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# **Redefining North Africa: Modern Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt in Russian Travel Literature**

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The article deals with the representation of Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt by Russian travel writers between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The text will focus on the hiatus between their *a priori* idea of North Africa as a cradle of an ancient and timeless civilization (an idea which reveals the contact with the orientalist European tradition) and their disappointment once they understand how modernized and “europeanized” this geographical area is. In these travelogues two different “Others” can be identified: while the first one is clearly North Africa, the second one, more subtle, is Europe, which emerges as something completely alien to the Russian mind. Modern North Africa and Europe are here described as symmetrical doubles, while Russia stands apart.

RUSSIAN TRAVEL LITERATURE,  
ARAB WORLD, ORIENTALISM,  
RUSSIAN IDENTITY

В данной статье рассматривается представление об Алжире, Тунисе и Египте в русских травелогах конца XIX-начала XX вв. Анализируется, как предыдущий образ Северной Африки, ранее сформированный на основе европейской ориенталистской традиции, меняется после путешествия авторов по этим странам. До отъезда, эта территория воспринималась ими не только как колыбель европейской цивилизации, но и как место, где живет вечный и древний народ. Впоследствии, изображая европеизированное пространство, на страницах дневников арабские колонии преобразуются в гротескный двойник Европы. В этой концепции России нет: и Европа, и Северная Африка являются для этих русских путешественников “чужими”.

РУССКАЯ ЛИТЕРАТУРА ПО  
ПУТЕШЕСТВИЯМ, АРАБСКИЙ  
МИР, ОРИЕНТАЛИЗМ, РУССКАЯ  
ИДЕНТИЧНОСТЬ

## 1

P.A. Chikhachev (1808–1890) was a diplomat and translator who was also interested in geology and biology. Chikhachev took part in many expeditions (to Altai, Armenia, East Thrace, Italy...); during the last one (1877–78) he went to North Africa through Spain, and later published his travelogue (1880). The present study draws upon a later edition (1975).

## 2

V.M. Andreyevsky (1858–1943) was a Russian statesman who travelled in Europe and in the Near East once he graduated from law school. After the 1917 revolution, he emigrated to France. In 1884 he published a travelogue about his journey to Egypt. The excerpts analysed in this study are taken from the second edition (1886).

## 3

V.L. Kign (pseud. Dedlov) (1856–1908) was a belletrist, writer, and critic, born in a poor noble Prussian family. Dedlov studied law at Moscow University and, upon graduating in 1878, worked in the Ministry of Internal Affairs; as he was interested in literature, Dedlov started to publish short stories and essays. He contributed to the newspaper *The Week* (*Неделя*) and to the journals *The Observer* (*Наблюдатель*) and *The Herald of* →

## INTRODUCTION

The present analysis will focus on six travelogues written by journalists or non-professional writers who travelled in North Africa between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century: Petr Aleksandrovich Chikhachev's<sup>1</sup> *Spain. Algeria. Tunisia* (*Испания. Алжир. Тунис*, 1880), Vladimir Mikhailovich Andreyevsky's<sup>2</sup> *Египет* (*Egypt*, 1884), Vladimir Lyudvigovich Dedlov's<sup>3</sup> *Adventures and Impressions. In Italy and Egypt* (*Приключения и впечатления. В Италии и Египте*, 1887), Sergey Yakovlevich Elpatyevsky's<sup>4</sup> *Египет* (*Egypt*, 1911), Yevgeny Kuzmin's<sup>5</sup> *Through Africa by Car. Travel Impressions with Photographs and Drawings by the Author* (*По Африке на автомобиле. Путевые впечатления с фотографиями и рисунками автора*, 1914) and finally Aleksandr Ivanovich Dmitriev's<sup>6</sup> *From the Trip to North Africa* (*Из поездки на Север Африки*, 1917).

The corpus of writings dealing with Russian travels in North Africa is, of course, broader, and it includes not only travelogues, but also poetry and fiction (cf. Dantsig 1973; Sandulov et al. 2002); herein, among the poets and writers who travelled in this region and later recalled their experience, we should cite at least Ivan Bunin, Konstantin Balmont, Nikolay Gumilev and Andrey Bely. However, there is a clear distinction between these above-mentioned professional writers and the heterogeneous whole of people, whose writings are the object of the present analysis: the latter ones are not interested in fictional strategies, so their representations<sup>7</sup> of Africa are not compromised by literary devices. The images they describe reflect, of course, their personal point of view and their individual background, but, at the same time, these accounts can be read more as the product of the culture they belonged to, than as their personal re-elaborations through a creative act.

The time frame taken here into consideration is particularly interesting: it is precisely in this period that the effects of colonisation and modernisation in these territories became clearly visible to a foreign traveller.

The aim of this article is to analyse how these writers' mental constructions about "North Africa" and "the Orient" change after they travelled in these colonised countries. As far as the method is concerned, postcolonial studies – and especially the notion of "orientalism" as highlighted by Edward Said – and a branch of comparative literature, i.e. imagology will be used.

First of all, the Russian idea of the Orient will be briefly discussed; then, some passages of the cited travelogues, dealing with the effects of colonisation and modernity and with the dichotomy between *a priori* common stereotypes and the reactions sprung from the encounter with the "real" Orient will be examined. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

#### AFRICA AS A RUSSIAN ORIENT

In his renowned essay *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said has pointed out that the category of the Orient has been built on purpose, during centuries, by the Europeans, who have gathered together under the label of "Orient" countries, peoples and cultures who are in fact very different. Their only common

*Europe (Вестник Европы)* using the pseudonyms A.B. or V. Dedlov. In 1886, Dedlov travelled in Europe and North Africa, and in 1887 he published a travelogue.

**4** S.Ya. Elpatyevsky (1854–1933) was a doctor, writer and one of the directors of the liberal people's journal *Russian Wealth (Русское богатство)*. Elpatyevsky was close to the Narodniks and was even sent to Siberia because of that. In 1911 he published a travelogue based on his journey to Egypt. The second edition (1912) of this work is drawn upon in the present study.

**5** Ye. Kuzmin (1871–unknown) was a journalist and correspondent for the journal *Car (Автомобиль)*. From 1902 he started to organise (and participate in) long journeys by car. Between 1912 and 1914 he lived in Cairo; in 1913 he travelled around the Mediterranean Sea with two companions (Andrey Platonovich Nagel and Boris Nikolayevich Nikiforov) and later published a travelogue (1914). A recent edition (2010) is used in this study. There are no traces of him after the 1917 revolution.

**6** A.I. Dmitriev (1878–1959) was an architect and engineer. From →

1904 to his death Dmitriev taught at both Moscow and Leningrad universities. Author of a series of articles in the journals *The Architect (Зодчий)*, *The Builder (Строитель)* and others, Dmitriev also published some books, like *From the Trip to North America (Из поездки в Северную Америку, 1905)* and *From the Trip to North Africa (1917)*.

**7** By "representation" we mean "the ways in which texts [...] provide images of the world. [...] The concept of representation as it has been used in more recent decades has emphasized the ways in which all images of the world are just that [...]. As such they do not much reflect a world that already exists [...]; rather they are ways of constructing and directing our view of the world with the help of language" (Beller and Leerssen 2007: 415).

denominator is the fact that they do not belong to Europe or Western civilisation. Thus, in the Western mind, the word “Orient” becomes a synonym for “Otherness”. According to Said, this mental construction is necessary to represent, study and eventually subjugate the Other. Following this assumption, the scholar identifies three meanings of the word “orientalism”: the first one is strictly “academic”, being “anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient” an Orientalist; the second one is more related to “a style of thought” based upon an ontological distinction between “the Orient” and “the Occident”; in the third meaning orientalism is seen as “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient; [...] in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient” (Said 1985 [1978]: 1–3).

In Russia, that of the Orient is a many-sided category, the representation of which changes and transforms depending on the era, the socio-political situation and, of course, the specific Orient considered. Although being itself often “orientalised” by the Europeans (cf. Tlostanova 2008), Russia has borrowed from the West the complex and stratified way of thinking, imagining and representing the East which Said has called “orientalism”. However, the pair “power-knowledge” typical, according to Said, of European orientalism has been recently questioned when applied to the Russian case. Said bases his analyses on the peculiar relationship between colonial power and its colonies; on the contrary, several scholars think that this kind of relation never occurred in Russia, as Russia never had proper colonies, establishing with its own peripheries a different kind of political, economic and cultural bonds (cf. Khalid 2000; Knight 2000; Todorova 2000).

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that orientalism as a set of disciplines regarding the Orient or as a mental construction perfectly suits

the Russian situation.<sup>8</sup> To this end, Russian mind seems to share with Europe the vagueness of the term “Orient”, which for example can be the Far East (which includes countries like Japan or China, *per se* very different) and, at the same time, the Inner East (in which, once again, disparate realities like Crimea or Siberia coexist; cf. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010; Jobst 2013).

This deeply-rooted attitude is widespread also between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. In her dissertation devoted to the study of orientalism during the Silver age, for example, Yelena Chach has pointed out that, in the first years of the twentieth century,

*география Востока Академии Наук очень широка: Персия, Грузия, Египет, Малайский и Индо-Австралийский архипелаги, Якутия, Тибет и т.д. [...] Таким образом, «Восток» включал в себе все, что нельзя назвать Европой. [...] А в «Журнале Министерства народного просвещения» [...] под народами Востока подразумеваются народы Азии и Африки. (Chach 2012: 48–49)*

It is worth noting that here Africa appears to be part of the so-called “Orient”. The exact geographical position seems not to be relevant at all: once again, the “East” gives the impression of being rather an “Other”, than a precise area located in the geographical East. This was actually quite common among writers<sup>9</sup>, journalists and statesmen, but, strikingly enough, even in geographical journals such as *Around the World (Вокруг света)* or *Nature and People (Природа и люди)* Africa was labelled as “Orient” (cf. Chach 2012). Chach comments on that with the following words: “Само понятие «Восток» становится не территориальным, а эстетическим, теряет четкие географические

<sup>8</sup> Vera Tolz, for example, argues that while Russian orientalist scholars were educated through European orientalist tradition, the politics they proposed was aimed at nation building rather than at imperial domination. Orientalism as a subject of study (*vostokovedenie*) was supported and promoted by the government (cf. Tolz 2005; Tolz 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Among many other writers, both Nikolay Gumilev and Andrey Bely considered Africa part of the Orient in their works about their travels in the Black Continent.

**10**

Among others, here we recall *Настольный энциклопедический словарь* (*Table encyclopedic dictionary*, Moscow 1890–1896), *Малый энциклопедический словарь* (*Little encyclopedic dictionary*, Saint-Petersburg 1898–1902), *Большая энциклопедия* (*The big encyclopedia*, Saint-Petersburg 1900–1909), *Энциклопедический словарь* (*Encyclopedic dictionary*, Saint-Petersburg 1890–1907).

**11**

For example, the works by the French geographer E. Reclus started to be published in Russian translation from 1867; Carl Ritter's book *Geography in Relation to Nature and the History of Mankind* appeared in the Russian version in 1864. They were both widely read.

**12**

Similarly, Yelena Chach states that “Безусловно, такое внимание к западным авторам и широкое увлечение в России их романами способствовало проникновению в русское сознание западноевропейского ориентализма, чему способствовало и обильное цитирование западных периодических изданий” (Chach 2012: 53).

критерии” (Chach 2010: 59). The same attitude can be traced also in many encyclopaedias of the time. Before 1890 there were only three encyclopaedias in Russia, but during the late nineteenth century a large quantity of other dictionaries started to be published.<sup>10</sup> Since the dictionaries were aimed at a wide readership, belonging to different social classes, the editions contributed to shaping the universal Russian psyche on many themes, including the Orient. Taking into account the entries about the Orient [восток] or orientalism [востоковедение], it can be noticed a general tendency to consider Africa (and especially North Africa, but not only) as an Orient, or, in other cases, even as “Asia”. Many of the academics who wrote these entries were educated in Europe, or at least have read European scholarship.<sup>11</sup> This is why in Russian encyclopaedias we find the same stereotypes traceable in European orientalist tradition (for example, the oriental bent for fatalism, backwardness, slavery, savagery and so on).

During that very same period, Russian image of Africa has been built also through the spread of European adventure fiction. Fiction authors like T. Mayne Reid, H. Rider Haggard, L. Jacolliot, J. Verne and P. Loti were translated and published, becoming in vogue among Russian literate public (cf. Davidson 2012).<sup>12</sup> Another way, once again borrowed from the Europeans, to create a Russian image of Africa very close to the European one, was the practice of human zoos. In 1901, for example, an exposition followed by a show of African “amazons” was held in Moscow, causing a strong sensation in the visitors (cf. Novikova 2003). In this case, the goal was to instil in Russian people the idea of the savageness and the underdevelopment of African inhabitants.

Thus, we can state that Russian perception of Africa was shaped by Western mentality. A trait that European and Russian cultural traditions have in common is the idea that Africa is split into two main

parts, North Africa and Black Africa. While North Africa is generally linked to the idea of a timeless civilisation and is seen as the cradle of the whole Western civilisation, Black Africa is usually associated with savagery and backwardness.<sup>13</sup>

### RUSSIAN IMAGES OF A MODERNISED NORTH AFRICA

The authors taken here into consideration travelled in Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt in a timeframe going from 1880 to 1913. Although they had different social positions and backgrounds, as well as different educations and jobs, they can all be ascribed (as far as their travelogues are concerned) to the category of “publicists”, in the old meaning of the English word [публицисты].<sup>14</sup> As a matter of fact, in these texts the elements of memoiristic prose, undoubtedly peculiar to the genre of the travelogues, are outclassed by a number of specific remarks about contemporary social and political North African reality. Thus, the following analyses will not deal with a precise reconstruction of their travels or with the recollection of interesting episodes; instead, it will focus on the effects that the experience of travel had on their mental construction about North African countries. Albert Meier has stated that

*[...] travel writing always organizes differences (“familiar” vs. “unfamiliar”) and highlights either the agreement or the divergence between the familiar and the alien, as the case may be (“domestication” vs. “alienation” or “exotification”). Thus, its imagological relevance stems both from its function as a mediator (in that travel writing adds new knowledge to what is already known), and from its construction of “otherness” derived from familiar concepts and known facts (by means of analogy, exaggeration and contrast – Beller and Leerssen 2007: 446)*

#### 13

An exception is Ethiopia (called Abyssinia at that time), which didn't belong – in Russian imagery – neither to North Africa nor to Black Africa. Instead, Ethiopians were considered by Russians as “black brothers”, thanks to their religious affinity.

#### 14

See the entry “publicist” in the Oxford online dictionary: “2. (dated): a journalist, especially one concerned with current affairs”.



Following this assumption, we argue that these authors' image of North Africa and its construction as a Russian "Other" change drastically after their travels.

On the one hand, an abundance of orientalist stereotypes can be clearly seen in the travelogues, a fact which confirms the authors' belonging to European mentality. The Arab, for example, is often described as mysterious, now heir of a great civilisation, now thief or swindler. Moreover, it is worth noting that even if during their travels Chikhachev, Andreyevsky, Dedlov, Elpatyevsky, Kuzmin and Dmitriev had the possibility of forming interpersonal relationships with Arab people, there are few passages in which they describe precise persons calling them by name or talking about their families and professions. For the most part, the authors resort to generalisations, as they tend to describe the whole category of the "Arab" through generic adjectives like "великолепный" [magnificent], "разноцветный" and "пестрый" [multicolour], "грязный" [dirty] and so on. Similarly, they frequently use collective nouns such as "толпа" [crowd], "народ" or "люди" [people]: in their mind, the inhabitants of these Oriental countries are made up of insignificant individuals. According to Said, this is a common feature in all European representations of the Orient: "the 'Arab' or 'Arabs' have an aura of apartness, definiteness and collective self-consistency such as to wipe out any traces of individual Arabs with narratable life histories" (Said 1985 [1978]: 229). Analysing European authors, Said has also written about the tendency to make the Orient a performance, an exhibition which exclusively suits the Western mind: in other words, the Orient is transformed into a stage, where its inhabitants are actors or puppets entertaining the European eye. It is no surprise, therefore, to find this very inclination also in Russian travellers: "На улицах они [арабы] производят впечатление артистов из балета" states Aleksandr Dmitriev, for example (37). In the same way, luxuriant

and exotic nature, as well as stunning landscapes, do not betray these writers' expectations: descriptions of beautiful and colorful gardens or of paradisiac oasis are frequent in the travelogues. These places, to the tourist eyes, have to be picturesque: “Как все картинно, и красиво, и поэтично!”, affirms Yevgeny Kuzmin recalling the village of Biskra in Algeria (162). The short form adjectives “картинно” [picturesque] and “поэтично” [poetical] are particularly meaningful, as they presuppose the transformation of the Oriental landscape into an object: a stage design or a vivid background of a piece of poetry. Therefore, the Orient is relevant only because it can be useful for the artist's sake. Sometimes, when African reality does not suit the classical image of a hot and sunny place, postcards have the power to reassure the traveller, re-affirming the clichéd traits of the country with their stereotypical essence: “Открыток здесь бесчисленно много, и открытки хорошие: и пустыня, и пески, и солнце, и верблюды, и арабы; все эффектно, африканисто, картинно, и холодный ветер с открытки не дул...” (Kuzmin 2010: 167). Thus, it is a postcard, i.e. a fake and stereotyped representation, which restores the authenticity of the real North Africa, an authenticity lost – in this case – due to natural causes.

Finally, the travelogues are not lacking in another widespread stereotype, that of the narrow, menacing and obscure streets of the bigger towns, like Algiers: “Узкие, темные улицы, извилистые, мрачные и непроходимые, как лабиринт [...]. Эти улицы мрачны и малолюдны, здесь живут только арабы, – старый город пользуется плохой репутацией; по ночам здесь для европейца может быть и небезопасно” (Kuzmin 2010: 121, 122). Close to Kuzmin's description of Algiers is a passage by Andreyevsky, where he tells how he got lost in Cairo's narrow, maze-like alleys; the Egyptian capital, labelled “волшебный город” [magic city, 28], can easily transform itself into the disturbing and

dangerous Hades, into the realm of the dead: “можно было подумать, что весь этот квартал вымер” (58), states the author recalling his adventure.

On the other hand, these writers felt very surprised noticing that many aspects of modern North Africa were not at all what they had expected. Thus, a common perception present in all these travelogues is that the Orient is no longer an Orient. A sensation of disappointment and disillusionment is aroused in these Russian travellers, who are no longer able to fully match their image of the Arabic world with a reality drastically changed: “Трудно себе представить что-либо менее африканское и величавое, чем Александрия. [...] Александрийская толпа тоже мало африканская и восточная”, writes, for example, Vladimir Dedlov (255, 256). Similarly, Yevgeny Kuzmin makes the same point in a dialogue between himself and one of his friends:

– А я вот и в Африке – не вижу Африки! – заявил Энгел.  
 – А что бы ты хотел?  
 – Ну, чтобы были леса с обезьянами, со львами! Горы, пустыня...  
 мало ли что еще! Африка, одним словом! (101)

Their orientalist stereotypes seem so deeply-rooted that the authors often perceive modern Africa as something fake and unnatural; describing Tunis, Chikhachev states: “Ведь этот город лишь слабое отражение, бледная репродукция истинного Востока” (287). The typical oriental features are now in danger: “все характеристические черты востока, от самых ярких до самых незначительных, изгоняются и все более и более ступшеваются; чрез несколько лет они совсем исчезнут” (Andreyevsky 1886: 22).

Lying under these inevitable changes are two inextricably linked main causes: modernisation and colonisation. The authors are startled

by the chaos reigning over oriental cities such as Tunis or Cairo, where machines and trams pollute the air and rumble in the streets: “Великолепный автомобиль с великолепными иностранцами [...]. А рядом мчатся трамваи, летят автомобили, ландо с разодетыми иностранцами, скачут великолепные арабские верховые лошади...” (Elpatyevsky 1912: 5, 6). It is frequent to run into similar attitudes reading modern orientalist literature; Said has clearly made this point, underlying that modern travellers often felt estranged in realities very different from the ones described in books. Transformation and change are two concepts traditionally not associated with the image of a static and immutable Orient.

On the contrary, Arabian cities are quickly becoming very similar to European metropolises, losing their “oriental complexion”. Responsible for this irrevocable process are the European colonists. Russian attitudes towards them vary from author to author; some, like Vladimir Dedlov, are disapproving of the whole process of colonisation, which deprives people of their freedom and rights. In his travelogue, for example, he attacks European censorship affecting the Egyptian press and repeatedly stresses the economic interests lying under Western involvement in Oriental affairs.<sup>15</sup> According to him, Cairo is “the sick capital of a sick country”: the percentage of poor is very high, the Arab man, “europeanised”, looks apathetic while the buildings are in ruins.<sup>16</sup> Also Dmitriev, visiting Tunis, underlines the impact that French colonisation had on this city and describes a monument built by the French to honor the Prime Minister Jules Ferry; the pedestal depicts a French boy teaching Latin to a young Arab and an Arab woman without the veil offering a rye bundle as a sign of submission. The author bitterly states that “действительность, однако, в обоих случаях, далеко отстоит от идеализированной художественной трактовки” (62).

**15**  
In his travelogue Dedlov writes: “Арабские газеты задавлены двойной цензурой, правительства и всемогущих европейцев. Европейские издания: «The Egyptian gazette», «Le Phare d’Alexandrie» и «Le Bosphore egyptien» заняты или обличением гаремных дам, бьющих своих служанок, или взаимными перекурами. [...] Читать эти перекуры и скучно, и глупо, особенно когда знаешь, что великие нации ссорятся вовсе не из-за того, кто меньше пьет, а из-за возможности грабить Египет, высасывая его кровь из суэцкой артерии” (266, 267).

**16**  
Dedlov states: “Каир великолепен, но в этом великолепии есть нечто напминающее, что это – большая столица больной страны. Обилие нищих, с изуродованными членами и лицами, неистовый разврат, апатичные лица европеизированных египтян, англичане с видом урядников, нищета предместий, запустелые мечети, плохая ремонтровка великолепных дворцов, недостающие плиты широких тротуаров, зацветшая вода в роскошных бассейнах, из которых не приказано брать воду...” (267).

Others show softer opinions, as they acknowledge the benefits that colonisation has brought to these countries on a practical level. However, no matter what position towards colonisation these authors defend, they all condemn the fact that Europeans tend not to preserve the culture of the subjugated peoples: “настоящий Восток” [the authentic Orient] is condemned to extinction:

*Вместе с полезной европейской цивилизацией, с каждым днем одерживающей новые победы во всех уголках земного шара, неразлучно идет и другая цивилизация, фальшивая и пустая, привившаяся между прочим и на древних берегах Нила. Это последняя цивилизация объявила кровавую войну всему, что оригинально; она отняла у городов и деревень [...]; она ворвалась в частные дома и заменила резные баулы и ковровые диваны дешевыми европейскими комодами и кушетками; под ее влиянием мужчины бросают свои шелковые кафтаны и чеканенные кинжалы, а в женщинах вселяется зависть к парижским модам. Свисток локомотива, несущегося по полям и пустыням, как бы смеется над выносливостью верблюда и быстротою арабского коня. (Andrejevsky 1886: 21)*

But what seems to strike these Russian travellers the most is the creation of a third space, neither Oriental nor Occidental, an in-between area combining elements of the West and the East. To this end, Elpatyevsky explicitly talks about the uncertain status and essence of the colonised countries, naming North Africa a sort of “middle-earth” between Europe, Asia and Africa (7).

The loss of coordinates becomes very clear in the descriptions of North African capitals, which disturbingly resemble European most famous cities. Chikhachev, for example, describes Algiers in these terms:

*Сейчас жизнь в старом городе замерла, центр ее переместился в современный город [...]. Сходя с парохода и осматриваясь, все еще думаешь, что находишься в Европе, точнее, во Франции. Эта иллюзия не рассеивается и когда видишь восточные костюмы. Потому что, как и в Марселе, и в Гибралтаре, здесь преобладают европейские одежды и мундиры. (74)*

Similarly, Kuzmin characterises Algiers' streets like the ones in Marseille or Nice ("длиннейшие улицы грязноватого европейского города, что-то вроде Марсея", "общее впечатление остается точно от Ниццы, или какого-нибудь европейского курорта с берегов Средиземного моря", 124; 128–129), labelling the city "a geographical calembour [pun]", Dmitriev equates Algiers to Toulon or – again – Marseille ("Сам город, с трамваями, шумной пестрой толпой имеет вид в части, стоящей над набережной, типичного южно-французского города, вроде Тулона или маленького Марсея", 33), Dedlov calls Cairo "the African Paris".

North African space can be permeated at the same time by European music and oriental drums:

*Ночь спустилась над Каиром [...]. Гремит венский оркестр на моей европейской половине улицы [...]. А напротив загоряются фонари арабских и сирийский кафэ-штанов, [...] и несутся оттуда странные мелодии и чуждый гомон музыкальных инструментов и человеческих голосов, и все покрывает глухой задущенный звук: бум, бум, бум... (Elpatyevsky 1912: 19)<sup>17</sup>*

Even Tunis, the only important city which still maintains hints of "oriental complexion" [восточный колорит] is corrupted by the Europeans: Kuzmin stresses that they built new areas, imported trams and

**17**

See also V. Dedlov: "Всю ночь по узким улицам бродят до полусмерти пьяные английские солдаты [...]; бродят скучающие европейцы [...]. Европа не отстаёт от Азии. Она завела множество кафе-штанов. И тут гремит музыка, звенят рюмки и раздаются песни" (265–266).

## 18

In postcolonial studies, hybridity refers to the results that colonial domination had on the subjugated cultures, which gradually – and partially – blend together with the Western ones. Basically, it identifies a loss of definite cultural borders and the creation of a new, mingled culture.

European goods, connected the whole country by rail and made French the official language. The strong impact that French culture had also on the subdued Egypt is recalled by Elpatyevsky, who describes compulsory French language learning in Cairo schools and a vast number of French books in bookshops, while stating that, in the best restaurants, only French can be heard; he thus comes to the conclusion that “французский язык и французская культура – язык и культура всего высшего каирского и вообще египетского общества” (27).

Thus, these authors characterise North Africa as a hybrid space,<sup>18</sup> i.e. a space where identity and otherness are intertwined and coexist, determining the rise of “ambivalence”. As a matter of fact, post-colonial studies have suggested that among the other effects of colonisation there is a feeling of ambivalence, i.e. a mixture of attraction and repulsion characterising the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. This feeling is aroused due to the difficulty in maintaining a strict dichotomy between the coloniser and the colonised. On the contrary, they tend to communicate – even if unintentionally – and this contact produces hybrids, ambivalent subjects among the colonised who seem to mimic the coloniser thus causing disturbance in its consciousness (cf. Bhabha 1994; Ashcroft et al. 2007: 10–11). Being of course not directly involved in colonial politics, Russian authors cannot relate to this question but from an external point of view. However, as they prove to be startled and disconcerted by the new hybrid reality, they can be regarded as proper representatives of Western culture, who feel at the same time attraction and repulsion for the colonised North Africa. It is interesting to note that they perceive it as something fake, artificial, unnatural: in these travelogues there is an abundance of nouns and adjectives related to the concepts of “fake” and “natural” ([не-]настоящий, подлинный, [не-]оригинальный,

фальшивый...)). Even the traditional belly dance is considered to be a tourist show piece by Russian authors since no trace of its original meaning remains. Considerations of authenticity are indeed typical of a colonial situation, where both the coloniser and the colonised complain about the loss of genuineness in certain cultural practises. The consequent births of “inauthentic” practises are thus regarded as contaminated fruit. This, however, presupposes the idea that cultures should not influence one another, or change, remaining instead fixed in their previously established characteristics.

In the travelogues analysed in this study, the modern Orient is therefore considered a fake one; paradoxically enough for these authors, the “real” Orient is that of the past. Initial evidence of this phenomenon can be traced in a passage by Kuzmin: the author uses the term “сохранить” [to maintain, to keep] when referring to the traditional oriental culture that is – in part – still present in Tunis.<sup>19</sup> The verb implies two interesting things: the first one is the reduction of a culture to a sort of relic which needs to be preserved for the European man’s sake; the second one is that the verb “сохранить” gains here a positive connotation, thus suggesting the superiority and major importance of a culture which actually no longer exists.

The idea that authentic Arabian culture belongs to the past is reflected in many passages dealing with ancient monuments or with museums where the relics of a glorious past are preserved. Firstly, this once again confirms the fact that the Orient is perceived as an exhibition, an object of the European gaze. Secondly, it stresses that in Western eyes the Oriental culture of the past is more important and authoritative than the present one. Vladimir Dedlov for example encourages his readers to visit the Bulaq museum in Cairo:

**19** Kuzmin writes: “Громные рынки Туни-са сохранили еще в достаточной степени восточный колорит [...]. В глубине города, особенно около казба, сохранились хорошие старые кварталы с настоящей жизнью Востока [...]” (198).



*Но не пробегайте музей наскоро, остановитесь и вспомните, что перед вами собраны памятники первого культурного народа на земле. Пред вами первая искра сознательной мысли и творчества. Это первый народ, который создал науку, искусство, религию, государство. И потому что он первый, он единственный из народов, создавший все это одними своими силами, без помощи, без подражания, а естественно. (301)*

Dedlov explains that the exposition follows the history of Egypt from its youth to its maturity, its unexpected oldness and its apathetic death. The conclusion is bitter, yet noteworthy: “Египтяне живут еще и теперь, но египетского народа не существует” (312).

Even more remarkable is a passage by Sergey Elpatyevsky:

*И когда я жадно всматривался в эту необыкновенную разновидность каирской толпы, я удивлялся, что не узнал их, – это были – они, люди из каирского музея древностей. Передо мной вставали люди с барельефов храмов, оживали огромные каменные, необыкновенных размеров фигуры богов и фараонов и всяких людей старого Египта. [...] И удивительное дело, словно мне нужно было сделать это «открытие» египтян и уловить их сходство с старыми людьми музея, чтобы начать понимать окружающую меня жизнь. (39, 40)*

Here the writer depicts a world inhabited by ancient Egyptians, who rise from the bas-reliefs, leave the archaeological museum like gods or pharaohs and begin to walk through the streets of Cairo. The city gains a new, gloomy shade: that of a realm of shadows, occupied by the dead. According to Elpatyevsky, true Egyptians are a thing of the

past: in his description there is no space for the current Arab man. In the same way, the real, authentic Egypt is the ancient one:

*Нужно выйти из Каира, чтобы увидеть и понять Египет. И достаточно пройти две-три версты вверх по Нилу, чтобы спало с души все чуждое, разноплеменное, иностранное, что застилает там глаза и заполняет душу, – чтобы встал настоящий, подлинный Египет. Египет древнего прошлого, древнего уклада... (72)*

Thus, it is no surprise to notice that the “authentic” Egypt resembles the one described in books, the Egypt belonging to the orientalist European tradition. While Cairo is seen as irremediably corrupted by the Europeans, hints of the “true” Egypt can be found in the depths of the country, where the impact of colonisation is less visible and the Orient can still be perceived as something alien.

The same attitude can be traced in Kuzmin, who defines Algiers’ inhabitants as “последние отпрыски народа, который может быть, и не был, великим, но все же был живым, предприимчивым, богатым и оставил свой глубокий след в нашей цивилизации” (122). Far from being a great civilisation, in the author’s view Algerian people were – but no longer are – alive, enterprising and rich. Current Algerians are only “the last offspring” of this dynamic civilisation, definitely ruined and corrupted by the Europeans.

## CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that the authors of these travelogues belong – consciously or not – to Western cultural tradition. They unquestionably follow orientalist practises, leaving Russia with a pre-established

knowledge that is only partially confirmed by the new Oriental reality. Their *a priori* idea of North Africa is that of an immutable and static place, stuck in the past and heir of a great cultural tradition. Surprisingly enough for them, however, they find themselves in a whole new Orient, not motionless at all; on the contrary, one that appears to be moving forward very quickly towards an imposed modernisation. The gap between their expectations and the actual world causes feelings of disappointment and sadness, as colonisation drastically changes this idyllic space (idyllic, of course, according to orientalist literature). Although they are aware that all the perceptible transformations have occurred, they continue to apply Western stereotypical procedures to their writings. For example, their tendency to generalise results in the so called “typicality effect”, i.e. the description of a nation through generic peculiarities and attributes, automatically applied to all the individuals who form that particular nation. Joep Leerssen has pointed out that “typicality thus tends, inherently, towards the very definition of *caricature*, the ‘grotesque or ludicrous representation of persons or things by exaggeration of their most characteristic and striking features’ (OED)” (451). The way in which they depict Arab people is certainly very close to the concept of caricature: from the usage of generic adjectives or fixed collocations (the “mysterious”, “dangerous”, “swindler”, “magnificent” Arab), to the grotesque allusion to the ancient Egyptians (who seem to walk in the streets of Cairo along with their gods and pharaohs), for these authors the Arab is never an individual. Their attitudes towards the idea of “authenticity” is also noteworthy: far from resetting their original point of view, thus noticing that “authentic” North Africa now is the colonised and modernised one, they maintain their mental sets. As a result, the new reality is perceived as fake, while the true, authentic one is a reality that actually no longer exists.

Though North Africa has been constructed as an Other by the authors in question, the construction changes gradually over time. Before starting their journeys, they clearly envisaged an exotic and idealised country. As a matter of fact, exoticism is one of the ways of constructing an Other; in this case, Arab culture seems to be appreciated only due to its strangeness, its picturesque essence, its distance to the canonical domestic standards: in other words, it is appreciated due to its exoticism. This idea enters a state of crisis once the authors understand that North Africa is no longer so exotic. Colonisation and modernity have endangered this mental construction which no longer squares with reality. The Oriental Other has been partially contaminated by the West, becoming a hybrid, a grotesque and unexpected mixture of diverse elements, Oriental and Occidental at the same time. While previously the Orient was wholly seen as an Other, now it is becoming more and more linked to the Occident, to whom Russia may belong on a cultural level. However, the situation is complicated by the peculiar condition of Russia, which is not directly involved in European colonisation – but rather stands against it – and holds an ambiguous position towards the West (cf. Bassin 1991; Neumann 1996; Lotman 2002 [1992]), often constructing it as an “Other”, too. As a matter of fact, from the nineteenth-century debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers, questioning Russian identity has become central in Russian thought (cf. Lim 2008). Crucial works by nineteenth and early twentieth century authors (like Aleksandr Herzen, Aleksey Khomyakov, Grigory Danilevsky, Vladimir Solovyev) show a visible trend: to challenge European system of values while discussing the Orient, thus linking the West to the East (two opposite poles), but at the same time not including Russia in neither of the two categories: “[...] Russian orientalism has its own specifics due to the fact that Russia did not just face the Orient as an

Other, but itself was part of a ‘triptych’ consisting of Europe, Russia and the East” (Masing-Delic 2003: 123).

For these reasons, we argue that the traditional binary opposition between the Self and the Other – in this case between Western culture and the Orient – becomes in Russia a ternary one, which involves Russia (the Self), the Orient (the first Other) and the West (the second Other).

It is worth noting that here Lotman’s theory about “enantiomorphism” potentially gains new interesting hints and suggests new perspectives (cf. Lotman 1992; Lotman 1996). In the essay *On the semiosphere* (*O cemuocφepe*, 1984), Lotman has investigated the mechanisms lying under the dialogue between different cultures, identifying in enantiomorphism – a mirror image made up of two images identical *per se*, but different when superimposed – a common process in constructing the “Other”:

*... the process of mutual acquaintance and inclusion into a specific general cultural world causes not only the rapprochement of separate cultures, but also their specialization — after entering a specific general culture, a given culture begins to cultivate its own originality in a more acute fashion. In its turn, the other culture also considers it as “special”, “unique”. The isolated culture “to itself” is always “natural” and “usual”. Only by taking part in a much greater whole, does it recognise the external point of view as specific to itself. In this way, cultural generalities of the type “West” and “East” are revealed in the enantiomorphic pairings of functional asymmetry. (Lotman 2005: 225)*

According to this model, Russia should have positioned herself within either the West or the East, simultaneously constructing the remaining field as an “Other”. In these travelogues, however, while the West and

the East remain an enantiomorphic pairing, Russia does not declare her belonging to any of these categories. The authors observe from an external point of view both the European colonisers and the Arab people, judging them both and thus elevating their own position. As Russians they become the subject, and Europeans and Arabs the object of their gaze. While never considering Arab people as brothers, Russian authors at the same time do not equate themselves completely with the West, as they do not share with Europe colonial politics and interests. In some cases, Russia is even considered a better alternative to Europe, as it is capable of wakening the subjugated Arab: “Я знаю, какое огромное значение имела для Египта и для всего Востока буря русской революции, какая непрерывная диффузия людьми и идеями существовала и существует между Константинополем и Каиром, какое глубокое захватывающее толщу населения движение идет в настоящее время на Востоке вообще и в Египте в частности” (Elpatyevsky: 55).<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, the West and the East – namely Europe and North Africa – are represented as inextricably linked one to the other: imported European architecture, style, fashion, languages and culture have made North Africa the very double of Europe. Mirror symmetry is therefore established between Europeans and Arabs, the two sides of a same coin. Russia, on the contrary, lies outside of this binary. The authors of these travelogues undoubtedly use Western strategies and practises to represent a different reality, thus putting themselves inside Western culture. At the same time, however, the images they construct hint at the fact that both the West and the East are, for them, Others. They come to this conclusion after their travel experiences, i.e. after their confrontation with the European colonisers and the colonised Arabs in that third, hybrid space which is embodied by North Africa. ♡

**20**  
S. Elpatyevsky is here speaking about the Revolution of 1905.

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## Резюме

На рубеже XIX-XX-ых веков русские ученые, журналисты и писатели путешествовали по Северной Африке по разным причинам. В путевых записках они потом описывали не только впечатления и переживания, но и социополитическую реальность этих европейских колоний.

В данной статье рассматриваются путевые заметки В. Андреевского, С. Елпатьевского, В. Дедлова (Кигн), Е. Кузьмина, А. Дмитриева и П. Чихачева, и анализируется представление этих авторов о современной арабской действительности. Обратится особое внимание на их предыдущий образ Северной Африки, сформированный на основе европейской ориенталистской традиции: в их воображении, Алжирия, Тунис и Египет казались колыбелей европейской цивилизации, нетронутыми временем и населенными древним народом. Современная страна, напротив, является гротескным двойником Европы, неожиданным и чуть тревожным смещением стилей, дегенерацией великого прошлого. В этом виноват европеец-колонизатор, введивший современность в места, которые должны были остаться неиспорченными.

В путевых заметках представлены два образа «Чужого»: если Северная Африка является *первым* – и традиционным – «Чужим», то колониальная Европа, от которой русские авторы, кажется, хотят отделять, оказывается *вторым*, более тонким. Процесс формирования «двойного Чужого» можно анализироваться и на основе теории энантиоморфизма Ю. Лотмана.

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