

Poštovani gospodine rektore,

Poštovane dame i gospodo,

On behalf of the Austrian embassy and the Austrian Cultural Forum it is my great pleasure and an honor to speak to you on the occasion of the opening of this exhibition on Felix Philipp Kanitz.

Felix Kanitz was the first Austrian who introduced Serbia and its people to a wider German speaking public. There may have been other travel writers and scholars who have visited Serbia before, but Kanitz was the first one who truly engaged with the country and its people and thus gave an authentic insight of Serbia, its landscape and people.

After studying art, history and ethnology in Vienna and Munich, Kanitz started travelling extensively around Europe. But he is best known for his work on the Balkans, a fact that ultimately led him to become known as the ethnographer of the Southern Slavs.

His first travels to Serbia in 1859 were sponsored by the Serbian government and Serbian intellectuals and for the first time introduced Kanitz to the country. Through the connections of his Serbian friends, Kanitz was able to visit parts of Serbia that no other foreign travel writer has visited before, thus introducing large parts of the country to a German-speaking readership for the first time.

His frequent travels to Serbia culminated in what is often regarded as his masterpiece, the book "Serbia — Ethnographic and Historical Travel Studies ". Published in 1868, on over 700 pages, Serbia and its people are presented. It is the pinnacle of the decade long occupation of Kanitz with Serbia and describes the rich cultural heritage of the country. The book can also be seen as one of the first "real" travel reports, as unlike travelers from abroad who visited Serbia before him, Kanitz took his time to talk with people and so depictions of everyday life are featured in the book, which makes it a lively and authentic account of the country.

His - for that time - innovative interdisciplinary approach that encompassed the fields of archeology, history, botany and geography, makes his works an invaluable source for scholars from different fields. A true friend of Serbia and its people, Kanitz contributed to bringing Serbians and Austrians together and presenting the beautiful country Serbia and its people to them.

It is therefore a great honor to open this exhibition and I would like to thank the University of Novi Sad and the organizers for showing this wonderful exhibition.

Hvala vam!

Johanes Iršik, direktor Austrijskog Kulturnog Foruma u Beogradu