

CROATIAN ART AND LITERATURE IN THE ENGLISH 19th CENTURY TRAVEL BOOKS ABOUT DALMATIA *

IVO MARDEŠIĆ
Filozofski fakultet u Zadru
Faculty of Philosophy in Zadar

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As early as the Middle Ages some British people were travelling along the Dalmatian coast, most of them on their way to the Holy Land where they were participating in the Crusades. Their interest varied from century to century. In the Middle Ages they used to visit the holy places and shrines, but from the 17th century onwards another kind of interest can be followed (architectural monuments, nature, natural resources). In the 19th century new trends in the English political and scientific life prompted new explorations. The travel writers of the 19th century recognize the value of the monuments and literature in Dalmatia but express at the same time, their disbelief in the capability and possibility of the autochthonous Dalmatian population to be authors of such works of art. Therefore their works (Wilkinson, Paton, Jackson) are a kind of autobiography and at the same time tell a lot about the official policy of their country towards small nations and their culture, and show a kind of opposition towards their national and cultural independence. As many of the travel accounts were financed and prompted by important British institutions they obviously had a great influence on the opinion and stance of their members, which can be followed up to the present day.

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The part of the Croatian coast called Dalmatia (the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea), its favourable geographical position, its famous architectural monuments and other works of art, its towns and people living in and near them, has always attracted the interest of English travellers. It can be traced back to as early as the twelfth century, when the first contacts between the English and the Croats resulted in some important scientific works. Throughout the Middle Ages Dalmatia was *en route* to the Holy Land where, not always for purely religious reasons, a great number of English travellers were heading, some of whom were active in the Crusades. Their accounts describing the stay in the Dalmatian towns abound sometimes not only with details of the descriptions of churches, holy places and shrines, but also with information pertaining to military fortifications, garrisons etc. Some of the visitors of Dalmatian towns (Dalmatia was one of the three constituent parts of the kingdom of Croatia) were people of great renown who often played an important role in English public and political life. The English king Richard the Lionheart, having experienced a shipwreck along the coast of Dalmatia, is reported to have donated a large amount of money to build the cathedral in Dubrovnik, as sign of gratitude to God for saving his life. An English prince, the future king Henry IV, visited Dalmatian towns on his return from the Holy Land. The accounts left by these and other travellers are short and restricted to only one or two aspects of the land. The authors are very much preoccupied with the problem of remaining alive in the hostile world, but do not miss the opportunity to show curiositis and express marvels at what they have seen. This kind of travel writings has been called recently "survival literature" and lasted well into the period of the Renaissance. But in the second half of the 17th century traces of scientific interest became apparent, as a result of the general state of the 17th century mind. This spirit saw a great development in the 18th century. Some valuable information about Dalmatia was printed in the famous *Philosophical Transactions* published by the Royal Society. In the 18th century other intentions and interests of the travellers can be followed. One can see the so called "statistical approach" which meant primarily a kind of inquiry into the material state of the country, in the case of Dalmatia its historical monuments, with special reference to the classical or Roman origin. This can be easily understood if the general "classicist" spirit of the age is borne in mind, the spirit that permeated literature and art in general in the second half of the 18th century. Consequently, the famous Diocletian Palace in Split, visited by the Scottish architect Robert Adam, was the subject of the celebrated book *Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor*

Diocletian at Spalatro in Dalmatia. It became soon one of the most famous books on the history of architecture in Great Britain and exercised a great architectural influence on designing public buildings in several British cities, notably Edinburgh and London.

The next sort of travel books showed a profound interest in nature and natural phenomena, natural resources, the beauties of nature and landscape. Of course this is again related, especially in later stages, with the general romantic sensibility pervading the time of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries.

This has been just a sort of introduction to the travel books about Dalmatia in the 19th century, the topic of this paper. An enlarged interest in this part of the world was related to the political situation in Europe when, owing to some events in the Austrian, later the Austro-Hungarian empire, two European powers, Great Britain and France, started to be interested in it. It is surprising to see numerous and voluminous English travel writings about Dalmatia, and they are all a happy union of the earlier and later type of travel books written about Dalmatia. The large and imposing number of writings is striking and arouses wonder at such an interest of eminent British men, primarily scientists in this country. In addition to the topics described in earlier books the new elements felt in the 19th century are the impact of natural history and global science, the interest that was manifested in geographical and geological explorations by the travellers, their writings often assuming the form of a report to learned societies, political bodies or individuals who, for various reasons, were interested in them or financed the journeys and accompanying explorations.

In the discussions of travel books there are several aspects to be considered, which in my opinion can be put into three groups.

Firstly, to what extent a travel book can have literary qualities and whether it can be taken as a work worthy of a literary approach. It is stressed in some theories of literature that a travel book is also a work of art, or at least that particular passages can stand on the verge of literature. Excepting some passages the 19th century English travel books about Dalmatia do not excel in this respect, although some parts are not devoid of poetic descriptions of the landscape and even of some works of architecture and painting. Taken all together, except in one instance, most of the writings do not pass the border of an accurate description of the objects seen.

Secondly, the problem of educational, professional and ideological background of the travel writer is of greatest importance in reading a travel

book. It is no exaggeration to say that every travel book becomes a sort of autobiography.

Therefore, in reading such a work it is often more important what is implied than what is openly stated and a sort of deconstruction of some parts will show the implied ideological and ideational mind. Both of these two elements will be shown later.

Thirdly, the importance of the travel book for the people and country visited can be of major interest. Travel writing is often a source of valuable information on many aspects of life of the country, especially if one keeps in mind that, owing to various conditions and frequent war conflicts, records were lost, monuments destroyed, costumes and folk dresses and national costumes abandoned. Such data collected and recorded by the traveller are, therefore, of great historical significance as well, because they give insight into some aspects of the country's past. But one should be on guard if the travel book is to be taken as a historical document, because the choice of events described by the traveller, his experience of them and omission of facts that he thinks are unnecessary or adding those he thinks are important are again closely connected with the standpoint of the writer, his intended reading public or audience and the origin and purpose of the task assigned. Taking travel writing as a reliable source of information can be perilous for the historical truth since the author, in order to support and justify his ideological standpoint, sometimes twists the reality and can modify the display of events to the extent that would prove his point. Besides the ideological standpoint and social position of the writer of decisive importance is the person of the interlocutor, or the "travelee", who often, from his own ideological standpoint about politics and culture distorts truth and gives such information as to promote his own ideas. This is what has been called the opposition between "autoethnography" and "ethnography" which sometimes caused a distorted truth to appear in the English travel books about Dalmatia in the 19th century.

The treatment of Croatian art, literature and culture in Dalmatia by the British travellers of the 19th century is naturally influenced by the elements listed above. The number of written and published works is large and for the sake of convenience three travel books will be considered: J. Gardner Wilkinson, *Dalmatia and Montenegro*, I&II, London 1848; A. A. Paton, *Researches on the Danube and the Adriatic*, I&II, Leipzig 1861; T. G. Jackson, *Dalmatia, the Quarnero and Istria*, Vol. I, II&III, Oxford 1887.

Each of the three writers shows predominantly a different interest. Wilkinson was more interested in economic conditions of Dalmatia and its natural resources, Paton more in literature, culture and society, and Jackson

in architectural monuments and other works of art. But regardless of their subject of description and problem discussed, they all have one main feature in common, although to different degrees. They look at the country they explore with the "imperial eye" (the term is not my invention) and they talk about various phenomena in Dalmatia from the stance of a member of a large nation possessing a higher culture and civilization than they find in the country they are visiting. As a result, what is openly stated or only implied is that they do not accept, or accept with difficulty, the possibility of such a small nation to have the ability and artistic sensibility to create works of art of major importance. The nation in question are the Croats in Dalmatia, their life through centuries and their cultural and artistic manifestation. They expressly point out predominantly Latin or Italian influence (which doubtless cannot be excluded as an important influential factor on the art in Dalmatia in general, but also in many other European countries), or they stress the importance of the Hungarian influence (which can be excluded). In describing the main events of Dalmatian history they choose to list those happenings which will show that no part of Dalmatia had ever enjoyed any kind of independence or freedom. Of course the situation and historical truth are different. Although the historical documents in Latin, German or Italian, which they obviously knew, show a different situation they ignore them. Dubrovnik, for example, was an independent republic for centuries. With exactly the same kind of prejudice they approach art, literature and culture in Dalmatia, drawing conclusions that its art must have been in an obvious and unavoidable dependence on a stronger nation and its civilization. They admire great works of art, which in their opinion are either the works of the neighbouring masters or are under their direct influence. However, sometimes the scholar surpasses the man, as in the statement that Dalmatian architecture "has so much in it that is peculiar and distinctive that it is entitled to rank as a style by itself among the various national styles of medieval Europe" (Jackson, I, 203-204). If certain degree of autochthonism is admitted, or some sort of originality of the native builders recognized, such monuments and buildings are "rude, especially in the elaboration of detail". The famous and typical old Croatian church of St. Donatus in Zadar (9th century) has a structure "rude almost to the verge of barbarism" (Jackson I. 256), interesting more as something unusual or exotic rather than as a work of art. The most interesting style in architecture for the English travellers are the Romanesque and the Gothic. But that style in Dalmatia is "barbaric Romanesque" (Paton, 355). Wilkinson, who was not an expert in art, recognizes the quality of some buildings, but the large number of concessive clauses gives the impression

of his intention to belittle his admiration. "Though of a mixed style ... the effect is pleasing" (Wilkinson I, 97). Writing about the architects of the Šibenik cathedral Paton says they "must have been ... more skilled than schooled, and know more of the practice of a workshop than the theories of academy" (147). Paton is right, but his statement could be applied to most builders of early times throughout Europe. On the other hand, there are some objects causing genuine admiration in the traveller. Pointing to the beauty of Dubrovnik Paton is reminded of "a charming Italian capital of the second class ... The sight of these flowers of art blushing unseen in such an out-of-the-way corner of the world would, if known, set all Wardour Street by the ears" (204). The writer shows another reason for the interest of the British travellers. Like other out-of-the-way or far away countries Dalmatia draws explorers or scientists, and it sounds like an invitation to explore the possibilities of the country which again fits into the dominant 19th century trend of scientific expeditions transferring the interest from nature, animals and plants to architectural monuments and fine arts. Dubrovnik deserves the title of "the Slavic Athens" not only for its building, but also for its literature (206). It is compared with Bohemia which owes its progress to the fact that it forms "an ethnographical peninsula in Germany" (231), and consequently Ragusa - Dubrovnik "owes her civilization to the position on the shores of the Adriatic, opposite, and of easy access to, the Italian peninsula" (231). Paton was neither architect nor art historian, therefore his pronouncements tell more of his deep conviction that he is correct in his estimation and does not seem to allow any doubt in the authority of his assertions.

Another traveller along the Croatian coast at the end of the 19th century, Thomas Graham Jackson, was a great authority on early architectural styles. His special interest was the Romanesque period, which he studied and described with great accuracy and enjoyment. Jackson was the first to draw the attention of the British public to the beauty and greatness of the cathedral in Trogir, in his lecture delivered to the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1888. The greatest expert in the history of art among the foreigners who studied and wrote about Dalmatian architecture was interested also in the Gothic and the Renaissance. In his great work he gives a detailed study of both major and minor works of the architectural art in Dalmatia. His main concern seems to have been an attempt at systematizing all historical monuments, as naturalists were trying to systematize nature by some thought a European project of a new kind. Jackson visited the Croatian coast - Dalmatia three times and had not come there unprepared, because he had studied all the available sources dealing

with the history of Dalmatia and its people. It was a textual practice for a travel writer to give a historical survey of the country he has visited, and the problem of choosing and presenting facts produced by the writers of history was sometimes a very delicate one. Jackson the architect and art historian accepted those views that he found in the works of relevant historians and could fit into his concepts, and sometimes rejected those that did not fit his preconceptions. The basic conviction that he got was the constant dependence of Southern Croatia on foreign political powers. His deep conviction about the long and continuous political dependence on another country must have affected Jackson the student of the art and culture under scrutiny. But at the same time a problem seemed to disturb his mind, almost a kind of binary opposition: On the one hand, there are great works of art, and on the other hand, when talking about the people, those in the hinterland and other "backward" parts, he finds them in cultural and civilizational way left behind. Such great works of art, it is implied, can be the product of a great culture and civilization and not of the people he has seen. Consequently he approaches the art in the same way, whereas the people of "Slavonic", actually Croatian origin are treated in the similar way people in overseas countries in Africa and America are described in the travel books of the time. Writing about Dubrovnik again he says: "Ragusa, the Dalmatian Athens, has sometimes been held up as an example of Slavonic culture, but this is only partially the case, for the history of Ragusa is uniformly that of a Latin rather than a Slavonic city" (Jackson I, 185). The statement is inaccurate, although nobody can deny the importance of, as Jackson writes, Latin influence, which is naturally present in other countries on the Mediterranean and elsewhere. And in addition he says that "it is to the Latins of Dalmatia that we must look for evidences of culture and intellectual progress and not to the Slavs. Those Croatian towns that, like Sebenico, emerged from semi-barbarism did so by being gathered within the Dalmatian pale, and by copying the institutions and customs and adapting the language of the older cities of Latin descent" (Jackson I, 185). This is another false supposition and simplification of the historical process in the development of that city. We can agree with Jackson that the Slavonic - Croatian conquerors came in as "barbarians with everything to learn and nothing to teach" (204), but they arrived in the 7th and 8th centuries i.e. only a century or two later than other tribes arrived in some other parts of Europe where civilized people were living in Jackson's time. He tends to forget the long period in which the Croats had time and opportunity to learn and develop. Now and then Jackson admits that some objects of the Dalmatian art have a style of their own, and that even as early

as the 9th century the newcomers could and did play an important role in the development of architecture in general. But the repeated implication of the need of a small nation to set their eyes on a more civilized and cultured nation is present throughout. The twisted truth about native Croatian builders is especially difficult to accept. They are either "Latins" or thoroughly "latinized" and therefore, he says, they could create such magnificent works. For the famous wood doors in Split (the author is Croatian) he writes: "The style of ... the work has nothing distinctively Slavonic about it, but is thoroughly romanesque ..." (II, 48). The implication is clear. Hence the slighting approach to the genuine Croatian art, sculptures of purely native origin and soil, belonging to the so called pre-romanesque period, i.e. from the 9th to 11th century. The relief that is actually a presentation that has been identified as a Croatian king on the throne was described by Jackson as "an imperfect group of figures ... grotesquely, and even ludicrously barbarous, of which the meaning is obscure ..." (II, 68). The next part of the description is highly ironical and shows the writer's ideological standpoint.

Jackson was not only a great expert in the Romanesque period, but also a great enthusiast. For him the portal of the cathedral in Trogir is "a work which in simplicity of conception, combined with richness of detail, and marvellous finish of execution, has never been surpassed in Romanesque or Gothic art". (Jackson II, 111). But his opinion about the builder is strange. He was of native, Croatian origin (Radovan) and there has been no indication so far of his being trained or educated outside his native country. However, his great ability and skill are explained in terms of his probable stay abroad and working with great masters. "Although there is no direct evidence of the employment of architects from beyond the Alps in Dalmatia at so early a period ... (and) Radovan the architect of the church at Trau may possibly have received training in Austria or Carinthia ..." (Jackson II, 158).

The figure of Orlando (Roland) in Dubrovnik aroused surprise in Wilkinson. That "token of the supreme jurisdiction enjoyed by the city ... is curious. But it is still more remarkable, that the favourite hero of German, French and Italian romance, should have obtained the same traditional honours in Dalmatia". (Wilkinson I, 367-368).

Croatian literature in Dalmatia had no better fate in the writings of British travellers, although in the three of them one can notice different treatments, depending on their different interests and intended reading public. The earliest published (1848) gives only a few hints and mentions several names. He was highly surprised that as early as the 16th century

there were some women writers in Dalmatia. And some other writers in "Illyrian" or Croatian "are still popular in the country". (Wilkinson I, 356). On another occasion he writes: "Poetry has always been much cultivated in Dalmatia, and some of the Illyric poets are not devoid of elegance and taste. These however, cannot be considered the production of the Morlacchi, but of educated persons who have devoted themselves to the study of literature." (Wilkinson II, 177). The name Morlacchi was used for the native people, primarily from the hinterland.

Croatian literature is described on a more extensive level by Paton. Several names and their works are mentioned and even compared with Dante and Milton. But some of them, although great, as Paton thinks, are more of historical importance because they have immortalized historical figures. The Croatian baroque poet Gundulić seems to appeal to Paton and he finds it necessary to dedicate a poem to him. Paton paraphrased a part of Gundulić's poem that possesses the charm of the exotic. Writing about another writer, Marko Marulić, he mentions his Latin works only (which are significant and were read in England in the 16th century by Thomas More and even Henry VIII) but he does not mention his works in Croatian for which Marulić has been called the Father of Croatian literature.

Jackson the architect was less interested in literature than his predecessors. Besides, the language barrier must have caused a great difficulty in talking about the literature written in another language. However, he sounds very assertive in his statement "that Slavonic (meaning Croatian) literature there is next to none; it is a matter of the future; it consists at present of little more than one epic and mass of lyric poems and national songs, and is inferior in interest to the ancient literature of Wales". (I, 191). Such a comparison at that time must have left not a very favourable impression about Croatian literature. On the other hand, Jackson cannot accept the rising importance of the native, national Croatian language at the expense of the fading role of the Italian, and he regrets the possibility of a small nation to have their own language as the language of state and education instead of the language of a greater and more popular nation and tradition.

By way of conclusion I should like to point out two main dimensions of the travel writings under scrutiny:

1. Besides other aspects, all of the three writers point out the rich Dalmatian architecture and art in general, primarily from the Romanesque and the Gothic periods (rarely Renaissance). They all give thorough and expert studies and their admiration is felt throughout their works. The picture and impression the reader gets is exceptionally favourable: it is a

country rich in art, slightly known up to their discovery, and they stress their merit in making it known to their readers. They also succeeded in presenting the Dalmatian region as a country in a wider cultural and civilizational context. They like to stress that the action of Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" takes place in a Dalmatian town. All three travel books performed an important cultural mission in the proces of transculturation in which travel books can have a great role.

2. Another dimension is their approach to the country's past and the country's people. Being members of a greater and stronger nation, a richer civilization and culture and great achievements as well, theirs is a slighting approach to the people inhabiting the towns of the Dalmatian coast. They feel it their duty to defend and protect the language and literature which they think more important than the native Croatian or "Slavonic". In this "civilizing mission" they tend to underestimate the community that stands outside their preconceived frame and think that it is in need of amendment. As in most other travel books of the period the historical anthropological discourse becomes again a form of textual practice, which is evident in slighting approach to Croatian literature. However, there is an additional element which must be remembered. It is the heteroglossic dimension of travel writings. The knowledge expressed in travel books "comes out not just out of a Traveller's sensibility and power of observation, but out of the interaction and experience usually directed and managed by "travelees" who are working from their own understanding of their world, and feel it almost their duty to adapt their idiom to the conceptions of the traveller ...". There are some hints in the books that such may have been the case, and it was the result of the language of communication both the traveller and "travelee" knew (Italian). Be it as it may, both the popularity and influence of these writings must have been great, but certain misconceptions and prejudices acquired by reading them probably have left traces, perhaps consequences as well, felt up to the present day.

*Ivo Mardešić: HRVATSKA UMJETNOST I KNJIŽEVNOST U
ENGLISKIM PUTOPISIMA O DALMACIJI U 19. STOLJEĆU*

S a ž e t a k

Britanci su putovali Dalmacijom već u Srednjem vijeku i posjećivali njezine gradove na putovanjima koji su ih vodili u Svetu zemlju gdje su mnogi sudjelovali u križarskim ratovima. Njihovo zanimanje za tu zemlju variralo je od vremena do vremena. U Srednjem su vijeku to najčešće bile crkve i mjesta hodočašća, dok se već od 17. stoljeća pojavljuju i nova zanimanja (arhitektonski spomenici, priroda, prirodni resursi). U 19. stoljeću oni se bave problemima povezanim s novim strujanjima u engleskom političkom i znanstvenom životu. Putopisci 19. stoljeća prave razliku između materijalnih spomenika i duhovne sposobnosti dalmatinske populacije, priznajući vrijednost umjetnosti, ali ističući nevjericu u mogućnost i sposobnost domaćeg stanovništva, Hrvata, kao autora takvih spomenika. Stoga se iz njihovih djela (Wilkinson, Paton, Jackson) mnogo saznaje o samim autorima i oficijelnoj politici njihove zemlje prema malim narodima i njihovoj kulturi i vidi da oni ne odobravaju jačanje njihove nacionalne i kulturne samostalnosti. S obzirom da je većina putopisa bila poticana ili čak financirana od značajnih britanskih institucija zacijelo su ti putopisi imali znatnog utjecaja na formiranje mišljenja i stavova koji se mogu pratiti do današnjeg dana.