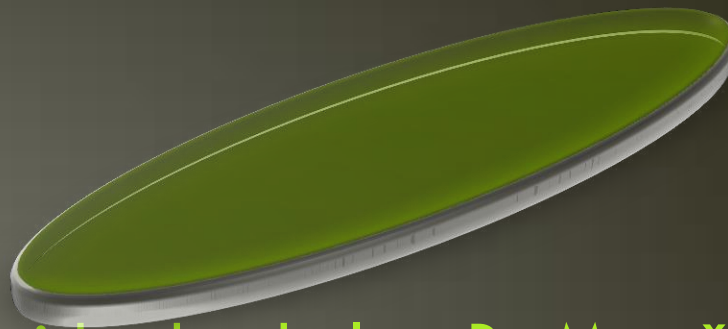


**Some English testimonies  
about Montenegro in the  
18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century**

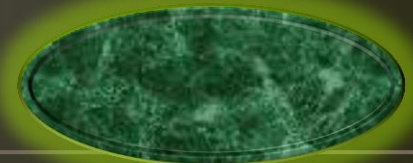


- According to the distinguished scholar B. Momčilović, there were **three reports** concerning **Montenegro**, published during the **18th** century in the British ***Annual Register***.
- The first two reports that were published in *The Annual Register* in **1767** and **1768** provided probably second-hand information about a controversial figure in Montenegrin history (**Šćepan Mali** - **Šćepan the Little**).

- Šćepan the Little probably came to Montenegro in **1766**. This herbalist who came from Dalmatia to *Maine* near Budva introduced himself as an escapee, the Russian Tzar Peter III.
- A year later people accepted him as the Russian Tzar.
- Numerous factors contributed to this – the current situation in Montenegro, the patriarchal tribal mentality, tradition deeply rooted in every aspect of the Montenegrin being, the longstanding ties between Russia and Montenegro.

- After the Turkish march on Montenegro in 1768 his original reputation plummeted because of his not highly "heroic" attitude on the battlefield (Momčilović, 17)
- He lost ingloriously his life – he was murdered in his sleep by a Greek servant.
- The piece of information concerning Šćepan the Little published by *The Annual Register* was not at first hand. His Italianate name Stefano points out that the source of information is most likely connected to Venice.

- The texts, especially the second one which deals with the massive Turkish offensive against the Montenegrins led by Šćepan the Little, contain certain factual imprecisions and arbitrariness.
- The author of the text probably got the information at second or third hand.
- According to Momčilović, the news from Montenegro in this period were unreliable and contradictory – both the news concerning Šćepan the Little, who personally contributed to this confusion, and the news dealing with the events in the country during his reign. Therefore, we should not take it amiss to the author of the text in *The Annual Register*. (18)



- In **1788** there was another report on Montenegro.
- This time it was **Eyles Irwin**'s piece of travel writing entitled *Some Account and Particulars Relative to the Natives of Montagna Negro, on the Coast of Dalmatia, as the Head of the Gulf of Cattaro, from a Voyage from Venice, to Lutichea, Being a Supplement to a series of Adventures in the Course of a Voyage up to the Red Sea, etc.*
- Irwin was one of the rare Englishmen who visited Kotor (Cattaro) at that time and had the opportunity to become familiar with Montenegro and its people.

- His text presents an addition to a travelogue in which he depicted his adventures in the Near East.
- He started his journey in Venice.
- There are lots of imprecisions in the text. The reader can identify a certain "intolerance" towards Montenegrins.


It is evident that he used some unreliable sources especially when he claims the Greek origin of Montenegrins.

- Irwin's tone of imperialistic disapproval occasionally comes forth in the text.



- "I mentioned the natives of *Montagna Negro*, as a parcel of *banditti*. They are, in all probability, the aborigines of the country; and when Greece declined from her former greatness, mouldered by degrees from the Roman hands, and became a prey to the barbarous nations, these wretched remains of a celebrated people forsook their fertile plains and valleys, and took refuge amidst barren and almost inaccessible mountains. They preserved, indeed, their liberty by this desperate step; but lost, what is, perhaps, of more consequence to the happiness of mankind – the manners, the morals, the laws, which form and preserve, unbroken, the bonds of society [...] This ferocious tribe acknowledge no master; and being equally out of reach of Venetians and Turks, serve as an impenetrable barrier to those nations in this quarter." (Irwin in Momčilović, 2000:10)



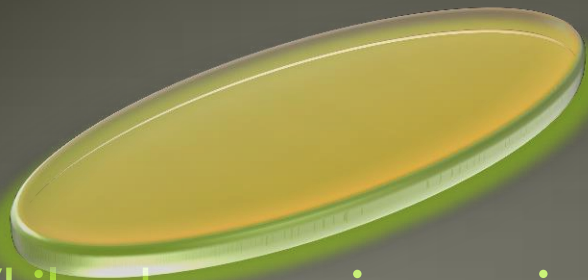
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- Commenting on the Montenegrin practice of revenge he states that it seems **"far more bloody and unquenchable"**, especially when he mentions the widow who brings up her son incessantly reminding him of his duty to revenge his father in the manner of "Spartan matrons".
  - **"Return victorios – or return no more!"** Irwin objects to this practice and concludes: **"What a dreadful atonement! How contrary to the dictates of reason and humanity!"** (Irwin in Momčilović, 2000:11)

- Viscountess Strangford in her preface to *The Eastern Shores of the Adriatic in 1863 with a Visit to Montenegro* modestly states:
- “This brief narrative of a summer’s journey is not offered to the public as containing any very new or important information. The ground, however, is not as yet hackneyed, and some account of it may interest the general reader. Those who seek for something better and more solid, I gladly refer to the three chapters added by my husband.”

- She describes different places she visited during her journey with her husband and friends and focuses special attention on detailed depictions of regions, nature, people, costumes, jewellery, customs, legends, and anecdotes.
- Her piece of travel writing presents an interesting account of her experience while travelling through the then Montenegro, Dalmatia, and southern and northern Albania.
- However, it is not deprived of occasional subjective opinions and judgments.

- The fact is that she liked many of the places she visited and things she experienced.
- Therefore she claims that **“the village of Delvino [is] an unusually pretty place”, “Antivari was once a splendid place, famous alike for the beauty of her edifices, her nobles, her riches, and her commerce”, “Cattaro itself is certainly a very remarkable and curious place”, while “a proud and noble city is that of Ragusa”**. (Viscountess Strangford, 1864: 5-109)

***(Antivari – Bar; Cattaro – Kotor)***



- While she was journeying toward southern Albania, the party hired a cook and two servants, “whose only fault was that they were as incapable of accomplishing any part of their duty as the cook was innocent of all cooking” (3)
- While waiting for the guides who failed to appear at the appointed time of 5 P. M., Viscountess Strangford concludes the following: **“Considering the way punctuality is understood east of the Adriatic, we thought ourselves fortunate in seeing the desired troop of quadrupeds arrive at the shore at 5 and 6 A. M. of the following day.”** (3-4)

- Strangford shows a great deal of interest in history, ethnology, and anthropology concerning the places she visited. She was familiar with the great Ragusan nobility and some distinguished families such as Caboga, Ghetaldi, Gozze, Gondola, Boscovitch – naming them in an Italian version which was not an unusual practice.
- “The Montenegro costume is the handsomest and most graceful I have seen in any country.” (146)



- “Arrived at the summit, we entered a plain, the stony ground of which was most carefully cultivated: here we found a small village called Niegush. We stopped at a roadside khan, built, as all the cottages in Tsernagora are, of stone, and dismounted to rest, while the hostess refreshed us with excellent *café au lait*, and pressed new milk and rum, &c., upon us. We paid her a small sum on leaving, when she complained bitterly of our having paid too much, and begged us to take some of it back; and really, she looked so honest and so amiable, I began to think the Montenegrines were the most charming people in the world.” (137)

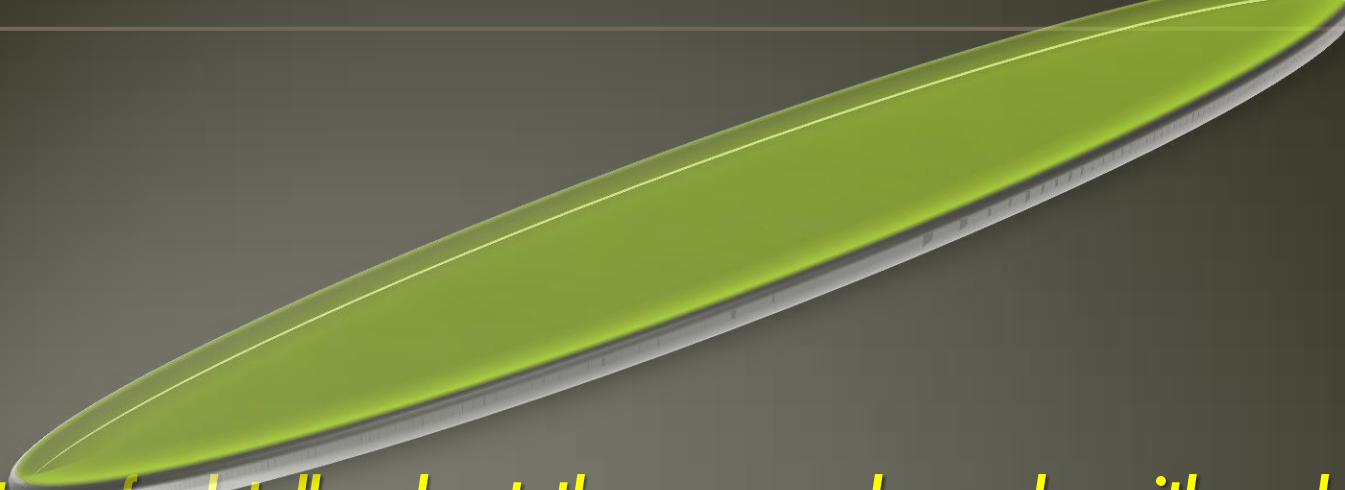
- “All along this road, and in all that I saw of Montenegro, the mountains are of that bluish grey which darkness so curiously in the afternoons and in winter into rich purples and absolute blacks, while in the bright daylight it is only cold grey and at the midday almost whitish. But seeing this rock covered with the dark-leaved dwarf oak and other brushwood which grows out of every crevice in black masses, the traveller recognises at once the meaning of the name so dear to its inhabitants – the Tserna-Gora, or Black Mountain.” (139)





- Her husband, Viscount Strangford, was a good philologist and Slavist. He knew well the sociopolitical situation(s) in the Balkans.
- Sometimes his political attitudes were reflected in his philological texts.
- In the chapter **“Chaos”**, which mainly dealt with the current situation in the Balkans, he presented the ideas of a conservative aristocrat who tried to “re-establish” the ways the Balkans had been presented in his homeland.
- In many cases he rejects “doubtful” opinions of his countrymen – reporters and travellers, stating that a real English critic should discuss the situation. Apart from Paton he did not see any worthy example.
- That is why he states: *“The English reporter has long begun his work in Slavonic countries: it is time for the English critic and judge to follow in his footsteps.”* (302)

- As a typical proponent of imperialism he doubts in the “justified” image of Turkey and Austria made by his predecessors and questions the established image of Turkish atrocities and reliability of reports sent by Western diplomats.
- Strangford claims that the common English traveller “*brings back and repeats one-sided opinions*” and criticizes generalities “*which are not always so safe as appear*”. (301-303)
- He does not believe in the possibility of the union of South Slavs because they do not represent one nation with a common language and religion.
- Strangford asked himself whether a Montenegrin was not as “bad” as the Turk referring to “*the strong evidence*” of Englishmen who saw Turkish soldiers “*on board ship at Corfu, on their way to Constantinople; men who had passed through the hands of the Montenegrines with noses and ears cut off, and otherwise ill-treated and mutilated.*” (335)

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- *Strangford* talks about the oppressed people with a dose of the imperialistic superiority. He questions their "capability" of attaining their independence and creating their own national identity.
  - "Dalmatia is incomparably the most civilised and the worthiest of these communities; she is their Tuscany as well as the nearest approach to their Piedmont" (314).
  - In some of his statements we can recognize certain contradictions. He concludes that the union of South Slavs is possible, regardless of different religions and interests – when it happens it will be the natural union.