

## TWO GENTLEMAN TRAVELERS IN THE SLOVENE LANDS IN 1737

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### 1. Introduction

The "alien eye"<sup>1</sup>—the written testimony of outsiders—has become an established type of historical source for the social and anthropological historian. Where else, indeed, can we find pertinent comments about society, if not from the writings of outsiders, who could observe everyday events as a novelty? Where else do vivid examples of the history of everyday life exist, if not in their diaries or personal recollections?

Historians are well aware, however, of the problems associated with the use of such texts. An irritated Piedmontese, Giuseppe Baretti, writing in the 1760s, attacked the genre of writing produced by Britons who "inspected countries from their post-chaises" and were therefore not fit to comment upon the Italian way of life.<sup>2</sup> Baretti had a good point: texts of this kind were often superficial and their authors lacked any background knowledge of the subjects on which they wrote. As such, their writings thus reveal more about the *mentalité* and the tastes of the literate upper classes of the countries from which they came, than about what they were trying to describe.

Despite these drawbacks it would be unwise to completely ignore the writings of previous centuries made by the few outsiders who did leave their impressions about the Slovene lands. In the eighteenth century, native Slovene texts—especially those describing social phenomena—were few and far between, and travelers of this period can provide us with material for some "thicker descriptions."<sup>3</sup>

### 2. British Travelers in the Slovene Lands: An Overview

The Slovene lands were not a usual destination for British travelers: they did not fit into any established itinerary, being neither "classical" (as travelers imagined Italy to be), nor as exotic and oriental as the more southerly Balkan lands. As such, there was no established paradigm in terms of which the land was described. The "Grand Tour" of the eighteenth century was usually undertaken for the moral and esthetic edification of young gentlemen, and consequently the route that they took was normally dictated

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1 The term "alien eye" is used by Peter Burke in his *Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), 15, in distinguishing between insiders' and outsiders' accounts.

2 Giuseppe Baretti, cited in Burke, 16.

3 "Thick description" became a popular term amongst historians who aimed to convey some of the rich texture of life in the past. It was borrowed from the work of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz. It can sometimes be an all too ironic phrase: for example, in *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), David Sabean admitted that the "thinner" description was all that was possible, despite the intentions of the author. Historians are often acutely aware of what Braudel called "the limits of the possible."

by the "rule of taste,"<sup>4</sup> and an interest in classical antiquity was *de rigueur*. The prescribed route of travel was generally through Italy and to the more prosperous towns of north-west Europe such as Cologne (Köln), which also had Roman remains. A few eccentrics, attracted by the exotic, did undertake journeys to the Levant in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> East-central Europe was either excluded from the itinerary, or was hastily passed through by travelers between Venice and Vienna; for instance, in 1796 J.B.S. Morritt stated that "the country between Trieste and Vienna is not often taken into the tour of Germany."<sup>6</sup>

Those who passed through the Slovene lands could be frustrated by a lack of information; as late as 1817 the traveler W.I. Monson, when writing about Koper and Izola, complained that

"Neither at Venice, nor at Trieste could we procure any work which treated the coast of Istria and the inconvenience which we experienced from being destitute of information has induced me to be more diffuse in my comments."<sup>7</sup>

At the end of the seventeenth century Edward Browne's book *A Brief Account of Some Travels*<sup>8</sup> was the only available English-language source that dealt with the Slovene lands in more than a cursory manner, although even his book dealt with some important features rather superficially.<sup>9</sup> The most authoritative book was, of course, Valvasor's *Die Ehre des Herzogtums Krain* of 1689:<sup>10</sup> Humphrey Davy and his colleague, J.J. Tobin, traveling in the area in the early nineteenth century remarked that it was the only book available in the inn where they stayed in Cerknica.<sup>11</sup> Valvasor's book was, however, something rather different from a "tour guide," its appeal being more to specialists willing to devote more time and effort to study than was common among most individuals taking the "grand tour."

By the end of the seventeenth century there was already a divergence between the books intended for specialists and those intended for gentleman

4 The phrase "the rule of taste" is used by J. Burke, "The Grand Tour and the Rule of Taste," 231-50 in R.F. Brissenden, ed., *Studies in the Eighteenth Century* (Canberra: Australian National Press, 1968). Burke argues that the Grand Tour was undertaken by members of the Whig oligarchy who were concerned to find classical antecedents for their own society.

5 An early "Levantine lunatic" was the Scot William Lithgow, whose *Painful Peregrinations* (London: N. Orce, 1632) emphasized the dangers of travel in the Eastern Mediterranean. These "lunatics" were really an offshoot from their class who deliberately sought out the exotic and non-European elements in Eastern Mediterranean culture.

6 Morritt passed through the Slovene lands in 1760 solely because of the war then being waged in Northern Italy. He expressed no regrets, however. He found "the lower chains of the Carniolan and Styrian Alps quite covered with wood and a verdure our eyes had been unaccustomed to in warmer climates. The water is beautiful and the country abounds in trout streams which are useful as well as ornamental." See G.E. Marindin, ed., *The Letters of J.B.S. Morritt of Rokeby* (London: John Murray, 1914) 307-08.

7 W.I. Monson, *Extracts from a Journal* (London: Rodwell and Martin, 1820), 26.

8 E. Browne, *A Brief Account of Some Travels* (London: T.R. for Benjamin Tooke, 1673).

9 For a critique of Browne's work, see J. Sumrada, "Valvasorjev angleški sodobnik Edward Browne v slovenskih deželah leta 1669," to appear in *Valvasorjev Zbornik*, Ljubljana.

10 J.W. Valvasor, *Die Ehre des Hertzogthums Crain* (Laybach: Wolfgang Moritz Endter, 1689); see Branko Reisp, *Kranjski polihistor Janez Vajkard Valvasor* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1983) and *Korespondenca Janeza Vajkarda Valvasorja z Royal Society* (Ljubljana: SAZU, 1987). The latter, a thorough study of this correspondence which occurred in 1686-87, was reviewed by Gerald Stone in *Slovene Studies* 10/2 (1988) 207-209.

11 J.J. Tobin, *Journal of a Tour made in the Years 1828 and 1829*. (London: W.S. Orr, 1832), 165.

travelers. For example, Thomas Nugent's later book *The Grand Tour*<sup>12</sup> mentions the Slovene lands, but only very cursorily, on the grounds of their lack of classical antiquities; this contrasts with a more "professional" book such as John Ray's *Travels through the Low Countries*, which includes his journey through the Eastern Alps and Friuli.<sup>13</sup> Ray states his intentions in his preface: "I grew desirous to see what variety [of plants] foreign countries of a different soil and temperature of air might afford."

At the time he was writing, Ray was aware of "the paucity of those who delight in the studies and enquiries of ... [the] nature [of a catalogue]." Instead, he wrote a narrative account of his voyage with "Observations topographical, moral and natural."<sup>14</sup> It was only later, in the last decade of the seventeenth century, presumably when the "paucity" of those interested ceased to be a problem, that Ray published more systematic "catalogues."<sup>15</sup> There was thus a divergence between dilettante and specialist, even if this was by no means clearly demarcated.

### 3. Milles and Pococke

After extensive travels Richard Pococke published his *Description of the East* in 1743-45.<sup>16</sup> The book's preoccupations in the Slovene lands were both botanical, with highly detailed lists of the flora of the region, and architectural, for Pococke was also interested in the classical remains at Ptuj and Celje. He was accompanied on his travels by his cousin Jeremiah Milles, who wrote a series of letters to his patron the Bishop of Waterford.<sup>17</sup> Although the two men made the same journeys, their written accounts are quite different, in tone if not in content. Milles' account was never intended for publication, but rather as "off the cuff" letters filled with informal details—a kind of account which represents an intermediate stage between the private mind and the published word. The letters may therefore reveal details of how the specialist and/or the dilettante approached the Slovene lands.

The two men spent over two months conducting investigations in the Slovene lands: their notes were written between the end of May and the beginning of August 1737. They visited established places of interest such as Idrija, Celje, Ptuj, Ljubljana, Celovec/Klagenfurt, Gorica/Gorizia and Trst/Trieste, but in their descriptions of these places added little to the comments of earlier writers; in many instances their comments are very cursory.

12 T. Nugent, *The Grand Tour* (London: J. Rivington, 1778). For references to Carniola, see Vol. II, 5, 8, 371-72 and Vol. III, 24.

13 J. Ray, *Observations Topographical, Moral and Physiological: Made in a Journey through the Low Countries...* (London: J. Martyn, 1673).

14 Ray, *Observations*.

15 Among Ray's more systematic publications from this period are the following: *History of Plants*, *History of Fishes*, *Synopsis of Quadruped Animals and of Serpents*, and *Synopsis of British Plants*. For his biography and the development of his writings, see C.A. Raven, *John Ray Naturalist: His Life and Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1942).

16 R. Pococke, *A Description of the East* (London: J. & R. Napton, 1743-45).

17 *The Letters of Jeremiah Milles to the Bishop of Waterford* [= British Library manuscript ADD MSS 15,774], cited hereafter as Milles.

Their itinerary indicates that they found it desirable to visit the classical remains in Slovenia. Milles was interested in the Latin inscriptions at Ptuj; after their visit there, he noted regularly with respect to the other Slovene towns that there was "not the least sign of antiquity to be found here."<sup>18</sup> His preoccupation with things classical even caused him to write, on occasion, about the Slovene people as if they had no awareness of the history of their own lands, and had somehow usurped the former Roman heritage. In Ajdovščina, for example, he noted:

"... plowmen discover daily underground [parts of the old city] . . . but . . . the people are so very ignorant that if they found any such [bas-reliefs or inscriptions] they would either break them to pieces or cover them again with the earth."<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, at Poreč in Istria he scorned "the ignorance of people who put marble inscriptions on the beach so they wasted away and were illegible."<sup>20</sup> Milles and Pococke showed no acquaintance with the history of the Slavic peoples in this area, and were themselves partial and ignorant.

In some ways, therefore, Milles found the Slovene lands an inappropriate place to conduct a "grand tour." Pococke's account is essentially similar, although he did not express judgements about the "ignorance" of the people as such. These neo-classical prejudices were not peculiar to these two travelers, for they are clearly evident in a letter from Dr. Edward Thomas to Milles fourteen years later from "the wild mountains that divide the Venetian from the Austrian lands."<sup>21</sup> On passing through these highlands, he wrote:

"It is surprising to see the sudden change of manners, customs, dress and complexions in so little way from the Italians, as I am now in Austrian territories. I know not what sort of stuff I shall fill up my letter for there is so strong<sup>22</sup> a barrenness of all manner of curiosities or antiquities and not least trace of any Roman monuments that we would imagine that people never inhabited this part of the world or planted colonies in it."<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, the accounts written by both Milles and Pococke do contain materials relating to matters other than their quest for antiquities. In both cases, the most detailed passages concern the periodic lake at Cerknica. Most critically, both men had read Valvasor, whose special interest in the phenomenon of this lake gave the area around Cerknica a special status;<sup>24</sup> and there are similarities between their writings and those by their near-contemporary Georg Friedrich Keyssler,<sup>25</sup> who had also read Valvasor. It seems that Valvasor's work had a strong influence on visitors who had

18 E.g., Milles, letter of 7 June 1737 written in Judenburg, about towns in Prekmurje.

19 Milles, letter of 23 June 1737, written from Idrija.

20 Milles, letter of 24 July 1737, written from Trst/Trieste.

21 *Letters of Edward Thomas to Jeremiah Milles* [= British Library manuscript ADD MSS 19,941], cited hereafter as Thomas, letter of 7 April 1751.

22 Or: "strange."

23 Thomas, letter of 7 April 1751.

24 *Die Ehre* contains many references to different aspects of Lake Cerknica, see e.g. II: 228-31 and IV: 630-96.

25 J.G. Keyssler, *Neueste Reisen durch Deutschland...* (Hannover: Nicolai Forsters und Sohns Erben, 1740); English transl., London: A. Linde & F. Field, 1756-57.

traveled to see the periodic lake and other "natural rarities" of the Slovene lands. It is also instructive in this respect to contrast the writings of Milles and Poccocke regarding the lake and its surroundings with the earlier travel writing of Simon Clements, an English wine merchant who had visited the area in 1715.<sup>26</sup>

When Clements approached Cerknica, his description was limited to the following:

"...a good bourg (with a large brook) which the maps place hard by a Lake of the same name: we had on our left for 2 or 3 miles before a large flat meadowy and moorish land which perhaps may have been formerly all underwater, but all we could see for a lake seemed no bigger than a fishpond."<sup>27</sup>

It was only later that Clements found out about the periodic nature of the lake, and in the margin of the above manuscript account he wrote "I have since been told that the whole flat (or moor) is covered with water in winter and makes the lake."<sup>28</sup>

This passage differs from the accounts by Keyssler, Milles and Poccocke. Writing on the same subject, Keyssler stated:

"[Cirknitz] is but a village and of itself is not worth seeing but the lake which lies about half a league from it is very famous and has been the subject of the disquisitions of many naturalists."<sup>29</sup>

Milles also noted that they "went to see that much renowned lake called the Cirknitzer Sea . . . justly reckoned to be one of the greatest curiosities of nature."<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps because Milles and Poccocke had an intellectual framework upon which they could base their observations about the Cerknica lake, they did not have to remain (in Monson's words) "diffuse in their comments" as they had, indeed, done in other places. Indeed, it seems that the pair traveled to Cerknica specifically to "see the whole process of this wonderful evacuation" and to "examine as nicely as possible into all particulars."<sup>31</sup> It is very evident that the area enjoyed the reputation of being of scientific importance.

Milles began his description with details about the topography: islands, rocks, and outlets from the lake. He was sending information to his patron who was apparently also aware of debates relating to the lake. Milles wrote:

"Some people who have wrote on this sea affirm that [the evacuation] happens in June or a little after and it returns constantly in September. But I must beg leave to observe to your lordship that this is a mistake for it depends entirely . . . on the temperature of the weather. In some exceedingly dry years it has been known to run out three times a year, but no longer than

26 Simon Clements, *A Journey of my Travels ... in the Year 1715* [= Egerton MSS 2167], British Library, London.

27 Clements, 22.

28 Clements, 22.

29 Keyssler, Brief LXXVIII, 848; English translation, 369.

30 Milles, letter of 15 July 1737, from Capodistria/Koper.

31 *ibid.*

twenty-four years ago or thereabouts it did not run out for seven years altogether!"<sup>32</sup>

It seems, from the form and content of this letter, that knowledge of and interest in the Cerknica lake had survived from the time of the debates with the Royal Society in the 1680s and the subsequent publication of Valvasor's work on Carniola.<sup>33</sup> Pococke and Milles visited the Cerknica area quite deliberately and in the light of the continuing scholarly interest in the lake, whereas the less well-informed Clements had passed through quite by accident.

Milles then proceeded to describe some of the economic activities around, and supported by, the lake: in particular, how the tasks involved in the catching of fish were divided. Women and children did not descend into the "uvalas" [sic] because of the risks involved, and caught fish only in the "dolinas." Milles mentioned that the water level relative to the "ribeskakamen" [sic] stone served as an indicator to the fishers as to when they should prepare their nets. He saw fish in prodigious quantity and noted that the surplus could be sent to neighboring countries.<sup>34</sup>

Both Milles and Pococke took pleasure in eating the fish; Milles described "the best crayfish I ever saw" although it was not the best that the lake produced.<sup>35</sup> Pococke described nine-inch pike,<sup>36</sup> which Milles said were of "extraordinary firmness and whiteness."<sup>37</sup> In their accounts there is a sense that the writers felt that they had arrived in Arcady;<sup>38</sup> and similar ideas are found in Steinberg's work of 1758 about the Cerknica lake, the frontispiece of which showed gods and mythological characters together with the cornucopia.<sup>39</sup>

Milles and Pococke were also interested in the crops which were grown on the lake-bed at those times of year when the lake was not full. Pococke commented that "many uncommon plants grow that are esteemed good for cattle."<sup>40</sup> The lake with its shallow water, reeds and varied plants attracted game. Milles wrote that as many as 5000 swans wintered in the area. At the end of his letter on the subject, he wrote a summary:

"...throughout the whole year this lake affords a great plenty of provision to the inhabitants round about, and what is very justly affirmed of it as a great wonder is: that within the space of a few days one may fish, shoot and hunt in it and one may see water, fish, fowl, corn, grass, cattel [sic] and all sorts of game and fowl."<sup>41</sup>

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32 *ibid.*

33 See note 10 above. In December 1687 Edmond Halley gave a demonstration of the workings of the lake to Royal Society members, see Reisp, *Korespondenca*, 100-101.

34 Milles, letter of 15 July 1737.

35 *ibid.*

36 Pococke, 259 (the term 'jack' is used).

37 Milles, letter of 15 July 1737.

38 The term "Arcady," popular since the 15th century, referred to an idealized (but non-existent) region of rural contentment. An accessible account of the history of "arcadian" ideas in European history is Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973).

39 F.A. von Steinberg, *Gründliche Nachricht von dem und in dem Inner Krain gelegenen Czirknitzer See* (Laybach: A.E. Reichhardt, 1758); reprint, Ljubljana: Ljudske pravice, 1970.

40 Pococke, 260.

41 Milles, letter of 15 July 1737.

#### 4. Conclusion

British seventeenth- and eighteenth-century travelers such as Milles and Pococke who recorded their experiences tended to follow an established "rule of taste." There is often little evidence that originality was desirable; this is perhaps because the travelers felt that they were traveling through the "known world" and not exploring "darker continents." Nevertheless, in the seventeenth century and, to a lesser extent, in the eighteenth, there was no established "rule of taste" with regard to the Slovene lands. Hence, writers were less sure of what, if anything, was worth visiting; or, to use Thomas's phrase, quoted above, "What sort of stuff . . . [could] fill up a letter." Consequently, Browne's *Brief Account* of 1673 is weak in parts: although he was instructed to investigate particular things such as mines, his writing is for the most part full of uninformed observations.

The information available in Valvasor really placed the Slovene lands on the scientific map of Europe. Pococke, whose interests were partly botanical, was interested in natural phenomena. Milles was involved in a sort of debate with his patron concerning the phenomena to be seen around Cerknica. The two men's writings indicate how the perception of the Slovene lands had been influenced by the image-making work of Valvasor.

By the end of the seventeenth century there was also a stronger sense that natural phenomena could, of themselves, be a *raison d'être* for travel. Thus Ray and other natural philosophers were able to publish works aimed at the specialist. As we have seen, however, our cognoscenti and dilettantes can not be categorized as neatly. After all, Pococke was a "Levantine lunatic" whose portrait—wearing full Turkish garb, including a turban—hangs in the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva. He was also interested in "heritage," as it was perceived by Englishmen of his social class, rather than in Slavic culture *per se*. As for Milles, he was also interested in finding classical remains and was disappointed by the lack of "signs of antiquity." The writings of these two men have value as sources of information, but more so as indicators of the influence of Valvasor on literate English travelers. Milles demonstrated that this influence was limited in its scope, being restricted to an élite who were quite separate from the majority of "gentleman travelers." Speaking of the karstic caves near Postojna, he wrote:

"I must only observe that as great a curiosity as this Grotto is, it is visited by very few travellers, though it is so little out of the way, most people who go this road, taking it for granted that there is nothing worth observation in Carniola."<sup>42</sup>

Clearly, the natural environment and such phenomena as the periodic lake at Cerknica were not particularly strong attractions for all eighteenth-century English travelers. For example, Slovenia's most well-known tourist

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42 Milles, letter of 19 July 1737, from Pula. A reference to the Postojna caves can be found in Valvasor, *Die Ehre*, XI: 6-7.

attractions nowadays—Postojna, Bled, Bohinj—were only visited *en passant* at this earlier time. Perhaps nature was considered as insufficiently edifying in itself, when compared with the merits of examining the classical remains of Western Europe. Valvasor had nevertheless felt that the "glory" of the Duchy of Carniola lay in its landscape and in the way in which its inhabitants lived; this is much more in accord with our twentieth-century view of how the image of an area can be more fully constructed. The existence of the writings of Milles and Pococke, however, does at least give us some insight into eighteenth-century mentality. Above all, it allows us to appreciate the intellectual status and lasting influence of Valvasor's work.

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## POVZETEK

### ANGLEŠKA GENTLEMANA NA POPOTOVANJU PO SLOVENSКИH KRAJIH LETA 1837

*V 17. in 18. stoletju slovenski kraji niso bili običajni cilj angleških gentlemanov - popotnikov. Najbolj moderne itinerarije je navadno narekovalo trenutno "pravilo okusa". Kot večji del vzhodne srednje Evrope se tudi današnja Slovenija ni štela ne za "klasično" kot Italija ne za "eksotično" kot Levant. Toda Jeremiah Milles in Richard Pococke sta poleti 1737 vendarle preživela nekaj časa v slovenskih krajih. Njuni vtisi so ohranjeni v Millesovih neobjavljenih pismih, ki jih hranijo v Britanski knjižnici v Londonu, in v Pocockovi knjigi Description of the East. V pričujočem clanku je njuno pisanje obdelano kot možni vir slovenske zgodovine. Antropologi in zgodovinarji so veliko razpravljali o vrednosti amaterskih pričevanj oziroma o "tujem pogledu" ter pogosto ocenili, da so tovrstni zapiski napisani pod močnim vplivom "dediščine", kot jo je razumel razred, iz katerega so avtorji izhajali. Millesova in Pocockova opažanja so po večini precej bežna, ker nista našla nobenih resnih rimskih ostankov ipd., slovanska kultura sama po sebi pa ju ni zanimala. Vendar pa sta oba precej natančno opisala "naravna redkosti" - Cerknško jezero. Skupaj sta odpotovala na Notranjsko posebej z namenom, da si ga ogledata. Iz vsebine Millesovih pisem je mogoče razbrati, da je bilo njuno zanimanje za ta pojav posledica korespondence med Valvazorjem in Royal Society iz 80. let 17. stoletja. Tako je torej v nekem smislu pravzaprav Valvazorjevo delo postavilo slovenske kraje in posebej Cerknško jezero na znanstveni zemljevid Evrope. Čeprav zapiski obeh Angležev sami po sebi ne prinašajo nič posebno novega, pa kažejo opazen vpliv Valvazorjeve knjige in ostalih del izobrazenih gentlemanov - popotnikov iz 18. stoletja*