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**DIGITIZATION AND INTERCULTURALISM
– UNIVERSITY LIBRARY “SVETOZAR MARKOVIĆ”
IN THE PROJECT «ITINÉRAIRES BALKANIQUES.
COLLECTION NUMÉRIQUE EN RÉSEAU» –**

Abstract. This paper presents one of the projects that University Library “Svetozar Marković” is involved in. The project «*Itinéraires balkaniques. Collection numérique en réseau*» («Balkan itineraries. Digital collection in a network») is the first attempt to create an online digital collection of rare and precious works, namely itineraries on the Balkan Peninsula and the Levant that were being written in French from the 16th to the 19th century, which are kept in the major libraries of the Balkan Francophone countries: University Library «St. Kliment Ohridski» in Sofia, University Library «Svetozar Marković» in Belgrade and National Library of Romania in Bucharest. These travel stories are important historical sources, but they can also support the development of interculturalism in the Balkans and neutralization of the existing antagonistic stereotypes about the common history of the Balkan peoples. The duration of the project is 18 month (1st October 2011 – 31st March 2013) and the coordinator is *Agence universitaire de la Francophonie, Bureau Europe centrale et orientale*.

The project is divided into several main phases: the creation of a bibliographic database of itineraries on the Balkans written in French (16th–19th centuries); the selection of representative works for digitization, with an emphasis on the works which connect Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania and could instigate the development of an intercultural vision of the common past of these countries and Turkey through a neutral carrier such as the French language; the definition of form and compatibility of the digitization format to harmonize the practice of the partner libraries; the digitization of the selected books and creation of scientific comments to these works; building a website that will contain digitized texts, with emphasis on intercultural education in the region; the publication of a multilingual collective bibliography.

Keywords: digitization, itineraries, francophonie, Balkan Peninsula, interculturalism

Introduction

The project «Balkan travel books. Digital collections in the network» is the first attempt of the Balkan Francophone countries to create an online digital collection of rare and valuable works written in French. The collection will be composed of travel books and reports about traveling to the Balkan Peninsula and the Levant that were being written in the French language from the 16th to the 19th century. These works are a part of special collections of three major libraries in the Balkans: University Library “Svetozar Marković” in Belgrade, University Library “St. Kliment Ohridski” in Sofia and National Library in Bucharest. The project duration is 18 months (October 1, 2012 – March 31, 2013). It is funded by the Bureau Régional Europe centrale et oriental (BECO) de l’Agence universitaire de Francophonie (AUF) (Francophone University Agency, Office for Central and Eastern Europe).

About the project

As far as Bulgaria and Romania are concerned, the contents of the project clearly fits into the European framework which favours multicultural exchange, particularly in the areas of culture, education and youth, with the aim to enable convergence of European nations in order to better cope with the diversity that continues to be enriched thanks to the changes brought by globalization. On the other hand, Serbia is an active component of the new European neighbourhood policy and the country whose population, in particular young people, seek openness and tries to multiply contacts with foreign countries. The common use of the French language anticipated in the project will facilitate the exchange and the functioning of this international network. An emphasis will be placed on the dialogue between the cultures which unites the goals of UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and the struggle for peace in the world.

It is no coincidence that this project is related to the Francophone travel books. During the period of the Ottoman Empire, France almost constantly maintained relations with Turkey and played a significant role in the political and economic life of the Balkan Peninsula. These relations, as well as trading, contributed to the acquaintance of the French ruling circles and the French public with the Ottoman Empire and its Balkan areas. The Balkan peoples, including the Bulgarians, the Romanians and the Serbs, were not unknown in France since the Middle Ages – because of the relations between the Cathars and the Bogomils, and even more as a consequence of the Crusades and the existence of the Latin Empire of Constantinople.

Travel books and reports about traveling were created by French or French-speaking writers (diplomats, soldiers, travelers, explorers, adventurers) and they contain their impressions about the Balkan countries during the period of the Ottoman rule. They represent important sources for reconstructing French images of the Balkans. However, a bibliography of these works still does not exist and those sources, that are so important for the history of the Balkans, are not systematically digitized.

The main language of the project is French, with meta-text that will be translated into Bulgarian, Romanian and Serbian. Because of the fact that Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia were a part of the Ottoman Empire from 16th to 19th century, the usage of the French language could serve as a neutral cultural connection with Turkey. Due to that, eventual antagonism from the past can be removed. Despite subjective observations and judgments of Francophone writers, which were conditioned by their education, interests, goals of travel, limited or unilateral information and political position of the country they came from, these travel books are valuable for the Balkan countries for several reasons:

- they supplement official information from Ottoman sources and poor and partial data from Balkan sources with the authentic testimony of neutral Francophone witnesses about the nature of the Ottoman rule in the Balkans and the situation of the Balkan peoples under foreign rule;
- travel books objectively show how France and Europe at that time perceived the Ottoman Empire, its institutions and subjected peoples;
- they encourage the development of interculturalism in an European region which was shaken by conflicts for centuries.

Each library that participates in the project has more or less limited collection of these works, which was being collected for decades according to the special interests of each country. There are even works whose different volumes are dispersed in collections of all three libraries. For example – the first volume of a book could be located in Bucharest, the

second one in Sofia and the rest in Belgrade. The digital collection that will be created could gather complete edition and give another dimension to the cooperation between libraries. By drawing together parts of these collections in a digital network, a collective and representative collection of works will be created and it will illustrate intercultural dialog that took place in the Balkans from 16th to 19th century and demonstrate the role of the French language in this area.

Partners who support the project are:

- Centre de communication interculturelle et de médiation (CICOM) at the Faculty of classical and modern literature at the University of Sofia “St. Kliment Ohridski”;
- Fondation nationale Académique NABIS;
- Ligue des Bibliothèques européennes de recherche (LIBER);
- The National Council for Science and Innovation;
- Department of methodology of foreign languages at the University of Sofia “St. Kliment Ohridski”;
- Faculty of classical and modern literature at the University of Sofia “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

Objectives and possibilities for future development of the project

Global objectives:

- to make available Francophone sources which are significant for relations between the West and the Balkans;
- to encourage intercultural exchange that shows a catalytic role of the French language through the development of an international Francophone network which will connect libraries in the region;
- to compensate the lack of a collective bibliography of the Francophone books on the Balkans from the 16th to the 19th century located in the partner libraries.

Specific objectives:

- to identify the Francophone travel books and reports about traveling which include information about the Balkans in the three partner libraries;
- to develop a collective list of the works from the collections of the three libraries, which will be published online;
- to form a virtual digital collection “Itinéraire Balkanique” from the books that contain reports and images about traveling in the Balkans;
- to provide a common portal for the virtual collection;
- to develop professional skills and to strengthen cooperation between libraries;
- to prepare a plan of action among three partner libraries for work on digitization of rare and valuable books;
- to make results of the project available to the public through the Internet website in four languages.

Expected measurable results:

- building a common Internet portal which links from each library’s website will be redirected to;
- digitizing 9000 pages – 3000 pages per library;
- joint multilingual digitized books bibliography (100-160 pages);

- final conference in Sofia, hosting 50 participants, where the results of the project will be presented;
- improving the practice of inter-library and inter-university cooperation.

The positive effects of the project will be reflected in the development of technical, communicational, cultural and language abilities of the people involved. Working methods, which include the usage of modern technology and intercultural openness, can be a significant factor in increasing public interest in Francophonie in countries where the project is implemented.

The project “Balkan travel books. Digital collections in the network” is a pilot project and it is still at its experimental stage. Its development will create positive effects which will be incorporated in a long-term strategy that will increase the exchange of experiences and best practices through the use of the French language and the joint efforts of partner libraries. At the end of the project, an integrated Internet portal will be created. On this Internet portal there will be information about the project with the access to digitized works. Also, there will be a short presentation about each partner library, with information about their history, structure, special collections and a gallery of pictures. The new website will make it easier to cooperate between libraries in the field of digitization of rare and valuable books.

This project will bring benefits to those who are learning French, to librarians who are being trained, to researchers and teachers. There are many disciplines that are affected by the results of the project, such as literature and languages, history, cultural history, anthropology, geography, etc. Moreover, these results encourage interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research, which is of a great scientific value. The project has great potential and, in the case of its success, other partner libraries could join in and they, together with the libraries that initiated the project, could provide a new initiative on digitizing Francophone resources and intercultural exchange.

At the end of the project, it would be possible to expand it to other countries of Central and Eastern Europe that have not participated yet. The interest in the Francophone dimension of digitization has already been shown in Greece, Turkey, Albania and Lebanon.

University Library “Svetozar Marković” in project

University Library in Belgrade is participating in this project with 3000 pages of travel books from 16th to 19th century about the Balkan Peninsula in the French language. Four most representative books on that subject have been selected and three of them have been converted into text by OCR (Optical Character Recognition). The following books have been digitized in University Library “Svetozar Marković”:

1. Voyage dans la Grèce : comprenant la description ancienne et moderne de l'Épire, de l'Illyrie grecque, de la Macédonie Cisaxienne, d'une partie de la Triballie, de la Thessalie [...] : avec des considérations sur l'archéologie, la numismatique, les mœurs, les arts, l'industrie et le commerce des habitants de ces provinces. T. 1-5 / par F. C. H. L. Pouqueville. Paris: Firmin Didot, 1820-1821.
2. Les pays sud-slaves de l'Austro-Hongrie : (Croatie, Slavonie, Bosnie, Herzégovine, Dalmatie) : ouvrage illustrée de 58 gravures et d'une carte / Amédée de Caix de Saint-Aymour. Paris: Plon, 1883.
3. Par delà l'Adriatique et les Balkans : Autriche méridionale, Serbie, Bulgarie, Turquie et Grèce / par l'abbé Hamard. Paris: Delhomme et Brigueat, 1890.

4. La Dalmatie, les îles Ioniennes, Athènes et le mont Athos / par Stanislas de Nolhac. Paris: Plon, 1882.

Conclusion

“Balkan travel books. Digital collections in the network” is the project of digitization through which University Library “Svetozar Marković” in Belgrade has got one more opportunity to show its valuable collections and precious historical sources. Also, this is another chance for librarians from the University Library to show their knowledge and skills in digitization area and to connect with librarians in other libraries in order to band together literature about one important period for the Balkan Peninsula.

Web locations

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