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From Arabia Felix to the Lands Trampled by Tyranny; or, the Picture of the Arab World in the Literature of Polish Enlightenment

Abstract

The aim of the article is an attempt to reconstruct a description of the image of Arab World on the basis of selected (yet representative) writings from the second half of the 18th century. In that period, due to the trending Enlightenment orientalism understood as a fascination with the Orient and references made to it in the culture, the Arab world appeared among Polish representatives of the Age of Reason. These trends were expressed in art, customs, literature and – in the form of various concepts and images – in social consciousness. These images differed between each other both in terms of content and form. Some of them aimed to depict the Arab world objectively and extensively, whereas the other, on the contrary, were merely delineations focused on particular elements of the Arab world, depicting only one or a few aspects. Some of them, such as the image of Arabia Felix or utopian reminiscences refer to the tradition and update it. Some of them were created for the time being. Nevertheless, each of them reflects the topics, problems and questions which concerned the minds in Enlightenment Poland. Moreover, relatively high correlation between European archetypes and the image of the Arab world which occurs in the writings of the Polish Enlightenment confirms that Poland belongs to the Old Continent cultural group, which was crucial for the promoters of Polish Enlightenment.

Keywords

Orientalism, imagology, Arab World in Enlightenment, perception of Others in Polish literature.

“This may be hard to believe, but documented contacts between Poland and the Arab world date back over one thousand years and reach back to pre-Christian times” – read the very first pages of one of the works by Marek

M. Dziekan.¹ Despite such promising start, one could be tempted to say, the relations between the Polish Republic and Arabian peoples failed to develop and were becoming more and more infrequent. The incidental nature of direct contacts on the one hand and a change in the balance of power in the East on the other led to a situation in which the Arab culture and its representatives were not often a subject of reflections or Old Polish writings. Sarmatian society focused mainly on the Ottoman Empire, “the proximity of which is always alarming and suspicious to us”,² to put it in the language of a 17th c. historian and writer, Szymon Starowolski.

The situation changed in the second half of the 18th century. Due to the trending Enlightenment orientalism understood as a fascination with the Orient and references made to it in the culture, the Arab world appeared among Polish representatives of the Age of Reason. These trends were expressed in art, customs, literature and – in the form of various concepts and images – in social consciousness. These images differed between each other both in terms of content and form. Some of them aimed to depict the Arab world objectively and extensively, whereas the other, on the contrary, were merely delineations focused on particular elements of the Arab world, depicting only one or a few aspects. There is abundance of the latter images. The aim of the following inquiries into the subject matter is an attempt to reconstruct a description of these images on the basis of selected (yet representative) writings from the period between the 40s of the 18th century and the 20s of the subsequent century (precisely till 1830).³ Not only does the subject of analysis consist of selected literary works and critical literary and theoretical literary writings, but also travel memoirs, science books (encyclopedias and compendia) and journalistic writings. One should bear in mind the fact that they are both an expression of social imagery and a factor which shapes and consolidates it. Defining the term *Arab world* is more problematic, mostly due to the fact that such a term was not yet known to the Polish society of the 18th century. Introducing Old Polish or Enlightenment terminology used in reference to the people of the Orient seems pointless as well. The ethnonyms present in the writings of that period are as follows: *Arab*, *Turk*, *Ottoman*, *Bedouin*, *Moor*, *Saracen* and *Mahometan*. The overlapping of ethnic, religious, political (historical) and even social factors in addition to insufficient knowledge of generally understood relations between the peoples in the East resulted in ethnonymical chaos in which the extent of meaning of a given term was vague. It was commonplace not to differentiate between an Arab and a Turk or a Persian (which unfortunately happens even nowadays),

¹ M.M. Dziekan, *Polacy a świat arabski. Słownik biograficzny*, Gdańsk 1998, p. 9.

² Sz. Starowolski, *Dwór cesarza tureckiego i rezydencja jego w Konstantynopolu*, Kraków 1858.

³ Obviously this does not imply that each and every text written in that period, especially if it was written in the transitional period, belongs to Enlightenment writings. It is obvious that the transition dates of cultural movements and eras are conventional.

it was often generalized about the aforementioned nations, referring to them all as *Eastern* or *Orient*, or conversely, each Muslim was called a Turk (an Ottoman) *pars pro toto*. Therefore, in order to avoid intricate (yet interesting) deliberations, following Rafał Karpiński, the lands “relatively densely populated by the Arabs: the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine (the Holy Land), the Tigris-Euphrates region, the whole North Africa from Egypt to Morocco, and also Spain until the Capitulation of Granada (1492)”⁴ are included in the Arab world. This is to some extent consistent with the area inhabited by the Arabs as described by Ignacy Krasicki. The entry *Arabia* in the Collection of Essential Information (*Zbiór potrzebnych wiadomości*) reads as follows:

a vast country in Asia, from three sides surrounded by the sea, bordering with Egypt and Palestine from the fourth. [...] The inhabitants pride themselves on originating from Abraham through a son of his, Ishmael of Hagar. [...] The descendants of Muhammad, who began to call themselves Saracen, before the caliphate they had extended their rule in three corners of the world, as the Kingdom of Spain was under their suzerainty, except for a few northern provinces.⁵

Without regard to the geographical-terminological intricacies, the world to which they referred was first of all perceived as different. Therefore, its symbolic and mental “iconosphere” is directly connected with one of the major subjects discussed in contemporary humanities, that is, the question of perception of Otherness. The concept of cultural resources formulated by Zbigniew Bokszański shall prove useful in interpreting the Enlightenment image of the Arab world. According to the author, there are three “sources of creating the perceptions of the ethnic Other”.⁶ The first one is the group tradition defined as:

cultural achievements of a society regarding the perception of different ethnic groups and nations. The essential feature of this system is that it is holistic, as it consists of group tradition accumulated and consolidated by various means [...] It includes both the oldest and the contemporary cultural standards, those “socially dead” as well as those “socially active” [...]⁷

An essential part of the tradition are the paradigms of the Other, which:

⁴ R. Karpiński, *Polska wizja Lewantu*, in: *Sąsiedzi i inni*, ed. A. Garlicki, Warszawa 1978, p. 231.

⁵ I. Krasicki, *Zbiór potrzebniejszych wiadomości porządkiem alfabety ułożonych*, vol. 1, Warszawa – Lwów 1781, p. 104.

⁶ Z. Bokszański, *Stereotypy a kultura*, Wrocław 1997, p. 60.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 60–61.

shape a significant part of common means of perceiving others. It is the element of total group achievements which is socially active. It is responsible for setting and determining the current perception of others. It is an open, active tradition.⁸

A category inferior to the tradition, being part of it at the same time, are ideological synopses of the other. They constitute “the part of schemas through which one perceives others which is a result of willful and intentional acts”.⁹ As the superior category, group tradition constitutes the source both for paradigms of the other and ideological synopses, developing and updating them at the same time. By this means, in each age, including the age of lights, a certain system of active images of the other prevails. Its structure and character is defined by a rich tradition on the one hand and the current socio-cultural context and “needs” which include the world view of a given age or geopolitics on the other.¹⁰ The same case was with the image of the Arab world in the Polish Enlightenment.

While discussing the factors that shape this image, it is necessary to begin with direct contact. Nonetheless, this instance is of marginal importance, since in the Enlightenment Poles rarely chose the Arab East as their destination.¹¹ It may be said that the contacts took place mainly through reading mostly foreign writings, thus they were of virtual and intellectual nature. Hence the portrayal of the Arab world in the Polish literature was to a significant extent “imported” from European imagery. Authors derived from already consolidated images, motifs or entire texts which were translated or adapted.

Intellectual encounter with the Arab world took place through reading travel memoirs which were popular in the Reading Europe. Due to the lack of original writings on this subject matter, foreign travel literature gained considerable popularity. *Relation d'un voyage fait au Levant* (Paris 1664–1684) by Jean Thevnot, now regarded as a classic, *Beschreibung von Arabien* (Copenhagen 1772) by Carsten Niebuhr [In Europe known in the French version as *Description de l'Arabie*, 1773 or 1774] *Voyage en Égypte et en Syrie* (Paris 1787), by

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

¹⁰ Such mechanism was valid for each ethnic group in each age.

¹¹ Agnieszka Żal-Kędzior maintains that throughout the whole 18th century (thus in the Enlightenment even less) only 15 monks and not many more laypersons made pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and only four memoirs were written with only one published in the 18th century, still, before the Enlightenment (1731). See: A. Żal-Kędzior, *Obraz Ziemi Świętej w polskim piśmiennictwie geograficznym i podróżniczym osiemnastego wieku*, Toruń 2010. Even less people travelled to other parts of the Arab world. Jan Potocki is a very uncommon instance. The author of *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* travelled to the Arab East twice – in 1784 he travelled to Egypt [combined with the journey to Turkey], and in 1791 to Morocco. In his memoir he wrote that he was the first foreigner to go there as a traveller. See: J. Potocki, *Podróż do Cesarstwa Marokańskiego*, [in:] (ed.) L. Kukulski, *Podróże*, Warszawa 1959, p. 109.

Constantin-Françoise de Volney,¹² who is honoured by Jan Potocki at the end of his memoir from his most famous *Voyage en Turquie et Égypte, fait en l'année 1784*, (Varsovie 1788),¹³ *Voyage dans l'Empire de Maroc fait en l'année 1791. Suivi du Voyage de Hafez*, (Varsovie 1792) by the same author and many more writings¹⁴ may be now regarded as the most popular literary works on travels.

Nonetheless, there is a literary work, which even more intensively than memoirs “moved” European [and Polish] readers to the East. It is a collection of tales titled *One Thousand and One Nights*. And although – as pointed out by, among others, Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski – “this literary work comprises of the morality decorated with the richness of the affluent creations of the Orient nations”¹⁵ – it is a title given to the collection by a Polish translator¹⁶ – *Awantury arabskie lub tysiąc nocy i jedna* [Arabic Row; or, One Thousand and One Nights] – which naturally directs associations to this particular part of the Orient world. Eastern tales reached Europe and the Poland

creating these wonderful apparitions of fairies, giants, spells, spreading the borders of an enchanted world, multiplying in imagination the richness and power of the man, introducing [readers] into an unearthly land of miracles able to occupy one’s mind, arouse, maintain and enrich insatiable curiosity not inducing aversion with dismay or mercy.¹⁷

By virtue of them, the reader could see the unknown, enchanted Orient world, which is fabulous, sensual, in which magical heroes get through a series of amazing adventures. Variety of costumes, characters, Eastern-style details and introduction of different customs surprised and fascinated the whole Europe. As the initial fad ceased, values different than sheer esthetics started being noticed in the “Arabic Row”. By this means, the fact that they are also a source of

¹² Polish translation: *Podróż do Syrii i Egiptu odbyta w roku 1783 1784 i 1785 przez P. Volney*, vol. 1–2, Kraków 1803.

¹³ See: “One more name shall be honoured by the voyagers and those who are keen on reading their memoirs: I am speaking of sir Volney. Pursuit of the truth and exceptional talent distinguish him among a number of such writers and make him deserve all the glory” in: J. Potocki, *Podróż do Turcji i Egiptu*, [in:] *Podróże*, transl. J.U. Niemcewicz, (ed.) L. Kukulski, Warszawa 1959, p. 81.

¹⁴ Due to abundance of writings, it is impossible to enumerate all the memoirs. To illustrate it with an example, the library of Stanisław II Augustus included several dozen items, whereas Jan Potocki in his memoirs makes references to or mentions at least several memoirs. See: *Biblioteka Stanisława Augusta na zamku warszawskim. Dokumenty*, (ed.) J. Rudnicka, Wrocław 1988.

¹⁵ A.K. Czartoryski, *Myśli o pismach polskich. Z uwagami, nad sposobem pisania w rozmaitych materiach*, Wilno 1801, p. 222.

¹⁶ A Piarist Łukasz Sokołowski is the author of the translation. It was published in twelve volumes between 1767 and 1775.

¹⁷ J. Tarnowski, *Badania historyczne jaki wpływ mieć mogły mniemania i literatura ludów wschodnich na ludy zachodnie, szczególnie w wzglądzie poezji*, Warszawa 1819, p. 57.

valuable moral teachings was acknowledged. Yet another advantage resulting from getting acquainted with the collection of tales was noticed by Stanisław Kostka Potocki, who puts it as follows:

Is there anything more pleasant than a greater number of tales of which the vast collection called *One Thousand and One Nights* consists? What is more, they provide us with an accurate insight into the character and customs of the East, and first of all – the Arabs, who ruled over these lands in times past. [...] Everything there is depicted more accurately than the most diligent traveller could do.¹⁸

Cognitive values attributed to the tales by Potocki were a sign of the collapse of the hegemony of classical values and proved the openness of Europe to new ideas. On the other hand, overestimation of Arabic tales in comparison with the writings which belong to documentary prose contributed to shaping and consolidation of false, exaggerated or even grotesque, but certainly simplified imagery of the Arab world. This was reflected in writings, especially in literature.

Even a glimpse at selected literary, critical or journalistic works allows to notice that this fairy-like land of giants, fairies and genies did not prevail in Polish writings and – if fiction is present at all – it is mainly in the form of an “accompanying outline”. Nevertheless, the imagery of the Arab world as an area where wise and righteous men lived and did noble deeds was dominant. It was the heroes – characters, or rather their types that were the main elements comprising this image. From their adventures the reader may learn a lesson and be encouraged [or warned] to act in accordance with the values generally accepted by a given group.

The character of a good Arabic ruler, the embodiment of which were the first caliphs of the Abbasid dynasty: Abu Jafar Al-Mansur Abū Ğa‘far al-Manşūr, Harun al Rashid Hārūn ar-Rašīd and less frequently al-Mamun Al-Ma‘mūn, shall be mentioned in the first place. It was mainly due to the fact that as the protagonists of the collection of tales *One Thousand and One Nights*, they were recognizable. Abu Jafar Abū Ğa‘far, for example, was famous for having “a true insight into the man’s heart” and could assess people according to their true value, not false pretences.¹⁹ In Harun’s Hārūn’s kingdom, which is famous for justice, “it is difficult to find a sad serf”.²⁰ Both rulers set an example for other rulers, Fan Kozru Adhad Eddulat – “a great warrior and politician”, who looks for new ways to “make happy the peoples which

¹⁸ S.K. Potocki, *O wymowie i stylu*, Warszawa 1815, vol. 4, p. 215.

¹⁹ See: [A. de S...N....] *Abu- Dżafar Almanzor albo jak poznawać ludzi*, [in:] “Dziennik Wileński” 1816, vol. 3/17, p. 409–430.

²⁰ F. Karpiński, *Wezyr Giafar do Haruna Al-Raszid*, [in:] *Dziela*, Warszawa 1830, p. 164.

were entrusted to his protection by the providence”²¹ had an opportunity to listen to the tale about Abu Jafar Abū Ġa‘far; J. U. Niemcewicz in the tale *Lew sprawiedliwy* [*A just lion*] advises that each ruler should follow Harun al-Rashid Hārūn ar-Rašīd, who:

With Giafar, the vizier of his
 walks the city undercover
 checking with no miss
 if the poor are oppressed by the affluent.
 Once mercifully they ordered to hang
 The bakers who shriveled the bread.²²

A character of a good and just ruler was important in terms of maintaining the conviction that thanks to him the country of wise men also becomes the country of happy people.

The second wide group of characters-types consists of merchants [in various configurations: father – son; father – sons; brothers]. It was the group of Ignacy Krasicki’s particular interest. Most of the characters appearing in his “eastern tales” are merchants. The characters created by Krasicki were personifications of virtues particularly appreciated among the society – kindness, modesty and justice. Thanks to these values they gain respect and accumulate wealth, obtain noble ranks, or they get what they were striving for. Some heroes do not know which way they should follow yet. A general image of the Arab world created on this basis of these characters, although not devoid of evil, depravity and pain, has some qualities of the utopia – the good is always rewarded, whereas the evil punished. It was a world of order, in which abiding by the rules or inevitable punishment for their violation guaranteed the order.

The picture of wisdom of the Arab East is complete when the country is shown as a country where science progresses. A passage from the work by Euzebiusz Słowacki reads:

Caliphs, by exempting from the rigorous commandments of the prophet, in peace and affluence, began to promote science. The names of Al Manosr Al-Manšūr, Harun Al-Rashid Hārūn ar-Rašīd, and especially Mamun Al-Ma’mūn, who was the father of the Arab literature, are known to the learned people of the world. Baghdad became a sanctuary of science under his rule. There were camels and mules entering the city, encumbered with Greek manuscripts, which were later translated into Arabic. The famous caliph himself practised his skills and did

²¹ [A. de S...N....], *op. cit.*, p. 409.

²² J.U. Niemcewicz, *Lew sprawiedliwy*, *Bajka VII, z włoskiego*, in: *Dziela poetyczne wierszem i prozą*, vol. 1, Lipsk 1828, p. 88.

not spare anything in order to make his court a gathering of the learned. This passion for sciences accompanied the Arabs who settled in Spain. There were public libraries, academies and schools in Cordoba, Granada, and Seville.²³

Similar information may be found in other writings, among others, the encyclopaedia by Krasicki or the work by Jan Tarnowski *Badania historyczne jaki wpływ mieć mogły mniemania i literatura ludów wschodnich na ludy zachodnie, szczególnie we względzie poezji*. [*Historical research into the influence of beliefs and literature of the Eastern nations on the Western nations, as observed in poetry*]. It is characteristic that the aforementioned characters of Abbasid caliphs appear in the writings, yet this time they are depicted as promoters of science. This is [in general] consistent with historical facts. Therefore, one may include education, affirmation of science and promoting science in the picture of an ideal ruler. Expanding knowledge is not mentioned by accident, since it was one of the qualities highly appreciated by the people of the Enlightenment, as even the period is called the Age of Reason and Philosophers.

In the cases the ruler is the main protagonist, yet another element enriching the image of the Arab world is observed, i.e., the manifestation of affluence and splendor. It is not a rule, as the texts are very often devoid of descriptions and the reader learns about the legendary wealth by virtue of the protagonists – their words and deeds, e.g. when Abū Ġa‘far al-Manşūr went to the Adjib’s feast undercover, one could read about “valuable scents being lit. The selection of young musicians and beautiful dancers arriving to show off their talents and charm before noble circles [...]”;²⁴ moreover, Seged “the devoted monarch of the whole nation, the master of the Nile” upon learning about the discovery of an island in the lake “ordered architects to go to the magnificent island and erect a palace as marvelous as possible, plant fabulous gardens and do it all in splendid and sophisticated taste. Immense treasures were devoted to the palace, as he told [his people] to spare no expense”.²⁵ The characters are “sitting on lavish cushions”, going for a walk to “most intimate garden palaces”.

The above described imagery of the rich Arab world converges with the oldest – as it dates back to antiquity – yet still active image of Arabia Felix. It is striking how accurately the poetic name *Arabia Felix*, which is in fact a linguistic error, refers to the actual geographical conditions of the

²³ E. Słowacki, *Mowa o potrzebie doskonalenia języków, miana w roku 1809*, [in:] *Dziela z pozostałych rękopismów ogłoszone*, vol. 3, Wilno 1826, pp. 380–381.

²⁴ [A. de S...N....] *op. cit.*, p. 413.

²⁵ I. Krasicki, *Seged*, in: *Pisma wybrane*, vol. 4, (ed.) Z. Goliński, M. Klimowicz, R. Wołoszyński, Warszawa 1954, p. 154.

southern part of the Arabian Peninsula.²⁶ In his *Geografia powszechna czasów teraźniejszych* [*Common Geography of the Modern Times*], Karol Wyrwicz, the author of one of the most widely read geographical compendia of the 18th century, puts it that “Arabia Felix derives its name from its fertile lands”,²⁷ and:

The Kingdom of Yemen for its unique fertility, richness, mild air shall be called Arabia Felix, the C[apital] C[ity]? of *Sonaa* on the bedrock founded. The air here is pleasant; the night is equal to the day, accompanied by the endless spring [...]²⁸

Arabia Felix became “a place abounding in mythology”,²⁹ mostly due to the “indescribably pleasant scent and atmosphere of the Arab land”.³⁰ It is “the only country in the world which provides frankincense, myrrh, cassia, cinnamon and gum” – goods which were highly valued and desired in Europe. Their value increased, as producing such goods was extremely difficult and dangerous, because it was hampered by flying snakes and other creatures. The location at the end of the then-known world and a very difficult road which lead through Arabia Petraea and Arabia Deserta, which “exposes everything that could trouble your mind and terrify”³¹ only created the allure of that place which aroused the fascination with its wealth, a place where “not only did merchants trade goods, but also mysticism”³² and could provide goods equipped with enchanted atmosphere, which aroused the desire for wonders and exoticism. The image of the mysterious and aromatic Arabia Felix etched in the European social consciousness and aroused imagination for centuries,³³ expressed dreams of

²⁶ According to Philip K. Hitti: “the name ‘Felix [‘fortunate’, ‘blessed’ but also ‘fertile’]” was probably inaccurately translated due to confusing two words: *yumn* ‘fortune’ and *yaman* ‘on the right hand side; righteous’; see: P.K. Hitti, *Dzieje Arabów*, Warszawa 1969, p. 41.

²⁷ K. Wyrwicz, *Geografia powszechna czasów teraźniejszych albo Opisanie krótkie krajów całego świata, ich położenia, granic, płodu ziemnego, skłonności obywatelów, handlu, obyczajów etc. Z najświeższych wiadomości Krajopisarzy i Wędrowników zebrana kużytkowi Młodzi Narodowej na szkoły publiczne wydana*, Warszawa 1770, p. 466.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 468.

²⁹ U. Eco, *Historia krain i miejsc legendarnych*, Poznań 2013, p. 9.

³⁰ Herodot, *Dzieje*, Wrocław 2005, p. 267.

³¹ J. Tarnowski, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

³² G.P. Nabhan, *Kumin, kakao i karawana. Odyseja aromatyczna*, trans. B. Gutowska-Nowak, Kraków 2016, p. 91.

³³ The fact that the Arabian Peninsula in general and the Arabia Felix in particular were not very well known is worth noticing. “The first purely scientific expedition to the lands of the Arabian Peninsula” set off in 1761, headed by a German, Castern Niebuhr. The expedition attracted the interest of scientific and intellectual elite in Europe. Stanisław II Augustus used to have the memoir of the expedition in his collection. Niebuhr stayed in Warsaw on his way back to Denmark in 1767. It was a very important social and cultural event which evidently triggered the increase in the interest in the Arab culture among Polish society. See: T. Hansen, *Arabia Felix. Historia duńskiej ekspedycji*

a different world and nostalgia for a paradise on earth, which was sometimes situated in the proximity of the Arabia if not in the Arabia itself. In 1745, thus at the beginning of the Enlightenment, Benedykt Chmielowski in his work “Academy of Each and Every Science” [“Akademia wszelkiej sciencyi pełna”] maintains that the Phoenix lives “in the vast Arabian deserts and in the mountains steep”.³⁴ Although in the Age of Lights no one gave credit to stories about flying dragons and harvesting cinnamon from the Phoenix nests, the symbolic imagery of Arabia Felix influenced collective (sub-)consciousness of Europe.

The repercussions of Arabia Felix are noticeable in the imagery of the Arab world – as the area for poetry, the image of which was shaped under the influence of the Enlightenment sentimentalism and the idea of geographical determinism³⁵ which was then getting more attention. Such a perspective was taken by, among others, Leon Borowski, who puts it as follows:

Let’s go to the East even today. Let’s watch the generations of Bedouin shepherds, nomadizing under tents, surrounded by impassable sands like the sea: they have maintained for more than one thousand years the indigenous atmosphere of uniqueness and power. The Arabia since the times past has retained the atmosphere for poetry. [...] There the defense or conquest of pastures, hospitality of nomadic tents, struggles in the desert, a shepherd’s strivings for a beautiful Bedouin girl’s love are present in songs and aromas waft through the air. They are as simple as the dynasties which use them, yet strikingly lively and vivid.³⁶

Proximity of nature, mellowness, free shepherd’s life are the source of happiness and provide the above described image with utopian qualities. Nonetheless, the poetry which was commonplace in the Arab world which was compared to the air may be perceived as the foundations of the Romantic concept of poetry.

Contrary to Arabia Felix and the utopian and sentimental imagery of the Arab world, the picture of Cairo written by Jan Potocki during his journey to Turkey and Egypt in 1784:

(1761–1767), Warszawa 1968; J. Reychman, *Orient w kulturze polskiego Oświecenia*, Warszawa 1964, p. 49–50; *Biblioteka Stanisława Augusta na zamku warszawskim. Dokumenty*, (ed.) J. Rudnicka, Wrocław 1988, p. 181.

³⁴ B. Chmielowski, *Nowe Ateny albo Akademia Wszelkiej Sciencyi Pełna na różne tytuły, jak na classes podzielona, Mądrym dla Memoriału, Idiotom dla Nauki, Politykom dla Praktyki, Melacholikom dla Rozrywki erigowana*, vol. 1, Lwów 1745, p. 111.

³⁵ See: Montesquieu, *On the Spirit of Laws*, but also the concepts of Johann Gottfried Herder continued in Poland by, among others, Kazimierz Brodziński.

³⁶ L. Borowski, *Uwagi nad poezją i wymową pod względem ich podobieństwa i różnicy*, w: *tegoż, Uwagi nad poezją i wymową i inne pisma krytycznoliterackie*, (ed.) S. Buśka-Wroński, Warszawa 1972, p. 42.

As I entered Cairo, the picture of this place was not very pleasant – famine is spreading in this rigid city. Here I have seen this dreadful plague from Heavens I have known from ancient accounts before. [...] There are the old, women and naked children starving in the streets, disfigured by hunger.³⁷

This very realistic description of a street in Cairo – dirty and poor – is not an exception. Realistic descriptions of Bedouin life are similar. While reading travel literature, which is placed between literature and journalistic writings, a totally different image of the Arab world may be found, a picture very different from the imagery created by moral-poetic visions. One could be tempted to say that the Orient magic was dispelled. Although not entirely, since in the Enlightenment travel literature was very popular, but generally realistic imagery of the Arab world did not consolidate in the social consciousness. The scents of Arabia could still be sensed...

The question of Eastern tyranny is the point in which the literary visions meet the description aimed at realism and objective perspective. In spite of the fact that it was indeed a problem widely discussed in the Enlightenment Europe and a common literary motif, it will not be exhaustively discussed in the following paper. First of all, it was due to the fact that the purely “Arabic” tyranny was rarely present in Polish writings. Moreover, tyranny was not the leading topic, as there was no such need. The writings critical of the eastern tyranny were in fact aimed at European (especially French) absolutism. The most complete image of despotism in the Arab world was presented by Jan Potocki in *Podróż do Cesarstwa Marokańskiego*, a memoir of a journey which took place in 1791. Morocco was then ruled by Mulaj Jazid Mawlāy Yazīd, an embodiment of the Eastern tyrant:

Meanwhile the Emperor, light-heartedly shared the rest of the money among his friends [...] People start to believe that abusing strong beverages messed with his senses and the vision of a despotic ruler-lunatic was terrifying in a way which is difficult to describe. [...] The emperor is still of sound mind, but in fact he also makes decisions impulsively, which has been a negative quality associated with Moroccan rulers. Never has he listened to both parties: he goes for some kind of wild cruelty, which is perceived as a memorable act of justice [...] This impulsiveness is a plague indeed. [...] The presence of the emperor gives raise to fears that after the interrogation the people who leave the emperor’s palace are congratulated on living through some danger.³⁸

In the subsequent part of the memoir, Potocki completes this abominable description with the information on sultan’s debauchery: the author claims that the ruler had numerous wives and one day he married all the girls in the

³⁷ J. Potocki, *Podróż do Turek...*, p. 67–68.

³⁸ J. Potocki, *Podróż do Cesarstwa...*, p. 174–175.

city who were deemed beautiful. This depiction is followed by a description of orgies which take place in the sultan's palace.³⁹ The author maintains that the information on the palace life derives from a journal "written down by a local upon my request". The author requested the journal, because as he explained "I know from my very own experience that 80 out of 100 questions a traveller is asked are about harems".⁴⁰ This seemingly trivial passage indicates the functioning of a very common cliché regarding the East (also the Arab East) as the land of debauchery and dissolution, and also the interest aroused by these accounts among the Europeans, who were eager to listen to stories about harems. Nonetheless, Polish writings did not meet this demand (Potocki himself considered "passing over these descriptions in silence appropriate") and the search of naughty stories like *Zulmis et Zelmaide* by Claude Henri de Fusée de Visenona or *Sofa* by Claude-Prospera Jolyota de Crébillona shall be futile. The relations between Alfons van Worden – the main protagonist of *the Manuscript Found in Saragossa* – with his Muslim cousins, Emina and Sibelda Zibelda may be perceived as an allusion to the discussed stereotype. Nonetheless, it is an isolated instance; moreover, certain facts therein were passed over in silence, thus it is difficult to speak of this as of the creation of the imagery.⁴¹

While discussing what is absent in the Enlightenment imagery of the Arab world, the fact that a very vivid image of the East (from the Arab east through a generally Muslim East to Turkey) as a dangerous enemy of the European culture is absent in the previous centuries is worth noticing. In the 18th century the times of Arab glory were already gone and due to the Relief of Vienna, the Turkish might was declining. Since the actual danger was already gone, the vision became out-of-date, the ideological synopsis became invalid.

Since the "things that are no longer" have been discussed, the conclusions may be now drawn. By collating the images discussed herein, one may notice that none of them constitutes a complete depiction of the Arab East. What is more, none of them aims at being one. They are mainly focused on a few aspects, and sometimes only on one. Some of them, such as the image of Arabia Felix or utopian reminiscences refer to the tradition and update it. Some of them were created for the time being. Nevertheless, each of them reflects the topics, problems and questions which concerned the minds in Enlightenment Poland.

Despite a relatively high correlation between European archetypes and the image of the Arab world, the writings of the Polish Enlightenment acquired certain individual features, which resulted from the lack of adaptation of the schemas into the domestic situation. The lack of erotic literature, more rare depiction of the Arab East as a land of tyranny requires mentioning at this point. Putting emphasis

³⁹ *Ibidem*, s. 190.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, s. 190.

⁴¹ J. Potocki, *Manuscript Found in Saragossa*, (ed.) L. Kukulski, vol. 1–2, Warszawa 1976.

on morality together with the absence of the image of the enchanted Arab world shall be mentioned as well. Despite these updates, it still remains a European vision, which does not decrease the value of the image created by this means; on the contrary, it confirms that Poland belongs to the Old Continent cultural group, which was crucial for the promoters of Polish Enlightenment.

Yet another question which requires further research is verifying whether the image of the Arab World is consistent with the image of the East in reference to other countries and lands – Turkey, Persia and India. In order to find an answer to this question, a comparative analysis of a vastitude of literary works which belong to the Oriental movement, which significantly exceeds the framework of the following paper. Nonetheless, it constitutes a very inspiring motivation for further research.

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