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Oleksandr Pysarevskyi,
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University
ORCID ID: 0009-0004-4802-0024

The Holy Dormition Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra in travel notes of English travelers of the first half of the 19th century

Abstract. In the first half of the 19th century, Kyiv attracted the attention of travelers from different countries. Their travelogues depicted it as a multidimensional phenomenon, harmoniously combining monumental architecture, a rich spiritual life, and a unique social order. Sacred architecture occupied a special place in their perception of the city – it became a lens through which observers comprehended Kyiv's cultural and historical essence. The study of the significance of sacred architecture in shaping the image of the city in travelogues is relevant, as it allows for a better understanding of the cultural heritage of Kyiv and the peculiarities of intercultural dialogue at that time. The study of the representation of Kyiv in travelogues was carried out by various authors who analyzed travelogues as a source of historical and ethnographic information. Foreign researchers paid attention to Kyiv.

Keywords: travel notes, English travelers, Robert Lyall, Mary Holderness, John Thomas James, James Morton, Robert Pinkerton, the first half of the 19th century, Kyiv, the Holy Dormition Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra.

English travelers Robert Lyall, Mary Holderness, John Thomas James, James Morton, and Robert Pinkerton described Kyiv in their travel notes.

They paid attention to the architecture, historical monuments, the inhabitants' lives, and the city's cultural features. Researchers emphasized the importance of Kyiv as a cultural, religious, and historical center, which remained an important node on the map of Eastern Europe.

In general, the travelogues of those times are a valuable source for studying the perception of Kyiv by European travelers. Although the authors of these notes had a subjective view, they left detailed descriptions of the city that help to recreate its appearance at that time. Their notes trace the general trends in perceiving Kyiv as a city with a rich history, spiritual greatness, and a unique cultural atmosphere. Some authors emphasized the religious component of Kyiv, pointing to its importance as an Orthodox center, while other researchers focused on its economic development, trade, and crafts.

The analysis of the sources includes the study of travelogues dedicated to Kyiv, in which the authors recorded their impressions of the city, its inhabitants, and cultural life. In particular, Kyiv appears in their descriptions as a center of Orthodox spirituality, a city with magnificent architecture, and a significant historical past. The travelers especially noted the beauty of Kyiv churches, such as St. Sophia Cathedral and the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, as well as the picturesque landscapes of the Dnieper. Architectural monuments were described with great attention to detail, allowing modern researchers to obtain valuable information about the city's appearance in past centuries.

English travellers emphasized the contrasts between Kyiv and European cities, emphasizing uniqueness and exoticism. They drew attention to the specific features of the urban landscape, the ethnic composition of the population, and the peculiarities of its behavior. Some

authors noted that Kyiv retained its uniqueness even within the Russian Empire, particularly due to the presence of ancient traditions and local identity.

We aim to explore the role of the sacred architecture of Kyiv, in particular the Holy Dormition Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, in the context of travel notes of English travelers of the first half of the 19th century. The authors of these notes not only left their impressions of architectural monuments, but also contributed to the formation of the idea of Kyiv as a spiritual center, which was distinguished by the grandeur of religious buildings and was closely intertwined with historical and cultural traditions. Travelers paid attention to the details of architecture, the symbolism of shrines, and the interaction between sacred space and the urban environment, allowing us to see Kyiv through the prism of views that could differ significantly depending on the culture and context of each traveller.

English travelers reflected the architectural and natural wealth of Kyiv. They sought to record the socio-cultural context, providing valuable material for modern research into the city's urban, religious, and artistic development. Their descriptions covered rituals, celebrations, and spiritual events, allowing contemporaries to understand better Kyiv's multifaceted spirit, social transformations, and cultural codes.

According to the traveler *Robert Lyell*,¹ Kyiv appeared to travelers as a city of diverse impressions that could satisfy a wide variety of aesthetic and intellectual demands: "The lover of a magnificent landscape and the painter will find their refuge in the fortress and on the banks of the Dnieper; the saint and the monk will lock themselves in the sacred caves with the imperishable relics of saints and churches; the military will be in the citadel and the arsenals; the antiquarian will mostly be happy with old Kyiv and its surroundings; the architect will find little to do if the church buildings of Russia do not interest him; and the historian will probably be interested in all these objects" (Lyall, 1825: 87-88).

These lines trace the perception of Kyiv as a multidimensional environment, where everyone finds their place according to their beliefs, professional interests, or spiritual searches.

Monasteries and churches were of particular interest to travelers, who were not only impressed with their architectural expressiveness but also served as repositories of unique relics, symbolizing the sacred center of the Orthodox world. This indicates that the religious component of Kyiv made a deep impression on visitors, and the numerous artifacts preserved in the temples created a sense of continuous historical heritage.

Among the landmarks that attracted special attention from foreign guests, the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra undoubtedly dominated. Founded in the 11th century, it became a center of spiritual life and a remarkable architectural complex that combined elements of different eras and styles, forming a harmonious ensemble. The English traveler Robert Lyall noted in his notes: "The Assumption Cathedral and the Bell Tower were the peak of Kyiv's sacred architecture" (Lyall, 1825: 104-110). This characteristic emphasizes the grandeur and majesty of the buildings that dominated the urban landscape of Kyiv, defining its sacred space.

The Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra combined spirituality and monumentality, serving as a pilgrimage center for many. Its architectural ensemble, which included numerous churches, bell towers, and caves, created an impression of grandeur and spiritual elevation. But visiting the Kyiv-

¹ *Robert Lyell* (1790 – 1831) was a Scottish surgeon, MD, naturalist, botanist, and traveler. He was a candid and insightful observer, a Russian-speaking British physician who commented on diverse aspects of the societies and territories he visited.

Pechersk Lavra left compatriots with different impressions, often ambiguous and contradictory. Their attitude to the shrine largely depended on their religious views. Some guests, admiring the architectural grandeur, at the same time criticized church traditions and organization. Some contemporaries had an ambiguous perception of visiting the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, and their attitude to the shrine often depended on religious affiliation. In such cases, admiration for architecture was frequently replaced by criticism of church traditions and organization.

Englishwoman *Mary Holderness*² wrote that generous donations supported the monastery and that its church was striking in its richness of decoration. She described walls covered with paintings and gold ornaments, massive silver candlesticks and candelabras, and the priests' luxurious vestments and mitres. Her impression was ambiguous: on the one hand, she highly appreciated the artistic skill of the icon painters, but on the other hand, she perceived the Orthodox cult as too pompous and focused on external effects (Holderness, 1823: 62).

After visiting the famous caves of the Holy Dormition of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, Mary Holderness concluded that religious feelings compel thousands of believers to come to the monastery every year. As a Protestant, she perceived Orthodox rituals as too pompous and believed that the church used them to influence people. In her opinion, the splendor of the services mainly attracts those who are poorly informed and easily succumb to the clergy's authority. In her opinion, this is a disturbing consequence of religious influence (Holderness, 1823: 67).

English travelers were most impressed by the caves of the Holy Dormition of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. One of the detailed descriptions was left by *John Thomas James*³, who was struck by the very manner of burial, and the fact that the relics of the saints were exhibited for general inspection and worship of pilgrims. This was the reason for his detailed description of what he saw (John Thomas James, 1817).

Another Englishman, *Edward Morton*, echoed the views of his compatriots who suggested that the relics might be forgeries. They believed the bodies were made of special materials so the church could influence the gullible faithful who visited the Holy Dormition of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra yearly (Morton, 1830).

*Robert Pinkerton*⁴ proposed a scientific version of this phenomenon. He believed that the key factor in preserving bodies is dry air, similar to cases he had already encountered in the cathedrals of Bordeaux and Bremen. Therefore, in his opinion, there was no reason to discuss the hoax (Pinkerton, 1833).

Robert Pinkerton shared information about the origin of the caves. He attributed their creation to the 11th century, particularly to the reign of Yaroslav the Wise. According to him, the presbyter Hilarion dug the first cave or cell. Later, in 1017, Saint Anthony settled there after returning from Mount Athos (Pinkerton, 1833).

² *Mary Holderness* (1782 – 1866) spent with her husband and six children the years 1816 – 1820 in the settlement of Karagoz in the Crimean Peninsula, farming the estate of an agronomist Arthur Young. On return to England in 1820, she published her Notes relating to the Crimean Tartars in 1821. This was reprinted with her fuller account in “New Russia: Journey From Riga to the Crimea, by way of Kiev, with some account of the colonization and the manners and customs of the colonists of New Russia” in 1823.

³ *John Thomas James* (1786 – 1828) was a Church of England bishop. He published in 1817 a Journal of a Tour in Germany, Sweden, Russia, and Poland, during 1813 and 1814.

⁴ *Doctor of Divinity Robert Pinkerton* (1780 – 1859) was a Principal Agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), a respected missionary, linguist, translator, and author of several books, including “Russia or miscellaneous observations on the past and present state of that country and its inhabitants,” published in 1833. Dr. Pinkerton traveled widely, encouraging the setting up of Bible societies, writing copiously about his travels.

An analysis of travel notes of English travelers of the first half of the 19th century attests to the key role of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra in shaping the image of Kyiv as the spiritual capital of Orthodoxy. Attention to the architectural grandeur, religious symbolism, and historical significance of the Holy Dormition of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra allowed travelers to see a center of monastic life and a unique cultural phenomenon. Travelers' reviews, including their emotional assessments, critical remarks, and impressions of the shrines, formed a multidimensional image of Kyiv as a city in which the sacred and historical were combined with a deep spiritual content.

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