

From a trip East. On a different Europe and the genre-fluid nature of the letter in Henryk Sienkiewicz's travel correspondence^{*1}

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TWO TRIPS

On a Saturday evening 21 August 1886 Sienkiewicz sat down, as usual, to writing letters. In Kaltenleutgeben, he thus wrote his regular pen pal Jadwiga Janczewska:

Przed godziną skończyłem *Potop* i właśnie podpisywałem pożądany wyraz: „Koniec”, gdy zadzwoniono na kolację. – Leży przede mną trzynaście ostatnich kartek – trzeba tylko jeszcze jutro przejrzeć i wyprawić. Cała kilkuletnia robota jest już za mną, a przede mną – bo ja wiem co? Jak na teraz to pustynia, a raczej próżnia, bo w tej chwili nie ma ani jednej farby na mojej paletce².

An hour ago I finished writing *The Deluge* and I was inscribing the much desired phrase 'The End' when the dinner was announced. Here they are, the final thirty sheets – now I'll just have to look through them tomorrow and despatch them. The several-year-long project is now behind me, while in front of me – I have no idea. At this moment it's a desert, or rather a vacuum because my palette doesn't have a single drop of paint on it.²

He was extremely tired. Just a few years later he wrote not only the biggest of his novels (*The Trilogy*), even though not yet complete at that time, but he also

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1 This article was written within the framework of the research project: *Henryk Sienkiewicz. Obecność w kulturze polskiej XX wieku. Polskość i nowoczesność. Recepcja i nowe odczytania*. [Henryk Sienkiewicz. Presence in the Polish culture of the 20th century. Reception and new readings] NCN/ DEC-2012/06/A/HS2/00252.

2 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy* [Letters], ed. J. Krzyżanowski, edited by M. Bokszczanin, consultation M. Korniłowicz, (Warsaw: 2009), vol. 2, parts 1-3 (Letters to Jadwiga and Edward Janczewski). Quotation from a letter to Jadwiga Janczewska, letter no. 18, p. 170. [Unless indicated otherwise, quotations in English were translated from Polish].

managed to experience married life, fatherhood and... tragedy. Maria née Szetkiewicz, the mother of his children, succumbed to her mortal illness in October 1885, even before he completed vol. 1 of *The Deluge*. The referenced letter had a black border, just as the envelope in which it arrived. Sienkiewicz's habit of writing to Janczewska, Maria's sister, who was Maria's complete opposite, became his addiction, a necessity, an obsession even. It lasted over 30 years.

The next surviving letter in this correspondence series dates back to 9 October of the same year. It was written en route – Sienkiewicz was already travelling. He wrote to Janczewska from Bucharest, where he spent time in the company of two of his friends: Kazimierz Pochwalski, a painter, and Antoni Zaleski, a Warsaw-based journalist well-known at that time. The latter seems especially interesting because he turned the trip, which he joined almost at the last moment,³ into a separate book. It is titled *Z wycieczki na Wschód*⁴ [From a Trip East] and includes an alternative account to that emerging from Sienkiewicz's correspondence. One would reference Zaleski's book in modern terms as a reportage book. It consisted both of his current remarks and extensive notes on the works he had read that enabled him to delve deeper into his momentary observations and enrich his narrative. In terms of size, it is not small – approximately 400 pages, but it contains no illustrations or photographs. It seems that a decade later the camera was widely used⁵ but at that particular moment it had seemed a luxury. Or perhaps there was a different reason for not using one – the trip was marked by haste and restlessness caused by the unsettling news on the political situation in the Balkans, which they were supposed to travel. Both Zaleski and his account shall prove useful in this discussion of Sienkiewicz's journey as the writer did not write any major text resulting from it. Oddly, he actually wrote no account of that trip to the East! From the entire trip through the lands of today's Romania, Bulgaria, and Constantinople and Greece enthralled in political turmoil of 1886, Sienkiewicz published only a short report entitled *Wycieczka do Aten* [A Trip to Athens] and only in 1889!⁶ Why? Did something happen there? Why publish only at that time? The journey was productive, although the outcome was of a different kind. In *Fire in the Steppe* the writer painted a full-coloured picture of the Turkish might in the

3 He had learnt about it as he stated in the initial part of his book, almost by accident, in Zakopane in August or early September 1886.

4 A. Zaleski, *Z wycieczki na Wschód. Notatki dziennikarza. Bukareszt. Ruszczuk. Warna. Konstantynopol* [From the trip to the East. Journalist's notes. Bucharest, Rutschuk, Varna, Constantinople] (Warsaw: 1887).

5 Sienkiewicz departed in December 1890 for Africa equipped with a camera, featured today in the Henryk Sienkiewicz Museum in Oblęgorek.

6 "Wycieczka do Aten", in: *Niwa* no. 1-5 (1889). As quoted in a reprint: H. Sienkiewicz, *Dzieła* [Works], ed. J. Krzyżanowski, vol. 44 (Warsaw: 1950).

fight against the Polish Republic. But why did he refrain from publishing his travel correspondence? For now all one can do is speculate. Unless one considers that what Zaleski revealed in the introduction to his book as being true, i.e., that one of them set off for journalistic material, while the other for artistic impressions.

WHEN PRIVATE BECOMES PUBLIC

Our situation is still better than that of Sienkiewicz's 19th-century readers, who were aware of his journey and waited in vain for any text summarising it. To some extent that gap could have been filled with Zaleski's account, printed after his return in December 1886, as well as in January and February 1887 in the *Stowo* [The Word], a periodical people still associated with the author of *The Trilogy* even though he was only formally a member of the editorial board at that time. The only surviving account by Sienkiewicz is that in his private letters to Jadwiga Janczewska, which are available in his extensive epistemological output tirelessly analysed and edited by Maria Bokszczanin.⁷ His letters to his sister-in-law not only rate among the most interesting parts of this body of works but probably the only such collection in the entire Polish literature. It is not a matter of their size – there are more extensive collections, e.g., the correspondence of Józef Ignacy Kraszewski. What is critical is its significance in documentary and literary terms. Primarily, the letters replace the author's other personal documents from the period, and secondly, they are a separate noteworthy artistic achievement; in this respect no other seem equally valuable.

In October 1889 Sienkiewicz wrote to his pen pal wishing her a happy name day and mentioned buying two notebooks intended for a memoir. In it he was saving a place for her, too – he addressed her affectionately: 'Dzunia', 'Dzidka' [a Polish term of endearment derived from 'dzidzia' (a child, baby)] or (because of her wide-set eyes) 'Żaba' [a Frog] or 'Ziaba' (a diminutive form) even. 'I must, however,' he added, 'use a very thin nib to give justice to all the intricacies; but I do recommend "Żaba" be good to Tom 'cause otherwise everything will turn black.'⁸ Tom is a Shakespearean figure that he often used when referring to himself: 'Tom' or 'Poor Tom', i.e., a beggar and a jester, someone who is 'constantly cold,' but, in fact,

7 The edited collections of Sienkiewicz's epistemological output were released in the years 1977-2009 (volumes 1-5) and, according to Bokszczanin herself, they were not exhaustive. They do include individual letters, but letters written to Sienkiewicz are still to be released, which if uncovered could explain many issues regarding his biography and works that remain unknown. Letters to Jadwiga Janczewska in collected form are included in vol. II (parts 1-3).

8 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy* [Letters], vol. 2, part 2, letter no. 183, pp. 128-129.

a prince in disguise, the successor to the throne unjustly deprived of his privilege by the usurper. This guise, which he borrowed from *King Lear*, played a major role in Sienkiewicz's private theatre in his relationships with women – first with Maria, his first wife, and after she died with Jadwiga, her sister. Rarely, only in exceptional circumstance, he used it in his public statements as a sign of his objection to the present situation.⁹

His memoir has not survived, but his letters have. They offer a one-of-a-kind dual portrait: first of the addressee, his confidant, tender friend, sometimes a stern censor ('Jankulio'),¹⁰ who had considerable influence on the writer's aesthetic decisions, and then of the writer, who even though not being completely honest, and most certainly not exhibitionistic in his conduct, wrote Jadwiga about everything that happened in his life, which was not as colourful as the decades' long legend that was born after his death would have one believe. Yet most of all the letters to Janczewska were the first and authentic account of all that Sienkiewicz saw and experienced during his travels. In this account and in the case of his later trip to Spain, the intuition-driven assumption that the letters written to his sister-in-law were a test before he decided whether to publish his experiences seems accurate. He recorded his accounts in the moment, sometimes in several versions,¹¹ and sent them to Janczewska to evaluate them, and only then did he correct or expand them. Yet sometimes he decided not to publish an entire work leaving only that which seemed to him the trip's essence, which carried some particular intention or, simply, which seemed the most interesting. That applies especially to his journey East in 1886, from which the only surviving account was a report from Greece (*Wycieczka do Aten*), and from Sienkiewicz's obscure journey to Spain marked by his surviving work *Walka byków*¹² [Bullfight]. The decision not to publish his travel experiences

9 Sienkiewicz's first column written upon returning from America in 1879 seems one such moment. Uncertain about the situation he was stepping back into, still internally shaken after a long time spent abroad, he was not particularly willing to engage in his journalistic obligations in the *Niwa* [Cornfield] periodical, which during his absence took a sharp turn to the right. He thus wrote: 'I have no reason to be optimistic; I'm more like that Tommy in King Lear because I'm cold in every possible way. The reality readers have to deal with is typical: grey, faded, sad, and often futile – so let anyone fulfil this role; I don't have the strength or willingness and I am going to talk about other things.' He transitioned from commenting on the "Current moment" to "Artistic/literary mixtures" – a world of 'thoughts and imagination.' As quoted in: H. Sienkiewicz, *Mieszaniny literacko-artystyczne (I)* [Literary and artistic mixtures], in: *idem, Dzieła*, ed. J. Krzyżanowski, vol. 50 (Warsaw: 1950), pp. 3-4 (I have retained the original spelling).

10 Jankulio was the actual surname of a Russian censor operating at that time in Warsaw.

11 This seems not a singular instance. For example, there are two versions of a single letter from Athens that have survived to this day. See: H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 32, pp. 260-271.

12 In the case of the Spanish journey the gap is particularly intriguing as Sienkiewicz spent a total of 40 days there and visited the major cities of the Iberian Peninsula. While there he also intended to go on a trip to Tangier, Morocco, yet for unknown reasons his plan fell through. Julian Krzyżanowski published a selection of private correspondence in 1931 in the *Kurier Warszawski* [Warsaw Courier]

could have been dictated also by other reasons. It is possible that Sienkiewicz considered his text not yet read. He could have also run out of time – his writing schedule was completely filled and his literary work always took priority over other writing matters. For obvious reasons a journalistic text, more than any other kind of record, becomes outdated quickly. Unless it is exceptional.

BULGARIAN BRAWLS OR ‘WHERE IS EAST?’

Sienkiewicz’s trip began on 6 October 1886. He left Cracow and travelled to Constantinople via Bucharest and Varna. It was risky. The areas of today’s Bulgaria and Romania (and Bosnia and Herzegovina) he travelled were from 1876 in a state of political turmoil. Russia’s victory in the war against Turkey resulted in the emergence of new states. When in 1879 the Principality of Bulgaria was established and prince Alexander of Battenberg ascended the throne, the political crisis seemed mitigated. Yet the Central Powers did not conceal their dissatisfaction with the emergence of a new state. Russia, a powerful player that released Slavs from more than 500 years of Turkish rule, had many supporters and its own interests there. That led to the so-called Serbo-Bulgarian War (November 1885), clearly provoked by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Later, in the autumn of 1886, when the parliament of the newly established Bulgarian state was scheduled to meet, the state experienced numerous provocations by the pro-Russian party and spies sent in from Russia. As they were leaving departing Poland the travellers received news that the prince of Battenberg was dethroned.

The exact route that Sienkiewicz and his companions travelled is known by dint of the writer’s correspondence with Jadwiga Janczewska and with the Gropplers, with whom the travellers stayed while in Constantinople. Antoni Zaleski’s account is an indispensable source of information – in it he described their many adventures during their journey; it is full of details regarding the politics of the time, historical trivia, and the author’s musings on economics. Zaleski borrowed greatly from several authors, most significantly from Emil de Laveleye, whose works he utilised extensively in his work.¹³ The travellers mainly travelled by train. On

(issue 1) under the title “Niedrukowane listy Sienkiewicza. Z podróży do Hiszpanii” [Unreleased letters by Sienkiewicz. From the Spanish trip], without indicating that they came from his private collection.

More on the journey and the vignette *Walka byków* – see: J. Sztachelska, *Henryk Sienkiewicz. Życie na walizkach* [Henryk Sienkiewicz. Life on suitcases] (Warsaw: 2017), pp. 93-99.

13 Emile de Laveleye (1822-1892), Belgian economist, professor of political economics at Université de Liège, particularly interested in the relationship between economics and politics. His published works include: *La Russie et L’Autriche depuis Sadouwa* (1870), *Essais sur les formes de gouvernement dans*

9 October they stopped in Bucharest, then in Ruse the following day (Sienkiewicz used the name Ruszczuk),¹⁴ and on 13 October in Varna, where they intended to board a ship to Turkey.

Sienkiewicz, who had long been interested in the future of that region of Europe,¹⁵ filled his letters with political allusions and drawings, offering an interesting testimony from that period. The travel companions observed the Bulgarian scandals from up close. We, in turn, have the opportunity to enter the landscape in which the actual Wokulski made great deals benefiting from those.¹⁶ According to his letters, the ability to watch history unfold in front of their eyes was fascinating for them. He wrote this to Janczewska: 'Dziunia, dear, you'll become an expert in Eastern matters soon', and at some point he even started referring to her, as if following a diplomatic protocol, as 'Your Excellence'.¹⁷ Zaleski, having great journalistic temperament, was also on the edge. Sienkiewicz described him as follows: 'Anta! is in his element. He's running around collecting gossip and keeps coming back giggling, telling us all about, throwing his arms in the air and pressing so close against me that I'm forced to fend him off.'¹⁸

Both displayed immense satisfaction when observing the events unfold. Despite being provoked and tempted by Russia, a country that had always been interested in expanding its sphere of influence, Bulgarians appeared surprisingly calm and reserved. Kaulbars¹⁹ manipulations fell through. Sienkiewicz was pleased with the political sensibility of fellow Slavs. While visiting Bulgaria and Romania he noted: 'hatred for Matushka [Rossiya] – a common thing'.²⁰ In his opinion, the inhabitants of those countries, tested by the many centuries of servitude, matured enough to

les sociétés modernes (1872). In Europe he was particularly known for his work *La Péninsule des Balkans* (1887-1888), in which he discussed, e.g., the special case of the survival under the Turkish rule of 'minor' Slavic nations, including Romania and Bulgaria.

- 14 Sienkiewicz used the name Ruszczuk (in Turkish: Rusçuk), which was commonly used in Poland since the Turkish period, i.e., since the 16th century.
- 15 The writer first revealed his keenness for such matters in his account from Venice, which he reached having travelled through Dalmatia and Illyria in October 1879. See my text *Italia Henryka Sienkiewicza* [Henryk Sienkiewicz's Italy], in: *Mity sienkiewiczowskie i inne szkice tylko o nim* [Sienkiewicz's myths and other sketches only about him] (Warsaw: 2017).
- 16 NB, Bolesław Prus's *The Doll* begins with the famous phrase 'Early in 1878...' and Wokulski's return from the Balkans.
- 17 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 22, pp. 194, 196.
- 18 *Ibid.*, letter no. 20, p. 179.
- 19 Kaulbars, born Alexander Wilhelm Andreas Freiherr von Kaulbars (1844-1925), a Russian general. In 1877, he participated in the Russo-Turkish War. In 1883, he co-wrote the compact between Russia and Bulgaria; in 1886, he was sent as a diplomatic delegate to stall elections to the National Assembly and convince Bulgarians they needed Russia's protectorate. When his efforts proved unsuccessful, he left Bulgaria with the entire diplomatic corps.
- 20 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 20, p. 179.

expect change. The several hundred years of political dependency first from Turkey and then Russia have had their mark hindering normal development, yet the desire for free life could be felt everywhere. According to his account:

jakkolwiek jest to mieszanina, Europejczyk [...] nie wsiąka w nią i nie staje się jej częścią składową. Sam czuje się obcym i ci ludzie w fustangach²¹, w kaftanach, w fezach i czapkach baranich uważają go za obcego. Jakkolwiek różni między sobą, stanowią w przeciwieństwie do nich [tj. Europejczyków zachodnich – J. Sz.] Wschód, mahometański czy grecki, ale odrębny. I co więcej; nawet tak krótki pobyt tu narzuca przekonanie, że Półwysep Bałkański musi z czasem należeć do ludów bałkańskich²².

even though it's a mixture, a European (...) does not get sucked into it to become its part. He himself feels foreign and those people in fustangas,²¹ caftans, fezes and sheepskin hats consider him a foreigner. Though they differ from one another, they are different from them [i.e., Eastern Europeans – J. Sz.]; regardless of whether it is Islamic or orthodox, the East is unique. Moreover, even such a short stay makes you realise that the Balkan Peninsula will have to some day belong to Balkan peoples.²²

Sienkiewicz argued, instinctively feeling solidarity with those aching for freedom, that it would only be a matter of time. Foreign influences would have to leave:

Rosja czy Anglia, czy Austria mogą na czas, może długi, pochwyć części tego półwyspu – ale wobec coraz wyraźniejszych aspiracji i poczucia narodowego w aborygenach, na zawsze się tu nie ostoją. Jestem prawie pewny, że np. Bułgaria nie może być już zmieniona w prostą gubernię rosyjską²³.

Russia or England, or Austria may for some time, even an extended one, seize a part of the peninsula – but when faced with ever increasing aspirations and a sense of national affinity among the aborigines, they won't remain here forever. I'm almost certain that, e.g., Bulgaria can never be turned into a simple Russian governorate.²³

Sienkiewicz's observations were those of an outsider. He did not speak any of the local languages, be it Romanian or Bulgarian. To speak Russian, though the language was commonly known by the locals, was risky, just as was to travel using a Russian passport. Even though according to Western standards, he came from Eastern Europe, he felt a representative of Western culture and civilisation. Was that justified? And what made him so certain about that? Was it because he belonged to the realm of artists and writers of which he always considered himself a member? That seems to have been the case. Sienkiewicz had always believed that artists had two homelands: the one where they were born and the one of the traditions from which they drew inspiration;²⁴ for him, the latter had always been Greek/Roman culture. Nonetheless, at no point did he express any superiority over the people he met. His experiences as a traveller had taught him to be humble and

21 Fustanga, presumably distorted by Sienkiewicz name of male gown worn in the Balkans and in Greece. Name derived from the Latin *fustagna*. Also spelled *fustanella*.

22 *Ibid.*, letter no. 22, p. 196.

23 *Ibid.*

24 He wrote about that outright to Jadwiga Janczewska, 18 December 1895. See: H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 3, p. 173.

careful in encounters with Others. That was for him a lesson in understanding civilisations and otherness in his journey through America.²⁵

Additionally, the peoples inhabiting the Balkan Peninsula (referred to as European Turkey) had been perceived by the West for exceptionally long time, throughout the 19th and even the 20th century (especially after the conflicts of the 1980's), as representatives of a different and inferior world, an unfamiliar civilised 'wild Europe' that could explode in unimaginable political conflicts, barbarity and stereotypes consolidated by popular culture.²⁶ There, in the space of the Orient, more poignantly than anywhere else, 'all that is solid melts into the air'.²⁷ The modernisation, or rather the process of returning to the 'civilised' condition that took place on the Balkan Peninsula when Turkey withdrew in the second half of the 19th century was not a restitution of that which was original but subjugation of the Oriental and the local, and of a widespread efforts to imitate foreign models, be it in architecture, culture or customs. This process was noted by Zaleski, who, similarly to Sienkiewicz, wrote in his account about the strange chaotic architecture of Bucharest, a mixture of the Byzantine and metropolitan styles, if you will, and about mud filling the city's streets. He was also observant enough to note Romanian elite, grotesque in their efforts to imitate the social rituals of the French or English and completely helpless when faced with the challenges of modern economy. For the journalist the East started somewhere outside Chernivtsi, where instead of the Galician peasant huts he started noting... holes in the ground in which in unimaginably primitive conditions there lived Vlachs, Romanians and other occupants of that fertile yet completely undeveloped land. At some point Zaleski thus summarised Bulgaria: 'The economic condition of today's Bulgaria is often compared to that of entire Europe in the era of Charlemagne and to the

25 See my text: *Ameryka – dotknięcie Nowego Świata* [America – touching the New World], in: *Miły sienkiewiczowski...*

26 That mode of outsider observation, usually by travellers from the West, unfamiliar with the local languages and who refrain from immersing themselves in culture, is the topic of Božidar Jezernik's book *Wild Europe: the Balkans in the gaze of Western travellers* (London: 2007), written in the spirit of post-colonialism. An equally interesting image of the world is presented by Błażej Brzostek in: *Paryże Innej Europy. Warszawa i Bukareszt, XIX i XX wiek* [Paris of a Different Europe. Warsaw and Bucharest, 19th and 20th centuries] (Warsaw: 2015). Popcultural simplifications include, e.g., the perception of Romania through the prism of vampires, whom the Romanticised frenetic imagination of Bram Stoker placed in the inaccessible expanses of the mountainous Transylvania.

27 Marshall Berman's book (*All that is solid melts into air: The experience of modernity* (New York: 1982)) discussed the modernisation process which, according to Berman, was implemented differently in the West of Europe and differently in Russia. What Berman wrote about Dostoevsky's Russia had its analogue in the Polish novel of the latter half of the 19th century, most certainly in *The Doll* (original release in periodical instalments in 1887-1889) by Prus ('Alas, there is more marble,' Wokulski exclaimed in Paris, 'than in the whole of Warsaw!'), but also in *Wysadzony z siodła* [Dis-mounted from the saddle] (1891) by Antoni Sygietyński.

contemporary East Indies'.²⁸ All things considered, Bulgarians in his descriptions appeared better than other local peoples because by being European 'gardeners' they used every inch of land for cultivation. He argued that Romania could become a wealthy state, a Lombardy of Central Europe, if only it had different agrarian relationships, some managerial traditions, and if it focussed on education. The countryside in particular made a shocking impression on him:

Negrowie Afryki środkowej lepiej chyba mieszkają i osady ich weselszy przedstawiają widok. [...] I w tych to lepiankach rzuconych na istnej pustyni żyją potomkowie kolonów Trajana, od siedemnastu wieków osiadłych na tej najurodzajniejszej w całej Europie glebie.²⁹

The Negros of Africa probably live in better conditions and their settlements are more pleasing to the eye. (...) And so, in these mud huts scattered around a desert no least live the descendants of the coloni of Trajan, who for seventeen centuries have inhabited this most fertile of Europe's soils.²⁹

AMONG COMPATRIOTS

As the journey continued, many amusing situations ensued and the travel companions were having a good time. Zaleski and Pochwalski in Sienkiewicz's letters are referenced in Romania as Zalescu and Pochwalcescu, and they are described in utterly witty ways. The energy of the journalist chasing gossip is contrasted with the shyness of the painter who did not join discussions and focussed on drawing and capturing the local atmospheres.

Many things surprised Sienkiewicz on the journey. Already in Bucharest he noted:

Zabawne jest, że wszędzie mówi się po polsku. Przyjeżdżamy do Suczawy – wołam na posługacza: „Ojciec, weźcie pakunki.” – Anta! wybucha śmiechem, a posługacz odpowiada: „Zaraz, panie!” – W bufecie po polsku: „Pieczeń wołowa!” – W paczarni po polsku, w Romanul także³⁰.

It's amusing that you can speak Polish anywhere here. When we arrived in Suceava and I called the attendant [in Polish]: "Ojciec, weźcie pakunki." [You there, take the packs] Anta! burst out laughing, while the attendant replied [in Polish]: "Zaraz, panie!" [Right away, sire!] At the canteen in Polish: "Pieczeń wołowa!" [Roast beef!] At the parcel shop in Polish, in Romanul the same.³⁰

Indeed, throughout their journey, the travellers met many Poles, who travelled around the world in search of work. In the Balkans, the situation was no different. The emigration of skills is, sadly, a fact.³¹ Back home, the 'educated' were

28 A. Zaleski, *Z wycieczki na Wschód...*, p. 157.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

30 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 19, p. 174.

31 "Emigracja zdolności" [Emigration of skills] was the title of the famous 1899 article by Eliza Orzeszkowa, in which she raised the topic of Poles emigrating not having found any opportunities for their self-fulfilment in their home country.

‘redundant’,³² but once they emigrated, they were able to take highly responsible positions. In Romania and Bulgaria, the managerial staff and railroad engineers were predominantly Polish. The same applied to the post, hotels, and restaurants. In Varna Sienkiewicz visited the battlefield and the duke’s palace in the company of people he had just met:

ledwośmy się poznali z Wróblewskim, gdy ten zwraca się do jakiegoś Turka w fezie, czerwonych papuciach i o wilczej mordzie i mówi do niego najczystsza polszczyzną: „Hassan! Weźmiesz rzeczy panów, zawieziesz do hotelu i będziesz na mnie czekał”. A Hassan na to również po polsku: „A drugą dorożkę dla panów zamówić? Bo później poodjeżdżają”. Rety! Co to za Hassan, co umie po polsku? – pytam. I cóż się pokazuje? Oto jest Tatar, mahometanin, który u Czajkowskiego nauczył się po polsku jak Polak³³.

we barely got to meet Wróblewski when he turned to some wolf-faced Turk in a fez and red slippers and spoke in the most Polish of accents: “Hassan! Weźmiesz rzeczy panów, zawieziesz do hotelu i będziesz na mnie czekał.” [Hassan! You take these gentlemen’s belongings, deliver them to the hotel and wait for me there.] To which Hassan responded also in Polish: “A drugą dorożkę dla panów zamówić? Bo później poodjeżdżają.” [And should I call another cab for the gentlemen? Because later they’ll be all gone.] “Oh gosh! Who is this Hassan who knows Polish?” I asked. And what does it mean? Here is a Tatar, a Mohammedan, who had learnt from Czajkowski how to talk like a Pole.³³

Thus, in the Balkans the shadows of Sadyk Pasha and Wokulski overlapped.

Having arrived in Varna, the travellers wasted no time and quickly boarded the Russian ship “Oleg”. Sienkiewicz expressed, as he usually did, his fears related to the ship’s name which... rhymed ominously with ‘poległ’ [he perished]. Despite his morbid predictions they reached Constantinople the same night, however, the warning about the need to quarantine for a long time they had received earlier proved perfectly true. Due to a dangerous plague (cholera? typhus?) the travellers were forced to remain in the port for ten days. That was hardly pleasant for them, they got bored quickly, and the costs of the journey kept growing but they had no other choice. They were anchored in Kavak, a suburb of Constantinople. Sienkiewicz spent his time to reading guidebooks and focussed on taking notes; similarly Zaleski, who read all he could find in works on Constantinople and set to organising his notes – anything and everything could prove useful. Pochwalski perfected his earlier sketches. After ten days of waiting, they finally arrived at their destination. They were welcomed in Constantinople by Henryk Groppler, a Polish emigrant who for many years had been living on the Bosporus. He and his wife Ludwika, whom Sienkiewicz described as follows: ‘people of some ancient sense of hospitality’, hosted the writer and his travel companions for two weeks at their expansive

32 See the seminal work by Jerzy Jedlicki entitled *Jakiej cywilizacji Polacy potrzebują* [What kind of civilisation Poles need] (Warsaw: 1988), chapter “Potrzebni i zbędni” [The necessary and the redundant].

33 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 22, p. 197.

villa filled with carpets, a multitude of Oriental art pieces ('in the house', Sienkiewicz wrote Janczewska, 'you won't find any normal furniture'),³⁴ a selection of weapons and at least, as he dutifully noted... 40 cats. Jadwiga loved cats.

MIRAGE ORIENTAL?

As they were travelling through the Balkan Peninsula, Sienkiewicz, eager to encounter the exotic, the atmosphere of the East, fervently sought out impressions: picturesque landscapes, interesting cul-de-sacs, religious buildings, and, most of all, Oriental 'physiognomies'. He was on the lookout for instances of a specific behaviour and a different lifestyle. He was drawn by the laced shirts of Bulgarian girls, sheepskin hats and the Albanian fustanella.³⁵ He noticed the dominant economics contrasts and the overwhelming misery. He identified even the slightest instances of otherness – the turbans on people's heads, the wild eyes, the outstanding rush in the port, and the widespread baksheesh. Mind you, it was the East! Already in Ruse he was able to identify some signs of the Oriental way of life. He noted wittily: it's almost like home here, only the people are in some disguises, like it's the carnival, their faces are striking, 'pirate-like'. In one of his letters, he asserted:

W ogóle wszystko, co się tu widzi, warto widzieć, bo to świat inny, bardzo malowniczy, bardzo kolorowy. Jest coś pierwotnego w tych strojach, twarzach, ruchach, w tym mrowiu nieznanych typów, w tych ciemnych sklepach, ciasnych ulicach, wozach ogromnych, ciągniętych przez bawoły. Wszystko to przenosi Cię w jakąś przeszłość daleką, w jakąś cywilizację nieznaną, która już gaśnie tu, a gdzie indziej dawno minęła³⁶.

Actually, all you can see here is worth seeing because this world is different, it is very picturesque, very colourful. There is something primitive in these outfits, faces, and movements, in this multitude of unknown types, in these dark stores, tight streets, huge carts drawn by buffaloes. All that takes You to some distant past, to some unknown civilisation, which is soon going to expire and which elsewhere has been long gone.³⁶

That is a significant remark as it reflected the views of someone not only from a different world but also a different civilisation, one which surely was not soon to 'expire' and which, unlike the one Sienkiewicz was tracking so eagerly, 'would not pass' any time soon. That comment was not a mere reflection of the current political situation in the Balkans undergoing profound changes but something constant, which the writer expressed very early on, already while working on the so-called minor trilogy, in which he offered portraits of Tatars, with whom he felt particu-

34 *Ibid.*, letter no. 25, p. 208 and letter no. 26, p. 212.

35 See footnote 21.

36 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 20, pp. 183-184.

lar connection by dint of his ancestry.³⁷ Those remarks offer glimpses into his opinion about the socio-cultural role of Islam. While aboard the ship heading for Constantinople, Sienkiewicz carefully observed the Turkish people stressing how picturesque their religious customs were, their attachment to their traditions, and the intensity of their faith:

Wyobraź sobie, że jest to chwila, w której słońce już zaszło, świeci zorza wieczorna, a na rumianym niebie połyskują pierwsze gwiazdy, [...] całość tworzy poetyczny obraz. Te zawoje dotykające się miarowym ruchem ziemi, te twarze ciemne, oczy wzniezione, pewien smutek i skupienie w obliczach, wszystko to nakazuje jakiś szacunek i tłumaczy siłę Islamu³⁸.

Try and imagine that it is the moment when the sun has already set, the evening afterglow is up, and the first stars are appearing in the rosy sky (...) the whole offers a poetic image. Those turbans touching the earth in a regular motion, those dark faces, eyes raised to the sky, some sadness and focus on their countenances, all that forces some kind of respect and explains the might of Islam.³⁸

What seems significant in this fragment is the aesthetisation of prayer, the emphasis placed on formerness, authenticity and gravity. Yet Sienkiewicz was a man of his time, i.e., a positivist and modernist with an acute pro-European focus. For him, Islam was a civilisation of the past, unable to function in the modern world.

During their time in Constantinople, the travellers explored the city eagerly. Yet their first impressions were not positive. They saw a city which was expansive, chaotically developed and very dirty. They visited Pera (a borough to the northeast) and the city's major historical sites: the Holy Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque, Muhammad's tomb, Museum of the Janissaries, Thousand Columns, the hippodrome, and the old Serai. In fact, they returned to all those locations many times as it was impossible to explore all that in one go. The writer was particularly impressed with the huge Hagia Sophia:

O ile św. Piotr w Rzymie wydaje się mniejszy, o tyle ona większą, niż jest. W środku pusta. Ogromne świeczniki roboty bardzo grubej zwieszają się z sufitu nad całą świątynią. W czterech stronach olbrzymie tarcze zielone z tureckimi napisami zawieszono są wysoko pod kopułą. Kopuła środkowej bazyliki wykładana pozłocistą mozaiką. Zresztą ni ołtarzów, ni jakichkolwiek przedmiotów. Posadzka pokryta słomkowymi matami; kilkunastu wiernych

While St. Peter's in Rome seems smaller than it actually is, this one is the opposite. It's empty inside. Huge and thick candle holders hang from the ceiling throughout the temple. At four sides enormous green shields with Turkish writing hung high beneath the copula. The basilica's central copula is tiled in a golden mosaic. Apart from that there are no altars or any other objects. The floor is covered in straw mats; a dozen or so worshippers chant prayers

37 Even though Sienkiewicz never highlighted his Tatar ancestry, Tatar threads often appeared in his works. I discussed Sienkiewicz's ancestry in the chapter "Tatarzy Henryka Sienkiewicza" [Henryk Sienkiewicz's Tatars], in: *Mity sienkiewiczowskie...* (Warsaw: 2017). The topic of Sienkiewicz's attitude towards Islam was raised by Maciej Głogier in the article "Islam i dekadencja w twórczości Henryka Sienkiewicza" [Islam and decadence in the works by Henryk Sienkiewicz], which he presented in November 2016 during the conference *Henryk Sienkiewicz. Voyager dans le temps et l'espace* organised by PAS Scientific Center in Paris and the Polish Library in Paris.

38 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 24, p. 204.

wyśpiewuje sennymi głosami modlitwy, ale nie ma w nich ni tej szczerości, ni tej powagi, którą widziałem u Turków modlących się na statku. Z zewnątrz przybudowano cztery minarety i mnóstwo budowli, które psują całość³⁹.

in languorous voices yet they lack the sincerity or the gravity I saw in Turks praying on the ship. Outside, four minarets have been added plus numerous buildings that distort the whole.³⁹

Unlike de Amicis,⁴⁰ extremely popular back then in Poland, Sienkiewicz included a spiteful remark:

podług mnie styl bizantyński, choćby najczystszy, nie ma w sobie prostoty romańszczyzny, ani powagi gotyku, ani wdzięku wesołego renesansu. To tak wygląda jakby olbrzymie jakiegoś płuca wyduły od spodu część skorupy ziemskiej i wytworzyły wielki bąbel. Może to bluźnierstwo, ale szczerze⁴¹.

in my opinion the Byzantine style, though being the purest, lacks the simplicity of the Roman style, the severity of the Gothic and the charm of the cheerful Renaissance. It seems as if some enormous lungs blew a part of the Earth's crust from the bottom creating a huge bubble. This may sound blasphemous but it's sincere.⁴¹

According to post-colonialist thought that should be considered as being blasphemous equal to the arguments by the French writer and traveller Astolphe de Custine, who in his famous travel account⁴² attempted to define the style of the famous Moscow Orthodox church and was unable to find for it any reference that existed in Europe's culture. Sienkiewicz also resisted the mirage of Oriental beauty.

His descriptions were even less forgiving for Mohammad's mosque, one of the biggest attractions in Constantinople. Sienkiewicz thus wrote Jadwiga:

Moska⁴³ Mohameda jest to turecka koronarska robota w kształcie wesołej altany, w środku której stoją groby pokryte czarnym aksamitem z tureckimi napisami. Z ich ponurymi zarysami nie godzi się ten styl lekki i radosny, tak jak katafalk nie godzi się z buduarem. W bocznej przybudówce stoją trumny siostr, żon i krewnych Mohameda, zupełnie jak w pokoju. Pierwsze wrażenie otrzymujesz szpitala z łózkami. W oknach są firanki, przed trumnami kanapki – zresztą wszystko nader skromne i proste⁴⁴.

Mohammad's moska⁴³ is a Turkish precise work in the shape of a merry gazebo inside which there are tombs covered with black velvet with Turkish inscriptions. Their gloomy outlines clash with this light and joyous style of the whole, just like a catafalque would clash with a boudoir. In an added side structure, there are coffins of Mohammad's sisters, wives and relatives, as if in house's bedroom. Your first impression is that of a hospital ward filled with beds. There are drapes in the windows and sofas in front of the coffins – in fact, everything's exceptionally modest and simple.⁴⁴

39 *Ibid.*, letter no. 26, p. 215.

40 De Amicis (a book by the author translated by Maria Siemiradzka entitled *Konstantynopol. Wspomnienia z podróży* [Constantinople. Travel memories] published in Warsaw in 1879) was often discussed by Zaleski, who argued that the author embellished and idealised his impressions to such an extent that they offered not so much a description of reality but rather of some mirage.

41 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 26, p. 215.

42 A. de Custine, *La Russie en 1839*, Brussels 1844.

43 Moska – a Polonised version of *mosque*.

44 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 26, p. 215.

Clearly Sienkiewicz's encounter with Constantinople left him in shock. He was expecting some *mirage Oriental* but instead he experienced overwhelming chaos, slapdashness and filth, the extent of which astounded him, surpassing his wildest expectations. In the same letter he argued:

Co to jest Stambu? Tu i owdzie wielka jakaś budowa: Seraskierat, wysoka Porta, św. Zofia, meczet Sulejmana, zresztą nagromadzenie chat nędznych nad wszelki wyraz. Wyobrażałem sobie, że to będą brudy, ale brudy włoskie, wśród których przebyskują arcydzieła. Spiętrzone mury, wśród których widać twarze bogów i duch wielki. Gdzie tam! To nie brudy, tylko obrzydliwości. To nie spiętrzone mury, tylko wałace się żydowskie domostwa małego miasteczka. [...] Góry śmieci, paskudztwa, resztek ubrania, jedzenia, powybijane doły, porozkopywana naga ziemia. Między tym wszystkim i na ulicach psy i psy. Ale nie „dusze złote” – tylko bezkształtne, robaczywe, parszywe, ociekłe potworki, których woń z daleka sprawia mdłości⁴⁵.

What is Istanbul? A major structure here and there: Sereskierat, the Sublime Porte, Hagia Sophia, and the Süleymaniye Mosque, and the rest is an accumulation of mostly shoddy huts. I was expecting filth but I imagined Italian filth from which masterpieces would stand out. Billowing walls inside of which you could see the faces of gods and some grand spirit. If only! It's not filth, it's something far more disgusting. These are not billowing walls but some collapsing small-town Jewish abodes. (...) Piles of rubbish, muck, pieces of clothing, food, holes in the ground and unpaved broken dirt. All that and every street filled with dogs. But those are not some 'golden souls', rather some shapeless, worm-eaten, lousy, dripping monstrosities whose smell makes you nauseous from a mile away.⁴⁵

Those remarks, with the dominant motif of 'dead dogs in Galata', are clearly not free of axiology. Sienkiewicz was scathing in his evaluation of the civilisational achievements of the empire that once ruled half the world. In his time, he thought, that was long gone. Turkey could not even dream of being compared to the unequally developed Western Europe. In his polemic with de Amicis, who, filled with admiration for the city, compared Constantinople to a gigantic village spreading on the Bosphorus, Sienkiewicz exclaimed: 'A village, so be it! But what a mess! (...)'⁴⁶ Soon afterwards, however, he added, as if after a deeper consideration: 'Well, yes. Life itself is absorbing – this swarming of the Asian multitude. It seems somewhat like swarming vermin'.⁴⁷

Sienkiewicz's letters ooze disappointment. There was nothing that profoundly moved him, nothing charmed him, and nothing fuelled his imagination. Surely his visits to the Museum, where he saw perfectly preserved Turkish uniforms from the period of the rule of king Sobieski and the endless collections of former weapons proved useful. He got some respite from the Princes' Islands, which he viewed at sea veiled in thick fog, and the wonderful view of the Sea of Marmara. However, his spirits were only eventually lifted during a visit to the Grand Bazar, where, as he had been assured, one could meet people from around the world. In

45 *Ibid.*, letter no. 26, p. 216.

46 *Ibid.*, letter no. 26, p. 216.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 217.

a letter to Janczewska in which he described that visit, he spared no detail – he became interested in the local trade customs:

Oprowadza nas po nim malarz Farnetti⁴⁸, Polak, który zna Stambul doskonale i umie wszystko tanio kupować. – Żebyś Ty wiedziała Hanem, jak się w tym Bazarze malują rozmaite temperamenty narodowe. Turek się nie targuje. Powiada swoją cenę i gdy mu ofiarują mniejszą, podnosi w górę głowę, mówiąc: jok! – nie! Ledwie raczy gadać z kupującym. Żydzi tak się ujadają jak u nas, a z Grekami cała tragedia: „Dzieci moje umrą z głodu, żona! Chcesz je zabić? Chcesz odpowiadać przed Bogiem? Napluj mi w twarz, jeśli mogę oddać za tę cenę. – Wychodzisz? Czelabi! Effendi! Monsieur! Gospodin! – bierz!”⁴⁹

We were shown around by Farnetti,⁴⁸ a painter and a Pole who knew Istanbul perfectly and was able to buy there anything and everything cheap. If only you knew Hanem [Turkish endearment] how in this Bazar different national temperaments became visible. Turks do not haggle. They speak their price and if a client offers less, they lift their heads and say: yok! – no! They barely talk to buyers. Jews yap just as back home, and Greeks are an endless tragedy: “My children will die of hunger, my wife! Do you want to kill them? Do you want to answer to God? Spit in my face if I can give it up at that price. You’re leaving? Czelabi! Effendi! Monsieur! Gospodin! – take it!”⁴⁹

Other historical monuments that Sienkiewicz saw included Eiub, Fanar and the Greek cathedral. He also met with Achmed Weffik,⁵⁰ a Turkish official and former diplomat who offered him a special lecture on the origin of the Turkish nation and, naturally, argued in support of its ancient roots and global significance. In his lavish house Sienkiewicz witnessed the feudal relations between a grand master and the servants, whom he treated like slaves, and he got a taste of true Turkish hospitality. He also visited the palace in Berlebej and in Skutari⁵¹ he watched genuine rituals of wailing Dervishes. Zaleski offered a detailed account of that visit in his book. He spared no detail and included a description of the expression of disgust on Sienkiewicz’s face who having endured a session of the Dervishes trampling sick infants (which was supposed to restore their health) exited appalled by the primitive practices. The writer kept fonder memories from his visit to Kachariatch, where he admired in the temple well-preserved beautiful mosaics (Christ’s Head, Virgin Mary with Baby Jesus). A visit to a historical cemetery on their way to Skutari (in his letter he exclaimed ‘Wonderful!’) put him in a melancholic mood and inspired to reflect on Turkish culture. He thus wrote to Janczewska:

Ktoś powiedział o Turkach, że lud ten żyje w największej przyjaźni ze śmiercią – i mimo woli przychodzi ci na myśl, że te miasta rojne, brudne, nędzne to chwilowe zbiegowisko, chwilowy jarmark

Someone said about Turks that they live in a strong friendship with death – and instinctively you think that these swarming filthy shoddy cities are only a fleeting crowd, a brief fair of human litter while

48 Stefan Farnetti, half-Pole and half-Italian, a painter permanently living in Constantinople.

49 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 27, pp. 224–225.

50 Antoni Zaleski devoted the entire chapter 5 of his book to him. Achmed Weffik was the head of the Porte in Bucharest, ambassador in Paris, chairman of the Turkish Chamber of Deputies, grand vizier, and governor-general of Brussa.

51 Skutari (Turkish Üsküdar) – a borough of Constantinople, on the Asian side of the Bosphorus.

ludzkiego pomiotu, a prawdziwe życie ciche i wieczne zaczyna się tam pod cyprysami. – Puviss de Chavannes umiałby to odmalować⁵².

the true life that is quiet and eternal begins there, under the cypress trees. – Puviss de Chavannes would be able to paint this.⁵²

EX ORIENTE LUX?

To say ‘light comes from the East’ in light of Sienkiewicz’s account would seem ironic. It is not that the journey was not satisfying. Maybe all the travellers had excessive expectations? They were clearly convinced about the ultimate failure of the former Empire, and that which the writer had insightfully noted was a confirmation of the crisis which the Ottoman state suffered after the severe defeat by Europe. The tendency to frame these issues in such categories (i.e., of a downfall, failure, or fiasco), to which Sienkiewicz only alluded, resonated strongly in Zaleski’s account, as he did not shy away from bold speculations regarding Turkey’s political future, a country which he termed, with some satisfaction, ‘Europe’s ill person’.⁵³ In the description of Pera, a borough of Constantinople, where at every step the greatest European powers flaunted palaces of their diplomatic missions, the journalist was even wondering which of the states would play a decisive role. There was, however, no doubt that Islam was in decline and it was only a matter of time when a banner with a cross would fly over Hagia Sophia.

Would Constantinople survive? Surely, the journalist confirmed: ‘Without the Turks and their destructive rule it will continue, even for its mere location, to be a wonderful city of the south, though no longer the “pearl” of the east’.⁵⁴

It seems, however, that Westerners did realise that Constantinople’s legend was a product of centuries-old idealisation. In 1908, Louis Bertrand devoted to that matter an article with the suggestive title *La réalité et le mirage*, in which he offered, i.a., an account of the many years he had spent in the city and his disappointment, which might have been even greater than that experienced by Sienkiewicz. At some point, he stated bitterly: ‘*Sans nos Byron, nos Théophile Gautier, nos Loti, Stamboul, elle-même ne serait qu’une expression géographique*’,⁵⁵ eventually admitting that the

52 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 28, p. 233.

53 The authorship of this term has been commonly assigned to Nicolas I.

54 A. Zaleski, *Z wycieczki na Wschód...*, p. 245. The author referenced an anecdote by Maurycy Mann which described how the vision of the wonderful nature of Constantinople had emerged. Apparently, an English lord arrived in Turkey’s capital aboard his own yacht. He stopped at the port and viewed the city through binoculars. Several hours later he departed without even trying to set his foot on land.

55 ‘Had it not been for our Byron, Théophile Gautier or Loti, Istanbul would have been nothing more than a mere geographical name’ (translation into Polish J. Sz.).

‘mirage Oriental’ was just that, a mirage.⁵⁶ From today’s perspective, such views must be considered as typical instances of colonial perception.

GREECE

In Constantinople, the travellers parted ways. Zaleski’s mission was accomplished, Pochwalski stayed longer to finish the portrait of Ludwika Gropplerowa, and Sienkiewicz departed for Greece aboard the “Donnai”, a shuttle between Bebek and Athens.

At night, he watched the sea closely. Islands slowly emerged from the darkness and the fog. Enchanted by the sight, he wrote an enthusiastic letter to Jadwiga: ‘I was thrilled thinking that I would be entering the Archipelago about which Greeks said it was as if the sky, because it was filled with islands just as the sky is filled with stars. Maybe that is why they named it the “Archsea”⁵⁷ In his report published in the *Niwa* in 1889 under the title “Wycieczka do Aten” he reused those descriptions, but in an expanded and supplemented version. He admired the landscape but must of all the stream of light flowing from the sky.

Wzrok na Archipelagu sięga dalej niż na innych morzach europejskich. Nawet najodleglejsze wyspy widzi się tak czysto i wyraźnie, że można odróżnić niemal każdy załamek skały i zarośla pokrywające zręby wiszarów. [...] Morze i niebo nie tylko są lazuruowe, ale i świetliste; gdzie indziej słońce świeci i pali, tu zdaje się przenikać cały krajobraz, wsiąkać weń, nasycać go i stapiać się z nim wyłączając zupełnie wszelki cień. [...] Wszelkie zarysy, na które oko pada, są jednocześnie i niezmiernie wyraźne, i mimo tego miękkie, bo objęte jednym tonem, zarazem przejasnym i łagodnym⁵⁸.

Your eyesight in the Archipelago extends further than on any other European seas. Even the remotest islands can be seen so clearly and distinctly that you can discern almost every rocky recess and the scrubs overgrowing the land. (...) Both the sea and the sky are not just azure but also luminous. In other places the sun shines and burns, but here it seems to permeate the entire landscape, sink deep into it, saturate it, and melt with it removing any shade. (...) Any outlines onto which your sights may fall as both distinct and yet soft because covered by a single tone, both utterly bright and mild.⁵⁸

The land which once was the cradle of European civilisation made him shiver with emotion. In a letter to Janczewska he confessed:

Niech, co chce, będzie, człowiek z pewnym wzruszeniem staje na tej ziemi, w obliczu Aten. Jak Innocenty VIII powiedział o Polsce, że w niej każda piędź ziemi krwią męczeńską przesiąknięta, tak można by powiedzieć, że tu każda przesiąknięta myślą

May there be what may, you set foot on this land facing Athens with some emotion. Like Innocent VIII said about Poland that in it every scrap of land is soaked with martyr blood, so you could say that here the land is soaked with Greek thought

56 L. Bertrand, “La réalité et le mirage”, in: *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. 48 (1908), p. 141.

57 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 31, p. 247.

58 H. Sienkiewicz, “Wycieczka do Aten”, in: *Niwa* issue 1-3 (1889). As quoted in a reprint: *idem, Dzieła*, vol. 44, p. 240.

grecką, sztuką grecką. Pamiętasz w drugiej części *Fausta* Macierze, owe pierwoksztalty i pierwowzory wszystkiego, istniejące gdzieś poza światami, poza czasem i przestrzenią, tak uroczyście w swoich nieokreślonych samotniach, że aż straszne. Attyka, nie będąc nieokreśloną ani straszną, jest przecie podobną intelektualną macierzą całej cywilizacji. Bez niej nie wiadomo, gdzie byśmy byli i czym byśmy byli. Wszystkie inne cywilizacje gubiły się w fantasmagoriach i potwornościach, ona jedna wzięła za podstawę wiedzy i sztuki świat realny, a jednocześnie umiała z tych pierwiastków czysto realnych wytworzyć najwyższy ład, prawdziwie boską harmonię. Jednym słowem: umiała być boską, nie przestając być ludzką, i to objaśnia całe jej znaczenie⁵⁹.

All of Sienkiewicz's reflections about Greece were special – they carried acceptance, outright adoration, and overt admiration. When reading them one has the sense of reading something deliberate and well-formed. The images and impressions make the reader feel like an erudite.

The ship with the writer on board arrived at Piraeus before the dawn. From there Athens, his final destination, could be reached by train. But he decided to take the coach. He wanted to discover the land in his own way, intimately, if you will. These descriptions always seem as if he had been there before. The reader's knowledge and imagination become engaged which is why the foggy Acropolis seems so majestic. Upon his arrival, Sienkiewicz did not conceal his astonishment – contemporary Athens seemed beautiful:

jasne, schludne i wesołe miasto, zupełnie europejskie, ale budujące się wedle dawnych porządków architektonicznych greckich, co mu nadaje pyszny pozór. Wszędzie spostrzegasz kolumny jońskie, korynckie i doryckie, fryzy, które począł rzeźbić człowiek, a dorzeźbia słońce

and Greek art. Recall the 'realm of the mothers' in *Faust*, those original shapes and models of everything, existing somewhere outside the world, outside of time and space, so charming in their undefined re-treats that they seem terrifying. Attica, even though neither undefined nor terrifying, is, in fact, a similar intellectual realm of the mothers of an entire civilisation. Without it who knows where or what we would have been. All other civilisations got lost in phantasmagorias and atrocities. It was the only one to take the real world as the foundation for knowledge and art and yet it was able to use those purely physical elements to create the highest order, a truly divine harmony. In short: it was able to be divine while remaining human, and that explains its whole significance.⁵⁹

a bright, tidy and cheerful city, completely European, yet developing as per old Greek architectural rules, a fact which gives it a delicious appearance. Everywhere you look you find Ionic, Doric, and Corinthian columns, and friezes which were initially carved by man but later completed by the sun

he reported to Janczewska.⁶⁰

In the city's architecture he noticed that what he valued the most: a direct relationship between nature and what is man-made. In his view that was the basic principle for a civilisation to function well, and the foundation of order and harmony. He did not notice that what had struck visitors to Athens before, the artificial atmosphere of the city recently redeveloped and modelled after Western metropolises.⁶¹ He stayed in the very centre of the city, in a hotel at the corner of

59 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 31, p. 248-249.

60 *Ibid.*, pp. 251-252.

61 Božidar Jezernik wrote: 'Athens retained their oriental atmosphere until the mid 19th century, just

Constitution Square and du Stade Street. From there he set off for his daily strolls, observing the passers-by and watching the new order as Greece between 1870 and 1890 was becoming a modern state. As was typical for him, he watched the streets to absorb the local atmosphere, somewhat disappointed at not being able to find people of classical features he knew from ancient monuments. He also missed any emphatic exotic types and the Orient-related picturesqueness. He recorded that the dominant countenance was the Armenian type, common, and unattractive. The contemporary Greeks – noisy, cynical, and lazy – did not resemble the characters from old legends, myths or epics. Far too often their main feature was national pride, verging on megalomania not proven by any actual achievements. Sienkiewicz was also critical of the Church of Greece. He argued that it was a real tragedy that a country of such past belonged to a schism: 'I am saying this not as some fanatic, but a cult that is so morose, so steeped in dry formalism will never foster science or art'.⁶² In his view no kind of orthodoxy could be reconciled with the commonly felt desire for a modernisation of life.

The highlight of Sienkiewicz's trip through Greece was the exploration of ruins. He visits the Acropolis, the Areopagus, the Hagia Triada museum, the temple of Zeus, the Stoa, and the Agora. He described his stroll through Acropolis in a letter to Janiczewska, in minute detail, as a special experience:

Pierwsze wrażenie: ruina, ruina, cisza, śmierć! Kolumny porozsuwane tak [rysunek], ściany strzaskane, wyszczerbione, przeświecające na wylot, poobłamywane, nigdzie łokcia swobodnego gruntu, cała przestrzeń zawalona trzonami kolumn, zrębami architrawów, fryzów, obłamami metopów, kapiteli, głazami ścian. Wszystko to narzucone jedno na drugie, obsuwające się, zwieszane, pochyłe, piętrzone, leżące w dzikim bezładzie, o którym nawet Forum rzymskie nie może dać pojęcia. Przychodzi ci do głowy, że się tu odbyła jakaś straszliwa walka olbrzymów lub olbrzymich sił, od której góra się trzęsła, pękały mury, aż wreszcie runęło wszystko i pozostało tylko zniszczenie. Więc pierwszym wrażeniem, jakie otrzymujesz jest wrażenie katastrofy.⁶³

My first impressions: a ruin, a ruin, quiet, death! Columns spread like this [a drawing], walls shattered, chipped, with holes through and through, broken off, not a cubit of free land, the entire area littered with column cores, skeletons of architraves, friezes, fragments of metopes, capitals, and wall boulders. All that tossed one onto another, slipping, sagging, sloped, accumulated, lying in some wild disorder unimaginable even for a Roman Forum. You imagine that some huge battle of giants must have taken place here or a struggle between outstanding forces which shook the hill, cracked the walls, and finally everything collapsed and destruction ensued. So, your first impression is that of a catastrophe.⁶³

like most Greek cities (...) After 1834, when the seat of the Greek government was transferred to Athens, the walls built round the city during the Ottoman period were pulled down so that the new Hellenic capital could spread. Several streets were opened, levelled and widened, and new buildings sprang up throughout the city. (...) By the mid 19th century the Turkish part of Athens had disappeared. Mosques were quickly demolished or turned into warehouses. In the latter half of the 19th century the historical part of Athens was replaced a modern "French" or "South German" city with a population of 50,000 souls' (*Wild Europe...*, p. 229).

62 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 31, pp. 254-255.

63 *Ibid.*, letter no. 32, p. 261.

The erudite nature of the description offers indications of Sienkiewicz's reading lists – *Ateny* by Burnouf or the French best-seller *Dictionnaire des antiquites* by Rich. Yet it also conveys a trace of emotion, in fact more convincing in his private correspondence than in the press pieces as in the former it was more direct:

Więc siedzisz, patrzysz na to kamienne uroczysko, na potop słoneczny, na zatopione w świetle zręby, złamy, aż wreszcie coś wstaje od ruiny, idzie i wstępuje w Ciebie. Zaczynasz się jednać z tym światem, później zlewać, w końcu po prostu kamieniejesz. Wtedy Ci jest dobrze, bo wchodzi w Ciebie ogromny spokój, ale to taki ogromny, jaki tylko może mieć kamień i ruina. [...] Prostopota, spokój, powaga i prawdziwie boski ład – oto one⁶⁴.

So, you sit, you observe this stone range, the solar deluge, the skeletons and pieces flooded with daylight and finally something rises from the ruin, approaches and enters you. You eventually begin to melt into one with this world, you eventually become petrified. Then you feel good because some enormous calm enters you, but it's so enormous like only of a stone and a ruin can. (...) Those were: simplicity, calm, gravity, and true divine order.⁶⁴

In all fairness, I must confront this remark with a modern remark by a previously referenced researcher. There is no doubt that to explore Athens means most of all to explore the Acropolis. As Christopher Wordsworth described it: 'ever admired and imitated but never equalled in beauty',⁶⁵ however... also in this instance it is worth listening to Jezernik:

Aby ujrzeć je w pełnej okazałości, trzeba by było jechać tam przed końcem XVII wieku, w towarzystwie Francisca Vernona czy Sir George'a Whelera⁶⁶, kiedy świątynia Ateny stała jeszcze nienaruszona. Poradzono by nam wtedy wziąć ze sobą ze trzy oki⁶⁷ kawy i przekupić nimi władze, by wydały zgodę na odwiedzenie Akropolu. Ci bardziej ciekawscy mieliby jednak problemy, gdyby chcieli na przykład poczynić tam dokładne pomiary, miejsce było bowiem siedzibą garnizonu tureckiego [...]⁶⁸

To view them in their full greatness one would need to have travelled there by the 17th century, in the company of Francis Vernon or Sir George Wheler⁶⁶, when the temple of Minerva and the Rotunda were completely intact. They would have been well advised to take three okes⁶⁷ or so of coffee with them to bribe the Ottoman authorities for permission to visit the Acropolis. The most curious of them would have had some difficulty in making exact measurements of it because the castle housed a Turkish garrison (...)⁶⁸

While the Turks, the researcher argued, were not willing to let anyone in. Further in his report from Athens, suspense intensified as if in a film by Hitchcock. It was a story of the city and its monuments moving from one owner to another, a story of unceremonious transformations into the products of new religions and civilisa-

64 *Ibid.*, letter no. 32, p. 262.

65 B. Jezernik, *Wild Europe...*, p. 229. The author referred to: Ch. Wordsworth, *Greece: Pictorial, Descriptive, and Historical* (London: 1839).

66 *Ibid.* That is a reference to Francis Vernon's letters from his journey from Venice, through Istria, Dalmatia and Greece to Smyrna, in Rev. John Ray, *A Collection of Curious Travels and Voyages. Containing Dr. Leonhardt Rawwolf's Journey Into the Eastern Countries II* (London: 1738), and a work by George Wheler, *A Journey into Greece. In the Company of dr Spon of Lyons* (London: 1682).

67 Okka – a former unit of measure of mass used by the Ottoman Empire. 1 okka = 2¼ pounds, approx. 1.282 kg.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 230.

tions, and, finally, of cynical pillage and looting often performed under the guise of science and protection of common heritage. Those brigands included not only pagans but also members of the highly developed societies of Western Europe, who thus were able to fill the halls of their stately museums, which they boast nowadays. As Jezernik has argued:

Zachodni miłośnicy sztuk udzielali się pilnie nie tylko na Akropolu. Na początku XIX wieku grupa brytyjskich podróżnych natrafiła w Mistrze na Peloponezie na kilkanaście fragmentów pięknie zdobionych kolumn, które kiedyś były częścią świątyni Demeter. Obok nich leżała rozbita na kawałki tablica z napisem. Podobno zniszczyli ją dwaj Francuzi, którzy nie potrafili jej odczytać i połamali ją na złość brytyjskim podróżnikom⁶⁹.

Western art lovers were busy not only in the Acropolis. At the beginning of the nineteenth century a group of British travellers in Mistra in the Peloponese came across several broken fragments of elegant fluent columns that may once have belonged to a temple to Ceres. Near these relics was defaced inscription. Allegedly, it was defaced by two Frenchmen, who, unable to read it, broke it to spite British travellers.⁶⁹

Was Sienkiewicz aware of how much destruction people afflicted there? That seems to have been the case. Contemplation of ruins usually contains melancholy and meditation on the past. Already in America the writer saw how original cultures were destroyed in the name of the future. I also believe that he must have realised that that what he was viewing was but a fraction of what he had imagined so beautifully and which had grown, not only in his imagination, into a true myth of Europe's roots. It was in the Greek ruins that he saw the mystical light and divine order traditionally associated with the Orient. The miraculous symmetry of that which was divine and human was, according to him, the purest expression of Greek art:

Mitologia grecka była częścią sił przyrody, czyli elementarnym panteizmem, ale w duszy Greka artysta przeważał zawsze nad filozofem, więc naprzód poeci ubrali zjawiska w ciała i uczucia ludzkie, później przyszła sztuka plastyczna i stąd narodziła się taka cudowna baśń kamienna. – Atena (do której z powodu Odysei mam szczególne nabożeństwo) umiała też sobie wybrać miejsce na stolicę, bo co to za tło dla tych świątyni i posągów! Z jednej strony widać morze, które w tym przezroczystym powietrzu wydaje się tuż! Z drugiej – całą Attykę jak na dłoni: góry Hymetu, dalej Pentelikon, z którego brano marmury na świątynie: na północ Parnas, a ku południo-zachodowi, ku Cieśninie Salamińskiej, Daphni. Nad wszystkim niebo ciągle pogodne i orły, których krakanie przerywa do dziś ciszę na Akropolu⁷⁰.

Greek mythology praised the power of nature, i.e., fundamental pantheism, yet in the Greek soul the artist always took precedence over the philosopher, so first the poets clad phenomena in human bodies and emotions, and only later plastic arts came and the amazing marble tale was born. – Athena (whom I treat with particular reverence because of the Odyssey) knew how to choose a capital, just consider what a wonderful backdrop it is for the temples and statues! From one side you can see the sea, which in this crystal air seems to be right there! From the other, the entire Attica as if in the palm of your hand: the mountains of Hymettus, then Mount Pentelicus, from where the marble was taken for temples: Mount Parnassus to the north, and Daphni to the south-west, towards the Salamis Strait. Overall that the sky is constantly clear, and there are eagles whose cawing even today breaks the silence in the Acropolis.⁷⁰

69 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

70 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 32, pp. 263-264.

However, what is most interesting is the fact that he valued the phantasm more than reality. Even though Greece had always been his desired destination and dream, he did not return to it, as he indicated in a letter to Janczewska, happy. It was close to a year since his wife died. His travels were supposed to calm his nerves; instead, they irritated him. He was returning through Italy and stopped in Brindisi and Naples. Having waited there until Kazimierz Pochwalski returned from Constantinople, they set off on an intense tour of southern Italy. They took a trip to Mount Vesuvius, they explored Pompeii, the Blue Grotto (*Grotta Azzurra*), Sorrento, Capri, and Castellmare. Once again, he immersed himself in the Elysium of culture. Eventually, he stopped in Rome, where he met with Pius Weloński and Stanisław Smolka.⁷¹

THE LETTER. THE GENRE AND ITS ANTHROPOLOGY

In the title of my article, I included the phrase ‘genre-fluid nature’ that emphasises the actually minor differences that exist in this particular case between the personal account, i.e., the artist’s journal or correspondence, and the travel letter, which has been treated as a public statement with an account-like nature (like a reportage). Indeed, minor differences if one was to skip the issues related to censorship and self-censorship commonly applied by authors in that period, as that was a major issue, Sienkiewicz included. Many of the remarks he communicated openly in his private letters, mainly related to political issues, could not and did not appear in press releases or texts intended for book publication.

As for its genology one could say this: if something was published in the press and it fulfilled the function of a report from a location, journey or visit, it did not matter whether it was of a private nature or not, nor what other genre-specific features it held – be it of a column, essay, epic, etc. – it was always read as an account having the original features of the author’s subjectivity. Such a text benefited greatly from the great stylistic bond,⁷² shared in the 19th century by all journalistic/literary texts, which were still developing their genre specifics (not yet a canon);⁷³

71 Pius Weloński (1849-1931), Polish painter and sculptor settled in Rome. Stanisław Smolka (1854-1924), Polish historian, organised of the so-called Roman expeditions (1886-1901) the goal of which was to explore Polish archival material stored in Vatican. They were both friends with Sienkiewicz.

72 Z. Jarosiński, “Tekst użytkowy i tekst literacki w XIX w.” [Utility and literary text in the 19th century], in: *Teksty* [Texts] issue 4 (1975).

73 Canon is actually something that remains unchanged in terms of its properties; press genres or, more broadly, media genres have always retained some kind of openness.

in essence, it was only deprived the rhetoric of intimacy, which constituted its original modal framework. While retaining the content, i.e., that 'which was being reported', a letter or correspondence being published abandoned any indications of familiarity, conversational fillers and all those other elements that could help identify the author and the addressee directly. That is perfectly illustrated by *Wycieczka do Aten*, which had originally been intended as a reading, which while primarily being a travel account was also a display of the art of synthesis and a proof of its author's high culture.

His novel, after the removal of any elements of direct identification, which in private correspondence spanned several letters, often extensive lengthwise and thus diffused in terms of content, functionalised differently in the form of a press release eventually became a several-pages-long statement with a strongly marked author's subject, proprietary style and a concept of storytelling. The fact that Sienkiewicz had an idea how it should be developed was revealed in his letter to Janczewska of 8 November 1886, in which he concluded outright: 'As for its reading, it won't be a description of the journey but rather something like images from Heine's travels, that is as if a column filled with diverse reflections'.⁷⁴ Indeed, the result was something of an extended column: with free-flowing narration, reflections on politics, customs and the role of tradition, with elements of humour and anecdotes, yet not avoiding deeper musings.

Everything I have discussed regarding the Oriental mirages and disappointments, became condensed in the correspondence published in the press and a near essence of the previously scattered remarks and impressions, a kind of an artistic summary. As his ship was departing Constantinople in the evening, Sienkiewicz admired a unique view:

Dzdzyste od kilku tygodni niebo wypogodziło się na koniec zupełnie i zarumieniło się wspaniałą zorzą wieczorną. Pobliski brzeg azjatycki zalany był światłem; Bosfor i Złoty Róg wyglądały jak olbrzymie ogniste wstęgi, a Pera, Galata i Stambuł, ze swymi wieżami, z kopułami i minaretami meczetów, tonęły w złocie i purpurze. [...] Chwilami zdawało się, że cały gród zaczarowanych pałaców wisi w powietrzu, to znów byłem pod wrażeniem takiego majestatu, ogromu i potęgi, jak gdyby z tego miasta dotychczas jeszcze szedł strach na całą Europę i jak-

The sky, overcast and drizzly, eventually cleared and gained a crimson hue from the evening afterglow. The nearby Asian shore was flooded with light: the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn seemed like some fiery ribbons, while Pera, Galata and Istanbul, with their towers, copulas, and mosque minarets, were drowning in a golden and purple haze. (...) For a moment it seemed that the entire metropolis of enchanted palaces hung in mid air, and suddenly I was astounded by the majesty, immensity and might as if the city has still been spreading fear

74 H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 30, p. 240. The reading entitled *Wspomnienia z Aten* [Memories from Athens] was delivered by Sienkiewicz in Krakow on 25 March 1887. Heine's text, which Sienkiewicz used as a model, was entitled *Die Reissbilder* [Travel Pictures], published in Poland in translation by L. Kaczyńska and A. Mielezsko-Maliszkiewicz as *Obrazy z podróży* (Warsaw: 1879), vol. 1-4. In terms of its genre, the text is a mixture of a travel journal and a column; it also includes poetic fragments.

by w wieży Seraskieratu dziś, tak samo jak ongi, wazyły się losy świata⁷⁵.

throughout Europe and as if in the tower of Sereskierat the fate of the world was still being decided, as it once has.⁷⁵

While in search of a balance between the experience of illusion and disillusionment, the writer managed to distance himself from it and view it more realistically:

te blaski zorzy wieczornej, te morza płonące, pałace i minaret, skąpane w purpurze i złocie, są czymś zupełnie równie rzeczywistym i realnym jak psy zdechłe leżące dziesiątkami po ulicach Stambułu⁷⁶.

that glare of the evening afterglow, those reddened seas, those palaces, and minarets drowned in purple and gold, are just as real as the dead dogs lying by their dozens in the streets of Istanbul.⁷⁶

Sienkiewicz's trademark tone, filled with paradoxes, could suggest that contradiction was the essence of the East and the local civilisation, which found itself in a moment of a major political and cultural change. The history of humanity claimed millions of nameless victims, becoming a bloody spectacle of violence. As his ship passed through the Dardanelles, the writer alluded in his reflection to his completed visit in the Balkans:

I znów przychodzi na myśl pytanie, które na Wschodzie przychodzi niemal wszędzie – w Ruszczuku, w Warnie, w Burgas, w samym Stambule: zali to są te kraje, o które wylało się tyle krwi ludzkiej, że można by nią całą cieśninę wypełnić? Zali dla tych miast, na wpół zapadłych w ruinę, zamieszkałych przez na wpół żebrzącą ludność, dla tych jałowych pól, bezpłodnych skał wydają się miliony, utrzymują się olbrzymie armie – i życie upływa pokoleniom ludzkim w niepewności dnia i godziny?⁷⁷

Once again, the question comes to mind which arises in the East almost everywhere – in Rustschuk, in Varna, in Burgas, even in Istanbul: may these be the countries for which so much human blood has been spilled that it could fill the entire strait? May it be for those cities, half-fallen in ruin, inhabited by half-beggarly population, for those barren fields and sterile rocks that millions expire and huge armies are maintained – and the life of human generations pass without knowing the day or the hour?⁷⁷

Leaving aside political speculation, Sienkiewicz finally directed his attention towards Hellada and basically repeated all his ravings from his private correspondence. His impressions when he first set his foot on the Greek soil, when he explored the capital, and his remarks about its inhabitants and their character which he had spun over several letters were rearranged into a new perfectly tuned whole. It could not omit his first-hand experiences in the ruins and it offered a detailed summary of that what Athens and Greece had been were for humankind, without which, to quote his own words: 'no one knows who we would have been or where'. Mind you, in *Wycieczka* Sienkiewicz managed to offer a broader than in

75 H. Sienkiewicz, *Wycieczka do Aten*, in: *idem, Dzieła*, vol. 44, pp. 236-237.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 238.

77 *Ibid.*, pp. 238-239.

his private correspondence argumentation about the reasons behind Greece's revival after the centuries of Turkish domination:

Nie sam tylko interes polityczny nakazywał wskrzeszenie Grecji, ale dla Europy był to dług do spłacenia, była to kwestia po prostu wstydu. [...] Gdyby nie owo olbrzymie credit, które na rachunek Grecji zapisała cywilizacja, gdyby nie jej sława i czyny, gdyby nie pieśni Homera, nie wspomnienia Maratonu i Salaminy, nie te ruiny akropoliskich arcydzieł, baszowie do tej pory mieliby swoje haremy w Erechtejonie, a ze szczytów Akropolis powiewałaby flaga Proroka. Więc gdy powiem, że Grecję dzisiejszą odbudowali Homer, Milcjades, Leonidas, Temistokles, Fidias, Perikles i inni bohaterowie lub geniusze tej miary, nie będzie to figurą retoryczną, ale dziejową prawdą. Pracując dla sławy swego narodu, pracowali, nie wiedząc o tym, dla jego odrodzenia – tacy nieśmiertelni agenci sprawili, że Grecja żyje⁷⁸.

It was not just politics that dictated the revival of Greece. For Europe it was a debt to be paid, it was simply a case of shame. (...) If not for the huge credit recorded by the civilisation in Greece's account, if not for its fame and deeds, if not for Homer's song, the memories of Marathon and Salamina, and if not for the ruins of the masterpieces in Acropolis, the bashaws would have still kept their harems housed in Erechteion and the Prophet's flag would have still been billowing from the tops of Acropolis. So if you say that today's Greece was rebuilt by Homer, Miltiades, Leonidas, Themistocles, Phidias, Pericles, and other heroes or geniuses of similar stature, that is no rhetorical figure but a historical fact. By working for the glory of their nation, they worked, unwittingly, for its revival – those eternal agents are the reason why Greece lives.⁷⁸

It seems clear that for Sienkiewicz the story of Greece, both ancient and modern, offered a chance to remind his compatriots, with whom he communicated while avoiding censorship, about the healing power of culture and its strength.

When we compare both journeys, the one recorded by Zaleski and by Sienkiewicz, one could draw many conclusions yet first and foremost I must stress how different their initial objectives were. Zaleski's account, extremely interesting considering his diverse interests and cognitive intentions, was filled with a multitude of details, journalistic book-keeping and sometimes even some risky political speculations yet sufficiently careful not to, for example, emphasise the complete failure of Russia in Bulgaria in the autumn of 1886. Significantly, while in Constantinople, not restricted by anything, he eagerly indulged in poking the dying of the Turkish empire. In that case Sienkiewicz was his opposite – in his letters written to his subtle and demanding pen pal he spared no detail but essentially did not split any hairs in terms of politics. In his press releases, he avoided anything that could have entailed any risk. And omitted the Balkan part altogether. Why? Because... he would have had to write the truth which no Warsaw censor would have accepted. Therefore, he chose cultural escapism. He wrote about Greek architecture, new organisation, and art and its eternal ability to revive whole nations.

Allow me to make one final, though by no means minor, remark. Modern rese-

78 *Ibid.*, p. 259. A fragment from a letter to Janczewska related to this remark reads: 'This is a unique case of a state that was revived only because 2,000 years back it bore unrivalled literature and art. In fact, no one cared in political terms for the revival of Greece, so actually: it was revived for Homer, Sophocles, Phidias, Aristotle, etc.' (H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy*, vol. 2, part 1, letter no. 30, p. 239).

arch regarding the documentary forms has significantly shifted its focus from genological issues to anthropology.⁷⁹ I believe that is justified as the domain of the various forms of documentary content has flourished and there have emerged various hybrid forms, a fact which even more has blurred the line between literature and journalism, and between truth and fiction, while it has not stopped in its search for its original mode of discussing the human condition. From that point of view what seems most important is what a text says about the world it describes, how it does that and why. It is also important having what kind of baggage one engages in the description of another culture.

It seems that Sienkiewicz was aware of those conditions. I do not think it is by accident that *Wycieczka do Aten* includes a fragment in which the writer commented on the frivolous tone of Edmond About's book, in which he stressed that contemporary Greeks differed from their ancestors, the creators of European cultural heritage.⁸⁰ Though he granted some merit to the arguments raised by 'Voltaire's grandson', he cautioned:

w tym, co mówi wspomniany autor i inni nowsi o Grekach, musi być niewątpliwie wiele przesady, a może jeszcze więcej nieporozumienia. Przede wszystkim każdy [...] podróżnik przynosi ze sobą gotową miarę etyczną, bardzo rozległą, bo będącą wpływem cywilizacji zachodniej i jej wyrobionej kultury moralnej. Owóż taką skalą mierzą społeczeństwo, które dopiero przed niedawnym czasem wydoszło się z niewoli, istotnie sromotnej i upadającej, a mierzą tym bezwzględniej, że chodzi o obcych, nie o swoich. Zapominają także i o tym, że jak na przykład pojęcia honoru i rycerskości były obce światu starożytnemu, tak samo musiała istnieć cała sfera pojęć moralnych obcych ludom wschodnim; że ludy, zwłaszcza podbite, jak byli Grecy, nie miały, ściśle mówiąc, przez długi czas żadnych pojęć, a rządziły się, bo się musiały rządzić, jeno zwierzęcym, samozachowawczym instynktem. Instynkt ów był dla nich miarodajnym i rozstrzygał zarówno w kwestiach etyki jak i logiki⁸¹.

in what the mentioned author and those younger than him said about Greeks there must be much exaggeration, and possibly even more misunderstandings. Above all, every (...) traveller brings with him a ready ethical measure, an extensive one for that matter as it remains under the influence of the Western civilisation and its established moral culture. They apply that measure to the society which has just emerged from enslavement, one which was severe and degrading, and their conduct is the more severe since they are dealing with others, not their own. They also forget that just as, e.g., the notions of honour and chivalry were unknown in the ancient world, there must have existed a whole host of moral notions alien to Eastern peoples; that peoples, conquered in particular (like Greeks), did not possess, strictly speaking, any notions for a long time and governed, as was necessary, following only some brutish instinct of self-preservation. For them it was reliable and settled the matters of both ethics and logic.⁸¹

The fact of assessing everyone using a single measure and hastily making judgements about the level of civility or savagery was according to the writer one of the

79 See: G. Grochowski, "Pytania o fikcjonalną prozę dyskursywną" [Questions about fictional discursive prose], in: *Polonistyka w przebudowie* [Polish Studies in reconstruction], ed. M. Czermińska (Cracow: 2005), and P. Zajac, *Jak świat prawdziwy stał się bajką. O literaturze niefikcyjnej* [How the real world became a fairy tale. About non-fictional literature] (Poznań: 2011).

80 I am referring to a book by Edmond About entitled *La Grèce contemporaine* (Paris: 1854).

81 H. Sienkiewicz, *Wycieczka do Aten*, p. 250.

most common threads in contemporary political discourse. If we do not use the opportunity offered by knowledge and experience, including that seen in others, we shall remain 'savage' for ever. Greeks were protected against the loss of moral sense by their recently revived political and cultural patriotism, which is mainly focussed on the miraculously regained future of their homeland.

Thus, the Greek lesson was once more a lesson for Poles and Sienkiewicz the traveller, displayed not only an excellent command of politics but also anthropological sensitivity.

*Translated by Jakub Wosik,
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ABSTRACT

The article refers to Sienkiewicz's journey to the East in Autumn 1886 and the writings remaining after that trip: private correspondence – letters to Jadwiga Janczewska (1886) and an account of the journey published in the Warsaw press entitled “Wycieczka do Aten” [A Trip to Athens], *Niwa* no. 1–3 (1889) (in a reprint: *idem, Dzieła* [Works], vol. 44, Warsaw: 1950). An additional text used in the article is a memoir written by Antoni Zaleski from the same journey entitled *Z wycieczki na Wschód. Notatki dziennikarza. Bukareszt. Ruszczuk. Warna. Konstantynopol* [From the trip to the East. Journalist's notes. Bucharest, Rustrschuk, Varna, Constantinople] (Warsaw: 1887).

The article highlights different aims of the journey that both of the authors had and confronts their specific visions of ‘other’, ‘wilder’ Europe – the Balkans and Greece, which are created anew after hundreds of years of Turkish captivity. Both of the correspondences contain interesting remarks on politics, culture and otherness. In the last part of this article the author pays attention to the fluctuations as a genre of a private letter and a letter from a journey, published in press, and also indicates to the anthropological sensitivity of the authors of correspondence.

KEYWORDS: travel letter, censorship, Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846-1916), politics, cultural heritage