

**TRAVELLERS AND READERS:  
EDMUND VON BERG REVIEWED BY SAINT-RENÉ TAILLANDIER**

BOGDAN POPA  
(*Institutul de Istorie „Nicolae Iorga”*)

The purpose of this paper is to investigate 19<sup>th</sup> century travel writings (also known as “travelogues”) under a new perspective. My interest resides neither in the analysis of the information provided by a certain author, nor in the connections which may be established with other local or foreign sources. Thus, I shall not approach travel writings as sources as such, e.g. compensating for absent or incomplete internal documents, and also not from the point of view of “the history of the other”. I aim to investigate here the response of contemporary reviewers towards a certain work.

In order to do so, I have chosen a case-study: the extensive study published by Saint-René Taillandier in “Revue des Deux Mondes” in October 1861<sup>1</sup> concerning Edmund von Berg’s *Aus dem Osten der österreichischen Monarchie. Ein Lebensbild von Land und Leuten*<sup>2</sup>. Saint-René Taillandier himself used the term “study” (*etude*)<sup>3</sup> in order to describe the article in which he analysed Edmund von Berg’s work on Banat. The extent of the article – printed one year after the book was published – suggests more than a simple review or cordial reading recommendation, as it was the case with the writings of several other authors in *Zeitschrift für Allgemeine Erdkunde* (Berlin, 1860), *Wolfgang Menzel’s Literaturblatt* (Stuttgart, 1860), and *Forstliche Blaetter* (Berlin, 1863).

Both the author (Edmund von Berg) and the reviewer (Saint-René Taillandier) belong to the category of political thinkers which advocated the need of internal reform within the Habsburg monarchy. Thus, the thesis of this contribution is that, even if the condition of the Romanians from Banat was a key element in Edmund von Berg’s work, their status in the province was politicised in order to enforce the views of both author and reader.

<sup>1</sup> Saint-René Taillandier, *Un voyageur allemand dans l’Autriche Orientale*, in „Revue des Deux Mondes”, XXXI année, tome XXXV, Paris, 1861, p. 957–979.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund von Berg, *Aus dem Osten der österreichischen Monarchie. Ein Lebensbild von Land und Leuten*, Dresden, G. Schoenfeld’s Buchhandlung (C.A. Werner), 1860. An annotated partial translation into Romanian is available in *Călători străini despre țările române în secolul al XIX-lea*, new series, VII, București, Editura Academiei Române, 2012, p. 469–515.

<sup>3</sup> Saint-René Taillandier, *op. cit.*, p. 978.

In order to demonstrate this thesis, which places the review at the crossroad between scientific criticism and politics, I shall first present short biographies of Edmund von Berg and Saint-René Taillandier, and second analyse the study of the French academic and journalist as part of his wider concern with the German speaking world and the internal situation of the Habsburg monarchy.

### I. AUTHOR AND REVIEWER

Edmund von Berg (1800-1874) was already an established scientist, author, and politician, by the time when the account of his travel in Banat was printed. After studying in Meiningen and Göttingen, he dedicated his life to the science of forestry, as a professor (since 1821) and author (he travelled extensively in different parts of Germany, Switzerland and Northern Europe and wrote numerous scientific contributions). In 1845, Edmund von Berg was appointed director of the Academy of Forestry in Tharandt and royal counsellor. The 1859 journey took Edmund von Berg, together with his two sons, through the Austrian province of Galitia, Hungary, and Banat. As a result, the Saxon scientist wrote a well-documented book, combining own observations with thoroughly collected statistical data. He retired in 1866 for health reasons, but continued to travel and write on the science of forestry<sup>4</sup>.

The greater part of Edmund von Berg's work was dedicated to the science of forestry. In *Die Staatsforstwirtschaftslehre. Ein Handbuch für Staats- und Forstwirthe*, Edmund von Berg depicted the forests as key elements in the economy and demography of the German states, but also as a formative element of the "national character"; this idea was also pursued during his travels in the eastern provinces of the Austrian Empire<sup>5</sup>.

René Ernest Gerard Taillandier (1817–1879) took the pen-name of Saint-René Taillandier in order to imitate his professor, Saint-Marc Girardin, a well-known supporter of the Romanians<sup>6</sup>. After completing his studies in Heidelberg and München, he taught French literature in Strasbourg, Montpellier and later French eloquence at the Sorbonne. Like Edmund von Berg, he also pursued a political path, becoming secretary-general of the Ministry of Education, before being elected at the French Academy in 1873. Saint-René Taillandier's career was

<sup>4</sup> *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, II, Leipzig, 1875, p. 360–361 (voice by W. Löbe).

<sup>5</sup> Published in Leipzig, F.A. Brockhaus, 1850. See also Jeffrey K. Wilson, *The German Forest: Nature, Identity, and the Contestation of a National Symbol, 1871–1914*, University of Toronto Press, 2012, p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> Saint-Marc Girardin's biography and travel account were published in *Călători străini despre țările române în secolul al XIX-lea*, new series, III (1831–1840), p. 521–539.

deeply linked with the “Revue des Deux Mondes”, where he first published many of his writings<sup>7</sup>.

Despite his knowledge of the historical, national, and political issues surrounding the young Moldo-Wallachian state (he was familiar with the works of J.D.F. Neigebaur, Siegfried Kapper, Jean Vaillant, Edgar Quinet, and Ion C. Brătianu)<sup>8</sup>, Saint-René Taillandier’s interest for the Romanians was minor. This attitude differentiated between him and the other French intellectuals, who supported to the Romanians (including his mentor, Saint-Marc Girardin). Most of these authors have written their contributions after a longer or shorter stay in the Romanian principalities<sup>9</sup>.

Whilst the political struggles of the Romanians were not high on Saint-René Taillandier’s agenda, he wrote extensively on Bohemia, Hungary<sup>10</sup> and Serbia<sup>11</sup>. The latter work was the only one to be mentioned in the bibliographies concerning the French-Romanian relations, compiled by Georges Bengesco (Gheorghe Bengescu)<sup>12</sup>. However, in a footnote to his modern history of the Balkan states, Nicolae Iorga characterised this widely cited work as a “simple compilation”<sup>13</sup>, discretely underlining the importance of travel as a scientific method. One might say that, though praising Edmund von Berg’s work – who wrote after thoroughly voyaging in a less known province of the Habsburg monarchy –, Saint-René Taillandier was not following a similar scientific method.

Yet, Saint-René Taillandier was not completely ignored by the Romanian cultural milieus. Aurel C. Popovici was familiar with his analyses of the relations between Czechs, Austrians and Hungarians within the Habsburg monarchy<sup>14</sup>.

An enthusiast supporter of the German-speaking world – after all, “Revue des Deux Mondes” had an important role in bridging between the French and German cultures<sup>15</sup> – Saint-René Taillandier was among the first intellectuals in France to

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle*, XIV, Paris, 1875, p. 1401; see also the obituary published by “Le Figaro”, February 25, 1879, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Saint-René Taillandier, *La littérature historique et la Question d'Orient*, in „Revue des deux mondes”, XXVII année, tome IX, Paris, 1857, p. 639, 650–651.

<sup>9</sup> Nicolae Isar, *Publiciști francezi și cauza română*, București, Editura Academiei Române, 1991, p. 7–27.

<sup>10</sup> Saint-René Taillandier, *Tchèques et magyars. Bohême & Hongrie XV<sup>e</sup> siècle – XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Histoire – littérature – politique*, Paris, Librairie Académique Didier et Cie, 1869.

<sup>11</sup> Saint-René Taillandier, *La Serbie. Kara-George et Milosch*, Paris, Librairie Académique Didier et Cie, 1872.

<sup>12</sup> Georges Bengesco, *Essai d'une bibliographie sur la Question d'Orient Européen 1821–1897*, Bruxelles, Paris, 1897, p. 172.

<sup>13</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Histoire des états balcaniques jusqu'à 1924*, Paris, J. Gamber, 1925, p. 168.

<sup>14</sup> Aurel C. Popovici, *Stat și națiune. Statele-Unite ale Austriei mari. Studii politice în vederea rezolvării problemei naționale și a crizelor constituționale din Austro-Ungaria*, București, Albatros, 1997, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Lilian R. Furst, *Counterparts. The Dynamics of Franco-German Literary Relationships 1770–895*, London, Methuen, 1977, p. 109–111.

advocate the necessity of a strong, yet reformed and confederate Austrian Empire, in order to oppose the rise of Prussia to the helm of the German world<sup>16</sup> and the influence of Russia on the Slavic populations<sup>17</sup>.

Thus, Saint-René Taillandier's concern with the issues of the Banat may be explained rather by his long-term interest in the reformation of the Habsburg monarchy after the revolutions of 1848–1849.

## II. THE WORK AND THE REVIEW

Though overshadowed by Francesco Grisellini's widely influential work on the region of Banat<sup>18</sup>, and less familiar to the Romanian historians, Edmund von Berg's account may be inscribed into a dominant pattern of the modern travel writing: the "illusion of the un-discovered"<sup>19</sup> corner of the Europe. In Edmund von Berg's vision, Banat was supposed to play a major role in the future of the continent, besides both Hungary and the Danubian Principalities<sup>20</sup>. After all, at the moment the travel in this *terra ignota*<sup>21</sup> took place, and the account subsequently published, the Austrian economy was growing<sup>22</sup>, and the penetration of modern industry in the area occupied an important place in the work of the Saxon scientist and politician.

From the point of view of the present day Romanian historical writing, Edmund von Berg was a "foreign traveller"<sup>23</sup>. However, the author's own view on his enterprise was somehow different. Edmund von Berg described his contribution as a "scientific book". His travels were not mere leisure activities, but a way to document for his profession (e.g., forestry) and also his philosophical approach towards mankind, economy and social conditions. Saint-René Taillandier was not the only reviewer to appreciate this point of view<sup>24</sup>. The short anonymous notice in

<sup>16</sup> Saint-René Taillandier, *Tchèques et magyars*, p. VI-VII. See also Dany Deschênes, *French Intellectuals and the Image of Austria-Hungary in France: Prelude to the Break-Up of Historic Hungary*, in "Hungarian Studies Review", XXXIII, 1–2, 2006, p. 104.

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Droz, *Saint-René Taillandier et la double monarchie*, in „Études Danubiennes”, V, 2, 1989, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> A Romanian version was published by Costin Feneșan: Francesco Grisellini, *Încercare de istorie politică și naturală a Banatului Timișoarei*, Timișoara, Facla, 1984.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing*, London, New York, Routledge, 2011, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Edmund von Berg, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> As defined by Saint-René Taillandier, *Un voyageur allemand dans l'Autriche Orientale*, p. 957.

<sup>22</sup> John Komlos, *The Process of Industrialization in Austria: A Long-Run View*, in „Études danubiennes”, IV, 2, 1988, p. 172–173.

<sup>23</sup> On the definition of the concept and its nuances, see our previous article: Bogdan Popa, *Contribuții la definirea conceptului „călător străin”. Observații preliminare*, in „Studii și Materiale de Istorie Modernă”, XXV, 2011, p. 77.

<sup>24</sup> Saint-René Taillandier, *Un voyageur allemand dans l'Autriche Orientale*, p. 958.

“Zeitschrift für Allgemeine Erdkunde” praised this particular way of travelling in a foreign land in order to conclude that “this book is a brick, not a construction”<sup>25</sup>.

Alexander von Humboldt, whose travel account in South America was published in an official German version in 1859-1860, described himself as a “scientific traveller”<sup>26</sup>. Edmund von Berg was an adept of the Prussian naturalist hence he considered that the character of the populaces was essentially shaped by their stance towards nature and environment<sup>27</sup>. The above mentioned definition of the “travel” applies well to Edmund von Berg’s *Aus dem Osten der österreichischen Monarchie*.

Further: Alexander von Humboldt believed himself that the “bewildering of the peoples” was a catastrophic consequence of poor administration, due either to despotism or a foreign conquer; Europe itself, though based on manufacture and commerce, was not subject to general prosperity without peace and the end of Ottoman dominance in its Eastern parts<sup>28</sup>.

This is an unsurprising resemblance with subject-matters on which Edmund von Berg and Saint-René Taillandier, whom both wrote from a Western European perspective, agreed. The social, economic and cultural conditions in Banat offered to the two faithful supporters of the Austrian monarchy the chance to advocate the change within the monarchy itself.

The inefficient, corrupt bureaucracy of the province was one of the key points of Saint-René Taillandier’s writing on Edmund von Berg. But both made use of this issue in order to stress upon Austria’s general administrative problems<sup>29</sup>.

A similar point of view may be depicted from another review, published by “Wolfgang Menzel’s Literaturblatt”. Making use of the term *Naturvölker* (and thus hinting on Alexander von Humboldt’s theoretical stance), this particular point of view insisted upon the “positive” depiction of the Romanians in order to underline both Austria’s political, administrative, and cultural errors and the need to correct these – but without applying improper policies, such as the rash industrialisation, the free press and Northern-German, protestant, type of education<sup>30</sup>.

Edmund von Berg described the Romanian orthodox clergy in an unfavourable manner<sup>31</sup> and Saint-René Taillandier followed this point of view. He had re-told the stories Edmund von Berg had claimed he had heard from locals or witnessed in person, in order to conclude that the backwardness of the Romanian

<sup>25</sup> “Zeitschrift für Allgemeine Erdkunde”, IX, Berlin, 1860, p. 254.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander von Humboldt, *Reise in die Aequinoctial-Gegenden des neuen Continents*, I, Stuttgart, J.G. Cotta’scher Verlag, 1859, p. III.

<sup>27</sup> Edmund von Berg, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Alexander von Humboldt, *Reise in die Aequinoctial-Gegenden des neuen Continents*, IV, Stuttgart, J.G. Cotta’scher Verlag, 1860, p. 399.

<sup>29</sup> Edmund von Berg, *op. cit.*, p. 76–77; *Călători străini despre țările române...*, VII, p. 475; Saint-René Taillandier, *Un voyageur allemand dans l’Autriche Orientale*, p. 964–965.

<sup>30</sup> “Wolfgang Menzel’s Literaturblatt”, No. 43, May 30, 1860, p. 171–172.

<sup>31</sup> Edmund von Berg, *op. cit.*, p. 124–126; *Călători străini despre țările române...*, VII, p. 491.

population in the area was also a consequence of the lack of a strong elite<sup>32</sup>. As an opposite, the depiction of the Romanian women, as compared to men, was highly sympathetic in Edmund von Berg's travel account: subsequently, Saint-René Taillandier shared this point of view<sup>33</sup>.

Though very important for Edmund von Berg's work in itself, the emerging industry of the Banat and the colonies of German or Czech workers were not of a major concern for Saint-René Taillandier<sup>34</sup>. He was more interested by the visit Edmund von Berg paid to the Ottoman pasha at Ada-Kaleh. Saint-René Taillandier translated into French much of the respective fragments, as he held these as much more than a mere "mirror-image" of the decay of the Empire. To Saint-René Taillandier, both the Ottoman succession and Austria's role in this were key-issues. It actually gave the French academic and journalist the possibility to warn against a similar "long agony" of Austria, similar to that of the Ottomans<sup>35</sup>.

The reviewer, Saint-René Taillandier, depicted the author, Edmund von Berg, in very favourable colours. He underlined the faith the Saxon scientist and politician had in a good fate for Austria, his goodwill and constructive criticism towards the post-1849 regime. In Saint-René Taillandier's understanding, Edmund von Berg was "a German Tory", devoted to Austria, a keen observer and yet, not a writer<sup>36</sup>. Therefore, *Aus dem Osten der österreichischen Monarchie* was not meant to please the readers, but to prevent Austria from becoming "a kind of Turkey in the middle of the Christian society"<sup>37</sup>.

To Edmund von Berg, the situation of the Romanians was of interest due to their predominance in the Banat region. Their poor living, moral, and cultural conditions served as a mean to criticise the post-1848 Austrian authorities for a failing to accomplish their civilising mission in the "Orient"<sup>38</sup>. As a solution, the Edmund von Berg offered the forgotten institution of the *missi dominici*. Whilst Saint-René Taillandier was sharing this point of view, he used it in order to strengthen his own views in favour of the Czechs and Hungarians. The solution to the structural crisis of the Austrian Empire, as revealed by the 1848–1849 revolutions, was to offer a confederate status to the Slavs and Magyars<sup>39</sup>.

The situation of the Danubian Principalities in itself was incidentally discussed and presented by the Edmund von Berg, simply as a conversation with an anonymous co-traveller. Thus, the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, and the French and Russian influence in the region, were simply mentioned in a negative

<sup>32</sup> Saint-René Taillandier, *Un voyageur allemand dans l'Autriche Orientale*, p. 967–970.

<sup>33</sup> Edmund von Berg, *op. cit.*, p. 104–105; *Călători străini despre țările române...*, VII, p. 483–484; Saint-René Taillandier, *Un voyageur allemand dans l'Autriche Orientale*, p. 970.

<sup>34</sup> Saint-René Taillandier, *Un voyageur allemand dans l'Autriche Orientale*, p. 971–972.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 978.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 964, 966, 975.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 979.

<sup>38</sup> Edmund von Berg, *op. cit.*, p. 130; *Călători străini despre țările române...*, VII, p. 493.

<sup>39</sup> Saint-René Taillandier, *Un voyageur allemand dans l'Autriche Orientale*, p. 978.

manner<sup>40</sup>. Neither Saint-René Taillandier, nor the other reviewers of the book have shown an interest in these aspects. Moreover, despite his obvious knowledge of the literature concerning the Principalities, the journalist from the “Revue des Deux Mondes” mistook the German term *Donaufuerstenthuemern* for *province autrichienne du Danube*<sup>41</sup>.

In dealing with this particularly interesting region of the Austrian monarchy, Edmund von Berg made a number of references to his other travels, and especially those in Northern Europe<sup>42</sup>. The short review published by “Zeitschrift für allgemeine Erdkunde” praised this particular aspect<sup>43</sup>.

### III. THE REVIEW BETWEEN CRITICISM AND POLITICS

The short notice on Edmund von Berg’s travel account, which was published in “Forstliche Blätter” in 1863, recommended the book to the readers, despite the fact that it was not dedicated solely to forestry and the political views of the reviewer (Julius Theodor Grunert) were different than those of the author<sup>44</sup>.

But there were precisely these political views and not the situation of the forests, nor that of the industry in Banat, which made Saint-René Taillandier to pay a special attention to Edmund von Berg’s work. Among the reviewers, who wrote about *Aus dem Osten der österreichischen Monarchie*, the French academic and journalist holds a particular position, due to the peculiarities and strength of his political opinions concerning the Habsburg territories. Even if Saint-René Taillandier mentioned, among other interesting topics, demography, bureaucracy, Catholicism, and industry, the main goal of his study was to draw attention to the national, political and moral issues of the Habsburg monarchy. Starting from Edmund von Berg’s descriptions, provided data and opinions, Saint-René Taillandier continued to advocate his pro-Czech and rather anti-Hungarian opinions, while ignoring the Romanians.

This case-study highlights the multiple meanings of the written texts, by arguing that, for the available cases, the opinions of the contemporary reviewers should be also taken into consideration. Therefore, in the case of the travel accounts one should also consider measuring the impact of these particular types of sources on their contemporaries and also investigate the author-reviewer/author-reader relationships.

<sup>40</sup> Edmund von Berg, *op. cit.*, p. 82-86; *Călători străini despre țările române...*, VII, p. 475-476.

<sup>41</sup> Saint-René Taillandier, *Un voyageur allemand dans l’Autriche Orientale*, p. 959.

<sup>42</sup> Edmund von Berg, *op. cit.*, p. 90; *Călători străini despre țările române...*, VII, p. 477-478.

<sup>43</sup> “Zeitschrift für allgemeine Erdkunde”, IX, 1860, p. 255.

<sup>44</sup> “Forstliche Blätter. Zeitschrift für Forst- und Jagdwesen”, Fünftes Heft, Berlin, 1863, p. 220-221.

TRAVELERS AND READERS:  
EDMUND VON BERG REVIEWED BY SAINT-RENÉ TAILLANDIER

*Abstract*

The aim of this paper is to study 19<sup>th</sup> century travelogues under a new perspective: the impact of a certain writing as it may be depicted from available reviews. It is a case-study based on Edmund von Berg's *Aus dem Osten der österreichischen Monarchie. Ein Lebensbild von Land und Leuten* (Dresden, 1860) as seen through available contemporary reviews, mainly that written by Saint-René Taillandier for "Revue des Deux Mondes". The paper also highlights the role review, between scientific criticism and political instrumentation.

*Keywords:* travel account, review, Banat, Edmund von Berg, Saint-René Taillandier.