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## Traces of the 19th Century Romantic Worldview in Władysław Wężyk's Egyptian Memoirs, *Travels to the Ancient World*

### Abstract

The given article is an analysis of Władysław Wężyk's *Travels to the ancient world* taking into consideration the most important problems and components of the 19th century Romantic worldview. Particular attention will be paid to the great Romantic themes such as folklore, art, music, spontaneous literary works and concepts of new humanity. Wężyk's memoir reveals his openness towards the Other and the understanding of foreign cultures which is by far the most important feature of a Romantic intellectual.

### Keywords

Orientalism, Romanticism, Polish literature, Travel journal, Władysław Wężyk.

Romanticism is by far one of the most complex and diverse intellectual movements to have ever appeared in European culture. In Władysław Tatarkiewicz's famous article *Romanticism or despair of a semanticist*<sup>1</sup> one may find a total of 25 different definitions of the movement that may often seem mutually contradictory, although the phenomena existed simultaneously within national and European romantic culture of the 19th century. One of the most distinctive components of the movement was the interest in folklore as opposite to the unified, standardized and inflexible Enlightenment culture of the first part of the 18th century. The end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century was a time of discovering and exploring local folk culture of each European nation. Indigenous works of art, music, songs and tales are said to have been the only spontaneous and natural intellectual products of the humanistic spirit

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. W. Tatarkiewicz, *Romantyzm, czyli rozpacz semantyka* [in:] *Pamiętnik literacki*, 62, 1971, pp. 3–21.

in its natural state and therefore they constitute the treasure of truthful, primal emotions and wisdom. Romanticism produced its own, new concept of humanity, according to which once underestimated social groups, regions and phenomena became most interesting because of their purity and innocence.

Romantic scholars, artists and travellers were also deeply fascinated by what was exotic and different from the classicist European culture. They eagerly gathered knowledge about distant lands and their inhabitants. An open attitude toward the Different and the Unknown was widely glorified; humanity was considered a complex whole, a harmonious mosaic of different national cultures and local customs,<sup>2</sup> therefore all kinds of human experiences were worth exploring. An interest in “the Regional” and “the Distant” derived from the same premises of respecting otherness and exploring the forgotten heritage of the cultures ignored for centuries. Within those tendencies one of the most important issues was rediscovering various Oriental cultures – therefore orientalism is by far the most important part of Polish romantic exoticism.

For the purposes of this article Orientalism will be defined as a special, overall attention paid to Eastern nations and their cultures that might be observed in various fields (whether it were works of art, literary experiments or traveling)<sup>3</sup> and considering them as the opposite to the Western intellectual formations. This fascination was the reason why the attempts to adapt Eastern literary genres (such as *qaṣīda* or *ḡazal*) were made; why choosing exotic background was so typical, why props to various Romantic literary works were given, or why a literary hero similar to a Bedouin soldier known from classical Arabic poetry was often the protagonist. It is worth noticing that an ideal Bedouin warrior was intensely explored in Polish literature especially before the November Uprising (mostly thanks to the popularity of Byron’s works). Secondary Polish artists (for example G. Zieliński,<sup>4</sup> M. Budzyński<sup>5</sup> or T. Padurra<sup>6</sup>) were also willing make use of the accomplishments of Adam Mickiewicz, whose *Szansfary* described an idea of a strong, independent and resistant human being in such accurate a way.

Not only was Orient an immensely powerful source of artistic imagination but also it soon became a destination for young men seeking adventure, traveling to the Holy Land or simply fleeing from the difficult political situation in subordinate Poland. Among the great multitude of Polish romantic works of art that describe Arabic culture one may find a significant amount of travel journals. A travel journal,

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<sup>2</sup> J. Bachórz, O polskim egzotyzmie romantycznym [in:] *Problemy polskiego romantyzmu*, series II, (ed.) M. Żmigrodzka, pp. 257–305.

<sup>3</sup> M. Piwińska, Orientalizm [in:] *Słownik literatury polskiej XIX wieku*, (eds) J. Bachórz, A. Kowalczykowa, Wrocław 2009, pp. 655–660.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. G. Zieliński, *Kirgiz i inne poezje*, (ed.) J. Odrowąż-Pieniążek, Warszawa 1956.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. M. Budzyński, *Wacław Rzewuski. Fantazja z czasów powstania podolsko-ukraińskiego w 1831 r.*, Bruksela 1841.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. T. Padurra, *Zołotaja boroda* [in:] *Pienia*, Lwów 1842.

especially a romantic, 19th century one, cannot be so easily classified as a non-fiction genre; the border between fiction and non-fiction can be crossed thanks to diversified forms of expression and including fictional passages in the relation<sup>7</sup>. The genre became popular thanks to various translations of French, English and German travel journals, among which *Voyage en Egypte et en Syrie*<sup>8</sup> written by Constantin François Volney is said to have had the biggest influence on Polish artists and intellectuals. The aim of this article is to describe one of the best 19th century Polish travel journals – *Travels to the ancient world* by Władysław Wężyk – and point out those elements of the author’s worldview that would be most compatible with the complex romantic idea of Orient. Those impassioned, exalted and sharp descriptions known from the belles-lettres are also found in a work that is supposed to relate the details of the distant land travels. Although *Travels to the ancient world* are very rigidly and precisely written, there are some qualities that undoubtedly place Wężyk within the romantic paradigm of thought.

Władysław Wężyk was born in 1816 in Toporów near Konstanyńów Podlaski. His father, Ignacy, was a veteran of the Napoleonic wars. During his studies Władysław first stationed in Krakow, then he moved to Warsaw and continued his education under the supervision of Kazimierz Brodziński. Wężyk’s studies were interrupted by the outbreak of the November Uprising in 1830 – he immediately decided to take part in the military action, although he was only fifteen at a time. After the fall of the uprising he shared the fate of many soldiers and had to leave the country. Wężyk moved to London and then to Paris, where he resumed his studies. Despite the fact that life in France seemed fascinating and lured him, Wężyk decided to return to his fatherland five years later (1836). That was the moment when he immersed in studying again – seduced by Hegel’s philosophy, popular back then in Europe, he decided to move to Berlin. Having visited Germany once, Wężyk gave up learning and began to plan his travel to the Middle East. He intended to visit Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and then go to Greece. On April 28th, 1839, he boarded the ship in Marseilles and reached Alexandria on May 1st. Wężyk spent 5 months in Egypt. This is the period described in *Travels to the ancient world*.

While his stay there, Wężyk explored villages located in the Nile Delta, after which he transferred to Cairo. The city astonished and enchanted him – he mentions the amazement many times in his travel journal. After leaving the capital, Wężyk followed the Nile to Upper Egypt and reached Aswan. At this point the story described comes to an end. Thanks to Ignacy Hołowiński<sup>9</sup>, Polish

<sup>7</sup> Cf. S. Burkot, *Polskie podróżopisarstwo romantyczne*, Warszawa 1988, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Polish edition: C. Volney, *Podróż do Syrii i Egiptu odbyta w roku 1783, 1784 i 1785*, Kraków 1803.

<sup>9</sup> I. Hołowiński had a chance to explore the Middle East quite thoroughly. An exact route of his travel is to be found in: J. Reychman, *Podróżnicy polscy na Bliskim Wschodzie w XIX wieku*, Warszawa 1972, pp. 131–134.

priest traveling to the Holy Land, we know that Władysław Wężyk continued his journey and reached Palestine. They met shortly before Hołowiński's departure from Jerusalem; the priest remembered Wężyk as a delightful young man wearing eastern outfit and narrating his visit in Cairo with passion.<sup>10</sup> After that and according to his plan, Wężyk also traveled to Turkey, Greece and Italy, but little is known about this stage of his journey. He returned to Poland in 1841 and took on horse breeding. *Travels to the ancient world* were written and edited in his land property in Toporów in 1842. In the following years he also published numerous literary reviews and short pieces relating his travels in Europe (for example to Vienna). Later on, Wężyk played an important role in reviving Polish theatre in Poznań. He died during the epidemic of typhus in Brzozów near Pszczyna in 1848.

*Travels to the ancient world* are divided into two parts. The first one is called *The history of Egypt* and presents the facts in chronological order in 10 chapters. Seemingly rigid and strict narration has some distinctive romantic features that are relatively easy to notice. At the very beginning Wężyk presents quite a long and credible state of research. He mentions names of ancient historians (Herodotus or Diodorus Siculus) as well as modern ones (Zoega, Chateaubriand, Volney, Champolion). The description contains a short survey on the political situation of Middle East at that time. Wężyk mentions the government organization and economy specifications in Morocco, Algeria, Libya and Egypt. Wężyk considers the region neglected and stagnated. What is important, the reason for this would be, according to the author, the dominance of Islam. The religion is therefore identified with poverty, superstition and laziness. Besides, the ideas from this passage it is not usual for Wężyk to give extended descriptions of Islamic rituals and beliefs.

The essential part of this section of *Travels to the ancient world* is an extended description of ancient Egypt's history and beliefs. It is significant that Wężyk attempts to present Greek mythology as a continuation of the ancient Egyptians' religion. Although this kind of reasoning had been well known in the past (Herodotus, among others, mentioned the fact that the Greek and Egyptian beliefs were genetically connected), Wężyk's views seemed to have originated from a typically romantic worldview and perspective. He intended to point at the spiritual and cultural community of mankind and its shared origin<sup>11</sup> (in the XIXth century linguistic research links were found between Eastern and European languages, therefore a conviction of Middle East being a cradle of mankind was widely common). It is also clear that Wężyk shares a romantic belief that folktales, myths and oral narratives represent a simple, primary truth that was once known to mankind, but became forgotten over time (especially in the

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> A. Walicki, *Filozofia historii* [in:] *Słownik literatury polskiej...*, p. 285–291.

western countries, where modern civilization had developed and destroyed the connection between man and nature).<sup>12</sup> Polish travellers also comment on some key features of an inhabitant of eastern lands. The Eastern man is described in accordance to the romantic image known from the 19th century literary works – he is passionate, vividly imaginative and able to “feel” the world rather than perceive it rationally:

God created this part of Earth more beautiful and abundant than any other. It was the cradle of mankind! Underneath this sky a man is born with an imagination more vivid, feelings more penetrative and passions stronger than anywhere else.<sup>13</sup>

It's worth mentioning that the history itself is considered a process – a chain of centuries connected to each other rather than being just an accumulation of events. A man, vulnerable because of his passion, is created by the historical process itself. That kind of perception is once again characteristic of a romantic historiosophy, especially influenced by Herder's thought:<sup>14</sup>

Wężyk also believes in a popular 19th century concept of determining a man's character and psychological inclinations on the climate of a region he grows up in.<sup>15</sup> According to the author of *Travels to the ancient world*, each man is born with the same set of good and bad features but after that he is being shaped by his environment. Interestingly, in this context Wężyk refers to Montesquieu and states that it is possible to evaluate a condition of a national culture solely taking under consideration its individual, unique historical, political and climatic determinants.<sup>16</sup> In that case, the Romantic authors' imagination was mostly inspired by the thoughts of Germaine (Madame) de Staël, a famous French novelist and publicist and one of the forerunners of comparative literature, for example throughout her famous theoretical work *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*,<sup>17</sup> but also throughout her novel *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807).<sup>18</sup> Madame de Staël's distinction between the North and South of Europe led to an outburst of fascination with northern (at first mostly Scandinavian) folklore, nature/landscapes and tales. A parallel interest in Oriental cultures resulted in establishing a model of an Eastern spirit (already described above), which is compatible with Wężyk's concepts included in his

<sup>12</sup> J. Bachórz, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

<sup>13</sup> W. Wężyk, *Travels to the ancient world*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1842, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> J. Bachórz, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

<sup>15</sup> M. Joczowa, *Literatura Północy i Literatura Południa*, [in:] *Słownik literatury polskiej...*, pp. 500–504.

<sup>16</sup> W. Wężyk, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Polish edition: A. de Staël Holstein, *Korynna czyli Włochy*, Wrocław 1962.

<sup>18</sup> The novel narrates a story of love between static British, Lord Nelvil, and passionate Italian poetesse, Corinne. Heroes characteristics are determined by their place of origin and upbringing.

analysis of ancient Egyptian history. According to *Travels to the ancient world*, the inhabitant of the Middle East suffers from *unnecessary impact of inflamed blood on a mind*.<sup>19</sup> He is also rapid, violent, greedy for fame, willing to avenge any harms but also to sacrifice himself for the cause. In fact, he is a man living in a state of nature, as he didn't get the chance to have his personality shaped by the beneficial influence of Christianity:

The seeds of wisdom of the Nazarene Prophet sewn by the heavenly hand have not put down roots on this volcanic land yet. The seeds that took a long time to put them down even on more fertile grounds, do not blossom here at all after 19 centuries.<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, an exemplary image of a fearless arabic warrior (faris), which had been strongly consolidated in Polish and European cultural context, is to be found in the first, factual and historical part of Wężyk's work. Right after describing the history of ancient Egypt under the rule of pharaohs, Ptolemaic dynasty and Romans, Wężyk's narration moves to the Arabian Peninsula – the purpose is to offer his reader comprehensive knowledge on the origin of Arabs and the genesis of Islam. Wężyk quite accurately describes the history of Muhammad's revelation and Islamic society under the rule of the "rightly guided" caliphs, after which the author focuses on the Arabian/Arabic conquest of Egyptian lands. Although the history of caliphate and the Prophet himself is described with great indifference and even a hint of irony (note how *It was fun for Muhammad to become a prophet*),<sup>21</sup> there is a significant change of attitude when it comes to 'Amr ibn al-'As, a military commander responsible for the success of the Muslim conquest of Egypt. The hero constantly avoids any kind of comfort convenience, he is an excellent, extremely brave warrior and a faithful friend as well as a great poet at the same time. He is able to combine a life of a warrior with a poet's fate. In Wężyk's description, the hero is uniquely gifted on the field of poetry, but it is significant that his talent is innate rather than an outcome of education:<sup>22</sup>

Amru did not rest on satin cushions. That outstanding leader was able to combine a poetic life of a dreamy and singing Eastern bard with bravery of the most courageous soldier. He would spend all day horse riding, and when the moon appeared [...] he would sit in front of his tent with his legs crossed, among his friends and chieftains, and accompanied by a sad and monotonous sound of

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<sup>19</sup> W. Wężyk, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 52.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 65.

an “Arabic guitar” he would improvise poetry? praising Allah, the Prophet and Arabian sword. He had a great talent in poetry (although he wasn’t educated) and that natural reason and vivid imagination, a great gift of heaven, common among the sons of the desert!

It is clear that the essence of poetic creativity is supposed to be a natural capacity of spirit – that concept is visibly opposite to the classic 18th century concepts contained in many normative poetics (according to them the ability to create fine verses was just a matter of following the rules). ‘Amr ibn al-’Āṣ appears in *Travels to the ancient world* many times, always described with sympathy and admiration.

Historiographic relation reaches the era of Muḥammad ‘Alī and terminates there. In the last chapter the author included detailed demographic data as well as a description of scientific, industrial and cultural development.

The second part of *Travels to the ancient world* is simply called *Egypt – impressions*, and was divided into five extensive chapters. This part seems much more interesting case for literary and cultural studies. The title itself indicates the nature of Wężyk’s work – it is full of digressions and poetic descriptions but lacks the educational value of the first part. Wężyk does not try to systemize any information on ancient monuments or local traditions. In the author’s narration, Egypt is basically a multitude of diversified stimuli that have been perceived and processed by a romantic mind. He intends to visualize all unknown, strange and exotic phenomena from his reader’s point of view. By doing so, he proves that Western European perspective may resume limited while visiting the ancient world’s wonders. In this part of the given article I will analyze Wężyk’s work by using some key concepts and thematic areas generally connected with the romantic worldview.

Wężyk’s reflections on Oriental arts and music are by far the most interesting component of his Egyptian memoirs. Many passages describing oriental art including music and oral narrative are found/can be found in his travel journal. The most significant one is to be found in the very first chapter, the description of events right after reaching the Egyptian land:

We sit in a circle between the tents... listening to tales about wars with the tribes living on the adjoining lands in the [Nile] Delta. [We are] listening how they praise Ali’s mare, [which is] swifter than an ostrich. [We are] listening them singing!

So men and women are humming a uniform song. Their chests are raising, their dolorous voices are bouncing off from the ever-blue skies. She is howling...! He is yowling...! But that’s what constitutes the beauty of their song! I would like to know how Rossini’s or Mozart’s aria would sound in the desert? Such a landscape needs different music than the public stages of effeminate [European]

nations. Let's sing them some feminine French trill... It would make them laugh! Let's sing a war song... They won't understand! They would keep asking if it was a ghazal about lovers from their land. So let's sing them Ukrainian Cossack's dumka (ballad)! Now they all accompany us with sad voices, and Matrus asks: "Whose pleasant singing is this?". This is the song of the Bedouins of the North! Bedouins living by the Don River!<sup>23</sup>

The translated paragraph of *Travels to the ancient world* cited above describes an early stage of his journey, his visiting villages located in the Nile Delta. The environment and autochthone culture were all new to him and he clearly took a great pleasure in witnessing musical performances of the local inhabitants. For a 19th century individual, such as Wężyk, who was immersed in Romantic culture and worldview, the most valuable kind of art is the one created by the folk and connected to a nation's history, tradition and tales. In line with the Romantic tendencies of religious tolerance<sup>24</sup> he is fascinated by the narratives relating the origins of Islam and its numerous encounters with the enemies of that time. The beauty of young Egyptians chanting is deeply primal. Wężyk compares their singing to mooing, screaming and howling. Those are certainly not the sounds a civilised, classically-formed European musician would ever make. Famous European artists and their achievements are emasculated and of no use in the search of true artistic creations. The primitive features of the performance were what appeared most fascinating to a traveler from a distant land. It is clear that Wężyk shares a belief of the essential, primal truth known to the whole mankind; the truth that was forgotten by the Western civilization long before and the only way to regain access to it is by exploring the areas of human culture that were once neglected. While listening, he is a part of a community despite of his different ethnicity. An agreement between two cultures comes easily – it is a chant of Ukrainian Cossacks that has enough inner strength and is truthful to a free human spirit so that it pleases Egyptian audience. No knowledge of a language is necessary to understand the emotions. Notably, Wężyk calls the Cossacks "the Bedouins of the North, living by the Don river" – according to his romantic worldview, all men are equal and all share the same features (especially if they managed to uphold "the state of nature" rejected by the West).<sup>25</sup>

Another example of romantic reception of Oriental music is an episode describing the concert of Safna, Cairo's most renowned female singer. The performance was strictly private. Small audience, unique atmosphere of an Arabian house and Eastern entourage made it possible for the traveller to fully

<sup>23</sup> W. Wężyk, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> J. Bachórz, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

<sup>25</sup> East of Europe was a source of primary, exotic inspiration as well as the Orient. *Ibidem*, p. 286.



immerse in a world that once had been unknown. Amazed by Safna's sad voice and subtle music, Wężyk distinctly expressed a romantic views on the nature of the creator himself:

True music is more meaningful to the hearts of the audience than artists themselves could ever know as they are simply a tool in the hands of the sound. They are obedient to inspirations that reach them and involuntarily extract thoughts from their wombs. [Music] is astonishing to them as well and it may be beyond their understanding. [That is] because true inspiration isn't their deed, and does not exist by itself. Music is the comforter of mankind, it is a history of a world of emotions and a prophetic voice of the future!<sup>26</sup>

Romantic intellectuals believed in an anti-rational concept of a genius individual that was not educated yet is capable of creating a perfect piece of art or improvising. That perspective was established among the Romantics mostly thanks to the 18th century German thinkers connected with a proto-Romantic Sturm und Drang movement (among them Goethe, Schiller, Hamann and others).<sup>27</sup> That kind of talent is a gift from God. A true meaning of such a creation may not be limited to the piece of art itself; in contains a testimony of an artist's soul and all his experiences. What is more, the artistic reception is not limited by the consciousness of the audience – they are able to feel the true meaning of Safna's words in spite of the lack of actual information included in it (for example on life in a harem – that's the exact association produced by Wężyk while listening to the singer).

While in Cairo, Wężyk was also deeply impressed by the vivid tradition of storytelling cultivated by raconteurs wandering from one place to another. He mentions that the most popular themes are events and deeds once described in the Quran or the tales narrating glorious historical events. Wężyk describes the whole storytelling within its sociocultural context – as a joint activity for men of every age and material status. The author of *Travels to the ancient world* also noticed that all Arabs (with an exception of the poorest) have a detailed knowledge of their history and cultural legacy.<sup>28</sup> In this passage he also mentions the exact time of his visit – it is the month of Ramaḍān for the Muslims, therefore the night life is extraordinary vivid (*But it's Ramadan! Who would go to sleep on a Ramadan night?*).<sup>29</sup>

A concise yet emotional description of a storyteller also catches our attention. The raconteur is an individual capable of gathering a crowd, gifted with an unique talent and charisma:

<sup>26</sup> W. Wężyk, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 62.

<sup>27</sup> J. Platt, Geniusz [in:] *Słownik literatury polskiej...*, p. 319–321.

<sup>28</sup> W. Wężyk, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 62.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

So let's look at a singer's face and listen to the words of his poetry!

He tuned his lyre. Let's listen!... Luckily I know just enough of Arabic to understand the meaning of the phrases that, slowly or frantically, like a delicate cascade's flowing down the rocks murmur or mill circle's rumble, are falling out of his mouth.<sup>30</sup>

To make his relation more interesting to his readers, Wężyk decided to relate an authentic tale he had heard while in Cairo. The story is titled "Giafar i Abassa". A historic *gazal* (it obviously lacks some accuracy when it comes to specifying a literary genre). The tale was certainly popular among the Egyptian folk as it recounts a love story including Ġa'far, a well-known seer of the Barmakid family, and probably the most famous caliph of all times – Hārūn al-Rašīd. The tale is by all means reliable as the caliph was a beloved hero of many folk narratives, including the *Thousand and One Nights*.<sup>31</sup>

A passionate Romantic individual, such as Władysław Wężyk, pays a lot of attention to nonverbal, nonrational, extrasensory cognition. His description of the city of Cairo is sensual, vivid and full of emotions:

The sun has set, but the sky was surrounded for another half an hour by a fiery wreath. Upon it, a golden wreath floated, and upon it an emerald ribbon, then a thicker pink garland that melted into a navy-blue skies in which a pearl-white stars begin to appear.

That is the moment we take? a breath in the East! That is the moment when Cairo is in fact Cairo. The East puts on its [best] robes. It takes a great painter, a great poet, to put such a view on canvas or put it into harmonious words.<sup>32</sup>

The descriptions provided by Władysław Wężyk – even if they were placed in non-fictional travel journal – are remarkably romantic when it comes to the composition, usage of phrases and stylistic ornaments. The narrative parts relating his journey are often written in a present tense which makes the relation more accessible for the readers. The usage of a first person narration in plural suggests he was accompanied by someone as well as gets his recipients involved in action. Because of the accumulation of short exclamations one may feel that Wężyk is rushing through the city – in fact his aim was to stimulate the reader's senses and visualize what was unknown for Polish people. At the same time he implies that a uniformed European mind wouldn't be able to fully understand the exotic and extravagant beauty of Eastern metropolis:

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 63.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. A. Clot, *Harun al-Rashid and the World of the Thousand and One Nights*, London 2005.

<sup>32</sup> W. Wężyk, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

What am I saying...! He [European man] wouldn't be able to see all this... He would barely notice that the streets are narrow, camels are naughty and the Arabs importunate and scary-eyed!

He would only pay attention to the lack of elegant, European shops, hotels, restaurants, markets etc. He would just shrug his shoulders and tell: "What a stupid and dull city it is...!"

But he is the one who is stupid and dull, because one stone in the house or mosque walls contains more thoughts and memories than all those empty heads of those self-important dolts!

To understand Cairo well enough one needs to be an artist, a poet; one needs to be an Arab!<sup>33</sup>

The citation above once again proves that the Romantics tended to attribute highly positive features to neglected cultures and lands. Wężyk's open-mindedness and his will to get rid of prejudices was the key to understand the Other and to fully experience the benefits of the journey.

The presented analysis would not be complete without mentioning Wężyk's interest in ancient ruins. That fascination was shared by many Romantic artists. Ruins were being rediscovered gradually since the 18th century as a symbol of the forces of nature winning with civilization. Ancient ruins were yet another sign of once forgotten wisdom and knowledge. They were a great place for meditation and rethinking the past and the future. Wężyk first noticed it when he was still in Cairo, but after he transferred to Upper Egypt the obsession with ruins grew even stronger. The descriptions of the Upper Egypt's monuments are abundant and detailed. The narrator is thrilled with the discovery of numerous traces of the past centuries while sightseeing. For a Romantic wanderer the journey made a great opportunity to take a deep, emotional look into his own mind:

After closing my eyes I saw those great historical heroes resembling friendly ghosts of fallen Ossian's knights taking walks through the ruins in the middle of those deserts... I saw (looking inside myself) my soul, smiling and opening my arms towards some of them, pushing the others away with disgust.... But my thought, after taking one look into myself, did not pay much attention to them... After leaving famous Alexander, Caesar, Saladin, Richard, [my thought] came under the roof of my own heart, into its most secret chambers and there looked into a bucket [...] filled with memories.<sup>34</sup>

The 19th century is also a time of a growing interest in psychology and taking inspiration from internal life. A man liberated from the primacy of reason and strict classical etiquette was able to be an individual – and that included

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 36.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 84.

a consent to recognition of mental diversity. Madness – once neglected and separating people from the society – became just another way of being and, in many cases, was perceived as positive. A twisted mind was the only one able to comprehend the areas of existence unreachable to the rational folk. It is clearly visible in Polish literature – the most famous mad protagonists would be, among other, Karusia from Adam Mickiewicz's ballad *Romantyczność* and Ksenia described in Seweryn Goszczyński's *Zamek Kaniowski*. Wężyk describes in a few words an encounter with a madman in Cairo. He mentions the fact that a crazy person can be unusually and unnecessary worshipped in the East (for instance kissing a madman's fingers by infertile women to bring good luck). Such behaviour is classified as unreasonable and stupid. On the other hand, Wężyk mentions a mental institution and some questionable behaviors of the workers there (like humiliating its patients). That is, of course, strongly criticized – Wężyk states that only a foolish person would laugh at a madman.<sup>35</sup>

Before reaching a conclusion, it is worth mentioning that another interesting passage is to be found in Wężyk's memoirs – although it is a hint of Polish national history rather than a typical trace of a romantic worldview. The author of *Travels to the ancient world* recalls an interesting meeting. During his stay in Cairo, Wężyk bumped into Michał Kęczkowski, once a Polish nobleman and a Napoleonic soldier (the last fact is not intentionally mentioned but it soon becomes clear for an insightful reader). It is in fact the only time Polish national cause is mentioned in the travel journey – Wężyk usually avoids any allusions to the state of affairs in his homeland. The story of the meeting, although quite short, is very touching and filled with emotions. An old soldier works as a shoemaker (probably in Giza); he does not own much, only his shop, a small house and a female servant working for him. It was not unusual for Polish romantic literature to praise Napoleonic wars and the soldiers who fought in them. Napoleon and his deeds gained nearly mythical glory among Polish patriots therefore we may assume that this episode was especially touching for Wężyk's readers.

Władysław Wężyk's *Travels to the ancient world* is by far the best Polish Romantic travel journal. Not only does it show the author's extraordinary knowledge and his insightful studies (he even learned some Arabic before the departure) but also the memoir shows that Wężyk faithfully adapted the worldview of his époque. He was deeply fascinated by the world that not so long before had been out of European reach. He does not hold any prejudice against an exotic culture – he is seeking the truth hidden within the Egyptian folklore, music and tales. Wężyk strongly believes that it is possible to understand each other on the very basic level – even without using the language. His vivid reactions while witnessing live performances in Egypt are deeply touching –

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 48.

Wężyk truly believes that music is an universal language of human spirit and wisdom. The author's perception of the foreign land is also purely Romantic – he focuses on emotions and details rather than facts and rigorous descriptions. Up to this moment, Wężyk's journal remains opportune and interesting for a reader interested in Eastern culture. Wężyk's journal comes to an end the moment he visits Upper Egypt, right before his departure to Palestine. Hopefully, I highlighted the most interesting aspects of his memoirs, yet there is still a lot to be discovered in this fascinating example of Romantic literature.

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