

**SKOPJE IN THE WORKS OF FRENCH TRAVEL WRITERS IN THE SECOND DECADE OF THE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES**



**History**

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**Abstract**

The City of Skopje was presented in many works by domestic and foreign authors, but the subject of this seminar paper is Skopje in the works of French travel writers, who visited and wrote their impressions of this city in the second decade of the XIX and early XX centuries. In the second decade of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the European public was very interested about the situation on the Macedonian land. It's the time of the Balkan Wars and the First World War, and the French travel writers, among which military officers also wrote about these events. Besides political and events in the battlefields, also wrote about cultural processes, spiritual and material culture, and they also wrote about the cities through which they passed, and among the most important cities was Skopje. French travel writers Ami Boué, Commander Leon Lamouche, General Herr Frédéric-Georges, Louis Léger, Gabriel Louis-Jaray, André Cherdamme, Colonel André Orioni and other travel writers stayed on the Macedonian land, and passing through Skopje they wrote about people, the town, the architecture, religious objects and they presented their works to the European and French readers. In this paper we used the methodology of historical analysis and heuristics, methods of analysis and synthesis, literature of travel writers in French, and we compared this material and made an analysis of the content and argument synthesis in order to get to objective conclusions. In this paper we have tried to prove that during the second decade of the twentieth century in Skopje there was a rich spiritual and material cultur and that this was recorded by French travel writers.

**INTRODUCTION**

The end of the XIX and the beginning of the 20th century marked the loss of power of the Ottoman Empire. It lost its former power, but at the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, it still had territories in the Balkans, and the territory of Macedonia was under its own authority.

For the situation in Macedonia, the Great Powers of that time, France, Austro-Hungary, Germany, Italy, Great Britain and Russia, were very interested, meanwhile this country was also an arena of a specific policy. On the land of Macedonia there were many travel writers who wrote about events in this part of the Balkans. In addition to the political events, they also wrote about cultural events and the cities of Macedonia. They presented their works to their readers.

Among the most common travel writers who went through the territory of Macedonia were the French, who talked in their writings about Macedonia, about wars, people, culture, architecture, as well as the cities visited.

The best-known travel writer who passed through the Ottoman Empire in the first half of the 19th century was the famous French traveler Ami Boué, who was a member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences. While traveling through this Empire he brought a lot of information about Macedonia, and his path was followed by other travel writers such as Commander Lamouche, a member of the international military mission in charge of the reorganization of the Turkish

gendarmérie, General Herr, Frédéric-Georges who wrote his diary on the Balkan Wars, Louis Léger, Gabriel Louis-Jaray, famous journalist and traveler André Cherdamme, Colonel André Orioni with a mission in Macedonia, and others.

## **1. Skopje in the first half of the 19th century according to the French traveler Ami Boué**

Ami Boué, was a well-known geologist who in 1840 published his scientific study "La Turquie d'Europe" (European Turkey). He traveled to that time's Turkish lands of the south Europe. In 1854, his "Travel Collection in European Turkey" was published.

When Ami Boué describes the city of Skopje, he points out that looking from far away, the city of Skopje seems very attractive, because of its 16 mosques with black domes and big minarets which are taller than the trees and the houses with red roofs.

He goes down to the market in front of the old fortress. He describes how he went to the fortress down a small staircase near the stone wall fence. Boué thinks that this wall may be the work of the Romans and that it is necessary to walk near it to reach the mansion of the pasha.<sup>1</sup>

According to him, Skopje lost its Roman and Byzantine monuments and now it looks like a Turkish city. When describing the Tower in front of the Stone Bridge, he remembers that it was built in 1462 during Mohamed II's time. He writes about the market and its shops, which do not provide anything special for this author, except the things that are most used. He most strikingly observes the old and high walls of the fortress, as well as the stone bridge over Vardar. When describing the structure of the bridge, it is written that it was built from a heavy structure, under which there lie islets.<sup>2</sup>

## **2. Skopje before and during the Balkan Wars**

Commander Lamouche, who was a representative of the international mission in charge of the reorganization of the Turkish gendarmerie, stayed before the Balkan Wars in Macedonia, and he spent more than half of his mission in Macedonia, which was five and a half years. He was in constant contact with the people, and he had the opportunity to visit all the parts of the country, so he had the correct idea of the situation in Macedonia.

According to him, the Greeks who had not only religious but also political privileges from the Sultan, constantly tried to impose their language, as a language of civilization, and tried

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<sup>1</sup>Amie Boué. *Recueil d'itinéraires dans la Turquie d'Europe détails géographiques, topographiques et statistiques sur cette Empire*. Tome premier. (Vienne: En Commission chez W. Braumüller, 1854) 210.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

to give a Hellenistic appearance to lot of cities. He also speaks about the Serbian propaganda in Macedonia, which gave minor results.<sup>3</sup>

At the beginning of the war, on October 18th, 1912, the Balkan States attacked the Ottoman Empire and the main battle between the Serbian and Ottoman armies was happening near Kumanovo and the Serbs were victorious and took this city. The Serbs occupied Skopje on October 26<sup>th</sup> and after that Bitola on November 19th, while their next target would be a marching to the Adriatic Sea. Serbia occupying the northern part of Macedonia did not perform only a military occupation, but according to the French travel writers, it was trying to make this territory a definite conquest. The new government was trying not only to keep Macedonia, but also to change the population's nationality to Serbian, and used many methods and procedures for it.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. The spiritual and material culture of Skopje in the journal of General Herr

General Frédéric-Georges Herr visited the Balkans immediately after the Balkan Wars. He wrote a journal about his journey from September 17th to December 15th, 1912. General Herr, took the train on the Austro-Hungarian capital, Vienna, and after a long trip he arrived in Belgrade. He continued his journey to Nis, so he arrived in Skopje on November 14th, 1912.

When he describes the people he saw from the window of the train, which did not go faster than 20 kilometers per hour, he noticed that almost all men wear folk costumes, caps, jackets and trousers of dark colors and are dressed with woolen socks attached to sheep skin and with shoes with sheep skin. When he writes about the impressions of his trip near Skopje, he notices that in this area there lives a population with vast differences in race and clothes. According to this French general, white dominates in Albanians, Roma wears shiny colored trousers and underpants, while when he describes the popes of the Orthodox Church, they have long braided hair and necklace.<sup>5</sup>

This French general, when describing Skopje, says that before the Balkan Wars this city had about 50,000 inhabitants and that it was the center of the Seventh Corps of the Ottoman Army.

*"Skopje is located on both sides of the Vardar River and while on the right side of the river, there is a European quarter, consulates and a railway station, on the left bank of the river there is the Turkish and Roman part of the city."*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale de France Direction des collections Paris, Département Sciences et techniques 8-V-2261 (1914-1924), *La Macédoine, ses populations*, Conférence fait le 11 juin 1914 a La Mairie du VI par le Commandant Lamouche, ancien membre de la mission militaire internationale, chargé de réorganiser la gendarmerie turque. (Paris: 1914) 52 – 55.

<sup>4</sup> Louis Leger. *Les peuples Balkaniques et leurs aspirations nationales, La science et la vie, Tome VIII, nr. 23 Octobre et novembre 1915.* (Paris : 1915) 404.

<sup>5</sup> Herr, Frédéric-Georges. *Sur le théâtre de la guerre des Balkans : mon journal de route, 17 novembre-15 décembre 1912.* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1913) 24.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibd.*

He describes a stone bridge with a pedestrian crossing and vehicles, as well as a railway bridge. He writes that in the First Balkan War, when Turks saw that they would be defeated, they wanted to blow up the railroad bridge, but that the dynamite did not explode like they hoped, so the bridge remained undamaged.<sup>7</sup>

He describes Skopje as a city with large barracks and a hospital with indescribable filth, with materials of German production which were out of use due to absolute lack of maintenance. He sees also that it is unusual to find people on the street wearing Turkish hats on their heads, because now that the Serbs have entered the city, they are afraid to go out on the streets.<sup>8</sup>

He describes a car full of hay pulled by bulls with long horns that go towards Prilep and Kumanovo, while the few horses they are reserved for the army, for cavalry and for carrying ammunition.<sup>9</sup>

General Herr writes that he is in great difficulty while analyzing the documents he has, because as he describes, the same cities and the same locations have different names written in Cyrillic, German, Turkish and other alphabets.<sup>10</sup>

The footwear are fascinating to him, and he describes the opanci which he says are similar to leather sandals, and that the peasants who are wearing them also have wool socks that sometimes are sheep leathered. If there are defects, people repair them themselves because they keep leather parts in their bags. According to this author, this kind of footwear has an advantage in this country where the roads are not flat, covered with mud and have the advantage as they dry quickly and there is no injury or colds with them.<sup>11</sup>

#### **4. Cultural monuments of Skopje according to the French travel writer Gabriel Louis-Jaray**

Gabriel Louis-Jaray, a lawyer and senior official at the French State Council, visited the Balkans twice and published his journals in the “Le correspondant” magazine, while in 1913 he wrote the book “L’Albanie inconnue” (Unknown Albania). He visited Skopje in 1912. Prior to this, he visited this city in 1908 and when he compares what he had seen four years ago and what he sees now, Jaray notices that almost nothing has changed since then, and the city almost looks the same.

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<sup>7</sup> Herr, Frédéric-Georges, op. cit. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Herr, Frédéric-Georges, op. cit. 31.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Herr, Frédéric-Georges, op. cit. 36.

When he describes Skopje, he realizes that Skopje is still a city with a large number of white mosques, with large minarets. He also describes houses near the Vardar River on both sides, where lie a large number of unequal houses. He describes the state of the roads, which are said to be covered with dust and reminds that when it rains, they cover with mud, and the pits on the roads become small wells. Jaray, who gives details of this city, writes that every man who visits this city inevitably notices a large barracks located in the hill.<sup>12</sup>

This travel writer in 1912 also writes about the great street that sends to the hill, about the shops on both sides of the street in front of which there are peaceful sellers and traders of all nationalities and religions who offer their goods. Unlike 1908 when he was last in Skopje, Jaray realizes that some new houses were built on the street. With the change of the government of Macedonia, he notices that the names of hotels and cafes in this city have been changed. The former "Hotel Turrati" has now become "Hotel Slobode", while on this street there is also a tavern called "Mali Kasino".<sup>13</sup>

He also describes the former konak and while describing these buildings, he writes that they are even, and that the interior and exterior are white from lime; sometimes carpeted, the floor is made of wood, which is often painted and that all these administrative palaces are now terribly dirty.<sup>14</sup>

Jaray also writes about the different peoples living in Skopje and that the wealth of Skopje is mainly from trade and agriculture. According to him, the industry almost does not exist on this Vlyyaet, while it has began developing in this city. He mentions an atelier for reparation of wagons and locomotives, which employs a large number of people and is not far from the train station, one beer factory, one small shoe factory, several brick factories, a cording factory, several mills, one electric factory, but which produces poor light bulbs which can not illuminate the city. Those who work get very low salaries, and get 2 piastres a day, while he notices that women do not work.<sup>15</sup>

According to him, Skopje is an intersection of roads from all sides, therefore this city, which has an exceptional geographical position, has now become a big trading place, that the Vardar Valley has fertile land that brings excellent agricultural production and that the biggest production are wheat, barley, oats, rye and corn, on the southern part rice, tobacco and other products are produced.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Gabriel Louis-Jaray. "Uskub". Le Correspondant, revue mensuelle: religion, philosophie, politique, histoire, sciences, économie sociale, voyages, littérature, beaux-arts. 10 octobre 1912. (Paris: V.-A Waille, 1912) 473.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Gabriel Louis-Jaray, op. cit. 474.

<sup>15</sup> Gabriel Louis-Jaray, op. cit. 477.

<sup>16</sup> Gabriel Louis-Jaray, op. cit. 480.

French travel writer André Chéradame, who published an article titled "How the Balkans Changed Despite Europe", tells in what situations are the countries after the Bucharest Tract. He also writes about France's interest in these countries. According to him, he had only one preoccupation to write things as they are. Among other things, he writes about the cities he visited as Ohrid, Struga, Skopje, Bitola, Thessaloniki and other cities.<sup>17</sup>

### **5. Skopje, an important historical city and city of the future**

Colonel André Ordioni, who was in charge of the Army of the Orient, arrived in the Balkans in November 1917, and after several duties he had, in September 1918, he became Commander of the Army of Bitola.

In February 1919, he visited Skopje and wrote about this city, which he says is the city of the future, that it is a historic and important city, and that it is the city of the old Dardania, Justinian and the capital by the river Vardar.

He mentioned the stone bridge as well as the historical events in this city, while during the Balkan Wars this city was a goal of the Serbian army, because this city has a strategic importance. Colonel Ordioni notices that Skopje has a small number of Serbs.

Ordioni notices that Skopje has no decent monuments that could be considered as such, but it distinguishes the Old Fortress, and the church next to it, where has beautiful sculptures, and icons drawn on wood with a great beauty. On the right side of the coast there is a new city with consulates, banks and others, which resembles the European city and differs from the other side of the oriental type. The old part of the city has many mosques, one of them is magnificent and there are several markets, while the Christian mahalla has the St. Marko monastery.

Skopje also has industrial and handicraft workshops such as steam mills, leather workshops and more. According to Colonel Ordion, the Macedonian element dominates in this city, but also that there is a colony of Christian Albanians, who have one church and one bishop.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> André Chéradame. *Comment les Balkans se sont transformés malgré l'Europe*. Paris. 10 mai 1914 (Paris: 1914) 417.

<sup>18</sup> Ecrits de colonel Ordioni, présentés par son petit-fils Dominique Danguy des Déserts, *Un officier français dans le Balkan*, Tome I, Albanie et Macédoine – Shkrime të kolonelit André Orioni, paraqitur nga i nipi Dominique Danguy des Déserts, *Një oficer francez në Ballkan 1917 - 1925*, Vëllimi I, (Tiranë : Botimet Papyrus, 2014), 85-86.

## Conclusion

Skopje has a rich history, and this is confirmed by a large number of French travel writers who visited this city during the second decade of the 19th and early 20th centuries. These travel writers wrote about this city in their works and we can conclude that French travel writers in an impartial way wrote and presented the cultural heritage of this city in the second decade of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

National costumes and footwear of all nationalities living in Skopje, customs of these people, religious buildings, the Orthodox Church, mosques, Catholic Church, Old Fortress, Old Stairs, the Stone Bridge on the Vardar River, the Great Turkish barracks, house architecture, pasha's konak, shops and other objects encouraged the interest of French travel writers, and all of these objects, accompanied by photos, were presented in their works in order to present it to the French public and readers in French.

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