

The *Voyageur François* in Hungary

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Abstract. In the forty-two volumes of *Voyageur François, ou la Connaissance de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Monde* (1765–1795), Abbé Delaporte devoted a few pages to Hungary. Through fictitious letters, the polygrapher produced a compilation that provides a glimpse of what a French nobleman wishing to discover Hungary might know. This is what we propose to analyse, by considering his historical approach, which reveals his biases, by examining the picture he paints of Hungary's towns and countryside, and then by focusing on his presentation of Hungarian customs (peoples, languages, religion, etc.).

Keywords: voyage, Hungary, history, France, customs

“The immense collection of travels would form a large library, the reading of which would occupy a lifetime.”¹ These are the words that open the preface to *Voyageur François, ou la Connaissance de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Monde* (1765–1795) by M. l'abbé Delaporte.² At this time, the travelogue was a favoured form of enquiry into foreign countries and peoples, shaped by the concerns of the Enlightenment. Historiographically, these travelogues have very often attracted historians' attention, who are interested in these accounts not only because of the factors involved (hazards of the journey, description of landscapes, etc.), but above all because of the foreigners' view of the land they travelled. This view sheds light on what the individual perceives as cultural differences.³ The travelogue is a means of perceiving reactions to otherness (the way in which it is apprehended, the feeling of embodying 'civilisation' in the face of 'barbaric' nations, etc.). The foreign country is an ideal field for reflection, whether political, philosophical, economic, or other. Enlightened

1 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1765, tome 1, avertissement, n.p.

2 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, tome XXIII (available on Google Play). All translations are by the author.

3 On this topic, we can refer to Gohard-Radenkovic, “»L'altérité« dans les récits de voyage.”

travellers were fascinated by the oscillation between opposing poles: barbarism vs. culture, luxury vs. misery, freedom vs. slavery. Hungary stimulated the traveller's reflections because it was a frontier of the European Enlightenment, which put to the test many of the certainties and ideas of the age, on the organisation of power, religious tolerance, territorial management, and the reading of the landscape. However, while for Poland the work of Michel Marty⁴ can be drawn on, eighteenth-century Hungary has not aroused the same interest. Nevertheless, Catherine Horel's book⁵ can be consulted, which studies some seventy travellers who passed through this territory in the nineteenth century. Of the rich material, this paper will focus on Delaporte's account.

This forty-two-volume collection is in fact less a record of actual travels than a compilation of accounts, which raises the question of sources. Delaporte admits to having drawn everything he knows about Transylvania, Bulgaria, Wallachia, and Moldavia from a manuscript by Francis Rákóczi II. For Bosnia, Dalmatia, and Albania, he refers to "accounts of some travellers"⁶ without naming them, but there is every reason to believe that he also drew on dictionaries and encyclopaedias, such as those by Moreri or Trévoux. Clorinda Donato shows that, among others, he used the *Encyclopédie de Paris* (1751–1765), the *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon* (1770–1780), and the *Encyclopédie méthodique*.⁷

The disclaimer at the head of the book explains Delaporte's project:

"By carrying, in his travels, the torch of philosophy and observation, he draws useful knowledge, which he communicates to his fellow citizens. The laws, customs, habits, religion, governments, commerce, sciences, arts, and fashions [...] of all the nations of the universe, beginning with the peoples of Asia, are the subject of his letters. He focuses his attention only on what seems to him to merit curiosity; and as his aim is to interest and to instruct, anything that does not produce these two effects does not seem to him worthy of his remarks."⁸

In fact, this is a didactic approach, borrowing the form of the letter and the travelogue, even if this fiction is poorly supported. The letters are supposedly addressed to a certain lady, whose name we do not know, and whom the author addresses at best at the beginning and end of the mission. In addition, he trims away everything that usually renders travelogues authentic:

4 Marty, *Voyageurs français*; Mervaud and Roberti, *Une infinie brutalité*.

5 Horel, *De l'exotisme à la modernité*.

6 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 102.

7 Donato, "Les récits de voyage source des articles d'encyclopédie au XVIIIe siècle."

8 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, tome 1, avertissement, VII–VIII.

“Neither the preparations for the journey, nor all those little accidents that necessarily happen are guessed at and assumed during a long journey; there is never any room for this in a more interesting narrative. It is not the traveller’s story that is important to know, but the story of the countries he travelled.”⁹

The success of the travelogue genre encouraged Abbé Delaporte to embark on this enterprise in 1765. He followed in the footsteps of Abbé Prévost,¹⁰ but pointed out that this series had largely neglected old Europe in favour of the New World. He therefore proposes to devote himself to “all the part of the Old World where the most memorable events took place.” Therefore, volume 23 opens with Hungary, which holds the author’s attention for 150 pages and four letters. He claims to have written it in Bratislava (Pozsony, Pressburg, today in Slovakia) on 20 and 22 October, and on 15 and 25 November 1765. Here, the man has an extensive vision of what he calls ‘Hungary.’ Thus, letter CCLXXXVIII includes developments on Moldavia, Wallachia, Romania, and Bulgaria. The next letter begins with the town of Trnava (Nagyszombat, Tyrnau), followed by Nitra (Nyitra, Neutra) and Esztergom (Gran, Ostrihom), and the descent of the Danube takes him as far as Buda and Pest. He continues on to Kalocsa and Tolna, and finally includes Belgrade.¹¹ This gives him the opportunity to expand on the treaty of 1739, in which the French ambassador played an important role. He then goes on to Serbia and Timișoara (Temesvár, Temeswar) in the Banat region. Delaporte occasionally justifies his extensive approach by arguing that the territories mentioned were, at one time or another, under Hungarian rule. The town of Timișoara in the Banat, for example, enables him to evoke Slavonia and the territories where this ‘esclavon’ language is spoken, and to conclude that “this name [Banat] is today restricted to a small province which, after having had its own monarchs, was subjected to the kings of Hungary; and is currently ruled by the Queen Empress [Maria Theresa].”¹² Further on, he adds “two other countries which border Hungary and were formerly dependent on it are Croatia and Carniola.” When not history, then it is the geographical proximity that serves as a pretext; this is the case, for example, with the description of Bosnia, Dalmatia, and Albania, which are always mentioned in the letters dedicated to Hungary.¹³

Abbé Delaporte had been using this type of writing since the beginning of his career, notably in the *Revue des feuilles de M. Fréron*, of which he was a contributor. Baptized in Belfort in 1714, the son of bourgeois merchants, Delaporte was educated

9 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, tome 1, avertissement, VIII.

10 See Prévost, *Histoire générale des Voyages*.

11 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 86.

12 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 93–94.

13 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 102, letter CCLXXXIX.

in Épinal¹⁴ and entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1731 but left it fifteen years later. He then found himself in Paris, without money but with a solid education and talent for writing. Grimm describes him as “employed by booksellers” to be engaged in “the art of making a fifth book out of three or four books.” “He set up a book factory, occupying five or six printing machines at a time. He made newspapers, dictionaries, travelogues, and almanacs: he shortened long works and lengthened short ones.” Delaporte’s judgments were often harsh, but he was well known in Paris, frequently meeting Encyclopaedists like Diderot and d’Alembert. He was also received in the great houses of the minister Henri Bertin, the Duchesse de Würtemberg, and Mme de La Marck.

These elements warn us to take a cautious view of the *Voyageur français*: it is not an original work, but a compilation. The *Espion anglais* describes Delaporte as a “literary rag-picker,” but says that “his style is at least decent.”¹⁵ If we consider the fact that Delaporte is simply repeating passages written by others and that he has no particular knowledge of Central Europe in general, we understand that he is probably incapable of discerning any errors in what he is repeating. The historian must therefore be particularly vigilant when using Delaporte’s text. Certain points are interesting from a factual point of view, but so are the errors, because they show a poor knowledge of Hungary on the part of the author and his readers. So why should we deal with his work? Perhaps precisely because of this relative mediocrity. We hypothesize that the *Voyageur français* is a compendium of what a French nobleman wishing to discover Hungary might know, and that it might be fairly representative of the preparatory reading that a quality traveller did before setting out on his journey.

Despite the criticism that Delaporte received, this kind of compilation was fashionable in the second half of the eighteenth century. In addition, his book seems to have been fairly well distributed: it appears in the catalogues of several booksellers,¹⁶ in Paris and Brussels, it is found in the catalogues of certain noble libraries, such as that of the Count of Artois, and we know that he was a frequent visitor to several great aristocratic houses in Paris.¹⁷ Its price—three *livres tournois*—made it relatively affordable, even if its content tended to reserve it for the educated elite.

We also hypothesize that travelogues about Hungary, or those which devoted significant attention to it, were unfamiliar to French noble readers. As Yasmine Marcil points out, “many of these accounts were not successful, and were only advertised by a single newspaper. This is particularly true of works about Northern Europe

14 The following information is taken from Anna-Mare Chouillet’s entry in the online dictionary of journalists: *Presse18*. <http://dictionnaire-journalistes.gazettes18e.fr/journaliste/455-joseph-de-la-porte> (accessed: 26 November 2024).

15 Ibidem.

16 See for example: *Catalogue de livres, provenans du fonds de M. Vincent*.

17 BnF département Arsenal, 4-NF-15191.

published in a foreign language. The periodical press mainly echoes stories published in French. As far as Europe is concerned, it is more interested in the countries of the south, particularly in works about Italy.¹⁸ Undoubtedly, in addition to dictionary entries and articles in major periodicals, the nobility acquired their knowledge of this part of the world through compilations such as the *Voyageur français*.

How, then, could the *Voyageur français* allow French nobility an imaginary journey through Hungary?¹⁹

A historical approach that reveals the author's biases

Historical chronicle of eternal Hungary

The story is primarily that of Hungary's, with its history stretching back thousands of years. Delaporte's narrative is not linear; Hungarian history is evoked through the towns and regions he supposedly travels. In the manner of a tourist guide, he takes stock of the notable events in the places he passed through. He recalls the memory of Pannonia, the Roman conquest, the Huns,²⁰ the reign of King St. Stephen, and the frequent attacks of Ottoman troops,²¹ but he has a particular appetite for the Roman presence.²² He tracks it down in famous historical episodes,²³ in the names of certain provinces or towns—Severin, he informs us, is the third city in Wallachia and owes its name to Emperor Severus²⁴—or in certain remains, such as the ruins of a bridge over the Danube.²⁵

Wars, peace, and rebellions: Hungary, a land of conflict

The history of Hungary is also, and perhaps above all, that of the conflicts that took place on its territory. And yet, despite the scale of conflicts, they are not the main focus of the author's attention. When we compare his account with the reports preserved in the

18 Marcil, "Le lointain et l'ailleurs dans la presse périodique de la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle," 22.

19 Roche, *Humeurs vagabondes*, chapter 3, "Le voyageur en chambre," 95–136.

20 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 35; Szabados, "Attila-ós, a sólyomforma madár és a fehér elefánt."

21 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 36, 37.

22 For a broader perspective, see: Brague, *Europe, la voie romaine*.

23 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 103–104 about the Roman origins of Dalmatia and its repression by Tiberius and Ferminus.

24 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 56; Nicopolis is also said to have been founded by Trajan, 72.

25 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 56; see also the description of Zara, in Dalmatia, 105, which mentions the aqueduct built by Trajan.

archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we clearly see the differences in approach. The inventory of military forces is also very spotty. The author barely alludes to it when describing Transylvania, simply reminding us that whereas in the past more than 80,000 men could be mustered under arms, now only six or seven regiments could be summoned.²⁶ Similarly, campaigns and battles are mostly mentioned and explained in no more than just a few lines.²⁷ Crossing the plains of the region, we are reminded of the battle of Petrovaradin (Pétervárad, Péterwardein) and the 1716 battle of Prince Eugene of Savoy against Grand Vizier Ali.²⁸ There are a few long and passionate accounts, however, which would satisfy the nobility's taste for feats of arms, but it is clear that Delaporte writes primarily for the man of the Enlightenment.

While not the subject of any specific development, the confrontation with the "Turks"²⁹ marks the entire narrative. When passing through a city, Delaporte takes the opportunity to recall that it was under Ottoman domination, while the description of another refers to a famous battle. Only occasionally are these struggles interrupted by treaties. The Treaty of Belgrade is of particular interest, so much so that Delaporte devotes several pages to it; however, the Treaty of Karlowitz is barely mentioned when the author passes through the eponymous town and castle.

On the other hand, a number of rebellions are introduced at greater length. The first letter opens with a reference to a certain 'Nadasti',³⁰ actually Ferenc II Nádasdy. Delaporte clearly presents this rebel in a positive light. He develops his case in much detail, summarizing the pleas of the rebel nobles. Serin's letter to the Emperor³¹ is a reminder of the noble privilege of taking up arms, the elective nature of kingship, and the stakes of the office of palatine, while the Count of Serin's letter to his wife,

26 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 39.

27 For a better identification of Delaporte's allusions, see: Póka and Tóth, "Chronologie;" Tóth (ed.), *Mil[le] ans d'histoire hongroise*; Bérenger, *La Hongrie des Habsbourg*; Pálffy, *The Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy*.

28 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 100.

29 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 102, Turkish conquest of Bosnia in the fifteenth century. Delaporte uses the word 'Turks' rather than 'Ottoman.' Fodor, "Hungary between East and West."

30 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 6. Ferenc Nádasdy or François Nadasti, Count of Forgatsch, (1623–1671) was one of the most active members of the league of Hungarian nobles against Austrian power in 1666. Unable to obtain the title of palatine from Emperor Leopold I of the Holy Roman Empire, he conspired: papers discovered in 1671 revealed his complicity in several plots. Therefore, he was executed.

31 Count Pierre de Serin or Péter Zrínyi. Péter Zrínyi was born in 1621 and died in 1671. His father and great-grandfather were banned from Croatia, which was then a kingdom united with Hungary. He was also banned from Croatia from 1665 to 1671. See: Vanel, *Histoire des Troubles De Hongrie*, vol. 1. On Zrínyi and Nádasdy, see: Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 86.

supposedly written on the eve of his death, presents the provisions of the Golden Bull of 1222³² and the measures taken by Leopold after the conquest.³³ In contrast, and contrary to what one might expect, Francis Rákóczi³⁴ is dealt with rather briefly, and finds no favour in the author's eyes despite his alliance with France.³⁵ From this point on, Delaporte's work is a sort of record of the outstanding characters of the time.

Heroes and villains: Delaporte's pantheon

While most of the story is told in a factual style, it is easy to discern a number of positions. Unexpectedly, the 'Turkish' enemy is not presented in the darkest light. Not surprisingly, Delaporte consider them to be very enlightened when they call for arbitration by the King of France. On the occasion of the Treaty of Belgrade:

“We see the Turks, who are supposed to be grossly ignorant, as enlightened about their interests, well-informed about the views and systems of other powers, and as skilful in their approaches and as refined in their politics as the best-educated nations.”³⁶

The first letter, on the other hand, is openly hostile to Vienna and the Emperor—a classic bias, even if, it must be emphasized, chronology is important. The Nádasdy episode is recounted through the pseudo-testimony of his descendants. They speak of the unfortunate Nádasdy, of a tender mother overwhelmed by grief, of disgrace, of misfortunes witnessed throughout Europe. We receive a biased version of the opposition between Nádasdy and the Count of Zrínyi to the Emperor Leopold.³⁷ Leopold's government is portrayed in a hostile light:

“Leopold treated us [Hungarians] like a conquered people, sent us foreign troops, drew all the agents from the country, abolished the office of the palatine [...]. The Council of Vienna thought it could do anything...”³⁸

32 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 13. The Golden Bull that Andrew II of Hungary in the spring of 1222 is issued in order to constrain the royal power. The law established the rights of the Hungarian nobility, including the right to disobey the king when he acted contrary to law. The nobles and the Church were freed from all taxes and could not be forced to go to war outside Hungary and were not obligated to finance it.

33 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 16.

34 Francis Rákóczi II.

35 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 32–34.

36 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 87.

37 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 7 and following. This passage should be read in conjunction with Claude Vanel's account of the event: Vanel, *Histoire des Troubles De Hongrie*, 86 and following.

38 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 16.

With Maria Theresa, however, the tone changes. Where Leopold was reviled, Maria Theresa is praised, the abbot taking pleasure in portraying a cherished and adored queen who won the hearts of Hungarians.

“This people, who had made incredible efforts and shed streams of blood to escape this domination, presented itself to the yoke that the new Queen wanted to impose on them. A moment of affability that their ancestors had almost never known made them forget two hundred years of hatred, sedition, and civil wars. The Austrian monarchs had been feared and hated; Maria Theresa was cherished and adored.”³⁹

Delaporte devotes several pages to the Empress, recounting with emotion her original link with the Hungarians and the benefits of her reign,⁴⁰ and when he evokes Emperor Charles VI, in his last letter, the panegyric turns to the most perfect sycophancy.⁴¹ Nor is it surprising that throughout the story, Prince Eugene of Savoy⁴² is regularly celebrated for his victories, while the other Austrian generals are confounded by anonymity and mediocrity. The capture of Timișoara, for example, is sung about. The abbot then takes care to detail the site of the city and its approaches in order to emphasize its impregnability, which highlights Eugene’s action.⁴³

Town and country in Hungary

Hungary’s cities

Hungarian cities form the backbone of Delaporte’s letters. He explores and presents Hungary by region, and then structures his narrative with a series of notes on the cities he ‘passes through:’ Bratislava, Tokaj, Buda, and Pest.⁴⁴

The way the cities are described is typical of the texts of the period and reminiscent of dictionary entries. The city is situated in relation to administrative districts, major waterways, nearby towns, the main infrastructures is taken stock of, including the bridge, the enclosure, the public square, and notable buildings, before making a few institutional or ‘ethnographic’ remarks. The institutions it accommodates are identified, which often determine the city’s rank within the country.

39 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 19.

40 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 27.

41 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 151.

42 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 102 for the reconquest of Bosnia.

43 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 100.

44 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 79.

Notable curiosities are listed, such as the tomb of Saint John Capistran in Ilok in Slavonia.⁴⁵ Fortifications are also systematically noted. Few towns lack a castle, citadel or fortress,⁴⁶ but most have fallen into disrepair and are used for non-military purposes. Often, the town's castle houses an administrative centre. The abbot deplores that these fortifications lack proper maintenance. For example, he notes that "Pressburg is surrounded by ditches which are neither wide enough nor deep enough to help in defence."⁴⁷ Buda also seems to have been neglected.

"It was thought that the Christians would strengthen the fortification and make it an impenetrable bulwark against the Infidels. The Pope, it is said, had already contributed one hundred thousand ecus. We need this defence today more than ever, since we lost the important frontier town of Belgrade."⁴⁸

However, the further east the author travels and the closer he gets to territories under Ottoman domination, the more frequent the mention of fortifications, even if their descriptions are sketchy.⁴⁹

As an abbot and lover of *belles-lettres*, Delaporte often records the presence of universities, colleges, and libraries, even in the case of secondary towns, and indicates who runs them. Braşov, (Brassó, Kronstadt) on the Wallachian border has a Protestant college and library;⁵⁰ Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár, Klausenburg),⁵¹ has a Jesuit university,⁵² a Calvinist and a Socinian college, as well as a printing house.⁵³ Similarly, Count Esterházy⁵⁴ entrusted the university he founded to the Jesuits in Trnava.⁵⁵ On the other hand, economic life in the towns is rarely discussed; at best, there are a few allusions to trade.

45 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 99.

46 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 103 for the fortifications of Bagnaluc in Bosnia or Jaicza. On these issues, see: Ágoston, "La frontière militaire ottomane en Hongrie."

47 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 25.

48 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 80–81.

49 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 76 ff, the town of Nyitra, Léopoldstald, and the island of Schut, 93 for Temesvár.

50 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 41.

51 Delaporte wrote "Coloswar, in German Clausenbourg" and then used the name "Clausenbourg."

52 Delaporte made a mistake here; there was only one Catholic university in the Kingdom of Hungary in Nagyszombat (Tyrnau, Trnava), but none in the Grand Principality of Transylvania.

53 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 39.

54 This is also a mistake. It was founded by Péter Pázmány, not Count Esterházy.

55 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 76; mention of the presence in this town a "seminary for all the clergy of Hungary."

The Hungarian countryside

Delaporte presents rural Hungary through the riches of the land.⁵⁶ More often than not, the presentation is disappointingly banal. For example, he describes the area around Bratislava in the following clichés:

“The fertility of the area around Bratislava, and above all the delicacy of its wines, is praised... The fruit is delicious, the wheat abundant, the cattle are numerous, and the oxen of extraordinary size.”⁵⁷

The eleven Saxon-held counties in Transylvania are rich in wheat, wine, and pasture, as the country’s water needs are provided by a large number of rivers.⁵⁸ Wax and honey are found in Wallachia.⁵⁹ Livestock breeding is regularly noted: from Wallachia prize horses, oxen, and wool cattle are sent to various parts of Europe.⁶⁰ Mining resources are also inventoried, such as the gold and silver deposits of Kremnica (Körmöcbánya, Kremnitz)⁶¹ in Slovakia,⁶² Wallachia⁶³ or Bosnia,⁶⁴ the iron of Hunedoara (Hunyad),⁶⁵ and the salt of Prešov (Eperjes),⁶⁶ whose exploitation he briefly describes. Occasionally, Delaporte is a little more verbose. The islands near Raguza (Dubrovnik) enchant the author with their limes, lemons, pomegranates, and “other excellent fruits which, together with the vines that cover the hills, offer a delightful sight everywhere.”⁶⁷ Hot springs are also described with gusto. In Buda, “they retain such great heat that eggs can be cooked in less time than in water boiling on the fire... but what is most surprising is to see fish swimming at the bottom of this boiling water, from which both live fish and cooked eggs can be obtained.”⁶⁸

There are, however, two notable exceptions. One is his description of fishing in Carniola at Lake Cerknica. This is in fact an intermittent lake, giving rise to a

56 For a broader overview, see: Wellmann, “Esquisse d’une histoire rurale de la Hongrie depuis la première moitié du xviiie-xviiiie siècles;” Wellmann, “Esquisse d’une histoire rurale de la Hongrie depuis la première moitié du xviiiie siècle jusqu’au milieu du xixe siècle.”

57 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 27–28.

58 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 40.

59 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 54.

60 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 52–53.

61 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 139 ff.

62 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 40.

63 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 53.

64 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 103; silver only.

65 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 44.

66 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 149.

67 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 108.

68 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 82.

highly efficient system of exploitation. Every year, from July onwards, the water flows through underground pipes. The men then descend naked into the lake, gradually catching all the fish in it, such as pike and tench. Once the lake is empty, the rushes are pulled out, leaving an excellent grass that is mowed after twenty days. Game, hares, wildcats and even bears are hunted here, and millet is sown and harvested before the water returns, around November.

But it is perhaps his description of the Tokaj vineyards⁶⁹ that is most stimulating. It reflects his perception of terroir, namely the characteristic aroma of the wine of a region: within the generic Tokaj designation, he distinguishes areas of different size and exposure, producing wines of very different qualities. He attributes these differences to three criteria: the way the grapes are grown, the quality of the soil, and the quality of the grapes. He picks out two grape varieties, Augster⁷⁰ and Muscadin, “because they have the smell and taste of nutmeg,” and these bunches, harvested separately, are then partially dried in the sun or in an oven, then the detached grapes are pressed, and the liquid is racked after a year. This would be the most esteemed quality. A second category would be obtained without drying, but by pressing only the grains. There would be a third category, but it is hard to understand how it differs. The author also recounts the beliefs surrounding this nectar, since people “claim to have found very shiny gold atoms in the pips,” as well as the practices and, in particular, the frauds that enable fake Tokaj to be made from lees, champagne wine, and Malaga. According to Delaporte, “this mixture produces the Tokaj served on most of our tables.”

Delaporte’s attention to these practices reflects his broader interest in Hungarian mores.

Hungarian customs: Hungary means diversity

Peoples and languages

The diversity of peoples living in Hungary is of great interest to travellers passing through. Delaporte’s approach turns to enumerating the peoples present.⁷¹ In Transylvania, Hungarians, Saxons and Seklers rub shoulders with Vlachs and

69 For a better understanding of the author’s point, see: Figeac-Monthus, “Tokaj et Sauternes aux xviiiè-xixè siècles;” Alkonyi, *Tokaj. The Wine of Freedom*; Haraszti, *Tokaj Wines*.

70 This is probably *Augster weiss*, a white grape variety, whereas *Augster blau*, also used in Hungary, is a black grape variety which produces a wine with low alcohol content. Information taken from the *VIVC database*.

71 For the summary Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François, 1777*, 141. These presentations can be enlightened by reading Kann and David, *The Peoples of the Eastern Habsburg Lands*, but the approaches of Robert John Weston Evans, “Confession and Nation in Early Modern Central Europe” and Aleksiu et al., eds, *Histoire de l’Europe du Centre-Est*, 337–484 are preferable.

Moldavians.⁷² This plurality leads to a great diversity of languages.⁷³ “Four languages are spoken here: Hungarian, German, Slavonic, and Wallachian, which has an affinity with Italian and is formed from Latin and Slavonic. Latin is used not only by scholars and people of status, but by the people themselves, and in the courts of judicature.”⁷⁴ Delaporte is fascinated by the fact that the names of towns are given in German and Hungarian, and he himself suggests some versions of names: Seben vs. Herman-stadt (today Sibiu),⁷⁵ and Pressbourg vs. Poson (today Bratislava).

A religious mosaic

This diversity of peoples and languages is associated with religious diversity. One might have expected more acrimony from an abbot, but Delaporte seems to be open-minded, as he is undeniably a worldly abbot of the Enlightenment. He lists the religions present, their respective strengths, their organization, and the privileges the authorities granted to each of them.⁷⁶ He notes that in Transylvania, the governor surrounds himself with advisors drawn from the Lutherans, Calvinists, Socinians, and Catholics, “for all religions are permitted in Transylvania; but Catholicism, though with fewer members than the Augsburg and Geneva Confessions, is dominant. There are also Greeks, Arians, Muslims, and Anabaptists.”⁷⁷ The author does, however, acknowledge the progression of the Jesuits, but this does not elicit any positive or negative comment from him.⁷⁸ Religions may be diverse but, overall, they seem to be fairly well observed. It is relatively rare that the abbot addresses superstitions. Only for the Morlachs⁷⁹ does he declare the following:

“These people are extremely superstitious and believe in goblins, sorcerers, magicians, and vampires. The old women pride themselves on knowing how to perform several charms, the most common of which is to divert

72 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 38, 41.

73 For example, Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 50, 93.

74 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 143.

75 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 41.

76 See in particular Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1765, 45–46, see also 50 on religions in Moldavia.

77 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 38.

78 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 39, 44. Referring to the Vlachs, he points out that “the Jesuits did their utmost to bring them over to our cult.” See also Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 143, mentioning the Jesuits’ assaults on Protestants “supported by all the imperial favour.”

79 Even though we are far from Hungary, Delaporte justifies his description by the fact that, “in the last wars with France,” the Morlachs rendered “such great services to the Queen of Hungary [that] it is a reason to make them better known.”

the milk of their neighbours' cows in order to obtain greater abundance; but there are other witches who have the power to break these enchantments; woe betide anyone who shows the slightest doubt about this."⁸⁰

This approach leads us to examine the ethnographic character of Delaporte's text.

Delaporte as an ethnographer

Delaporte's presentation of peoples in modern times is shockingly full of commonplaces and uniform formulas. Moreover, his judgments are not devoid of condescension when judging foreign peoples. As Béatrice Nickel points out,⁸¹ neither in travelogues nor in compilations is knowledge transmitted in an objective or neutral way. Instead, the way it is described is always marked by a certain ideology. For this reason, eighteenth-century travel writing must be seen in the context of the contemporary debate on what constitutes 'civilisation.' Delaporte's descriptions of the cultures encountered are objective only in their geographical details, but all his ethnographic information is highly subjective.

It is always an author's cultural reality that is used to explain the culture of the Other. French travellers are necessarily the products of European modes of perception and ways of thinking.⁸² Moreover, travelogues are written to meet the expectations of French readers.⁸³ Delaporte is not entirely immune to these expectations. While he is respectful of the Jesuit and Protestant establishments growing and multiplying in the best cities, his presentation of certain regions of Transylvania borrows heavily from the register of barbarism. It is striking that these descriptions mainly concern territories far from the heart of Hungary, but the author somewhat artificially includes them in his letters about Hungary. "These peoples, whom some call Bulgarians, are descended from the ancient Scythians... Their morals are still coarse, and their language is close to that of the Hungarians, but the pronunciation is rougher." Similarly, in Moldavia, there is "the barbaric custom of seizing, for public service, anything that comes across [...] without paying for anything. They take from peasants in the villages, from travellers on the main roads, even from foreigners on the road."⁸⁴ The abbot's attention is repeatedly drawn to women's customs. He devotes a long section to Morlachs women, their finery, matrimonial rituals,⁸⁵ and childbirth, producing an image that is minimum rustic:

80 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 127.

81 Nickel, "Les récits de voyage français du XVIII^e siècle."

82 Osterhammel, "Distanzerfahrung. Darstellungsweisen des Fremden."

83 Hupfeld, *Zur Wahrnehmung und Darstellung des Fremden*; Zimmermann, "Texttypologische Überlegungen zum frühneuzeitlichen Reisebericht."

84 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 52–53, 72.

85 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 128.

“Often they even give birth in the countryside, picking up their child themselves, washing it in the first stream they come across, carrying it home, and returning to their usual work the next day. These children are swaddled in wicked sheets, and thus for four months remain poorly cared for.”⁸⁶

These few extracts might lead us to believe that Delaporte views Hungary as a backward country, but this is not the case. A distinction is made between royal Hungary, with its ‘civilized’ mores—which is familiar to a Frenchman—and the outlying regions.

Some of his insights may be invaluable in grasping realities whose surviving traces are few and far between. Peasant housing, for example, is repeatedly described in detail. In Wallachia, “their houses, covered with the reeds that are found everywhere here, are built only of straw bound with fat earth.”

In Bulgaria, “the walls of their houses are made of nothing but earth, supported by a few crossbeams. The best ones have a kind of covered small portico, from which you enter a very narrow room, and from this one into another. The first has a large chimney in one corner, with a square flue up to two feet wide. As the rain easily enters, the fire is made with long pieces of wood. These houses usually have no windows, but two doors, one of which opens onto the portico, and the other to the side; and it is through this, or through the chimney, that the rooms receive a little daylight.”⁸⁷

These depictions, which became increasingly frequent in the eighteenth century, may carry a political meaning: by highlighting popular cultural values, Delaporte is opposing Habsburg domination.⁸⁸ In fact, does Delaporte not describe the great Hungarian families as increasingly allied with Austrian bloodlines?

How should we understand Delaporte’s text today? There is no doubt that it is generally unreliable as a source of knowledge about Hungary in the modern period. We should remember that the writer is a Frenchman writing for fellow Frenchmen. Thus, he selects the elements related to the prism of his own reading grid and the prism of the interests of his readers. In addition, the text reflects many easily identifiable prejudices, such as hostility towards Vienna, even if the target seems to be Leopold and not Maria Theresa. Here again, the nationality of the author matters,

86 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 128.

87 Delaporte, *Le Voyageur François*, 1777, 70–71.

88 Lammel, “L’ethnographie en Hongrie;” Hoffmann, “Techniques agricoles dans le bassin des Carpates;” Sozan, *The History of Hungarian Ethnography*.

and the overthrow of the Covenants of 1756⁸⁹ is undoubtedly no stranger to this praiseworthy approach. Delaporte presents the prejudices of his contemporaries, and in the guise of barbarism he willingly paints the realities that are most foreign to him.

Does this mean that nothing should be retained from Delaporte's observations? In reality, the text is of interest when it is used for what it is. The book is representative of how to structure knowledge to map out an unfamiliar territory. It is fascinating to note similarities between the method of dictionaries of the time, such as that of Moréri, and Delaporte's text. They find links with ancient history, give summaries of the main historical episodes, mention remarkable monuments, and offer a synthetic approach to institutions and their functioning. These parallels reveal a shared intellectual pattern.

Therefore, *Le Voyageur François* is relevant not as historical source about Hungary in the eighteenth century. Instead, it allows us to perceive what the educated French elites may have known about Hungary in the modern era. In this case, the work of Abbé Delaporte is a compilation of various texts available to him. It therefore helps us grasp the ideas the French elites had of Hungary: a vision imbued with stereotypes, a vision oriented by French interests, whether intellectual or political, a partially erroneous vision. This vagueness is also due to the fact that for the French of the time, this geographical space was a very distant territory, and they had a very poor knowledge of its history.

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89 The overthrow of the Covenants of 1756 (in French, the *Renversement des Alliances*) is the diplomatic revolution of 1756, i.e., the new alliance between the two traditional rivals, the Habsburg Empire and the Kingdom of France.

différentes langues de toutes les nations connues, contenant ce qu'il y a de plus remarquable [...]. Paris: chez Didot, 1746–1759.

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