

## VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE WESTERN BALKANS ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE DRAWINGS OF OLGA BENSON

*This article was inspired by the desire to familiarize the Russian scientific community with the works of the artist and ethnographer Olga Benson, who was born in the Russian Empire, but later lived and worked in Yugoslavia for more than 30 years. Although her drawings illustrate the section devoted to the culture of the Balkans in the volume “Peoples of Foreign Europe” of the series “Peoples of the World”, published in USSR in the 1960s, this name is virtually unknown in Russia (Peoples of Foreign Europe 1964). On the opposite, in her second homeland Olga Benson’s activity is highly appreciated. An exhibition of Olga Benson’s drawings was organized at the Belgrade Science and Technology Gallery on the 130th anniversary of her birth. The Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts Ethnographic Institute has digitized and uploaded an archive of her drawings to its website and published a monograph dedicated to the artist (Gavrilović, Milenković-Vuković 2019). Olga Benson’s drawings and watercolors are an invaluable ethnographic source, which gives notion of everyday life of the Balkan Peninsula’s population in the first half of the XX century. At the same time, the author of this article did not limit herself to writing a mere biographical sketch of a personality. Driven to generalizations and, using Olga Benson’s work as an example, the author sought to actualize the importance of theoretical understanding of drawing as an ethnographic method in general. She was prompted to do so by the fact that ethnographic drawing, the oldest method of visual documentation, had lost its position to photography and filming and had fallen out of the scientific arsenal of the modern anthropologist. At the same time, visual fixation, including drawing, is always performed within the framework of theoretical and methodological approaches of its time. In this respect, Olga Benson’s creative legacy contributes to the history of ethnology and anthropology as a scientific discipline.*

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