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# DISCUSSING HERITAGE AND MUSEUMS: CROSSING PATHS OF FRANCE AND SERBIA

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## FRENCH PERCEPTION OF SERBIA AT THE 1900 WORLD FAIR: A SUPPORT TO THE SERBIAN NATIONAL CONSTRUCTION

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# FRENCH PERCEPTION OF SERBIA AT THE 1900 WORLD FAIR: A SUPPORT TO THE SERBIAN NATIONAL CONSTRUCTION

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## **Biography:**

Ksenia Smolović is doing a Ph.D in Contemporary History at the Paris Panthéon-Sorbonne University under the supervision of Antoine Marès, since 2015. Her thesis is about representations of Serbia in France, from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1920. She tends to understand the divergence of these representations, to analyze how these images were created and, then, evolved. One of the goals of this subject is to renew a nationalistic historiography of the Franco-Serbian relations.

## **Summary:**

*French Perception of Serbia at the 1900 World Fair: a Support to the Serbian National Construction*

The 1900 World Fair in Paris was organized at the end of a century during which the Oriental question influenced the European context. Serbia obtained its independence in 1878 and France has mostly supported it. An event organized several years afterwards, in 1900, could represent an occasion for us to observe how the French perceived the Serbian Pavilion, in relation to the context we have mentioned. The books published in France on the occasion of the event, as well as the articles in newspapers, are a way to understand the images that the French had about Serbia. Firstly, we can see that architecture of the Serbian pavilion appeared to be the first perception of the country, with the religious and Serbo-Byzantine influences referring to Serbian past. Then, several points mentioned in books seem to be a way to affirm the construction of the Serbian nation, mentioning the mine industry, the education or the commercial field: all these are supposed to convince the audience about the Serbian future, with the potential to develop. Finally, the description of the Serbian identity is a manner to support Serbia and its national and identity construction, compared to the other Balkan countries. The presentation of the national costumes, with their political power, and the entire ethnographical museum bring France closer to Serbia, in a way that goes beyond the national exaltation proper to the World Fairs.

**Résumé :**

*Perception française de la Serbie à l'Exposition universelle de Paris en 1900 : un soutien à la construction nationale serbe*

En 1900, l'Exposition universelle est organisée à Paris, à la fin d'un siècle influencé par la Question d'Orient. La Serbie devient indépendante en 1878 et la France a encouragé ce mouvement, prenant parti pour les chrétiens de l'Empire ottoman. L'exposition organisée en 1900 est une opportunité pour comprendre comment les Français ont perçu le pavillon serbe, croisant leurs discours avec le contexte politique. La presse et les ouvrages publiés en France sur cet événement nous permettent de caractériser les représentations françaises de la Serbie. Tout d'abord, l'architecture du pavillon est la première image du pays à être véhiculée, avec les influences religieuses et serbo-byzantines qui font référence au passé de la Serbie. Puis, plusieurs éléments mentionnés dans les ouvrages apparaissent comme des vecteurs d'affirmation de la nation serbe. Y sont décrits l'industrie minière, l'éducation ou encore le champ commercial : tous ces domaines témoignent du potentiel de la Serbie et doivent convaincre le public français que ce pays a un avenir. Enfin, la caractérisation d'une identité serbe est une façon de soutenir la Serbie et sa construction identitaire, en comparaison avec les autres populations balkaniques. Les discours sur les costumes nationaux, à fort pouvoir politique, ainsi que le musée ethnographique dans son ensemble, illustrent alors le rapprochement franco-serbe, au-delà de l'exaltation propre aux expositions universelles.

## FRENCH PERCEPTION OF SERBIA AT THE 1900 WORLD FAIR: A SUPPORT TO THE SERBIAN NATIONAL CONSTRUCTION

“Bulgaria takes part in the World Fair for the first time. That is to say its entrance in the European civilization”<sup>1</sup>; this is what we can read in a French guide published on the occasion of the 1900 World Fair in Paris. This approach is very significant, as it considers the exhibition as a manifestation of the civilization in Europe. It also considers that Bulgaria has not entered the civilization<sup>2</sup> before its participation in this event. In this perspective, World Fairs are great vectors to question the French perception of other countries. Furthermore, this 1900 cultural and scientific event had to deal with all the particular issues linked to the end of the Oriental question. From the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Balkan countries highlighted their wish for independence from the Ottoman Empire and fought against the Ottoman authorities in order to obtain it<sup>3</sup>. We will focus on another Balkan country, Serbia, which got its independence in 1878 at the Congress of Berlin<sup>4</sup>. Though this exhibition was not the first one after Serbian independence, it continued to underline some of the issues related to the European context of the independence in the Balkans. The World Fair is the result of a reflection about the messages nations wanted to transmit to visitors from all over the world and it is very interesting to understand, apart from the fact that the Serbians wanted to show some things about themselves, what the French remembered about the Serbian Pavilion. The historian Manuel Viera de Miguel underlined the importance of the World Fairs in order to understand political and cultural issues of the society<sup>5</sup>. Thus, we will try to link these two aspects analyzing the way the French described the Serbian Pavilion.

As the 1900 Exhibition took place in Paris, numerous French historians did the research on the event, but the study of the Serbian Pavilion was rather brief. However, we could refer to the book of Vesna Dušković, who works at the

1 *Paris Exposition 1900 : guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'exposition* (Paris : Hachette, 1900), 245.

2 See Manuel Viera de Miguel, “Absolutisme, fanatisme et orientalisme : l’image exotique de l’Espagne à travers le kaléidoscope des expositions universelles du XIXe siècle”, in *Les expositions universelles. Les identités au défi de la modernité*, ed. Christiane Demeulenaere-Douyère et al. (Rennes : Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014), 101.

3 Georges Castellan, *Histoire des Balkans XIVe-XXe siècle* (Paris : Fayard, 1991), 238-270.

4 Georges Castellan, *Histoire des Balkans*, 320-321.

5 Manuel Viera de Miguel, “Absolutisme, fanatisme et orientalisme”, 101.

Ethnographical Museum in Belgrade, called *Srbija na svetskoj izložbi u Parizu*<sup>6</sup> [Serbia at the World Fair in Paris], which gave us important information about the Serbian pavilion and its ethnographical museum. Our aim is not to analyze the content of the pavilion, but to question the way it was perceived and described by the French. We examine French works published in 1900 about the Exhibition which mentioned the Serbian pavilion and commented its contents. We referred to the *Catalogue général de l'Exposition* [General catalogue of the Exhibition] and in particular one additional volume which described different nations that witnessed the event. There are also five guide books about the Exhibition, which dedicated one or several pages to the Serbian Pavilion. A few general books published during the event also mentioned the Serbian pavilion, as well as some periodicals and newspapers. By examining the content of these publications, we could understand what made a deeper impression on the French about the Serbian pavilion, and what they remembered. At last, sometimes we needed to introduce some elements of comparison between the Serbian pavilion and the other Balkan pavilions, in order to find out what were the real characteristics of the descriptions of the Serbian one.

The Great Exhibition of 1851, sometimes called The Crystal Palace Exhibition, took place in London: it was the first World Fair<sup>7</sup>. Paris organized another one four years later. For several years, France and England shared organization of these international events and then many cities hosted World Fairs. The historian Christophe Charle links these exhibitions to a tendency of highlighting the modernity<sup>8</sup>, and another French historian, Jean-Christophe Mabire, suggests that “modernity” is the “main theme”<sup>9</sup> of these exhibitions staging technical and industrial innovation. During following fifty years, these events grew and brought together many countries with an aim to state the development of societies, not forgetting fun, athletic and artistic dimensions that were also important.

Jean-Christophe Mabire traced back the organization of the event: a presidential decree from the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 1892 established the event. A second decree from the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 1893, treated the organization of different parts of the Exhibition; then, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 1896, the related Law was promulgated<sup>10</sup>. The President of the French Republic, Emile Loubet, wanted to reinforce the

**6** Vesna Dušković, *Srbija na svetskoj izložbi u Parizu* (Belgrade: Etnografski muzej, 1995).

**7** See Jeffrey Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

**8** Christophe Charle, *Discordance des temps. Une brève histoire de la modernité* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011), 18.

**9** Jean-Christophe Mabire et al., *L'Exposition universelle de 1900* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2000), 15.

**10** Jean-Christophe Mabire et al., *L'Exposition universelle de 1900*, 19.

Republic and to gather the French population through the success of the event. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of April 1900, the Exhibition opened in the French capital. It consisted of eighteen main parts: education and teaching; artworks; instruments and general methods for literature, sciences and arts; equipment and methods for mechanics; electricity; civil engineering and means of transport; agriculture; horticulture and arboriculture; forests, hunting, fishing, picking; foodstuff; mines and metalworking industry; decoration and furniture for public buildings and houses; threads, materials and clothes; chemical industry; other industry; social economy; hygiene and public assistance; colonization; land and sea army forces.

Serbia took part in the Exhibition with a pavilion at the bank of the Seine, next to the Alma Bridge, at the end of the Rue des Nations [Street of the Nations]. In 1897, Serbia was invited to be a part of the Exhibition. Vesna Dušković underlines two points which explain that Serbia took the invitation seriously<sup>11</sup>. The first one was Serbia's success at the 1889 World Fair and the fact it won a lot of medals. Then, the conflicts with Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey encouraged Serbia to assert itself at the international stage. According to Vesna Dušković, King Aleksandar Obrenović ordered, in his letter from the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 1897, to reserve the area of 500 square meters at the bank of the Seine for construction of the Serbian pavilion<sup>12</sup>. Serbian Professor Milan Kape-tanović and the French architect Viterbeau were responsible for the project of the pavilion<sup>13</sup>. The Pavilion consisted of eight groups: mineralogy, agriculture, public education, military school of Kragujevac works, national industry, wine and tobacco, domestic industry, costumes and embroidery.

## Architecture of the Serbian Pavilion as the First Image of the Country

The architectural constructions of different World Fairs have been abundantly studied<sup>14</sup>. Historians agree that architecture is an essential in these events and Hélène Mugnier claims that “ephemeral buildings have mostly architectural ambition of showing a synthetic image of their countries”<sup>15</sup>. The French

**11** Vesna Dušković, *Srbija na svetskoj izložbi u Parizu*, 66.

**12** Vesna Dušković, *Srbija na svetskoj izložbi u Parizu*, 13.

**13** *Ibid.*

**14** See, for example, Mathieu Caroline, *Les expositions universelles à Paris : architectures réelles ou utopiques*. Paris : Musée d'Orsay, 2007. Isabelle Chalet-Bailhache *et al.*, *Paris et ses expositions universelles. Architectures 1855-1937*. Paris : éditions du Patrimoine, 2008.

**15** Hélène Mugnier, “Les pavillons de l’Autriche-Hongrie à l’exposition universelle de 1900 à Paris”, *Bulletin de l’Institut Pierre Renouvin*, 03 (1997).

archaeologist and geographer Louis Rousselet already wrote in 1901 that “Every palace thus constitutes the architectural image of the country it represents”<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that external appearance is the first impression the visitors (or not). We must therefore think about the image of Serbia spread by its Pavilion’s architecture in 1900, about the architectural elements the French memorized about this Pavilion.

The first observation we can find in the books of the period about the Exhibition is related to the religious inspiration of the Serbian Pavilion. The Flammarion guide of the 1900 Exhibition, for example, explains that “the Serbian Pavilion architecture is inspired by the religious buildings of Serbia”<sup>17</sup>. Hachette publishers’s guide agrees that the “Pavilion reminds us of Serbian religious monuments”<sup>18</sup>. We can also quote the *Revue illustrée de l’Exposition* [Illustrated magazine of the Exhibition] which goes further and tells that “Pavilion of Serbia is [...] a church”<sup>19</sup>. These are the first lines of different extracts which evoke the Serbian pavilion, so this piece of information appears to be essential in the description of the building. The *Supplément illustré du Petit Journal* [Petit Journal Illustrated supplement], which published a page of illustrations of different pavilions every week, goes as far as to identify the Serbian architecture with a religious one: “Serbian architecture is only original when it comes to the construction of religious buildings. Palaces and other monuments [...] imitate architecture from the other nations and do not present anything very interesting. So, it was natural that Serbia built its Pavilion in the style of its temples.”<sup>20</sup>

This allows us to conclude that architecture and Serbian nation are linked to religion in the French books. This is the first distinguishing feature that is mentioned. Nevertheless, we could find similar observations about Romanian architecture. Indeed, the *Volume annexe du Catalogue general officiel de l’Exposition* [Additional Volume of the General catalogue of the Exhibition] considers that “during one and a half century, [Romania] has suffered from foreign yoke and does not have, at that time, a well distinctive national architecture. [...]”<sup>21</sup> and that “explains why the religious architecture is the only one that exists in

**16** Louis Rousselet, *L’exposition universelle de 1900* (Paris: Hachette, 1901), 56.

**17** H. Lapauze, *Le guide de l’Exposition de 1900* (Paris : Ernest Flammarion, 1900), 334.

**18** *Paris Exposition 1900 : guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l’exposition*, 242.

**19** *L’Exposition en famille, revue illustrée de l’exposition universelle de 1900*, N° 4, June 5, 1900, 70.

**20** *Supplément illustré du Petit Journal*, Sunday October 28, 1900, 6.

**21** *Volume annexe du Catalogue général officiel*, Groupe VII, Classes 35, 37, 39 et 42 (Paris and Lille: Lemercier/ L. Danel, 1900) n.p.

Romania”<sup>22</sup>. Here, we can perceive the consequences of the imperial occupation of the Balkans which can explain the lack of national architectures.

Then, there are notes in different books about the “Byzantine”<sup>23</sup> or “Serbian-Byzantine”<sup>24</sup> architectural style of the Pavilion. Here we have a reflection on the Serbian national construction. After several centuries of the Ottoman domination, the exhibition highlights the architecture which established itself as affirmation of the Serbian identity. The Serbian art historian Bratislav Pantelić explains that the architecture inherited from the Middle Ages symbolizes Serbian independence, with characteristics which directly remind us of ethnicity and Serbian national religion<sup>25</sup>. The Hachette guide explains that, inside the Pavilion, visitors can see Serbian arms with the “four symbolic S”<sup>26</sup>. Even if these symbols are not explained in the book, the author decided to write about them, probably because they are very important for affirmation of the Serbian national identity. Indeed, these four “S” refer to the Serbian motto “*Samo Sloga Srbina Spasava*”, which means “Only unity can save the Serbs”. According to the legend, this motto is attributed to Saint Sava, the first Archbishop of the Serbian church<sup>27</sup>. The historical fact is that the “sign of four S” reappeared during the Serbian uprisings against the Ottoman Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: it is added to the Serbian coat of arms by the duke Stefan Lazarević. Thus, it permits the reference to the medieval Serbian Empire and this is the symbolic field the author wants to explore.

After these observations, it could be stated that the French books that evoke the Serbian Pavilion are mostly giving a laudatory representation of its architecture. The *Guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'exposition* [The practical guide of Paris and Exhibition visitor] and *L'Exposition et ses attractions* [The Exhibition and its attractions] underline the elegance of the Pavilion. The *Supplément illustré du Petit journal* [Petit Journal Illustrated supplement]

**22** *Volume annexe du Catalogue général officiel*, n.p.

**23** For example in *Paris exposition 1900 : guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'exposition* (Paris : Hachette, 1900), 242.

**24** For example in *Guide Armand Silvestre de Paris et de ses environs et de l'Exposition de 1900* (Paris : Didier et Méricant, 1900), 177.

**25** Bratislav Pantelić, “Nationalism and Architecture: The Creation of a National Style in Serbian Architecture and Its Political Implications”, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 56-1 (Mar. 1997): 16-41.

**26** *Paris exposition 1900 : guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'exposition*, 242.

**27** See Maria Falina, “Religion Visible and Invisible”, in Liliya Berezhnaya, Christian Schmitt, *Iconic Turns: Nation and Religion in Eastern European Cinema Since 1989*. Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2013. And Dušan T. Bataković et al., *Histoire du peuple serbe* (Paris: L'âge d'homme), 22-23. See also Dušan Bandić, *Carstvo zemaljsko i carstvo nebesko: o gled o narodnoj religiji*. Belgrade: Biblioteka XX vek., 1997.

mentions its “graceful impact”<sup>28</sup>. The book by Louis Rousselet adds that “the outward decoration of the palace is one of the most attractive ones to the eye”<sup>29</sup>. However, we have to introduce here some new elements of comparison, in order to slightly modify this laudatory tone. Indeed, architecture of other Balkan pavilions is described with the same tone. For example, we can read about the harmony and elegance of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian pavilion, with its “delightful vegetation”<sup>30</sup> and its “very specific charm”<sup>31</sup> and that the Bulgarian pavilion is “very simple [...] but very graceful”<sup>32</sup>. Thus, we can come to the conclusion that this tone is not a specificity of the description of Serbian Pavilion but a facet of the enthusiast and promotional rhetoric of the World Fairs and their guides, or journalistic campaigns.

### Affirmation of Serbian Nation in the Eyes of the French Public

We can underline now that French books about the Exhibition perceived different points which emphasized the affirmation of Serbian nation: descriptions of the pavilion depict a country which asserts itself on the occasion of this international event. Thus, the note about the Serbian pavilion on the *Volume annexe du Catalogue general officiel de l'Exposition* [Additional Volume of the General catalogue of the Exhibition] points out that “Serbia, proud of its economic development, wanted to present itself with dignity at this big and peaceful nations review”<sup>33</sup>. Of all the evocations of Balkan architectures we mentioned, here the word “*proud*” does not appear in the descriptions of the other countries. In this official publication, Serbia is not mentioned as a small country but as a country with potential for the future. While several authors<sup>34</sup> mention the positive influence of Austria on the administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are no comments about the influence of Ottoman Empire on Serbian past and history. Twenty two years after the recognition of its independence, Serbia appears here as a country full of resources and the *Volume annexe du Catalogue general officiel de l'Exposition* [Additional Volume of the General catalogue of the Exhibition] states that the “commission

**28** *Supplément illustré du Petit Journal*, 6.

**29** Louis Rousselet, *L'exposition universelle de 1900*, 103.

**30** *Volume annexe du Catalogue général officiel*, n.p.

**31** *Ibid.*

**32** *Paris exposition 1900 : guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'exposition*, 244.

**33** *Volume annexe du Catalogue général officiel*, n.p.

**34** For example in H. Lapauze, *Le guide de l'Exposition de 1900* (Paris : Ernest Flammarion, 1900), 305.

in charge of the preparation of Serbian exhibition in Belgrade was composed of the most distinguished personae”<sup>35</sup>. For that reason, this national pavilion is considered as more credible, even though we can quote the note about Romania that also underlines the great value of the people who organized the Romanian Pavilion<sup>36</sup>.

Other more prosaic fields permit to give credibility to the Serbian future. Firstly, the publications about the Exhibition mostly evoke Serbian mines. The Hachette publishers’ guide *Paris Exposition 1900* [Paris 1900 Exhibition] describes the different rooms of the Pavilion and writes about the first one: “when we enter the room, the mineralogy of the country: gold, copper, argentiferous lead ores, extracts of Serbian mines that are still not very developed but which are expected to play an important role in the future”<sup>37</sup>. The book of Louis Rousselet is similar: “Official Exhibition is particularly represented by a very important collection of the mines. The samples it shows give us an idea of the wealth of the auriferous and argentiferous deposits of the area”<sup>38</sup>. Here, an objective characteristic is described: this is not a part of the descriptions of other Balkan nations. These extracts about Serbia aim to depict Serbia as a developing country.

We can identify the same elements in the commercial field. The Hachette guide *Paris Exposition 1900* [Paris 1900 Exhibition] mentions “the ground products” with “plums, which are especially exported to Austria”<sup>39</sup>, but also Serbian tobacco, “one of the most famous, and mostly exported to France”<sup>40</sup>. Another guide writes that “Serbia here shows its wines and... its pigs, as Serbia makes a point of fighting with Chicago”<sup>41</sup>. The reference to farming business of Chicago, which slaughters 2.5 million of pigs every year during the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>42</sup>, authorizes to compare Serbia with this business power. This discourse seems flattering, as the reference seems excessive and should emphasize the Serbian situation. Other elements are mentioned in the same tone – the Serbian public education, which is said to have done a “enormous

**35** *Volume annexe du Catalogue général officiel*, n.p.

**36** *Ibidem*.

**37** *Paris exposition 1900 : guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'exposition*, 243.

**38** Louis Rousselet, *L'exposition universelle de 1900*, 103.

**39** *Paris exposition 1900 : guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'exposition*, 243.

**40** *Ibid.*

**41** *Guide Armand Silvestre de Paris et de ses environs et de l'Exposition de 1900*, 177.

**42** Hélène Harter, “Chicago et l’incendie de 1871 : entre mythes et réalité,” Alain Cabantous *et al.*, *Mythologies urbaines* (Rennes : Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2004), 219-236.

progress”<sup>43</sup> or jewellery, which presents “delicate Serbian jewellery”<sup>44</sup>. All of the extracts we quoted are related to elements that take part in the Serbian national and independent construction and this is the image that remains with French visitors during the days after the Exhibition.

Finally, two specific books were published by the Serbian Ministry of Finance on the occasion of the Exhibition. The first one is about agriculture in Serbia<sup>45</sup>, and the second about Serbian mining industry<sup>46</sup>. The goal of these publications was to underline Serbia’s abilities for the development. Here again, we cannot forget that this is one of the aims of the international event, and that the other nations benefit from the same rhetorical promotion. Moreover, another book was published in France on the occasion of the Exhibition, dedicated to the Serbian Ethnographic museum. The latter allows us to approach the representations of Serbia linked to the identity.

### The Description of the Serbian Identity

Different French publications which mention the Serbian pavilion evoke Serbian Ethnographic museum in a representative manner and particularly the exhibition of the national costumes. After mentioning the pig business, Armand Silvestre’s guide explains that “what soothes us of that prosaicness are the beautiful national costumes we can admire in the vast rooms”<sup>47</sup>. In the magazine *L’Exposition et ses attractions* [The Exhibition and its attractions], a promotion of the Serbian Ethnographic museum goes in the same way: “In the elegant royal pavilion, located on the edge of the Street of the Nations, we’ll see this museum, absolutely done in the Belgrade style. Wax figures, very precisely costumed, will show us the varied clothing used in the country for all the classes of the society; we will also see the people’s professions and customs in this country.”<sup>48</sup>

In *L’Exposition universelle de 1900* [1900 World Fair], Louis Rousselet even feels that this is the most interesting part of the Pavilion for the visitors: “But what strikes the visitor’s attention is, with a very important lot of Pirot carpets,

**43** *Paris exposition 1900 : guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l’exposition*, 243.

**44** *Ibid.*

**45** L. R. Yovanovitch and Ministarstvo Narodne Privrede Srbije, *L’agriculture en Serbie. Monographie composée à l’occasion de l’Exposition Universelle de 1900* (Paris : imp. De Chaix, 1900), 106 p.

**46** Ministarstvo Narodne Privrede Srbije, *Industrie minière Serbe : Exposition Universelle de Paris 1900, catalogue spécial* (Paris : imp. De Chaix, 1900), 40 p.

**47** *Guide Armand Silvestre de Paris et de ses environs et de l’Exposition de 1900*, 177.

**48** Jules Rouff, *L’exposition et ses attractions* (1900), vol. 1, 89.

of Belgrade's embroideries and of beautiful filigree gold and silver jewellery, a rich collection of national costumes which shows us the men and women's finery in Serbia."<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, these different extracts illustrate the way that authors insist on the presence of Serbian national costumes and their beauty. These costumes are powerful vectors of political and national representations; they are used to stage the Serbian national specificities. Furthermore, they link Serbia to its history and concentrate Serbian nation in the tradition: Serbia has a past and the costumes are one of its marks. The French historian Anne-Marie Thiesse underlines that "the affirmation of a delighted and intangible yesterday"<sup>50</sup> allows the construction of the nation, more than the promise of a stunning future. Here, the Pavilion plays its part, by positioning Serbia in a national continuity – without any mention of the Ottoman past. The French perceive the Serbs as the members of a nation built in the continuity, across the centuries. Furthermore, other books do not depict the costumes of the other Balkan countries with the same enthusiasm, or do not describe them at all. For example, the Armand Silvestre's guide evokes Bulgarian and Bosnian costumes, but without describing them. The Hachette publishers' guide *Paris Exposition 1900* [Paris 1900 Exhibition] depicts the great colours that honour the Serbian costumes – and does not write anything about Bulgarian ones<sup>51</sup>. Also, it mentions people wearing national costumes in the Bosnian and Herzegovinian pavilion without explaining how they look like. The geographer Louis Rousselet who dedicates a part of his book to the "Countries of Balkan Peninsula"<sup>52</sup>, does not mention Bulgarian, Romanian or Greek national costumes. He wrote that there were some of these costumes in the pavilion of Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>53</sup> whose description remained within the part related to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but did not describe the costumes. Once again, Serbian national costumes were the only ones to be highlighted: "These costumes, with bright and distinct colors, overloaded by golden and silvered embroideries, dress models artistically positioned. Their group is one of the most interesting ethnological museums. [...] The Serbian feminine costume has for principal distinctive feature a coat, which women from all the classes of the society, from the great lady to the humblest farmer, dress. The only difference comes from the richness of the embroideries. The rest of the costume includes a bolero, *Jeletché*, and a

**49** Louis Rousselet, *L'exposition universelle de 1900*, 104.

**50** Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales, Europe XVIIIe-XIXe siècle* (Paris : Seuil, 2011), 162.

**51** *Paris exposition 1900 : guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'exposition*, 244-245.

**52** Louis Rousselet, *L'exposition universelle de 1900*, 103.

**53** *Ibid.*, 70.

*chalvari*, which is a kind of culotte skirt, similar to the French cyclewomen ones. The Serbian women put the belt around their waist, sometimes weaved with fine pearls, and which ends by a high metallic staple that serves as corset in a way; they put on a skullcap weaved with silver and pearls.”<sup>54</sup>

Consequently, we have found what the French specifically memorized about the Serbian identity during the event: the Serbian national costumes, which are associated to the Serbian identity. We have to insist on the political power of these national costumes, which we can link to the French position in the Oriental question. As France was supporting Serbia during its struggle for independence, underlining its national illustration is now a way to honour it.

In the publication of Ethnographic museum, the Introduction allows us to complete the representations spread to the French public. This preface, written in French, insists on the notion of tradition in relation to Serbia: “Even though everything changes almost everywhere in Europe, the Serbian race has kept intact its traditions of the past centuries [...] preserving national taste in its purity, thus affirming respect and loyalty to the ancient customs.”<sup>55</sup> What we felt in this flattering mention of the national costumes is here clearly expressed. Moreover, the preface evokes the “Serbian race”. Anne-Marie Thiesse explains that the word “race” can be a synonym for the “nation”<sup>56</sup>.

Two important elements appear as well: the first one is a South Slaves hierarchy which would be favourable to Serbians. Indeed, we can read that “Reading again the history of Europe’s Eastern peninsula, we see most of the time Serbian people at the head of all the Slaves [...]” and that Serbians can, thus, “rightly consider themselves as the pioneers of the South Slaves’ civilization”<sup>57</sup>. Therefore, the highlighting of the Serbians has to go through a comparison with its neighbours. Once again, the method of comparison allows us to think about the particularities of the Franco-Serbian specific case: the French seem to promote their relation with Serbia and to encourage the emphasis on the Serbian development. Then, a description of the South Slaves’ “race”, which the text considers the typical Serbians: “[...] they are courageous, despite a rather peaceful temperament, kind, men of order, respecting property, with an independent spirit; they are also fond of modern progress. The race is beautiful, strong and very welcoming.”<sup>58</sup>

**54** Louis Rousselet, *L'exposition universelle de 1900*, 104.

**55** *Musée ethnographique serbe : Exposition universelle de Paris 1900* (Strasbourg, 1900), V.

**56** Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales*, 181.

**57** *Musée ethnographique serbe : Exposition universelle de Paris 1900*, V.

**58** *Ibid.*

In addition to the reference about the independence, which appears as a direct support to the Serbian one, we also have to perceive the notion of progress that we have already found in different publications we referred to. The tone is specifically laudatory one and replies to the national exaltation proper to the World Fair. Furthermore, the favourable stereotypes about Serbian identity have a political role: they come as a political support to Serbian nation, when the European context encourages France to draw closer to Serbia. The Exhibition appears to be a vector of these politics.

It is difficult to conclude about the laudatory French tone about Serbia on the occasion of the 1900 World Fair, as we could also notice the same tone about other pavilions, including the Balkan ones. Indeed, we could not consider the French point of view about Serbian pavilion without comparing it to its neighbours. Even if we could observe the kind tone in the mention of the Serbian Pavilion, we have to be careful: we cannot forget that publications about the Exhibition wanted to attract visitors and to spread favourable representations of the different nations that were a part of it. However, the study of the French books and newspapers permitted us to observe French support to the Serbian national construction. The representations of Serbia are underlining an acceptance of the Serbian independence and a support to its development. Beyond the notes about Serbian progress in several fields, we have to underline the highlighting of the Serbian national costumes, which appear to be, with the emphasis of the Serbian ethnological and stereotypical particularities, the French symbolical way to approach the young nation. While Serbia had a geostrategic and diplomatic situation between Austria-Hungary and Russia, the country was under the alternate influence of these two countries. The Franco-Russian alliance from 1893 led the French politicians to integrate Serbia in their strategic considerations<sup>59</sup>. Thus, we can conclude about the links that exist between the French laudatory representations and speeches about Serbia and this geostrategic atmosphere in Europe about the Balkans. Support to Serbia was a way to get closer to it, as the French wanted to take advantage of economic and cultural potential of Serbia.

**59** Stanislav Sretenović, *La France et le nouveau Royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes (1918-1929) : des relations inter-étatiques inégales* (Florence: Institut universitaire européen, 2006), 27.

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