

## **The Balkans through the eyes of a Polish cornet**

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**Abstract.** The study is based on an unpublished original diary by the Polish officer Ludovic Przesmycki, who took part in the Russo-Turkish war of 1829, serving under Diebitsch-Sabalkanski (Hans Karl von Diebitsch-Sabalkanski). The manuscript was bought by the Archive Institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (now known as Scientific Archive), through the intermediation of Dr. Tadeusz Grabowski, professor of Slavic Literature at Kraków University. The diary reveals interesting aspects of the life of the Balkan nations as observed by the author in his contacts with the local population during the military campaign. Despite his religious bias and subjective judgments, the Polish officer presented a new picture of the ethno-demographic characteristics of the residents of Wallachia, Moldavia, and the northeastern Bulgarian lands.

**Keywords:** Russo-Turkish War, Hans Karl von Diebitsch-Sabalkanski, Polish cornet, Ludovic Przesmycki

The Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829, also known as the war of General Diebitsch-Sabalkanski<sup>1</sup>, is famous in Bulgarian historiography primarily as a military campaign and for its diplomatic dimensions. The reason for this is rooted in the nature of the available documentation. Surprisingly, however, an unpublished manuscript by a Polish cornet<sup>2</sup>, a direct participant in the events, has left us interesting descriptions not only of the theatre of military operations but also of the Balkan peoples - the Moldovans, the Rumanians, the Bulgarians, and the Turks. Objective or partial, poetic or excessively critical, one-sided or inclined to generalizations, this ethno-demographic narrative has remained unread to date, although the manuscript has been kept in Bulgaria for decades

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Karl Friedrich Anton von Diebitsch (1785-1831), or, in Russian, Иван Иванович Дибич (Ivan Ivanovich Dibich), was a German-born Field marshal general in the Russian Army. During the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-1829, he replaced Field Marshal Wittgenstein as chief commander of the Danube army.

<sup>2</sup> Cornet was a military rank in the Russian army cavalry in the period 1731-1917.

(Paskaleva 1972, 5-16). The concrete purpose of this study is to provoke initial interest in the source prior to its publication.

A few words about the author of the diary. Regrettably, until now specialists of the era know quite little about him. The name of Ludovic Przesmycki does not figure in the heroic annals of events, and we can only draw fragmentary information about him from his memoirs and some documents attached to them. Thus, we learn that he was born around 1802-1803 in the Volhynian Governorate. As the descendent of an impoverished aristocratic family, he was unable to grow in the military career, which he soon abandoned, for this reason as well as due to illness. During the war waged by Diebitsch-Sabalkanski, he was enlisted in the Lithuanian Uhlán regiment as a cornet. He had a remarkable knowledge of languages: in addition to Polish and Russian, Przesmycki knew French, German, and Latin. He tried his hand at belles-lettres, which reveals his literary inclinations. In the second part of his memoirs, he describes events that took place in the winter of 1828 in Moldavia, as well as his impressions of the Bulgarian lands during the 1829 military campaign. His memoirs do not end with the signing of the Adrianople (Edirne) Peace Treaty, but continue with a description of the withdrawal of the army to the other side of the Danube.

A rich gallery of characters appears along the road of war travelled by this young Polish officer. His first impressions are of Moldavia, which the Russian army crossed twice. During the winter of 1828, almost the whole Danubian army camped there, and the author of the diary was able to observe the local population. The villages around the city of Ocno strongly impress him by their lovely mountainous terrain. Assessing their potential for economic development, the Pole judges that this fertile land could feed a large population, “*if the Moldovans were hard-working - but unfortunately, they are lazy*”<sup>3</sup>. Despite the possibilities to develop agriculture and viniculture, the local residents chiefly exploit the natural resources, such as the salt mines in the Carpathian Mountains, ore, fishing from the Danube.

One cannot say there is any local industry, “*because no one until now has thought about developing it*”. Under a new, enterprising leadership, however, light industry in particular could flourish, since sheep-raising yields good-quality wool, from which cloth “*unique of its kind*” could be produced. Judging by the large-scale production of home-made colourful rugs, which cover the floor of every rural “*cabin*”, the Polish officer assesses that the skill of Moldovan women could be put to use for the production of expensive carpets. He also sees a possibility for exporting high-quality wines. “*All this, in the hands of enterprising governance, would bring in countless earnings*”, writes Przesmycki (ScA, collection IV, list 1, a.u. 7, p. 5).

The Pole is amazed that, despite the fertility of the land, the local population is so poor, and he realizes this is a “*result of the oppression, lack of rights, and sloth*”. As an impartial side-observer, he clearly sees the cause of this are the

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<sup>3</sup> Ludovic Przesmycki's manuscript is preserved in the Scientific Archive of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (hereafter ScA), collection IV, list 1, archive units 7, 8, 9. The publication of the diary is forthcoming.

Greek Phanariotes and their boundless despotism. He gives an interesting description of a ceremony: when the boyars came to present themselves to the new prince, he received them seated on a high throne, and each visitor, regardless of family rank or wealth, was obliged to kiss with the utmost submissiveness the outstretched foot of the Phanariote. When the prince went out of his palace to take a walk, the streets were quickly emptied, as a precaution against assassination attempts. Prince Alexandre Caradja attempted to lighten these rules by ordering every passer-by to stand aside and salute him. If, however, the awnings of a coach happened to be dropped even by accident, the car was immediately set on fire and its owner was heavily fined. The local people would tell stories of the cruelty of rulers like Soutzos and Alexandre Caradja long after these were deposed.

Being of the Catholic faith, Przesmycki displays a special sensitivity to the religious affiliation of the population. He notes that in Moldavia and Wallachia, the religion is “Greek” and then adds that there are many Catholic villages in the Carpathian Mountains, where the parish priests are primarily missionaries from Hungary, who, following an ancient tradition, wear long beards. As they find it hard to adapt to the rugged climate, they are constantly suffering from fever. The missionaries had the advantage of being under the patronage of the Austrian emperor, and were thus able to protect the population from Turkish pogroms during the uprisings led by Alexander Ypsilantis.

The young officer is strongly impressed by the local people’s lack of religious tolerance. Although they have lived in proximity for centuries, Orthodox and Catholics detest each other. There are no marriages between Moldovans and Hungarians. Naturally, the Catholic Przesmycki presents us only with the attitude of Orthodox towards Catholics, adding that “*intolerance is a blemish on the lower class of people here*”. During his stay in Moldavia, the local people seriously assured him that “*the Catholic dogs are not Christians*” (ScA, collection IV, list I, a.u. 7, p. 6).

He gives an interesting description of the women’s monastery near the city of Neamt<sup>4</sup>. During the revolts in Moldavia, the Turks had invaded the convent and abducted more than a hundred young nuns. At the time the Polish cornet was writing his memoirs, the monastery was restored and 200 nuns were living there; they were young, beautiful, of the best families, yet, to his amazement, “*they visited the living quarters of the military men*”. This observation occasions his reflection whether it is right for a person to take vows “*in the years of passion*”, when reason is too weak for a person to take vows that are contrary to nature. The young officer’s judgment is likewise rather severe with regard to men’s monasteries in the Carpathians. “*There too, they live, as usual, in idleness and by begging*”, he writes with conviction (ScA, collection IV, list I, a.u. 7, p. 7).

He takes a moralistic tone in describing the traditions and customs of the local population. Foremost, he stresses the conservative attitude to progress made by the neighbouring nations, from which the Moldovans assimilate nothing that would change their old traditions. “*Their mores are corrupted and loose*

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<sup>4</sup> The monastery is not named in the text.

both in the best homes and in the village cabins”, he believes, which is a curious remark for those times. Although admitting that “*what is called a woman’s honour is problematic among us as well*”, he adds that in Moldavia there is no woman for whose fidelity a husband could pledge. Yet he finds it strange that the men, especially in the upper class, are not at all jealous. He sees the explanation for this in the educational difference between the two sexes.

According to Przesmycki, Moldovan women are not only beautiful, but have outdistanced their husbands by half a century with regard to civilization. Here is his description of one such lady, who had obviously won the young cornet’s heart: “*Excellently brought up, very well educated, a master at music and dancing, speaking French, German and Italian, singing like an angel, dressed after the latest Parisian fashion, the young and lovely madame Maria Dimitraki is the wife of an enormous boyar who lacks elementary manners; dressed in two fox-fur coats, wearing a little cap on his head and a shaggy beard, constantly lighting his pipe, he sits with his feet on the sofa, sulks and responds to every question asked of him with the greatest seriousness by a “yes” or “no”*”.

The situation is said to be no different in the rural regions where moral “corruption” is at an even more advanced stage. The exception to this are the Hungarian villages, where men drink less, and women are more faithful to their husbands. The Polish officer assesses, unjustifiably, that the men “*prefer*” to preserve the “*Turkish customs*” and are unwilling to give up their style of dress “*or their national obscurity*”.

The Moldovan men follow the Oriental taste in their dress. A long cloth robe similar to the Polish zupan is their under garment. Over it they wear a fox fur short coat with short and wide sleeves; they girdle themselves with long waistbands and on their heads, they wear large hats with broad tops and no brim. The official shoes are red boots, while at home they prefer to wear knitted house shoes or slippers coloured yellow or red. The wealthy differ from the common folks not by the cut of their dress but by the quality of the cloth and the precious furs they wear. The beard is also a mark of distinction among the wealthy boyar class.

As women rarely appear in public spaces, their clothes are quite different. A wealthy Moldovan woman can afford to dress in the latest European fashion, although she does not abandon the local costumes either, due to the costly beaver or sable furs they wear casually thrown over the shoulders. The middle class is distinct by the mixed clothing it wears. Although the author does not conceal his aristocratic disdain, he admits that on holidays, even a peasant woman dresses with taste: “*A colourful short coat with short sleeves, lined with fox fur; a small colourful skirt, shoes likewise of yellow or white hide, and a thin white shirt with various embroideries in the lower part and on the sleeves; a kind of small turban on the head, entwined in the braids*” (SCA, collection IV, list 1, a.u. 7, p. 10).

The rural houses impress the author by their cleanness, but the internal furnishings of even the wealthier homes is rather backward by the standards of civilization. Everywhere people sit cross-legged on the floor or upon small cushions, around low three-legged tables; seen from the side, this seems quite comical. There are no eating utensils even in the boyar families, which is why, before lunch, the guest is offered a basin of water to wash his hands. People usu-

ally drink the local wines with the various dishes, which the Pole finds “*unaesthetic, tasteless, and very spicy*”. In some regions, they use water from the salt water springs instead of salt. Warm mamaliga is usually the substitute for bread. Tea is not served with the Oriental meal, but is replaced with Turkish coffee. Men never take the pipe out of their mouths and prefer strong tobaccos. The cooks are usually Gypsies, who in Moldavia are considered to be witty, gifted and good musicians. Nevertheless, the term “Gypsy” is said to be as derogatory here as the word “Negro” is among the Turks.

In this connection, the author gives interesting descriptions of the purchase of Negro and Gypsy slaves; according to the Polish officer, this is a common transaction in the Ottoman Empire. In the city of Shumen, he personally wanted to buy an “Arap” as the Negroes are called, and the seller, advertising his goods, quite seriously told him “*of all creatures, the one most attached to man is the Negro*” (ScA, collection IV, list 1, a.u. 7, p. 11). In Moldavia, the price of Gypsies depended on their weight. As this surprised the Russian soldiers, the traders seriously asked them how slaves were sold in Russia.

The description of the Moldovans’ character is likewise unsparing. We again see here the author’s poor knowledge of the situation in the Ottoman Empire and the actual status of the population. Thus, Przesmycki describes the Moldovans as lazy, timid, of loose morals and incapable of heroic deeds. The petty cunning, miserliness and selfishness are said to be the distinguishing features of the whole population. The cornet sees nothing but slave mentality and believes the idea of freedom is alien to this people, in which he sees no sign of national energy. However, he gives their ancestors their due by interweaving historical tales about the victory of the Moldovans over Sultan Mehmed II, “*the terror of all Europe*”, who conquered Constantinople<sup>5</sup>. He makes the interesting remark that the population continues to celebrate this victory in an odd way, by fasting only on bread and water for four days.

The language of the Moldovans impresses the author by its harmony, colourfulness and the numerous Latin words they weave into their speech. Despite this, they still have no national literature, poetry is not widespread, and the rural folk songs are definitely not to his liking because they sound monotonous to him. These songs express suffering and melancholy - coming from the long years of slavery and oppression - and in this, they seem to him to resemble the folksongs of the Lithuanians.

Although he is clearly aware of the defenseless situation of people in Wallachia and Moldavia, the author leaves the strange impression of lacking empathy for the Balkan nations. Although he is in the Russian army, which should have some consciousness of being on a mission of liberation, the Pole has a markedly disdainful and even derisive attitude towards the local people. In travelling to buy horses near the Austrian border, he makes the acquaintance of two “*ridiculous originals*”, the boyars Koray and Maurikiy. He describes their outward appearance in a strongly cartoonish manner: their effeminate behaviour, their fat

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<sup>5</sup> Sultan Mehmed II entered Constantinople on 30 May 1453, which is considered the date of the official capitulation of the city.

bodies, their enormous black moustaches, the underpants and nightcaps they wear. They are rustic and uneducated, they bow at every word with pronounced Oriental servility. Wanting to laugh at their expense, he even introduces them to the other officers, who seem to lack excitement in their lives. This attitude is fully shared by his friend, Dr. May, who is a former official in the Spanish embassy in Constantinople and thus should be more familiar with the Balkans. The latter also speaks ill of the Moldovans, whom he considers to be “*spoiled egoists*”.

We might suppose this prejudice is largely due to the author’s religious bias. Although not a fervent believer, which he notes on several occasions in the narrative, Przesmycki has certain sympathies for the Catholic villages, which in this case are Hungarian. In visiting the Carpathian Mountains, he is elated at the exceptionally lovely landscapes but also impressed by the centenarians he finds among the Magyars; he believes their longevity is a sign of a moral way of life. Also, he sees here three colossal granite rocks, of which the middle one is so high that the top is lost among the clouds. The ignorant Moldovans believe these rocks are inhabited by evil spirits and warn him not to touch them. “*As long as they [the spirits] flew low, the Lord God did not bother them, but when they turned their gaze to heaven, He transformed them into these rocks*”, the local people explained to him, always making the sign of the cross and spitting when near to the colossal rocks (ScA, collection IV, list 1, a.u. 7, p. 19).

Przesmycki describes with great sympathy the Armenians in Moldavia and Wallachia. He encounters them only in cities, as merchants and people of the privileged class. They are sober and honest, liked and respected by all. He is strongly impressed by their willingness always to help out people of their own faith. One Armenian from the city of Roman told him: “*Among us, no honest person is poor. If by a confluence of events, he becomes impoverished, which can always happen in trade, we immediately and with great willingness start a petition for him, help him out as best we can. He spares no effort for our aid, and God blesses both him and us*”. Although he says the attire of Armenians does not differ from that of the Moldovans, Przesmycki emphasizes the cleanliness of their clothes and the tidy appearance of their homes. The lovely, dark-eyed Armenian women are faithful wives, gentle mothers, and good housewives. The author does not forget to note the particularities of the Armenian religion, towards which he has no prejudice. On the contrary, he describes their priests as respected clergymen, and adds, “*May God grant that in our country as well, their might be fewer temples and more exemplary clergymen*”.

One might expect that, as a participant in the military campaign south of the Danube, Ludovic Przesmycki would write interesting pages about the Bulgarian nation as well, but one would be quite disappointed. Bulgarians are mentioned only incidentally throughout the manuscript, and the idea of liberating a related fraternal “Slavic” people can be found only in our politicized historiography. On the other hand, we see the author struck with admiration for the natural beauty of the Bulgarian land. Reaching Razgrad with the cavalry, he shares: “*No pen can describe, nor can the brush of the most perfect artist depict, the lovely country through which we passed. A narrow path leads to a steep hill overgrown with bushes, and at its foot, in a small gorge, shooting upwards, rises a rocky colossus. From its top falls a crystal-clear water source, scattering into millions of droplets as it dashes onto the enormous rock lying at the foot of the colossus. The large trees that en-*

*circle it create natural bowers, home to their feathered inhabitants. Their varied chirrup, the sound of the falling waters, the silence all around, the high branches, the sleepy rocks hanging over the chasm, all this strikes with admiration, stuns, and elevates the eye and the heart, the mind and the soul*" (ScA, collection IV, list 1, a.u. 7, p. 29).

Provardia impresses him as being a natural fortress, something that the Turks fail to appreciate and allow the Russian army to capture "*the door to the Balkans*". He compares the locality to a cauldron, at the bottom of which lies a beautiful town, crossed by many pure streams. After furious battles, however, all this turns into "*ruins amidst tree stumps*". Out of curiosity, the cornet climbs the rocks rising above the town in order to examine the ruins of an old "*monastery or castle*". He is surprised to find many fossilized shells there, a clear sign that these heights once lay at the bottom of a sea. He collects some of these shells in order to show them together with other such, collected at the shore of Mangalia.

For the Polish officer, however, "*one of the most beautiful places in Bulgaria*" is Madara (ScA, collection IV, list 1, a.u. 7, p. 60). Part of the Russian cavalry camps there in 1829, because the place provides a natural fortification and cannot be attacked from the rear. Although he spends many days there, we find no description of the Madara Horseman, which is strange, being in contrast with his tendency to provide detailed descriptions. "*A narrow ravine of enormous boulders, which hang over one another and seemed to have been cut short by the word of the Almighty in their gallop amidst the thunder of the rocks, in order to create a cave 350 feet high, and 50 deep. On either side and above it, rises a rock 45 sazhen high - an excellent dwelling for the aerial residents. At a moss-covered wall of the cave, rain is constantly falling, and at the foot of the enormous stone pillar looming above, drops of water seep through, clear as crystal. Seen from here, the valley seems surrounded on all sides by forest, and no road can be seen to lead to it.*"

Evidently, at that time the locality was quite uninhabited, for in places he saw the ruins of a dozen mills. The cornet nevertheless notices the sign of human handiwork on the cliffs, but he believed these are eagles nests carved into the rocks, as the population paid its annual tax in the form of hunting birds for the Sultan. He gives an interesting interpretation of the word "Madar", which, according to the local people, means "*a place where there is a market for women*".

Although he is amazed at the strong and impregnable fortress of Shumen, he does not hide his disappointment at the appearance of the city inside. "*I had never seen such a disorderly city: narrow streets full of mud, water and filth.*"

During his stay in the Bulgarian lands, the Pole observes with interest the customs of the local population, whom he designates as "*the residents of Bulgaria*". He finds some of the rituals quite comical, such as jumping over fire on the last day before Lent. Thinking about similar religious practices in Warsaw and Russia, the author refrains from commenting on where this ritual might have originated.

The marriage ritual is described in greater detail, as a strange mixture of Christian and pagan practices. The veiled bride and the bridegroom, together with the best men and bridesmaids, go to the bridegroom's parents to receive their blessings. Only then does the priest lead them to the space in front of their house, where he joins their hands and slips the wedding rings on them. The newlyweds circle three times around a tree bedecked with fruit, ribbons and all sorts of decorations, and the couple water the tree to the accompaniment of a

bagpipe and chorus. “*After this ceremony is finished, the newly wed man is given a bow and a quiver containing four arrows. He lays the bow on the ground and passes over it three times, but dares not pass a fourth time, and then raising the bow, he takes the three arrows that the bride hands him and shoots them to the east, the west, and the south, in order to rid himself of all misfortune, while the fourth arrow he saves for the future.*”

The burial ceremony seems strange to Przesmycki, and especially the claim that a priest is very rarely present at the death of his parishioners. He points out that the people in northeastern Bulgaria most often die of whooping cough due to the bad climate. He also finds strange the Greek custom of burying the dead in family vaults. It is incomprehensible for him why the Bulgarians are forbidden to build churches above ground or to ring bells for the religious service.

Most of the descriptions related to northeastern Bulgaria are about the horrors of war. Along the road from Silistra to Shumen, he is struck by the sight of hundreds of dead bodies of people and horses transfixed on the village fences. This is a customary Muslim practice, - after the enemy is hacked to death, his body is exposed for all to see. He encounters an even more horrible sight in the Devnya valley, which is all strewn with the corpses of the unfortunate residents of Varna. Depressed by the cruelty of the “*Turkish barbarians, who are a disgrace to mankind*”, Ludovic Przesmycki raises his eyes to the Almighty and says the moving words “*Does nature have a Father?*”

As a Christian, he cannot understand the custom of Muslims to cut off the heads of enemy warriors killed on the field of battle. Despite multiple entreaties by the Russian generals that the bodies of their dead soldiers be returned intact, it is impossible to come to an agreement with the enemy. Then Prince Madatov, on his own responsibility, undertakes a reciprocal measure. He orders that every Turkish prisoner of war be castrated and then freed. The grand vizier immediately sends a negotiator, who states that an order has been issued against cutting off the heads of the dead Christians (ScA, collection IV, list 1, a.u. 7, p. 67).

It would be logical to expect that, after these disturbing scenes at the war front, the Russian army would have a very negative attitude towards the enemy. However, the description of the daily occupations of the Russian army suggests the contrary. Turkish prisoners of war are treated with great tolerance: the Turkish pashas are allowed to visit them and bring them food and money. “*These meetings passed in full harmony. We treated them to vodka and wine, and they treated us to tobacco and coffee*”, Przesmycki writes. At the forefront of the siege of Shumen, the Turks, and the Nekrassovtsi<sup>6</sup> fighting on their side, often dismounted and “*were constantly chatting*” with the Russian soldiers (ScA, collection IV, list 1, a.u. 7, p. 55).

After the peace treaty was signed at Edirne, relations became even more harmonious. “*The Turks would come to our camp, and we would go to theirs, and after a week, we had forgotten we had ever been enemies. They received us with great hospitality*”, Przesmycki writes. This attitude of his allows him to meet with many high-ranking Ottoman military leaders and to write down amazing descriptions of their outward appearance and mentality, descriptions that cannot be found elsewhere.

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<sup>6</sup> *Nekrassovtsi* - Cossacks who had migrated from Kuban to northeastern Bulgaria.

According to the officer, the enemy is noticeably unwilling to fight, which leads to many desertions from the front. Even the pashas are divided in their feelings; most of them do not approve the policy of Sultan Mahmud II to modernize the Empire. The Turks consider the use of alcohol and especially the shaving of beards and the discarding of turbans as a compromise with the faith, as these are symbols that outwardly distinguish Muslims from the infidels. One of the Turkish officers testifies to the backwardness of the military elite, saying that his colleagues contemptuously call him an “infidel” only because he knows French and in his leisure time reads books. “*May God permit that some day we enter the ranks of the enlightened nations*”, says the French-educated Turk, adding skeptically, “*it is hard to destroy such centuries-old obscurity*”.

Ludovic Przesmycki wanted to pay his respects to the “*glorious man*” Hüseyin Pasha, known for his savage nature. Visiting him in his tent, he finds his host lying stretched out on a precious carpet with hookah in hand. The cornet is amazed at the kindness written on his face. “*I saw nothing that might suggest a cruel and savage heart. His black beard reached his chest and his dark face was pock-marked by smallpox. His lively, fiery eyes and his smile testified to his kindly heart. His bearing was serious, he was of average height and plump*” (ScA, collection IV, list 1, a.u. 7, p. 73-74).

Yusuf Efendi also treated the cornet to a rich meal, Turkish coffee and pipes of strong tobacco. Having won his friendship, the Pole learns the touching story of his brother Selim. The brother was fortunate to bring to his harem a young girl he loved, the daughter of a rich merchant of Constantinople. However, a man of his father’s age desired her for himself and the submissive son handed her over without objections to the cruel old man, because, “*the father’s will is holy for us, like the will of the Prophet*”. Surprisingly, however, Selim requested and received the forgiveness of his unsuspecting father, after which he killed himself before the father’s eyes (ScA, collection IV, list 1, a.u. 7, p. 76). This individual case shows how little we know about the inner turmoil of Muslims confronted with the age-old backwardness of their own people.

The author provides very interesting information about the life style and mentality of the military invalid Ahmed Ali, the Turk whom the Polish aristocrat visits most often. When asked about the attitude of the Turks to the *giaours*, Ali surprisingly tells him they treat the infidels as they treat their wives, as objects of pleasure. For Przesmycki, the Turkish pride is an “*innate evil*”, because the insulted Muslim cannot forgive, and in order to satisfy his vengefulness, he kills with the same cold-bloodedness with which he lights his pipe. It should be stressed, however, that war invalids are given no allowance by the state. The Russian officers are strongly impressed by the great diligence with which the Turks collect the bodies of their killed soldiers. It turns out this custom is not a religious obligation, but is based on economic motives: every pasha is obliged to support the families of those killed in action whose bodies have remained in the hands of the enemy.

According to Ahmed Ali, a true Muslim must obey the orders of the Quran and treat every other faith as inferior to his. When the educated Pole objects that according to the words of the Prophet, the blood of the martyr is also dear to him, the Turkish officer firmly insists that to forgive the enemy is not a virtue

but shows weakness of character. For this Turkish officer, only he is honest who obeys the religious dogma without questioning it and does not touch the poison of enlightenment. *“And may God permit that this never happens. Without it [enlightenment], we almost conquered Europe, but with it, they will chase us out of Europe. The laws of the great Prophet are sacred. They forbid - probably for our preservation - every science other than the Quran”*. The fanatical Turkish officer is firm on this view.

The Polish aristocrat is amazed by the daily life of the country's rulers. When he asks how they spend a typical day, the host explains:

*“We smoke a pipe or a hookah, we lie on the sofa, like we do now, and we drink coffee.”*

*“And nothing else?”*

*“Sometimes we count on the string of beads. This distracts the mind.”*

*“When do you rise in the morning?”*

*“Here is how our day passes. Because we pray before sunrise, we get up early. That is why we have lunch at 10 o'clock, we smoke a pipe, drink coffee and everyone is busy with his duties, but most of the day we sleep. After the evening prayer, at sunset, we go to bed, but of course, taking the occasion to share the bed with one of the women from our sarays.”*

*“How many wives are you allowed?”*

*“As many as we like. Usually 3-4, and even as many as 7.”*

*“What is the difference between the first and the others?”*

*“The difference is that when we no longer desire her, I must provide for her support by giving her the dowry promised at the wedding. If I no longer wish to have her with me, I enter the saray and I say to her the following words, ‘Kazi benden bosh ol!’ [Woman, I free you]. She immediately covers her face, which I am seeing for the last time, and the next day, she comes to take the money owed to her”* (ScA, collection IV, list 1, a.u. 7, p. 83).

Even more interesting is the Turkish military elite's notion of paradise. All sorts of imaginable pleasures await the faithful there. However, women are not allowed, because they have *“two great shortcomings”* - they age quickly and you must keep them locked up so they will not be unfaithful. On the other hand, paradise is full of *“eternally young, beautiful and faithful houris”*. The urge to enter this blissful place makes people admit to thefts that no one has seen them commit, in order to receive the death sentence (ScA, collection IV, list 1, a.u. 7, p. 85).

Ahmed Ali displays his extreme ignorance and fanaticism when he says that not only those killed in battle, but also victims of the plague are welcome in paradise. *“The plague is a gift from the Prophet. Those who he summons to himself die with the marks of the plague and when their bodies are carried through the city, every passer-by and traders in their shops, all hurry to touch the body of the dead person, because his soul is in paradise”*, the Turkish officer explains, adding proudly that in some years, thousands of persons die each day (ScA, collection IV, list 1, a.u. 7, p. 84). The Pole is astounded by his words. *“What a terrible force fanaticism is!”*, he writes. He gives the disturbing statistics that in Bazardjik (the present city of Dobrich) in the year 1828 alone, more than 12,000 people died, and in Babadag, 24,000. The situation was similar in Tulcha, Machin, Harsovo, Kyustendja, Mangalia, Kavarna, Varna, Silistra, etc.

The gallery of characters in the Polish officer's memoirs includes adventurers like Sardonelli di Campano, an enthusiastic follower of Napoleon in the past, who came to the Orient to serve and look for ways to get rich (ScA, collection IV, list 1, a.u. 7, p. 79).

The author's reflections show the impartial view of a foreigner who clearly sees the coming end of the Ottoman Empire, which will collapse under the weight of its own conservatism. The destruction of the Janissary corps was a sure sign of the end of past greatness. For the author, Napoleon was a comet that rose suddenly over Europe, briefly shined in full glory, and disappeared. However, the Old continent should tremble before the Northern Star - Russia, as the 19th century will be the high point of that country's might. Its influence will be felt in Europe more strongly than that of France, because it is based on a deeper strategy.

The memoirs of Ludovic Przesmycki contain many other detailed descriptions of the lifestyle, mentality and customs of the Balkan peoples. His aristocratic disdain towards this population is evident, yet, despite its strongly subjective perspective, the diary should not be bypassed. A Pole's traditional political bias in favour of the Turks marks the author's story of contacts with the enemy. Still, in his account, we find assessments, facts, and descriptions of persons, for which no other such first-hand information is extant. That is why the publication of the memoirs would enrich not only the historiography of Diebitsch-Sabalkanski's campaign, but also our picture of everyday life in the Balkans in the early 19th century.

## References

**ScA:** Scientific Archive of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, collection IV, list 1, archive units 7, 8, 9.

**Paskaleva 1972:** В. Паскалева. Дневникът на Людвик Пшесмицки от престоя му в България (1829-1830). - In: Stosunski literackie polsko-bułgarskie. Nadbitka. Warszawa, 1972, 5-16. (V. Paskaleva. Dnevnikat na Lyudvik Pshesmitski ot prestoyata mu v Bulgaria (1829-1830). - In: Stosunski literackie polsko-bułgarskie. Nadbitka. Warszawa, 1972, 5-16.)

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