

Petra Košťálová

The Stranger on the Road: Simeon from Lviv as the First Known Backpacker Travelling to the Ottoman Empire

Lilit Mnatsakanyan

Pázmány Péter Catholic University (PPCU), Hungary; The Leibniz Institute
for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO), Germany

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Petra Košťálová, Assistant Professor at the Department of East European Studies at Charles University, offers a notable contribution to the study of early modern Armenian travel literature through her monograph based on the 2016 annotated Czech edition of *Ughegrut'iwn* (Simeon Lehatsi's travel accounts). Following the English-language annotated translation and introduction by George Bournoutian (2007) and her own Czech edition (2016), Košťálová's work approaches the text from a different angle. Whereas earlier studies contextualize Simeon of Poland's travels by focusing on their cultural, religious, and ethnographic dimensions, this study places greater emphasis on the traveller's personal experience and emotional narrative. Moving beyond the text's traditional use as a historical or ethnographic source, Košťálová foregrounds the subjective voice of



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the traveller – his emotions, displacements, and sense of exile, thus situating Simeon as a microhistorical agent.

In terms of methodology, Košťálová employs an interdisciplinary approach, combining microhistorical perspective, discourse analysis, and literary comparison in her analysis of Lehatsi's travel account. The microhistorical perspective allows to examine Simeon not just as a traveler, but as an individual whose fragmented experiences reflect broader social and historical dynamics, particularly those tied to exile and identity. Textual and discourse analysis, with close readings of the language, structure, and rhetorical strategies of the travelogue, especially its use of genres like lamentation (p. 179), which are shown to convey both personal alienation and collective memory. Košťálová also applies genre and literary analysis, emphasizing the hybrid nature of seventeenth-century travel writing, where pilgrimage, ethnography, autobiography, and religious narrative intersect. One of the most original aspects of the methodology is the articulation of the 'double exile' concept, which captures the condition of a diasporic subject departing not from a stable homeland, but from an already exilic space. This conceptual framing allows the author to explore the emotional and cultural density of diasporic subjectivity, ultimately bridging Armenian Studies with broader humanistic inquiry.

The opening chapter lays the foundation for understanding the geographical and cultural framework that shaped the Armenian identity. Košťálová situates the concept of the 'Armenian world' within the historical context of the South Caucasus, Anatolia, and the Armenian Diaspora. This chapter examines how the displacement of Armenians due to political upheaval, such as the Jelali uprisings, influenced their sense of collective identity and the preservation of cultural and religious traditions. By doing so, the author positions Simeon's travels not merely as personal explorations but as collective narratives of dislocation, identity preservation, and religious devotion. This lens is essential for understanding Simeon's motivations and emotional investments in sacred places, such as the city of Jerusalem, or the monastery of St. John the Baptist (Surb Karapet) in Mush, which emerge as anchors of Armenian cultural memory.

Building upon the historical context presented previously, Chapter 2 shifts focus to the specific diasporic community to which Simeon belonged: the Armenians of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the social, political, and economic dynamics of the *Lehahayer* community, particularly in the cities of Zamość and Lviv, where Simeon spent much of his life. Košťálová examines the rights and obligations of Lviv's Armenians, their integration into local society, and the challenges they faced in preserving their cultural and religious identity. The chapter also explores the religious transformations within the community, such as conversions, and how these shifts impacted their collective sense of

self. This sets the stage for understanding the personal and emotional significance of Simeon's later journey.

In Chapter 3, Košťálová situates Simeon Lehaci's travel writings within both the Armenian literary tradition and the broader context of Renaissance travel literature. She explores how Simeon's works reflect the intellectual awakening of the Armenian Enlightenment (*Zart'onk'*), highlighting themes of diaspora identity, religious devotion, and cultural preservation. His use of vernacular Armenian, enriched with Polish and Turkish lexical borrowings, underscores the linguistic and cultural hybridity of the Armenian diaspora. The chapter also places Simeon within the Renaissance tradition of *ars apodemica*, emphasizing the educational and cultural value of travel. Drawing parallels to European travellers like Pietro della Valle and Jean Chardin, Košťálová demonstrates how Simeon blends personal narrative with ethnographic observation. This comparative framework allows her to underscore Simeon's position as an Armenian pilgrim and scribe, offering both *emic* (insider) and *etic* (outsider) perspectives on the cultures he encountered. Through this analysis, Košťálová underscores the significance of Simeon's work, not only within Armenian literary tradition but also in the broader genre of travel writing, showcasing his contributions to both fields while reflecting the complexities of identity and cultural exchange in the seventeenth century.

In Chapter 4, Košťálová moves from literary analysis to a detailed narrative of Simeon's travels. She puts Simeon's narrative within the conceptual frameworks of microhistory, ego-documents, and discourse analysis. Košťálová interprets Simeon's encounters not just as geographic crossings, but as cognitive and emotional negotiations with the Other. His voice becomes a repository of informal, everyday knowledge, a *petit récit* that stands in contrast to dominant historical discourses. This chapter is especially compelling in demonstrating how the personal story mirrors larger historical ruptures, like the Jelali uprisings or the fragmentation of Anatolian Christian communities.

The final chapter reflects on Simeon's return to Lviv after years of travel. Košťálová examines the emotional and psychological complexities of homecoming, focusing on themes of reintegration, belonging, and the tensions between self-perception and communal identity. The challenges Simeon faces in returning to his community after his prolonged absence underscore the emotional weight of his exile and the transformative nature of his journey. The symbolism of the 'flower' of the Land of Sham (p. 173), referenced in the chapter title, serves as a powerful symbol for renewal, growth, and the enduring connection to one's homeland. It represents not only Simeon's personal journey but also the larger narrative of the Armenian diaspora, whose members constantly find themselves

between displacement and the desire for a renewed sense of home. Through the use of the lamentation genre, Košťálová reveals how Simeon's return is not a straightforward reconciliation but an emotionally fraught process, highlighting the broader diasporic experience of displacement and longing for home.

In conclusion, Košťálová's book offers a fresh perspective by foregrounding the emotional and personal experiences of Simeon Lehatsi, positioning him not only as a chronicler of his time but also as a diasporic subject whose journey intersects with broader cultural, religious, and intellectual currents. The work is particularly innovative in its interdisciplinary approach, blending microhistory, literary analysis, and discourse analysis to offer a structured understanding of Simeon's travelogue as both an ego document and a historical document. This approach marks a significant departure from earlier works, which primarily focused on the historical, ethnographic, and religious aspects of his travels. Particularly compelling is Košťálová's articulation of Simeon as a figure of 'double exile', a diasporic subject departing from an already exilic space. This concept provides a useful conceptual framework for future research on diasporic narratives and the emotional landscapes of mobility.