

SPAIN IN JOVAN DUČIĆ'S TRAVELOGUES AND DIPLOMATIC AFFAIRS

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Jovan Dučić (1871-1943) was a Serbian writer and diplomat with a fruitful career. He was also the author of extraordinary travelogues. In his «Letter from Spain – Ávila» in the book collection of travelogues *Cities and Chimera* (1940) the travel writer Jovan Dučić and the diplomat facing the dramatic reality of fascist Spain, which allowed the division of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on the eve of the Second World War, offers two images.

One of them represents space and time, that is the overall atmosphere, including people, culture, history, art, mentality while the other, the diplomatic one, illustrates the factual information such as time and circumstances that had a fatal impact on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and its diplomats, including Jovan Dučić himself.

This difference bears a lot of resemblance with the one Vladimir Gvozden (2014) emphasises in the article «How to read a travelogue» by claiming that «travel writers ‘wrote the other’ by writing about the other – the writing itself is the central problem, not some kind of neutral transmitter of objective facts»¹ (Gvozden, 2014).

However,

It would be difficult to prove that travel prose is a pure document about events, that is, that it constitutes perfect factuality. In fact, the documents that belong to this discourse do not document factuality, but also the actuality of the writer and the text. From this point of view, the genres of testimony do not merely mediate history, but also play an active role in the history to which they relate (Gvozden, 2014).

For that reason, this paper tackles the period of Jovan Dučić's life and work in Spain tied to engagement in the state diplomatic missions. The first one took place from 1918 until 1922, whereas the second mission lasted from 1939 until 1941. Both of them are very significant because the first one was in progress at the time of the establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, whereas the second mission was ongoing in the last years of the aforementioned country that capitulated on April 6, 1941.

Why Spain? Because it is a country that, with its multicultural wealth, was extremely attractive to several Serbian writers in the period between the First and Second World War. Jovan Dučić in his travelogue «Letter from Spain – Ávila» describes Ávila, but also Toledo and El Escorial as centers of royal power, which is based on land and in a harsh landscape without greenery domi-

¹ All the translations in the article are provided by its authors unless otherwise is specifically mentioned.

nated only by the strict Catholic Church. Dučić only got to know the parts south of Córdoba and Seville, and that is why his impression is related to darkness and austerity:

In these foreign Spanish cities, the darkness falls quickly as if it will never rise again, heavy, material. This is how its palaces and tombs look at night in Toledo. In Segovia, the dark walls look like enemy buses. In Santiago, which entirely consists of monasteries and asylums, the night shadows on the deaf markets look deep like abysses, and something black boils from the ground, and something cold crawls up our body so that one must not look at the crossroads at night (Dučić, 2000b: 196).

Dučić was interested in Spanish history as well as its culture. He was especially focused on St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross. As a comparatist, Krinka Vidakovic Petrov in the chapter «Jovan Dučić and the Spanish modernists» in the book *Hispania Horizon*, draws a parallel between Jovan Dučić and Antonio Machado and Juan Ramón Jiménez. This book represents a comparative interpretation of their influences. However, at the same time, it proves that Dučić did not read their poetry in Spanish, so it is the influence of the poets who were his contemporaries what he cherished.

In his travelogues of Spain regarding both diplomatic missions, he provides extremely significant perceptions of Madrid, where he was Serbian first ambassador from 1939 to 1941, whose jurisdiction included Spain and Portugal but he resigned because of the British policy towards Yugoslavia. For him, the first diplomatic experience from 1918 until 1922 was important as it was not marked by any challenging political circumstances.

The second diplomatic mission in 1939–1941, on the other hand, was influenced by a series of demanding political circumstances happening throughout Europe including Spain and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with respect to the Second World War. Surprisingly, it did not leave an imprint on his travelogues.

However, this was a very challenging period for him as a diplomatic representative before the war in Yugoslavia broke out. During his diplomatic career, which commenced in May 1910 and ended in July 1941, Jovan Dučić was in eleven diplomatic missions, seven of which were in the Mediterranean countries / Italy (two missions), Greece (two missions), Spain (two missions) and Egypt.

<...> let's not forget that travel writing was often related to diplomatic missions <...>, it will be easier to understand the permanent ambitions of diplomats in this genre. In this sense, in earlier periods, travel, travelogue and politics were mostly inseparable <...> (Gvozden, 2014).

With this in mind, Jovan Dučić met, talked to and befriended many rulers and political leaders, politicians and diplomats, military leaders and scientists, writers and artists. Additionally, he had the opportunity to feel the atmosphere of life in the Mediterranean capitals, to recognize the directions that history took, to see the importance of the Mediterranean as a crossroads where the past and the present, civilizations and religions, new ideas and ossified traditions, life habits and customs imposed by the new times intersect and mix (Dimić, Milošević, 2022: 25).

In the capitals of the countries of the Mediterranean region, like Madrid, Jovan Dučić, in addition to understanding their politics and breathing their past and art, paid special attention to the mentality of Mediterranean people. He was also interested in the dominant political culture, traditions, history, heritage and habits.

Furthermore, he had the opportunity to observe the eternally mystical world of diplomacy on a daily basis, to witness revolutions, defeats and victories, lies, shaming and affairs but also arts and many other achievements of that time. During his career, he stood up against the politics of revanchism, the spirit of clericalism, totalitarian ideologies spreading across Europe and the Mediterranean (especially Spain).

Dučić places Spain within the framework of various religions of the Mediterranean in a religious context, thus opening new pages of his travelogues across the Ionian Sea and even further to Egypt. Although his travelogue is a form of a cultural text with elements of a framework, this type of travelogue and comparison laid the foundations for a modern view of the Mediterranean in Serbian literature beginning with this writer.

During his first service, Dučić was in Madrid from 1918 to 1922. In that period, he was reading newspapers, had contacts with politicians and intellectuals and wrote about the overall situation in Spain including its conflict with Great Britain and problems with Gibraltar. That was the key for Mediterranean and all the countries who have part of any part of Mediterranean Sea. In that moment, Dučić was a poet, but also an amazing diplomat with the PhD in philology who worked in Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Back then, Yugoslavia became the part of the Mediterranean countries because Adriatic Sea was the great part of that country, from Istria to the border with the Albanian part.

Dučić initiated the early years of the unified Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes with a diplomatic career, which he later executed by regent Aleksandar Karađorđević's decree of July 1, 1918. In accordance with the great historians of diplomacy Ljubodrag Dimić and Miladin Milošević (2022), as a diplomat and poet during those days after the First World War, Jovan Dučić mobilized the unification of the South Slavs by commemorating the founding of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Therefore, this Kingdom was a Mediterranean state at the same time since it ran along the Adriatic coast from Istria to northern Albania and included almost all of the Adriatic Sea's islands.

His identification with Mediterranean states and civilizations, and the creation of a new state for him, was a tremendous time when all South Slavs came into the world of Mediterranean nations. He was well aware of international relations, and, at that time in Spain, he was preoccupied most of all with the task of unmasking the fictitious allegations of Italian propaganda, due to dissatisfaction and in decline after the First World War. He was particularly interested in the lie uttered at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, where he stated in off-the-record accounts that Italian propaganda within Spain stated that the Yugoslavian unification and dissatisfaction were achieved with «50,000 Serbian bayonets».

Dučić remained more than 30 years in 8 European countries, a single country in Africa (Egypt) and in 13 missions in Sofia, Madrid, Rome, and once more Athens, Geneva, Cairo, Budapest, and once again Rome, Bucharest and Madrid the second time and finally Lisbon. Dučić's diplomatic career began with the lowest rank of clerk, but he climbed the ladder hence gradually earning the ranks of secretary, counselor, permanent delegate to the League of Nations, consul general, chargé d'affaires, envoy, and finally his appointment as the first ambassador to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia when he was appointed extraordinary representative of the minister and ambassador to Bucharest in 1936. Hence, in case of Jovan Dučić, the traveler:

Traveling is less and less useful as the discovery of new territories, but becomes a form of knowledge, broadening horizons in the spirit of the «age of the enlightener», but also a romantic inner journey. The traveler, therefore, acts in the service of knowledge, awareness, familiarity, intellect (Gvozden, 2014).

His expression was incorporated in both subjective but also general, romantic but critical as well, descriptive and analytical, eventful but synthetic, a great deal of contemplation but also in knowledgeable and erudite answers. He was a privileged participant and witness to the events, a connoisseur, an astute observer and an inspired narrator, interpreter, the writer who left an impressive testimony about the time and is alive in diplomacy and the places that he visited and served in. Dučić likes Spain so much, its small streets, the voice from a church after which everything had to be peaceful.

It rings for a long time at dinner in Ávila. And when the pendulum finally dies, and there is peace in the air, it seems that something terrible and black has passed over the city. There are cities where the ringing of bells reminds us more of death than of God. These are old Christian cities, on whose dark markets and narrow streets the deep night of the Middle Ages falls with the first darkness. Within their walls, it seems that more people died than when compared to those who were born. In that place, the legend is always bigger and more alive than reality (Dučić, 2000a: 194).

Dučić considers this place the Spain's spiritual center. Furthermore, he establishes connections with places such as Toledo, Cordoba and the town Escorial, while searching for the unique cultural image of Spain through focusing on its towns/cities:

There are, therefore, cities that have a soul, the soul of the city is a story, a woman, then it is a story – a story about a woman or, as poetry is: a woman. And a woman is also the «soul» of Dučić's discourse, a metaphysical, «Platonic» figuration of a woman and the feminine, as a chimera, illusion, fantasy, apparition, imagined and elusive in poetry, subordinated in culture; women as the souls of the city and the city as women, by which Dučić «unconsciously» confirms the historical-cultural matrix <...> (Bošković, 2022: 454).

Moreover, his travelogue *Cities and Chimaeras* (1930, 1940) might be seen both as a text about culture in general as well as an indispensable text within Serbian culture. This book is important for understanding national identity that was founded in the possibility of literary expression, images of other cultures are places at the centre of the literary travelogue, rather than being its remote, undefended and forgotten boundary. For example,

Nineteenth-century Europe was the scene of the race of individual cultures for their own nationality, and the struggle for culture was a greater necessity than the struggle for the nation, since it was a necessary precondition for the emergence of a nation – hierarchies of cultures and drawing the borders of one's own culture (much more than territory), had the task of determining national identity. That is why the imperialist nations considered themselves world-historical cultures and were perceived as such by others – as in the case of the image of France and England in our travel writers. It was precisely the stereotypes of cultures produced by the «greats» that led to the theory of culture, carrying within it all the «difficulties of imagining other people». As Elaine Scarry points out, the ability to imagine others has a great power precisely in great literature, whose influence conveys not only artistic, but also political ideology (Gvozden, 2014).

When it comes to politics and political ideology, Jovan Dučić was a prominent political figure while staying in Spain on two occasions, the first one immediately after the founding of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the second during the brutal politicization during the 1940s, until 1941, coincided with its founding. This experience is captured in a specific way in his travelogue directed to the heart of

a Castilian town renowned as the birthplace of two Spanish saints, Santa Teresa de Jesús and San Juan de la Cruz bringing Dučić back to a rich tradition of mysticism and mystical literature, particularly that of 16th-century Spain, a period that holds immense cultural importance for Spanish culture. Both Saint Teresa and Saint John, often referred to as the black saints, lived during the reign of Philip II, who ruled the empire described as «the one in which the sun never sets». Jovan Dučić's travelogue «Letter from Spain – Ávila»

<...> – as much as it is – is not a letter about Spain, or even about a city, Ávila: it is a story about a woman who is the «soul» of the city, the legend, the Spanish culture, the «soul» of this Dučić discursive study of the Spanish mentality and character. Just as poetry is a woman, so is Ávila, therefore, a woman. «A nun», Dučić would say. Saint Teresa of Ávila (Bošković, 2022: 454).

1. CULTURAL AND POETIC «CONSTRUCT» OF SAINT TERESA OF ÁVILA IN THE TRAVEL LITERATURE BY JOVAN DUČIĆ

In his «Letter from Spain – Ávila», Dučić, «<...>whose journey, after all, is a true example of purposeful activity» (Gvozden, 2014) portrays Ávila, along with Toledo and El Escorial, highlighting these locations as pivotal centers of royal authority in a landlocked Spain. This region, characterized by its stark, expansive plains devoid of lush greenery, reflects some of the most extreme influences of the Catholic Church. Dučić expresses his disconnection from this version of Spain, which feels not airy but rather profoundly continental and staunchly religious, suggesting that it is far removed from the Mediterranean charm and instead rooted in the heart of the Iberian Peninsula.

Unfortunately, he did not get to know multiethnic Córdoba or white Seville, Granada as the most beautiful examples in which light and a mixture of Arab and Christian culture penetrate. In contrast, Miloš Crnjanski will delve into the vibrant spirit of Seville and explore the vast cultural panorama of the Mediterranean. For Dučić, Spain seems somber and complex, particularly in his reflections on Toledo, Segovia, Santiago, El Escorial, and Ávila:

In these old Spanish places where there is only granite and a shadow, everything is expressed by stone, sung by a pillar, pressed by a slab, surmounted by a wall. Spain could never separate beauty from sadness, nor faith from despair. <...>A terrible faith without mercy and a sandy land without beauty have made the tragic soul of the Spanish man. Spanish Catholicism does not have the pagan smile and cheerfulness of Italian Catholicism. In Spain, religion is eerie, fanatic, ferocious. Italian Catholicism is Hellenistic, and Spanish Catholicism is Jewish (Dučić, 2000b: 197).

2. «LETTERS FROM THE IONIAN SEA» – SPAIN IN JOVAN DUČIĆ'S MEDITERRANEAN CIRCLE

In his travelogues, most notably in «Letter from the Ionian Sea», and then in other travelogues from Rome, Athens, Jerusalem and Egypt, he reveals the depth of the Mediterranean climate, the layers of its culture and the meaning of religion. Dučić needed journeys that would merge into the book *Cities and Chimeras*, where he would discover a broader horizon of his own cultural identity, his own people, the Mediterranean region, but also religious self-awareness. This proves to be true as

In the «Letters from Italy» there is a rather stretched and abstract «classical Italy», i.e. classical Rome, which is characterized extremely positively, and whose merits are primarily in the universalism of law and the spread of art, as well as in the transfer of the Greek heritage to European cultures (Gvozden, 2014).

Journeys to Athens, Rome, Ávila, Jerusalem, Cairo represent true discoveries for the mature Dučić, which would be woven into his understanding of the Mediterranean, the relationship between his native Herzegovina and Dubrovnik, the meaning of the sea, the depths, light and the deepest secrets that stand on the border of two worlds. The Mediterranean circle that starts from western Madrid, through Rome and all of Italy to Athens, and ends in Egypt, represents extremely significant places where, before the First World War, during the war, and later on, in the interwar period until the April War of 1941, Dučić was always in designated places that were politically and nationally challenging for the Kingdom of Serbia, as well as for the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1908, before the Annexation of Bosnia in Rome or during the First Balkan War in 1912, and then in Rome).

Dučić's Mediterranean grew up on the border of his native Trebinje and Dubrovnik, developing culturally towards distant places of the ancient world (Delphi, Athens), Rome and especially the dark Ávila burdened by Catholic dogma in the heart of Spain. The deepest roots of Dučić's commitment to the luminous philosophy of the Mediterranean is in the retrospective parts of «Letters from the Ionian Sea», where the fascination with the sea reached back to his earliest childhood. The relationship between land and sea is nowhere more intense and complex in the geographical, cultural, ethnic, state and religious fields than in the area of Dubrovnik and its hinterland on the road to Trebinje.

In this area, the most complex historical circumstances, state and then religious between the Orthodox and Catholic worlds, are refracted. Jovan Dučić understood very well how the land encroaches on the sea and how the Adriatic Sea enters the inland inlets, bringing a different, high culture of the Renaissance and Baroque and Italy, but also a distinct Catholic effort to isolate Dubrovnik from the Orthodox hinterland.

However, geographical, hydrological and cultural circumstances undoubtedly directed Dubrovnik towards the hinterland and Herzegovina, and then the rugged people of rocky Herzegovina to head towards the city and its world marked by a «different» civilization. Dučić emphasizes in his text about Ivo Vojnović the historical context of the relationship between Dubrovnik and the medieval hinterland:

Up behind Srđ and above Brgat, there was our great Serbian empire and lordship. There were also the courts of the legendary twelve kings of the Moors of Orbin, who were already known about in Dubrovnik from the beginning of the 18th century; and up in Trebinje near Trebišnjica, as in Brzjak in Ras, were the courts of Queen Helen of Anjou. In Brankovina, near the same Trebišnjica, the fiefdom of the Branković dynasty, which was first mentioned here, can still be seen. Dubrovnik also received the water of Trebišnjica from above from that area, which emerges as the Ombla sinkhole near the town of Saint Blaise. All the blood and spiritual sustenance came to this city from above already from the beginning... Between Dubrovnik and the people, and in its background, there was a difference mainly state and political, and only later religious and the cultural ones (Dučić, 2001: 19-20).

Dubrovnik is extremely interesting for Dučić because in «Letters from the Ionian Sea» he describes his childhood in which he got to know the sea, the bays and inlets of the Dubrovnik coast. This was not a geographical knowledge, but rather what we today call a geophilosophical view of a space and its higher, metaphysical determinants. However, when it comes to Dubrovnik, Dučić repeatedly defined his relationship to that Mediterranean gem that was deeply geographically and historically linked to the hinterland with a clearly focused view of Venice.

The duality of this town, which was built on the heritage of the hinterland, its ethnic members, waters and shores, is directed towards Venice in a cultural and religious aspect. Dučić's rich experience of being born in the hinterland of the Adriatic Sea, his trip to this picturesque town, and his encounters with Italy helped him to better and more clearly understand the world of Spain and the Mediterranean echoes that helped him realize the following:

But those who watched as a child the warm midday sea when the mistral blows, the summer white and motionless sea that shines bigger than the starry sky, could not be melancholy on its shores. It is the sea, more than anything else, that convinces them of the infinity of a beauty before which all others disappear. I also think that the idea of God was conceived in front of the great open sea or in the middle of the desert, because only there could the idea of the immeasurable and eternal be acquired. (underlining is ours) That's why the open sea evokes only a furious love for life in people born by the sea <...>. Faith is pure sentimentality; because there is no idea about God, but a feeling about God, and an imagination about God (Dučić, 2000b: 109).

Hence, Dučić's philosophical and metaphysical ideas were created in the coastal landscapes of his childhood. The quote is a perfect example of how being raised right next to the expansive ocean can alter your life's course. First and foremost, Dučić is an optimist – a man who believes in the future – which we are used to call South-thinker and that blossoms on this Mediterranean litoral. That luminous vision comes most clearly during those illuminating midday sessions with the maestro, when thoughts of the divine intermingle with images of the sea. His considering religious issues has its desert aspect, exposed also in his travel writing «Letters from Palestine» and «Letters from Egypt», placed inside southern Mediterranean boundaries as well.

In addition to choosing the direction of travel as an act of self-legitimization, for many of our modernists, narrating the journey was also a sign of additional ideological justification of their activity – to place themselves and/or their people in the European family. Finally, every travel writer inevitably reflects the paradox of tradition: its charms depend on the residue it conveys as its own ideology, but if we stopped purifying that residue, the movement would be stopped – writing utopically cancels what gives it meaning. The prose of a true travel writer is not simply descriptive prose, it is also revelatory writing – discovering oneself and others. At the same time, in the last two centuries, travel writers have come far after the «time of discovery» of the cultures they write about, a time that in Serbian literature is associated with Dositej and his era, and in European literature with the so-called «imperialism of the imagination». Hence, the only thing left for the travel writer is to present himself in one way or another as a man of experience, who must somehow be above his contemporaries: in terms of literary value, position, success, material condition; all this most often results in the desire to «aristocratize» one's own position, to escape from «a kind of amateur-absolutist», against whom Jovan Dučić came out once upon a time <...> (Gvozden, 2014).

In relation to Spain, the travelogue² dedicated to St. Teresa of Ávila, and «<...>through its poetic figuration city–woman–soul–story, and the power of the legend, from that very Dučić extracted Saint Tere-

² See more detailed interpretations of Dučić's experience of Spain and the modernists: Krinka Vidaković Petrov, «Jovan Dučić and the Spanish Modernists». *Hispania Horizon*. Belgrade: Čigoja Print, 2017, 62-87; Vladimir Gvozden. *Jovan Dučić, Travel writer. An essay on imagology*. Novi Sad: Worlds, 2003; Slobodanka Peković. «Travel writing – conditioning of the genre» (20-35). *Book about travel writing – collection of papers*. Belgrade: Institute for Literature and Art, 2001.

sa as the soul of Ávila» (Bošković, 2022: 457), is a synthesis of medieval, Renaissance and Baroque culture. For Dučić, the image of St. Teresa of Ávila, is an echo of the sublimity of faith combined with architecture.

Serving in Spain, as later in some other Mediterranean countries, convinced him that life in that area is burdened by the fact that it is inhabited by «peoples who believe in God differently», express love for their own and hate and the faith (religion) of others, are ready to fanatically suppress other people's culture and religion and equally passionately defend their own. He observed exclusivity, fanaticism, and primitivism in this attitude towards religion (Dimić, Milošević, 2022: 31).

For Jovan Dučić, the Mediterranean circle ended in July 1941 on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean in Lisbon, the most western point of the Mediterranean. The cold ocean currents were to take him forever to the other, new world of USA, far away from Europe that had already been at war. Setting off from his beloved Trebinje and the European cities, Dučić, both physically and spiritually, traveled through the countries of western, southern and central Mediterranean bearing in mind that «traveling is a fundamental human activity» (Gvozden, 2014).

Spain and the entire Mediterranean was, for Dučić, the spiritual, poetic and overall cultural haven, but also the region where he performed the most delicate diplomatic tasks. He found himself again in Madrid where he was an ambassador from 1940 to 1941 and appointed for Spain and Portugal in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. He was given the difficult task of cooperating with the Spanish government before the start of the war in Yugoslavia, and after the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in April 1941. He did not want to go to London and from Madrid and Lisbon; he went to the USA to Illinois, where he died on April 7, 1943.

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