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Representations of Urban Sociability in Odesa in Early 19th-Century British Travel Accounts

This paper explores the travel accounts penned by the British travellers who resided in Odesa in the 1820s. It analyses their representations of the city as a “civilized” metropolis on the edge of both the Russian empire and Europe which served as a meeting place of the Western and Eastern worlds. By presenting Odesa as a place of commerce, cultural and linguistic diversity, these travel narratives contributed to forming a distinct image of the multicultural and multilingual city on the mental maps of the British reading public. For travellers, socializing in a foreign environment served as an instrument of better understanding their own identity and as a means of assessing the degree of “civility” of society in which they moved. An analysis of these travel narratives adds to our knowledge of urban sociability in Odesa in the period and, in a broader sense, it contributes to our understanding of contemporary perceptions of the European frontiers.