politicians in Serbia and providing his own assessment of the inherent political orientation. Relying closely on the ideas encapsulated in the *Projet de Memoir*, he provided a lengthy analysis of the diplomatic proceedings following the election of Prince Alexander in September 1842. Urquhart sought to justify the legality of Prince Alexander's election to counteract concerted efforts to the contrary. His chronicle of these historic events had a lengthy self-explanatory title, *Narrative of*

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<sup>15</sup> Dušan T. Bataković, “Ilija Garašanin's Načertanie: A Reassessment”, *Balkanica* XXII (1994), 157–183.

<sup>16</sup> *The Portfolio / Le Portfolio*, New Series vol. 1, 71–76.

<sup>17</sup> Ekmečić, *Dijalog prošlosti i sadašnjosti*, 128–135. Cf. also Milorad Ekmečić, “Evropska pozadina Načertanija Ilije Garašanina”, in *Garašanin. Susreti i vidjenja*, eds. Z. Konstantinović and S. Pavićević (Kragujevac: Jefimija, 2002), 265–273.

*Events in Serbia from the Election of Prince Alexander in September 1842, to his Re-election in July 1843*. He commented favorably on the newly-charted political course in Serbia. He fully agreed that it was important to keep Serbia within the protective realm of the Ottoman Empire. Urquhart's *Narrative* was published in the same issue of *The Portfolio* that brought the *Projet de Memoir*.<sup>18</sup>

Urquhart described in great detail the change of the ruling dynasty in Serbia. The deposed Obrenović dynasty chose to leave the country. Subsequently, Prince Alexander, heir of the Karadjordjević dynasty, was summoned to rule the Principality of Serbia. In addition, the unresolved Eastern Question was rightfully perceived as a causative and dangerous political reality.<sup>19</sup>

Urquhart criticized the duplicity of the alleged contested legality of ascension to the vacant throne by Prince Alexander, the heir of the Karadjordjević dynasty. True to his Russophobe attitude, he provided arguments pointing to the misguided efforts of Russian officials to declare the election illegal. The Russian tenuous accusation reverberated not only in Serbia but throughout Europe since it endangered the political discourse by questioning ultimately the judicial justice and integrity of law:

Since in this period efforts have been made to apply the term "illegal" to this election, and this attempt has given great importance to the event, not for Serbia only but for Europe, — not as affecting only political objects and interests of its various Government, but as bearing on the public law of nations and the sense of rectitude and justice in all men.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, Urquhart asserted that Russia had declared her indignation and her wrath against Serbia and against the Sublime Porte in all courts of Europe. Russia also tried to influence Prince Metternich with "the double fear of a Russian army appearing before Belgrade." Urquhart quoted a statesman from Vienna who, fearing the proximity of the Russian army, stated that: "Austria cannot expose herself to allow another Caucasus to be created at her frontier!"<sup>21</sup>

In actuality, the Prince had been rightfully and legally elected to the ruling position already in September of 1842 by the Serbian Assembly. Urquhart was aware of the legality of the election upholding the rule of lawful governance. He recorded with satisfaction the re-election of the

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<sup>18</sup> "Narrative of Events in Serbia from the Election of Prince Alexander in September 1842, to his Re-election in July 1843", *The Portfolio*, New Series vol. 1 (1843), 77–111.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 77.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 77–78.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 89.



Prince by the unanimous consent of the Serbian Assembly. The election was reported in the *Augsburg Gazette* of 12 July 1843, and described as a peaceful conclusion of recent upheavals. Urquhart quoted this report and noticed that it mentioned the presence of Russian officials at the election in Belgrade: "It is indeed a repetition of the election of September last, with the difference of taking place in the presence of two Russian commissioners, Baron Lieven and M. Wastchenko."<sup>22</sup>

Again Urquhart highlighted the good offices of the Ottoman governance gradually allowing independence of Serbia's internal affairs. According to four hatt-i sheriffs (of 1829, 1830, 1833 and 1838), the Sultan recognized Serbia as a self-governing principality under the elected hereditary dynasty. Moreover, since there existed some misgiving about the legality of Prince Alexander's newly-attained position, a second election was contemplated and it took place in July 1843.<sup>23</sup>

Urquhart commented on the ongoing implementation of the projected political course expressed in *The Projet de Memoir*, as stipulated by the Serbian leaders. He singled out the following statement:

It is our first duty to prevent the bonds that attach us de jure to the Sultan from being the means of subjugating us de facto to Russia. It is not from the strength of Turkey that we have to fear, it is from her weakness that we have to apprehend.<sup>24</sup>

Urquhart appreciated the desire of Serbian leaders to safeguard their hard-won sovereignty. He trusted the good judgment of the Serbian people at large since they were "fully able to distinguish their friends from foes." Urquhart was equally aware of Russian long-standing interests in the Balkans and Serbia in particular. Thus, he was both surprised and delighted to observe the forthright resentment against any Russian or any other foreign interference in Serbian internal and foreign affairs.<sup>25</sup> Equally, he noticed that Serbian politicians did not necessarily accept as feasible all Russian plans and perspectives, a move that Urquhart perceived as prudent and wise.

Urquhart had long felt that only few published books and reliable sources presented the events that influenced the making of Serbia as a nation throughout historic times. Thus, he summed up his own reflections in

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<sup>22</sup> Urquhart, Introduction, *A Fragment of the History of Servia*, xi.

<sup>23</sup> Radoš Ljušić, "Ilija Garašanin o srpskoj državnosti", in *Garašanin. Susreti i vidjenja*, 69–72.

<sup>24</sup> Urquhart, Introduction, *A Fragment of the History of Servia*, vi.

<sup>25</sup> Urquhart, "Narrative of Events", 77–111.

a succinct exposé titled “The Affairs of Serbia”.<sup>26</sup> Although he thought that his explanation would not amount to an extensive discussion of major historical events, he assured the readers that it would provide reliable facts:

So few sources of information respecting Serbia are generally accessible, and the interest involved in the question of her independence from foreign interferences are so complicated and momentous, that we shall offer no apology for presenting our readers with a succinct account of her present position and her recent history; promising that our sketch, if rude, shall be characteristic, and that if imperfect, it shall not be materially erroneous.<sup>27</sup>

Urquhart starts his historical overview with his unique perception of the distinctive character of Serbian people. The inhabitants of Serbia appear to have inherited a spirit of loyalty to their ancestral lands relying on themselves while not actively seeking foreign assistance.<sup>28</sup> Urquhart observed that the Serbs seemingly possessed a singular spirit of patriotism more related to the classical paradigm than to the modern age.<sup>29</sup>

He found the question of Serbia’s independence from foreign interference to be very intricate. Urquhart proceeded with a brief geographic as well as demographic account of Serbia and its people. He noted that the main chain of high mountains and thick woods provided a formidable impediment for an invading army. As a shrewd observer of economic and trade potentials and well versed in maritime affairs, Urquhart saw another advantage of this natural resource. He reasoned that the extensive oak forests throughout Serbia could produce excellent timber for shipbuilding that any country with naval tradition, including Britain, would appreciate. Thus, Serbia was largely indebted to her forests for potential wealth as well as security. Urquhart commented on the strategic position of the Morava valley which intersects the mountainous surface of Serbia. He estimated that with a population consisting more than one million.

Urquhart gave a brief outline of historical events starting with the arrival of the Slavs on the European scene and the gradual formation of the

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<sup>26</sup> “The Affairs of Serbia” was published in *The British and Foreign Review* XVI (London 1844). In a short preface of sorts to this article, Urquhart cited Leopold Ranke’s book *Die Serbische Revolution* and Amie Boué’s *La Turquie d’Europe*. He also quoted several treaties, debates and hatt-i sherifs presented in the House of Commons. He probably wanted to provide the bibliographical sources pertaining to Serbia that he valued.

<sup>27</sup> Urquhart, “The Affairs of Serbia”, 77.

<sup>28</sup> It is noteworthy that Milorad Ekmečić (*Dijalog prošlosti i sadašnjosti*) commented on the importance of “The Affairs of Serbia” and included a portion of it pertaining to some crucial arguments, bringing the selected excerpts both in the original English version and in a Serbian translation (pp. 128–135).

<sup>29</sup> Urquhart, “The Affairs of Serbia”, 77.

first Slavic states on the Balkan Peninsula. Singled out among the Serbian rulers was Stefan Dušan, who had assumed the title of Emperor of all Serbs and Greeks. After Emperor Dušan's sudden death in 1355, frequent Ottoman invasions led to the decisive Battle of Kosovo in 1389. Although the leaders of both armies died, the Ottoman forces eventually achieved victory and soon entered into a close feudal alliance with the Serbian rulers. The demise of Serbian statehood brought a marked change in the lives of the Slavic populace deprived of native leadership and representation gradually reduced Serbia to an Ottoman province. By and large, the Porte respected individual property and religious and secular customs. The Muslim rulers established their residences almost exclusively in towns, while the countryside remained the domicile of the people at large. Urquhart commented as well on the scarcity of schools and educated teachers that resulted in a low literacy rate and lack of education in general. Under these circumstances, the Serbian people continued to respect the traditional ways of their forefathers. Epic bards, *guslari*, became historians, perpetuating the oral renditions of historical events. The lyrical and epic songs and stories preserved metaphorically traditional moral and ethical values.

Urquhart closed his outline of Serbian history with a well-chosen metaphor comparing the imminent growth of all Slavic nations, and Serbia in particular, to a proverbial oak tree. His sympathetic tribute to Serbian people acknowledged their exemplary achievements:

We now bid Adieu to the Serbians [...] Let them remember that the tree of liberty is of slow growth; but like their native oak, once rooted in a favorable soil, it derives fresh vigour from the storm that agitates its branches [...] They stand at the head of all nations of Slavonian origin, for they possess freedom, without which intellectual development is impossible [...] their example cannot fail to exercise the most powerful influence: their steadfastness may rescue from debasement one of the noblest races of mankind.<sup>30</sup>

From the start of his political career Urquhart aimed to consolidate British political and commercial interests. During his term as the secretary of the British Embassy in Constantinople, he believed it important to inform the public at large and summon support against the Russian colonial designs in the Balkans as well as in the Caucasus. He was concerned that the British regional interests would be held in check by the proximity of the competing Russian presence.

The outspoken tenor of his commentaries on Russian affairs was in time perceived as inflammatory by the British Secretary of foreign affairs, Lord Palmerston. Urquhart's unfavorable view of Russian foreign policy

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted after Ekmečić, *Dijalog prošlosti i sadašnjosti*, 134–135.

threatened the diplomatic negotiations, potentially leading to an unwanted international crisis. Moreover, Urquhart published his views in an openly anti-Russian pamphlet, *England and Russia: being a fifth Edition of England, France, Russia and Turkey*.<sup>31</sup> His highly critical position resulted in his being recalled from the British Embassy in Constantinople in 1837.

Urquhart was not alone in embracing a Russophobic attitude. Informed politicians as well as British writers such as, among others, Disraeli, Byron and Shelley, argued against any Great Power involvement in the Greek cause. Shelley's well-known poem *Hellas* expressed mistrust of all covert colonial aspirations of Austria, Russia or England. Shelley rightfully perceived that such interventions should be abolished since: "This is the age of the war of the oppressed against the oppressor."<sup>32</sup> Byron was equally outspoken in this respect and even considered Orthodox Christian Russians no different from Muslims. Byron believed that only Greeks should fight to free Greece. He thought that Greece would be better off under the Muslims than under the Russians:

But this is well: Greeks only should free Greece  
Not the barbarian, with his mask of peace  
Better still serve the haughty Mussulman,  
Than swell the Cossaque's prowling caravan;  
Better still toil for masters than await,  
The slave of slaves before a Russian gate.<sup>33</sup>

Urquhart's views as well as those of a number of well-known British intellectuals presented largely a response to the colonial advancements of the Russian Empire in the Balkans and the Caucasus of long standing. Russia's appropriation of the Crimea in 1783 was perceived as a strategic territorial expansion of major significance. Such a move aimed also to appropriate the historic Taurus of Greek antiquity. Catherine the Great and her generals, beside strategic considerations, entertained the idea of transforming the native landscape, rich with rare herbs and plants, into a proverbial Garden of Eden.<sup>34</sup> Yet there were many unsettling questions in

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<sup>31</sup> David Urquhart, *England and Russia: being a fifth Edition of England, France, Russia and Turkey, revised and enlarged* (London: James Ridgway & Sons, 1835), 4.

<sup>32</sup> Percy Shelley, Preface to *Hellas*, *Poetical Works*, ed. T. Hutchison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 448. Cf. also, H. Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain. A Study of the Interaction of Policy and Opinion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 173–177.

<sup>33</sup> George Gordon Byron, *The Age of Bronze*, in *Poetical Works of Lord Byron* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 169–178.

<sup>34</sup> Andreas Schoenle, "Garden of the Empire: Catherine's Appropriation of the Crimea", *Slavic Review* 60/1 (2001), 1–4.

this artificial paradise. The indigenous Caucasian population, including Chechens, Kabardians and Circassians, was hard to subdue and maintain even a tenuous collaboration. Most of all there was a growing hostility and ongoing sporadic confrontations between Russian military and civilian authorities with the independent chieftains resisting Russian encroachment. Mutual relations projected uncertainties and shifting loyalties with Turkey, Iran and Russia. Urquhart left a vivid recollection of his first encounter with Circassians:

I did land on that shore unarmed and alone . . . and within four-and-twenty hours did I find myself seated on the summit of a knoll, the Kuban running at my feet, and before me rolled out the interminable vistas of the plains of Muscovy, traced with Kalmyk lines, and dotted with Cossack plucks braves, while around me were assembled . . . Then it was that the involuntary oracle burst from my lips, "You are no longer tribes, but a people; you are Circassians, and this is Circassia".

He decided to advance the unity of all Circassian people by providing a recognizable symbol of their identity. He designed a national flag as the emblem of their unity. The same flag continues to be honored and used in Circassia even today. Urquhart described the concept of his design in an inspired manner:

From the naked necessities of the moment, therefore, was the colour to be derived . . . Green, the colour that robes their mountains, and that indicates the faith of Mecca, was that which I chose. On it, I placed a bundle of arrows, their peculiar arms and a crown of stars, that in the nightly bivouac they might associate their freedom...<sup>35</sup>

Urquhart was also aware of the geographic importance of Circassia "as a barrier to mighty conquests — a veritable rampart against Russia". He believed that Serbia held a similar strategic position. In the Introduction to his lengthy treatise, *A Fragment of the History of Serbia*, Urquhart acknowledged the strategic position of Serbia as well as its people.

Urquhart perceived certain similarities between the indigenous Circassian population and the Serbian people as open to consideration. Both the Serbs and the Circassians preferred independence and objected to any interference in their respective internal affairs. Their innate geopolitical position presented a veritable rampart against foreign invasion, including Russian colonial design. Urquhart perceived that the respective lifestyle of both Serbs and Circassians was conducted in harmony with

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<sup>35</sup> Speech titled "The Flag of Circassia" was delivered by David Urquhart on 23 May 1838 to the Commercial Community in Glasgow. It was published in London by the Circassian Committee in 1863 as a single-sided leaflet and is in the possession of the British Museum since 1882.

their natural environment. He also considered the respectful traditional ways of both Serbs and Circassians to be pure and unspoiled by harmful western influences.

Urquhart described Circassia “as the land of primeval mythology, the land of beauty and the Golden Fleece attracting again the eyes of the West”.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, he did not detect any hostility toward Circassians while he visited Turkey. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that there existed a voluntary connection among several Circassian chieftains who expressed the oath of allegiance to the Sultan.

Urquhart also noted an affinity in interpersonal relations between Serbs and Circassians. He formed this assumption in Serbia during the unsettling situation after the election of Prince Alexander in September 1843. At the time, the highest Ottoman administrator in Belgrade was Hafiz Pasha, a Circassian by birth. In his conversation with Serbian officials, Urquhart noted an approval of Hafiz Pasha’s comportment. Further conversation verified his supposition and he was told that although Hafiz Pasha was a Ottoman official he was a native Circassian and therefore was favorably inclined towards the Serbian cause. Hafiz Pasha obviously discerned a resemblance with the Circassian position in Caucasia pitted against powerful empires. He understood well the underlying situation of Serbia within the domain of powerful neighboring states.<sup>37</sup>

Later, remembering his experiences both in Serbia and Circassia, Urquhart considered writing a book titled “Serbia, the Circassia of the West”, which would have included an “Outline of the Character and Position of the Slavonian Population in Europe”. He planned to present his observations on perceived affinities and ostensible similarities between these two regions and their inhabitants.<sup>38</sup>

While Serbia unlike Circassia or Greece really dwells in Europe, Europe comprehends it still less than those name, so much used and so little understood. Serbia was a great and powerful kingdom when Muscovy was composed of distracted provinces and Poland was yet unuttered name. She now stands pre-eminent among the Sarmatian race unincorporated with the

<sup>36</sup> *The Portfolio*, New Series vol. II (London: James Maynard, 1843), Section 13, 351.

<sup>37</sup> Ljušić, *Kneževina Srbija*, 377.

<sup>38</sup> The planned book, *Serbia, the Circassia of the West*, was announced in *The Portfolio* 24 (1844), 294. It seems that this book was never completed or was published in a small numbers of copies. Cf. also, Ekmečić, *Dijalog prošlosti i sadašnjosti*, 102; and Slobodan G. Markovich, *British Perceptions of Serbia and the Balkans 1903–1906* (Paris: Dialogue, 2000), 14. Markovich concurs as well with the view that the *Fragment of the History of Serbia* apparently is the preserved part of Urquhart’s book *Serbia the Circassia of the West*.



Russian Empire. She is the centre of Slav resistance to Muscovite despotism and presents to Europe its chief security against Russian ambitions.<sup>39</sup>

In time, his persistent campaign against fallacies of Russian colonial aspirations became a *cause célèbre*. A number of Urquhart's contemporaries declared him a strange figure with only one cause in his life. Karl Marx summed up these opinions:

... his campaign against Russia, which he conducts with monomaniacal acumen and a great deal of expert knowledge, none of this does any harm. The knight with *one* cause in life is bound once more to be "the noble knight of the woeful countenance".<sup>40</sup>

In reality, Urquhart supported many causes during his lifetime. As a young man he fought valiantly with the Greek fighters for independence from Ottoman rule. At the outset of his diplomatic career in Constantinople he was instrumental in providing the British government with significant intelligence. His prolific writings testified to his strong desire to promote the British cause endorsing its political grand design and mercantile interests in Turkey, the Caucasian region, Serbia and adjacent Balkan principalities. Urquhart advanced in particular his understanding of Serbian history and culture in his many extensive writings. His engaged commentaries on the crucial changes in the political discourse of the Great Powers pointed as well to the inherent intricacies of the Eastern Question.

Urquhart valued opportunities to explore the concealed beauty of ancient vestiges of civilization. By the same token, he was engaged in a meaningful exchange of ideas with contemporaries, in many walks of life, appreciative of the offered hospitality.<sup>41</sup> He skillfully provided a passing look of the environment, habitation, customary ways while cognizant of the lot of people inhabiting the contested regions that retained considerable geopolitical importance. For the most part Urquhart appreciated the rising political importance of Serbia and wrote a number of articles pertaining to Serbia's history past and present. He advanced as well the idea of Circassian nationhood and political independence. He was fully aware of the shared historical experiences of the people in contested regions bordering the Ottoman Empire, as well as the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires.

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<sup>39</sup> Urquhart, *A Fragment of the History of Serbia*, iv.

<sup>40</sup> *David Urquhart by Karl Marx*.

<sup>41</sup> Urquhart even provided architectural sketches of a typical dwelling admiring the façade and the airy and uncluttered interior space. Cf. *The Spirit of the East*. His travelogue was well received and translated into German: *Der Geist des Orients* (Stuttgart and Tübingen: Gotta'sche Buchhandlung, 1839).

Urquhart appreciated the cultural diversity of the world he knew and the people he met on his eventful travels crossing Serbia and the bordering Balkan principalities, Turkey, Greece and the regions of Caucasus. He wrote studies of lasting significance related to the spirit of the East, as well as to the spirit of the West of his time.

UDC 327(42:560)"18"  
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341.78:929]Urquhart

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