

FROM MEMORY TO LANDSCAPE AND ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY – THE VILLAGE OF BEŽANIJA AND MY SOCIALISTIC CHILDHOOD¹

OD USPOMENA DO KRAJOLIKA I EKOLOŠKE ISTORIJE – SELO BEŽANIJA I MOJE DETINJSTVO U SOCIJALIZMU

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Summary

*Historians are raconteurs trained in telling stories and weaving them upon reliable sources. This text is written in a hybrid, polyphonic form, using personal recollections, childhood memories interlaced with visual testimonies – maps, photographs, city plans, and Ottoman and Habsburg documentary sources. It reconstructs a geographical part of the New Belgrade area. The area is situated in the former district of the village of Bežanija, tracking its environmental and landscape history. The great trailblazer in this sort of narrative is Simon Schama. His magnum opus *Landscape and Memory*, transgressing the disciplinary boundaries as a work of highest literary value, should have a more substantial impact on the ways we choose to tell the stories. The threads of the narrative presented here spin to the modern-day citizens' struggle to preserve the historical heritage site of the original village and, in another sense, to stop the illegal constructions of private houses on the river flood difference infrastructure – the River Sava embankment. The interplay of the river, its floodplains and people needs to be further pursued with the collaboration of hydrogeologists, urban and environmental historians.*

Keywords: New Belgrade, the village of Bežanija, River Sava, memory, environmental and landscape history

Ključne riječi: Novi Beograd, selo Bežanija, Rijeka Sava, sjećanje, povijest okoliša, povijest krajolika

“... I no longer want to be anything except what who I am.

Who what am I? I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I'm gone which would not have happened if I had not come.”

– Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1991)

“A place (like a person) needs to be recognized in terms not only of individuality but also of contextuality, as a product both of nature and of nurture. A landscape is a social construction, both intentionally and unintentionally.” – Alan R. H. Baker, Introduction, in: *Ideology and landscape in historical perspective* (1992)

¹ This text has germinated from the presentation I made for ESEH Conference held in Zagreb, 26-30th June 2017, under the title: “River's Playground – The village of Refugees (Bežanija) in the Floodplains of Sava River”, which I could not have presented had it not been the kindest help of my fellow colleague, Prof. dr Žiga Zwitter, and my gratitude extends to Prof. dr Hrvoje Petrić, who insisted that I should write a paper with this subject.

“A landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings.”– Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove, *Introduction: Iconography and landscape* (1988, 20079)

INTRODUCTION – PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE

Long overdue, I faced the question of hesitating to write this article, and now I know the reason – it turned out to be an emotional journey into my childhood, a kind of “rabbit hole”. The reflexive method and autoethnographic approach I try to pursue here are well-recognized and applied in cultural anthropology for past decades (Ellis et al., 2011). Perhaps this winter of the third pandemic year serves the purpose better than the situation four years ago (B.C. – ‘Before Corona’) when this was just an outline for the ESEH conference presentation. While avoiding this task, several other essays and papers poured from my pen and computer, but they had no direct emotional connection: production and culture of alcoholic drinks; Count L. F. Marsigli and the Danube navigation; landscape and settlement pattern in medieval Serbia and Bosnia; environmental history in Serbia (2017); climate change and ‘climate of violence’ in the 17th/18th century Balkans (2018); sensing and describing the weather patterns (2018, 2020); geography of “my Brazil” through movies and literature (2019); rice cultivation, and allegoric cartography (2020 – see further: J. Mrgić – Google Scholar, Researchgate). This glaring evidence from ‘ex silentio’ analysis of my writings occurred as I was preparing a chapter for a volume dedicated to disasters and epidemics in the “long Middle Ages” in Serbia and Bosnia, commissioned by my Faculty of Philosophy, commemorating the Covid-19 world crisis. It helped me address the well-known and extremely scarce evidence from a fresh point of view – history of emotions and different “emotional regimes” in history. In our current regime of ‘emocracy’ (Ferguson 2019), with the overflow of words and emoticons in the mass media and social networks, researchers in humanities must be more careful not to attribute modern terms and definitions of emotions to the historical sources from the past societies. And vice versa: the lack of written or painted historical sources does not mean that the people were not aware or lacked emotions (Mrgić 2021).

Furthermore, this period of pausing and the lock-down silence in my urban environment made me finally realize that historians pursuing professional objectivity in their research today cannot escape the fundamental human traits that make them biased, consciously or not. As Haraway rejected the false dichotomy of objectivity and biases, everyone must question, address, and notice their own social and cultural contexts of life, education, and work, admitting that every knowledge they produce is situated. That extends to historical geography as my primary training dictum: it is spatially, temporally, and ideologically framed, and every knowledge I acquire and produce is contextual in a man-dominated society and academia (Haraway 1988).

TWO RIVERSCAPES AND A GIRL

As I peel away the layers of memories, there has always been a river in my life, though not the River Thames from Schama’s childhood. I was born in the city of Niš, situated on the banks of the river Nišava, in 1972. The ten-story building with red bricks at the Boulevard of Lenin No. 9 (now Nemanjić Blvd.) still exists, some hundred meters from the left bank, along with a patch of the public green area where I used to play as a kid. Other memories dealing with this river are my father babysitting and taking me on a fishing excursion with him. He made a swing on a tree to keep me safe and ‘busy’ while trying to get some fun of his own. I do not recollect him catching anything that day, but he had his ‘gang’ of recreational fishers (anglers), and they were trotting along the richer waters of the South Morava. They made a trophy catch there – a huge catfish, weighing ca. 90 kilograms, which they placed atop of Fiat 500, from its front to the back bumper, and it was photographed and published in the local newspapers, so it was not a fisherman’s tale. The other impressive memory is of the Bucharest earthquake (March 4, 1977), whose effect was felt all the way to Niš, and the shaking made us flee the apartment, as all our



Picture 1 – Construction site of the first Bežanija Block 61, two years before my family moved into the next block in line, the Block 62 South (“Stare slike Novog Beograda” – Old photos of New Belgrade F.B. page). This photo is used on several social media platforms yet unattributed. Based on the level of skill, composition and technology, my learned guess would be to ascribe it to one of the most famous Yugoslav photographers, Ivo Eterović (1935–2011), Tito’s personal photographer and the author of high-quality photo monographs of Belgrade (1977, 1989), New Belgrade (1995), Split, Brač, Zagreb, Dalmatia (Eterović).

neighbors did. We got into the car and drove to the Nišava barrier, out of the danger of collapsing buildings, and there we spent the night.

Soon afterwards, my family moved to New Belgrade, on the left bank of the River Sava, to a newly built Apartement Block 62, one late day in August 1978, and I lived there until autumn 1998. I recently came across this photo that perfectly captured the new neighbourhood’s first sight, and, more disturbingly, it evoked feelings long forgotten and suppressed (**Picture 1**). I remember the day was hot and sunny, but with strong gusts of *košava*, the south-eastern wind, which blew dust and sand. From our car windows, we saw tall reed and sunburnt grass sway fiercely, both on the left and the right side of the road. The road kept going to the end of the row of tall skyscrapers till the end of the flat horizon, while my father turned the car right into our parking lot. I was not unfamiliar with tall buildings, but the ones I saw were double in height and much uglier because they were so plainly grey, made from prefabricated concrete slabs. Trying to avoid the intellectual contamination of a child’s memories, the complete lack of green areas and trees, playgrounds, the overall lack of any colour other than grey and beige made me feel disoriented and uprooted, quite anxious, and worried. I left all my friends and familiar playgrounds, and I found myself in this ‘wasteland’, a real ‘desert’, with piles of sand everywhere, where I did not know anybody, and I had not seen a single child nor a playground. That was the first ‘landscape’ that I remember, and this mental image I constructed persisted all these decades, representing a completely depersonalized space that I have not turned into a ‘place’. The proper landscaping was performed by architects in due course of time, with the progress of finishing one block after another. Still, it was meagre, minimal, and again unimaginative – with just a few trees, a pair of swings, climbing rods, artificial lawn mounds, which were the cover of atomic shelters for each building. These were used later on, during the NATO bombing between March and June 1999; in my childhood, only the slopes of the shelter served for our winter sledging.

This photo’s socio-economic and ideological background is socialism, ‘self-government’. Today, it is fashionable to admire this kind of modern architecture, also called “brutalism”, which is eye-catching in its dystopian aesthetics (Kulić 2012; ib. 2014; Stierli – Kulić 2018). From the point of view of a former inhabitant and a historical geographer dealing with socially and culturally shaped spaces and environments, I, however, express a different perspective. The feeling of ‘alienation’ and oppressive uniformity, absence of distinguished landmarks in the monotonous rows of nearly identical blocks induced disori-

Picture 2 – Photo of the Lole Ribara/Nehruova Street with houses leading to my elementary school, at the top left corner and the crossroad with Vojvodjanska Street (ca. 1963-64). Their demolition began at the end of the 1970s. The remnants were buried under sand and the North row of new blocks (F.B. page Stara Bežanija).



entation for my guests and me, needing detailed navigation instructions; added to that was the feeling of not being safe coming in the night and early morning hours from the parties and clubs in my high-school days, due to the lack of visibility control of the building entrances. I emotionally experienced my neighbourhood – the block district, which was the western periphery of Belgrade – as a ‘temporary habitat’. Everything I loved and needed was in the city centre: high school and later faculty, bookstores, museums, shops, clubs etc. Unfortunately, city planners and political authorities did not take the opportunity to materialize the blocks in the concept of a ‘garden city’, as Lewis Mumford advocated (Mumford 1961), and labelled it as ‘utopian’ for New Belgrade (Blagojević 2007; Gašić 2011). Even the main avenue – Jurija Gagarina Street, equipped with streetcars in 1984 (with a P.R. slogan “With streetcars into the 21st century”) – has never been envisaged as a tree-lined boulevard. However, there is still enough space, and it could be a walkable and cyclable district. Those few kilometres leading to intersections with other public traffic lines were left barren. During the arduous times of civil wars and hyperinflation, 1992–1995, the inhabitants, me included, had to trudge across dull and empty plots of land, with piles of rubbles and shrubs.

After a preparatory year in the kindergarten in the opposite Block 45 (built in 1974), I went to the elementary school located in Bežanija village. Hence the personal connection and interest in researching the history of landscape and environment, which changed dramatically during and after my stay. The school “Jovan Sterija Popović” still exists, but the village street with rows of houses along which we walked (**Picture 2**) was swiftly demolished. I vividly remember that we trudged over their ruins, debris, and mud until all of it ended under three-four meters of sand, concrete, asphalt, and a new row of apartment blocks. These ‘pictures’ now make me uneasy, remembering the inside of someone’s homes, parts of walls with painted patterns, personal items scattered and discarded. The village topography was quite an easy one – one could see the church with a bell tower on the main Vojvodjanska street, leading to Vinogradska Street and the village of Surčin to the west. The new airport built there was the place of my father’s new job and the reason for our resettlement. Behind the schoolyard and the church, a hill slope named Bežanijska Kosa rose. This hill is a part of the loess plateau, stretching from the town of Zemun in the east, connected by an old road named “Tošin Bunar” (i.e., Toša’s water-well). The person behind the name seems to be Toša Apostolović (1745–1810), a wealthy cattle merchant who built a tavern and the water-well and who, as the story goes, came from Ottoman Serbia. The place around his



Picture 3 – Green areas along the River Sava quay were carefully planned and nurtured for public use since the late 1970s (source: *Fortyfivers*)

household and the tavern on the western outskirts of Zemun attracted other people to build their houses with gardens and vineyards on the slopes of Bežanijska Kosa. The *Zollhaus* (*trošarina*, customs house) was nearby, so his tavern was a 'pit stop' for travellers and merchants going to the market in Zemun. It existed until 1948 when the students' dormitory complex Studentski Grad was built in that location. The water-well was buried, but the name of the street was preserved and used for the stretch leading west to Bežanija (Nikolić - Redonjić 2012; Nikolić 2014).

Nowadays, the remnants of the village of Bežanija are extremely downsized. Both Tošin Bunar and Vojvodjanska Street were subdued to modernization, during which the whole southern part was demolished to make way for a four-lane road and new apartment buildings. That is why the old inhabitants have united in the citizens association "Stara Bežanija" (Old Bežanija) to preserve at least a couple hundred meters of the old street and houses. Facebook page Stara Bežanija, as well as the pages "Old photos of New Belgrade" and "Black and white Belgrade", collect plenty of photographs with family stories, bursting with nostalgia. I am grateful for the efforts of administrators and contributors to keep the memory and preserve the local history. Another ethnological material is collected into two local monographs, dealing with the vanishing of the people and material heritage (Jovanović 2012; Matijašević 2013).

To the south of the village and my block is Block 45, and, over the double barrier, is the River Sava. It was a long though pleasant stroll to and along the quay in those early days, with just a couple of restaurants and a peer for boat transfer to Ada Ciganlija. This river island is also quite old in its origin, drawn on the printed maps and engravings of Belgrade and its surroundings since the late 17th century (*Zigeuner Insel*). But before turning to historical images, I will continue my walk down memory lane. The riverscape was tranquil, secured with a concrete barrier on the first level with concrete benches. The second is a few meters above. The third and highest is the massive earth dam with an asphalt road planned only for pedestrians, roller-skaters, and cyclists (**Picture 3**). Record high water levels of both the Danube and Sava Rivers were in March 1981, the latter reaching the foot of the highest defense barrier, so the army and civil service members were in a state of vigilance, as I remember my father talking about it.

However, during the last three decades and especially during the last one, many illegal houses and restaurants occupied the first level of flood defense system; the mature trees in the floodplain were cut, creating the massive potential for flood disaster. That was the main reason for the inhabitants of the Blocks to gather in the citizens association and grass-root movement "Savski Nasip" (Sava River Embankment), leading the campaign against this hovering threat. Their representative participated in

two public debates on ecological and environmental issues, which I chaired at my faculty in March and November 2019. The photos they presented are hard evidence of the level of destruction and should serve as a warning to Belgrade city authorities regarding the flood alert and defense system. Still, so far, city's and political authorities has done nothing to stop it and mitigate the danger before it happens (**Picture 4**).

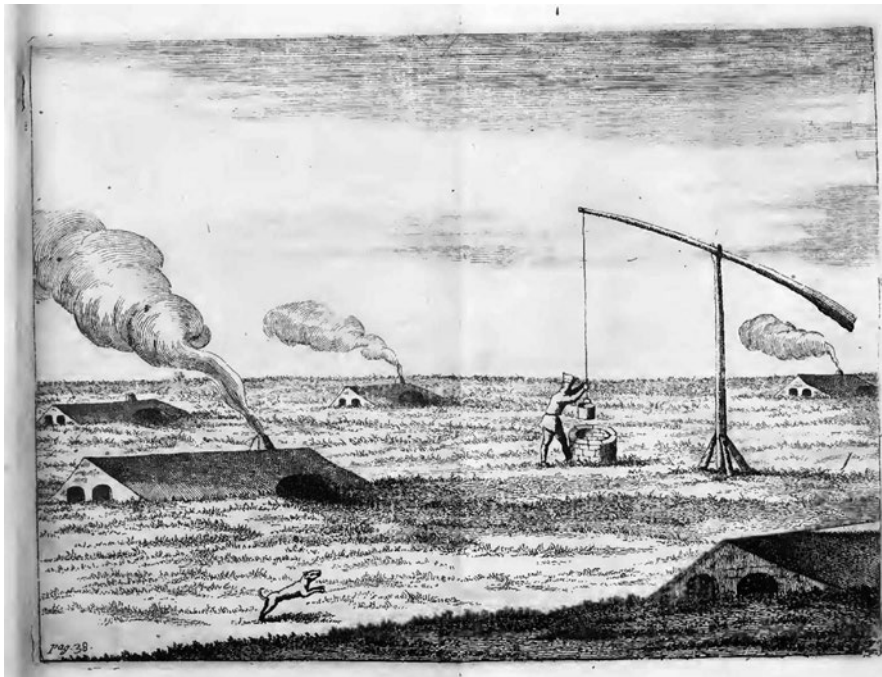
This stretch of the River Sava along the New Belgrade blocks is three kilometers long. The land beside the next eight kilometers of the upstream part of the river was left for flood defense, thus purposefully unurbanized, as a potential buffer and overflow area with only agricultural land. However, it has since been vandalized with illegal constructions. The latest hydrological and ecological analysis of the River Sava basin, as a part of the wider Danube River basin, stresses the necessity to re-evaluate different aspects of this main Danube tributary regarding the potential flood risks and includes the recommendation to rehabilitate several former retention areas, floodplains, alluvial forests, marshes, and natural reserves, such as Spačva – Bosut forests (Glatz-Jorde et al. 2021), Obedska bara and Kupinovo nature parks and reserves (Milačić et al. 2015; Schwarz 2016). The scientists are considering a different approach to river systems, which seems to me as something that Simon Schama termed 'self-regulated arterial flow, akin to the bloodstream of men' (Schama 1995). From the point of view of environmental history, the case of the Bežanija village could be an example of how different societies, cultures, and economic systems perceived this area, how people managed the floodplain, shaped the riverscape and which resources have been valued.



Picture 4 – drone photo of the illegal construction buildings in the flood defense area of the River Sava Embankment, provided by the organization "Savski Nasip" (April 7, 2021 - F.B. and internet page).

THE VILLAGE OF BEŽANIJA IN WRITTEN AND VISUAL SOURCES

Though the name of this settlement almost too obviously points to 'refugees' (Serb-/Cro. *bežati* – to flee, to run away, to take refuge), it turned out that the settlement was much older than its first record under this name. In the voluminous Csánki's register of settlements in the Hungarian Kingdom from the Hunyadi era, there is a reference to a village in Sirmium comitatus (Szerém vármegye) from 1072 – *Bozias*. It was the place where the Cuman army, in the service of the Hungarian king, crossed the River Sava and attacked Belgrade, also known as *Campus Wuzias*, and in 1320 as *Magyarbuzyas*, *Kyusbuzyas*, *Toth Buzyas*. This village (Hungarian and Slavic) should be, as Csánki wrote, somewhere in the vicinity of Zemun (Taurunum, *Zimony*), where "Bezania" was located. The village and its adjacent field (*campus*) were placed between two Roman strategic points – Zemun on the River Danube and Singidunum (*Alba Graeca*, Belgrade, Nándorfehérvár) at the River Sava confluence. Zemun was the easternmost town and



Picture 5 – Houses in the country called Schremnia (Srem) and a water-well (Tur. djeram) – Edward Brown (1673) wanted to show his erudition to readers, so he made an exclamation of being an eyewitness to the Troglodytes, cave-dwellers. They were, in his words, mentioned in Herodotus's and Strabo's oeuvre. Other travellers in the same area also testify to this building practice, stressing the depopulation of Srem county and the inhabitants' poverty (Jačov 1990).

marketplace, essential for overland and river transport of goods, people, and armies, with commercial privileges from the Hungarian kings (Csánki 1890). The name in its German transcription – *Semlin* – indicates better its linguistic origin as a citadel fortified by earthen (adv. *zemljan*) ditches and walls, whose remains are meagerly preserved (Detelić 2007; *Leksikon* 2010; Dabižić 2014; ed. 2015).

One picture of half-buried houses (*zemunica* type of houses) in the Sirmium area was printed in the travel book of MD Edward Brown from 1673 (**Picture 5**). Still, in the marshland where Bežanija was situated, one cannot safely presume the existence of this type of household before Habsburg land and spatial reforms during the 18th century, which included the construction of causeways and drainage of the floodplain, nor before putting the periodical flooding under control. Therefore, I would suggest another type of house, relying upon the existing practice of building *lagumica* (Tur. *lagum*) – a tunnel house dug in the loess hill (Nikolić 1956), which would better serve the purpose of sheltering from the weather and the army troops.

The influence area of the town of Zemun, its zone of attraction and position within the settlement network viewed from the aspect of von Thünen's model of spatial pattern analysis (von Thünen 1826, 1990 – 5th edition; Koder 2006; Mrgić 2012) included the whole lower Sirmium county, south and southeast from Mt Fruška Gora (*Alma Mons*), and east of the old capital of the county – St Demetrius, Száva-szentdemeter, Sremska Mitrovica on the River Sava. The ancient Roman road coming from the Adriatic port of *Salona* (Split), traversing the silver-rich Central Bosnia and *Domavia-Argentaria* (medieval and modern Srebrenica near the River Drina), made its landing there. Yet, Mitrovica also served as a Roman fleet harbor, descending from *Siscia* (Sisak) (Bojanovski 1974; Mirković 2017). In the organic process of medieval urbanization, Bežanija village was probably acting as a sort of *Vorstadt*, a peri-urban settlement of Zemun, only some five kilometres to the north-east, representing a day-return connection. This development ultimately ended after the Second World War with the new layout for socialistic New Belgrade. Pal Engel presented the urbanization of the medieval Srem within the medieval Hungarian Kingdom, distinguishing Petrovaradin and Sremska Mitrovica as the wealthiest commercial spots, probably due to exports of the famous wine. However, the proximity of Belgrade, the capital of Serbian Despotate (1403–1427) with various urban privileges, was not found significant (Engel 2001; cf. Kalić-Mijušković 1967). Despot Stefan Lazarević (1402–1427) and his successor Djuradj Vuković (Branković) (1427–1456) had been granted the rule over Zemun and Kupinovo, along with other vast domains in the

central part of the Hungarian Kingdom, during the time of King Sigismund (1387–1437) and his descendants. These areas were the destination for the Serb migrations to the north, fleeing from the Ottoman armies advancing from the south and south-east (Ćirković 2004; Bubalo et al. 2010). Therefore, regarding the “refugees” in the popular etymology of the village of Bežanija, the whole medieval and early modern borderland region was in a constant fluctuation of people, being the valuable pray of the war parties. Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490) left a written testimonial on how his state was deprived of 200,000 people during the first three years of his reign, so he strived to mitigate the situation with the same tactic. In the campaigns of 1480 and 1481, the Hungarian and Serbian joint troupes deported some 110,000 people from Serbia (the area between Smederevo and Kruševac). They resettled them to the Banat of Temesvar and Maros county. The fall of the Serbian capital city of Smederevo in 1459 was followed by the Ottoman conquest of Belgrade in 1521, and the deported citizens took the name as far as Constantinople – the Belgrade Forest (*Belgrad ormanı*) (Popović 1950; Ćirković 2004).

The earliest Ottoman written record of Bežanija under this name is in the census defter of Zemun *nahiye* from 1546. The village consisted of 40 *hanes* (households); among taxpayers were five men with surname ‘Vlah’, two priests – Jovan and Petar, and two widows. According to the tithe list, the villagers grew wheat (800 *akçes*), barley, rye, millet, and oats, though the hay tax (320) was higher than the millet tax, which points to extensive use of meadows in the wetland areas which the Sava River periodically flooded. Cattle, pigs, and beehives were also taxed, but the *bac-i bazaar* (market dues) at the place across the Belgrade *şehir* was very high – 600 *akçes*. In comparison, the neighbouring village of Surčin had only 25 *hanes*, five widows, two priests and a *knez* (count). The amount of tithes ascribed and the structure of agricultural production, especially the vineyards, point to earlier foundation time. In the next census, from 1566/67, the village of Bežanija showed progress – 52 *hanes*, two widows, three priests, and again there were more than the village of Surčin (34 *hanes*, a *knez*). More significantly, Bežanija was taxed with wine tithe – *uŝr ŝire*, in the amount of 265 pintes (per 10 *akçes*), that was twice the amount as the Christian *varoŝ* of Zemun, consisting of 73 *hanes*, taxed with 127,5 pintes. Further, tax on wine barrels (*resm-i fuçi*) was accounted for Bežanija in the amount of 125 *akçes*. This census defter provides more details into agricultural structure of the village, which produced not only grains (wheat, barley, rye, oats, and millet), fruits (namely apples and melons – *bostan*), vegetables (cabbage, turnip, beans, and onion), linen and hemp, but also very significant amount of small cattle, estimated according to the tithe of 1.300 *akçes*. That probably refers to sheep and goats, while the pigs were taxed separately, along with *resm-i Boyik* (Christmas tax). For the first time, the village was taxed for fishing in the nearby “lake” – one of the ponds inundated regularly by the River Sava (Šabanović 1964).

The practice of viticulture indicated stability and even progress of this village’s economic and demographic prosperity since this was a highly specialized activity (Mrgić 2011). It survived at the slopes above the houses of Bežanija and on the loess plateau of Bežanijska Kosa until more recent urbanization (Jovanović 2012; Matijašević 2013), testified in the name of the street – Vinogradska – ‘the street of the vinyards’. As Bruce McGowan showed, *sancak* of Srem was a frontier area until the capture of Buda in 1541 and Temesvár in 1552, with a light tax system until the end of the sixteenth century experiencing the ebbs and flows in population dynamics. The tithe on wine in the amount of 265 pintes in 1570 in the village of Bežanija was twice the amount that the Christian *varoŝ* in Zemun had to pay. Regarding the size of the area under viticulture, some rough estimations would be that 265 pintes, each of 8 *okka*, and the total of 2120 *okka* = 2719 litres, a tenth of the overall amount of wine. So if the production were of the lowest value, 25 hl/ha, the minimum size of vineyards would be 11 ha. If it were of the medium value, 35 hl/ha, the vineyards would spread across 7,8 ha. According to the parameters accepted for the village communities, Bežanija remained a medium-sized settlement with 40 and 52 *hanes* in the defters, growing to even 60 houses at the beginning of the 18th century, and never described as completely abandoned (McGowan 1983; Jačov 1990; Amedoski 2005; Krstić 2007; Dabić 2011).

In ecclesiastical history, the church in Bežanija village was not listed in the defters mentioned above, from 1546 and 1566/67. However, the presence of the first two and then three priests, and the tax on the church land in the later census, indicates that there was a local church. Furthermore, the later written



Picture 6 – Prospect der Belagerung Belgrad von der K. K. Armée unter Comte Feldmarschall Loudon im September 1789 bis zur Ubergab der Vestung den 8 October – publisher: Johann Thomas Edler von Trattner (Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 85720, CC0).

evidence and the remains of the old graveyard testify to the foundation of the Church of St George near the present building: the oldest one was built before 1733, constructed with unbaked bricks (*čerpič* < Tur. *kerpiç*), and by the end of the 18th century, its roof was covered with shingles. The existing church in the main street of Vojvodjanska was rebuilt in 1827 and has been enlisted in the register of cultural monuments by the Cultural Heritage Preservation Institute of Belgrade (Šabanović 1964; Amedoski 2005; Đokić – Dumić; Zavod za zaštitu spomenika grada Beograda).

Secondly, the Ottoman evidence presented in these early 16th-century defters clearly indicates the importance of *skela* – crossing the River Sava by boats and floats from the field of Bežanija to the City of Belgrade. *Skela* served not only for military purposes, which probably existed before the earliest Hungarian evidence in 1072, and would continue until the Second World War, but also as a commercial connection and exchange of people and goods. The sancak of Srem had to prepare grains and sheep for the Ottoman expeditions during the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent (1520–1566), and the transit dues and international customs played a significant part in the revenues. The river traffic and commerce were voluminous, involving the Sava, Danube, Tisa and Drava. However, according to defters, the six docks and markets on the River Danube made less revenue than those on the River Sava, and those in Rača and Mitrovica were exceptionally high (McGowan 1983). The slowing of the River Sava flow before its confluence made it easier to cross. It facilitated the sediment deposit and the formation of the river islands – *adas* in the Danube and Sava.

Regarding cartographic presentations, Srem county was part of the presentation in the Hungarian-Habsburg borderland with the Ottoman empire, with the City of Belgrade as a major reference point at the confluence of the River Sava into the River Danube (in detail: Török 2007; Grčić – Grčić 2018). These features were carefully outlined on printed battle scenes of Belgrade on various occasions – 1688, 1717, and 1789, along the whole area of the mouth of River Sava, from its left bank and the Srem county.

Accurate maps were valuable weapons – containing visual information used for military preparations, strategies, and tactics. The War of the Holy League (1683–1699) marked the beginning of the mass production of broadsheets and maps for this latest “theatre of war” in the most famous European mapmaking companies in Venice, Vienna, Paris, Rome. They were tailored by the most skilful cartographers (Giacomo Cantelli, Vincenzo Coronelli, Nicolas Sanson, Nicolas de Fer), and several examples testify to the intricate topographical layout of the Belgrade area (Mrgić 2011 b; Abramović – Cicmil 2014; Grčić – Grčić 2019).

Two other mapmakers were present at the siege and capture of the Ottoman Belgrade. The engineer Joan Baptista Gump (1651–1728) made the first detailed urban plan of the captured Ottoman Belgrade, printed in Munich. Although the military convoys of the Habsburg armies descending to the left bank of the River Sava were presented larger than trees and a small group of hamlets, the planked road leading from the City of Zemun was nicely detailed, as well as the ravines at the slopes of the Bežanija’s loess plateau (Gump 1688; Veselinović 1974). The other mapmaker, the more famous one, was count Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli, and he was acting as a member of the military headquarters of Prince Eugene of Savoy. He made hand drawings, sketches in pen and watercolours, which means that those were confidential maps, and they are preserved in his collection at the University Library in Bologna. Furthermore, Marsigli was personally in charge of demarcation after the Karlowitz Peace Treaty, especially of the part of Srem designated to Prince Livio Oddesalchi. However, both Zemun and Bežanija were left on the Ottoman side of the borderline, so his attention in mapping Sirmium did not go in their direction (Kisari Balla 2004). Two successive Austro-Ottoman wars – 1714–1718, and 1736–1740, were fought for the dominion over the City of Belgrade, so the cityscape was again at the centre of the stage in the baroquely envisaged and printed war landscapes (Kurtaran 2018; Simić 2019).

For this research in the environmental history of the village of Bežanija, I would select a few visual presentations rich in content. The first *imago-text* – a map with textual explanations, paratext (Mrgić 2020), depicting Fieldmarshall Laudon siege of Belgrade in September 1789 – is oriented with south at the top. It is a landscape, a framed view from Zemun fortress on the hilltop, gazing to the south, with the central subject (the siege of the Ottoman Belgrade), the fortress, surrounding hills (*Berg Dedinac* – today Dedinje), and Mt Avala in the background (**Picture 6**). The remains of the four-towered medieval castle at *Gardoš* were represented here, lacking their covered turrets. The picture is also important for the presentation of built infrastructures and reshaped landscape near the Sava River confluence, namely the road built upon wooden planks and timber to safely cross the marshland in the area of the village of Bežanija. This technique was also applied from the Ottoman side in every advancement of the Ottoman army into the Hungarian Kingdom and described by travellers. In 1608, the pontoon bridge over the river course was estimated at 800 steps (ein Schritt = ca. 75 cm, hence the total of ca. 600 m; cf. nowadays Google Earth = 230 m). The solid construction, unmovable over the marshes, was estimated to be 4.000 steps (Schritte = 3.000 m; today, Google Earth gives a larger distance between the solid ground in Zemun and both riversides of Sava). Another bridge was supposedly constructed in 1662, with the dimensions of 36 pontoon boats, and the length of the oak bridge over the marshes was 3.380 steps (ca. 2.535 m), its width of 15 steps (11,25 m). The City of Belgrade was the center for making the pontoon boats (*köprü gemi*), placed and transported wherever the Ottoman army needed to cross the river course (Hrabak 1974; Zirojević 1976; ead. 1983).

This wooden road continued, as pictured here, with three pontoon bridges over the River Sava: first leading directly to the *Raitzenstadt*, the suburbs of the Belgrade fortress and its harbour, named after its Serb population. The other two pontoon bridges were built over the *Zigeuner Insel*, here presented as covered in woods. A blue line starting from the right edge of the picture, i.e. from the west, depicts a water flow, which could be identified in later maps as *Dunavac* (diminutive – “small Danube”), its overflow area, and retention. This water feature has been quite persistent and existed until the drainage works in 1938 (Gašić 2011). These significant and industrially driven achievements were continued after the incorporation of Zemun into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1918, and the City became a part of the Belgrade metropolitan area in 1934 (Antonić 2013; Macura-Vuksanović – Banković 2018).

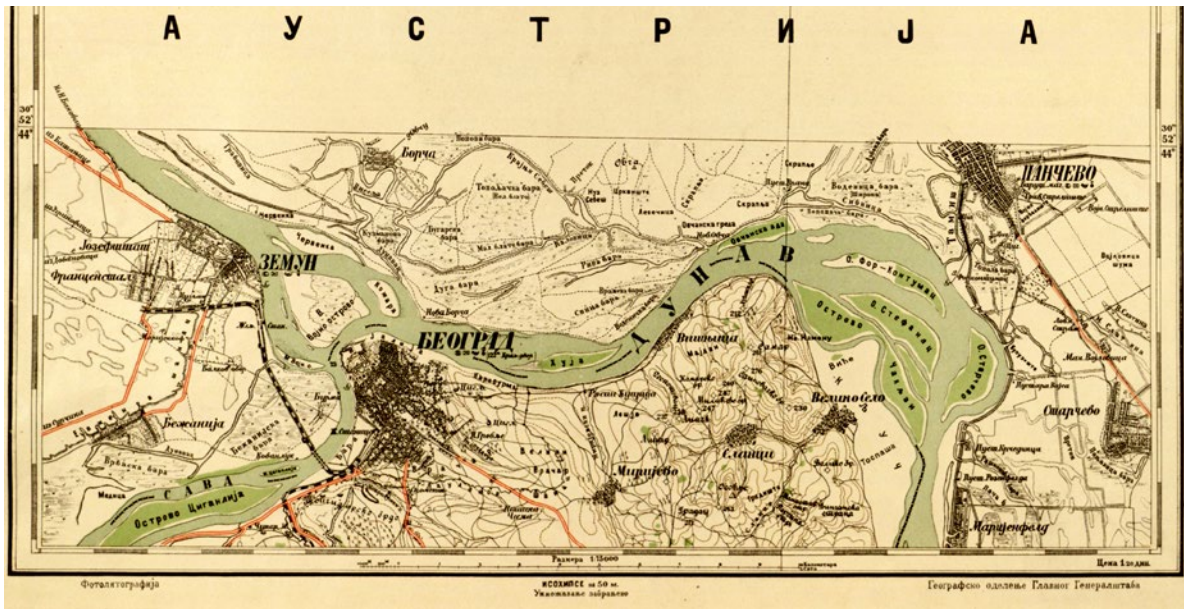


Picture 7 – Artaria et Co. Verlag, Plan von Belgrad, Semlin, und den umliegenden Gegenden, 1789 (Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 179053 CCO)

The second visual source (**Picture 7**) deals with the same historical event but with interesting information about the land cover and use in the village of Bežanija. The marshlands are clearly marked in a different pattern as *Morast*, overgrown with a reed (*Rohr*). However, this is the first evidence of *Damm und Weg* – an earthen dam with a causeway all along the River Sava and the left bank of the Danube River. Furthermore, clay digs (*Ziegel Gruben*) and furnaces (*Ziegel Offen*) are depicted, located near this embankment and nearer to the suburb of Zemun. Quite near the Sava bankline, scattered cottages of boatmen (*Hütten den Ueberfahrer*) were positioned, along with the symbols for trees and *tschardak* towers (*Wachthäuser*) demarcating the frontier since Marsigli's fieldwork in 1699–1700 (Kljajić 2002). The map legend in the right corner explains the main features in the built landscape, numbered from 1 to 14, distinguishing the seven gates leading to and from the Belgrade fortification, following the lined road communications.

The following example is the oldest military topographic map, made by the Serbian Army Headquarters in 1894 and most certainly assembled from previously published Habsburg maps and reconnaissance activities (**Picture 8**). The village of Bežanija was drawn with a layout of in-line houses along two streets, joining at a right angle – more prominent is Vojvodjanska Street, and the other one could be future Lole Ribara/Nehruova. The rivulet Dunavac was presented as though its source was at the foothill of the loess plateau in the village, and it bent towards the Danube River, having Vrbaska Bara (pond) on the west, and Bežanijska bara on its eastern side. Two names are placed on the bank of the Sava River– Kovanluk, which indicates a place with beehives, and further up north – Burma, also a Turkish term for a bend in the river flow. Besides the red lines of most essential roads, this map marked the railroad line leading from the City of Zemun, over the bridge, to Belgrade downtown railway station, built in 1884 and recently dismantled and abandoned to be repurposed into a museum.

Within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, further industrialization, detailed urbanistic regulations, and general plans continued to reshape the land cover and its use in Bežanija village. This terrain was already designated for “the New Belgrade”, following the urban sprawl of the metropolitan area of Belgrade (Blagojević 2007; Gašić 2011; Antonić 2013). On the “Dojno Polje” site, at the foothill of Bežanijska Kosa, the oldest airport building was constructed between 1929 and 1932, with four grass runways, the main terminal building, and six large concrete hangars. Those were designed and built upon



Picture 8 - Djeneralštabna karta Kraljevine Srbije – sekcija Beograd, D 1, 1894 and its part with the village of Bežanija (National Library of Serbia, Kp II 600)

the plans of the world-famous scientist – a proper polymath: mathematician, astronomer, climatologist, geophysicist, and engineer Milutin Milanković (1879–1958). Though heavily damaged during the Second World War, the airport was again in service until the new one was built on the terrain of the village of Surčin, on the western outskirts of the socialistic New Belgrade in 1962. Unfortunately, only one of the original Milanković's hangar is preserved and protected as a cultural heritage object (Gašić 2011; Hungar starog aerodroma – Zavod za zaštitu spomenika grada Beograda, with photos).

The interwar period brought the most dramatic reshaping of the grounds belonging to the village of Bežanija: the complete change of land cover and use and the new settlement layout plans. The stone-built embankments and drainage of some 60 hectares to the west of the old railway and the new bridge of King Aleksander (1934) went hand in hand with the 'original' New Belgrade. Some 160 land plots with houses and gardens were built before 1941, in the vicinity of the magnificent modernist architectural complex – Belgrade International Fairground, opened in 1937 (Gašić 2011; Antonić 2015; Gašić – Vuksanović-Macura 2019). Regrettably, with the start of the Second World War, the facilities were used as a concentration camp for Jews (*Judenlager Semlin*), and soon afterwards, for antifascists, communists, Serbs, and Roma people, with an estimated more than 40,000 victims until the end of the war. Later, the whole complex was neglected and left to dilapidation because of “too much history” and its disparate, contested views (Bajford 2011).

The socialistic New Belgrade has its birthday – April 11, 1948 – which marked the start of the enthusiastic programme of youth labor force building the future for the society of equality and brotherhood (Kulić 2012; ib. 2014). No matter how utopian it may seem now to many people, if it were not for idealistic plans, the whole human history would look much different. For me, socialism gave me the chance to acquire the best possible education without any student debt, so before ‘casting the stone’ on the old and young leftists, take a pause and reconsider.

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION – NARRATIVE THREADS

As Ingmar Bergman once said, “I use myself both as a wood and a chisel”, this text was an attempt to combine personal memories as a testimony to environmental changes of my childhood landscapes, with various historical sources collected over an extended period. I have ventured in this ‘curly’ and hybrid shape to offer some new ways of observing, researching, and writing. So, I agree with Prof. Marco

Armiero, the president of the ESEH, who encourages us to be brave about transgressing the disciplinary boundaries (Armiero et al. 2019). I read urbanistic and architectural studies and appreciate their passion and laudations about ‘socialistic modernism’. Nevertheless, I could not agree with their points made from their professional knowledge since I have to address my own emotional history/experience and the ‘emotional regime’ of the socialistic society in which I spent my childhood. Every ideology has its imprint in the ‘landscape’ – the theoretical ‘frame’ through which we interpret socio-economic and cultural relations, the critical concept of historical and human geography, as well as environmental history (Baker 1992; ibid. 2003; Daniels – Cosgrove 1988, 2007, 9th edition).

Regarding the predictions of the climate change outcomes but also of the anthropogenic impact in the Danube and Sava Rivers basins (Milačić – Ščančar – Paunović 2015), the future of the Belgrade metropolitan area looks grim, unless the grassroot citizen movements for ‘greening the city’ and turning it into an eco-friendlier place increase in strength dramatically and seize the political power in the forthcoming elections. Concerning urban environmental research, I can only appeal to future broader collaboration among the geo-sciences, urban historians, and the environmental humanities. The historical and visual sources should be further collected and thoroughly analyzed to reconstruct the ‘waltz’ between the settlements and their rivers, in the manner of Vienna and the Danube channels (Hohensinner et al. 2013; Vuksanović-Macura et al. 2018). Drifting apart from the micro-history of a destroyed village, as a socially situated and thus biased scientist, I can testify to post-socialistic and quasi-neoliberal capitalism, which continue to reshape this patch of New Belgrade. Furthermore, I would point to a significant theoretical approach, beneficial, in my opinion, for long-term studies of the Balkans. Namely, sociologist Manuela Boatcă applied a post-colonial concept of ‘creolization’ in the case of a Transylvanian village. Still, the real importance of her insights and observed entanglements is treating the spaces “at the crossroads of several imperial geographies”, shaping them as inter-imperial regions (Boatcă 2013; Boatcă – Parvulescu 2020). These and other novel perspectives should be considered seriously and be a starting point for reviewing our “common histories”, always multicultural, multilingual, and multiconfessional.

VISUAL SOURCES

Picture 1 – “Stare slike Novog Beograda” – Old photos of New Belgrade F.B. page – <https://m.facebook.com/stareslikeNBGD/photos/a.265403455942/317256020942/?type=3&source=54>

Picture 2 – “Stara Bežanija” – FB page - <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2795553594015868&set=g.10477334540>

Picture 3 – Fortyfivers Blog - <http://fortyfivers.blogspot.com/2014/08/savski-kej-80ih-godina.html>

Picture 4 – Savski nasip - <https://savskinasip.com/translations/story-about-insolent-people-and-powerless-system/1439/>

Picture 5 – Brown 1673 = https://archive.org/details/briefaccountofso00brow_0.

Picture 6 – Johann Thomas Edler von Trattner (publisher), „Prospect der Belagerung Belgrads von der K.K. Armée ...“, 1789, Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 85720, CC0 (<https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/en/object/154655/>)

Picture 7 – Artaria & Co. Verlag, „PLAN / von / BELGRAD / Semlin / und den umliegenden Gegenden.“, 1789, Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 179053, CC0 (<https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/en/object/396173/>)

Picture 8 – Djeneralštabna karta Kraljevine Srbije – sekcija Beograd, D 1, 1894 - National library of Serbia, https://digitalna.nb.rs/wb/NBS/Kartografska_gradja/Djeneralstabna_karta_Srbije/KR-II-2-D01#page/0/mode/lup

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SAŽETAK

Rad se uveliko razlikuje od prvobitno planiranog teksta, zamišljenog da sledi konferencijsku prezentaciju iz Zagreba, jula 2017. godine, i rezultat je višegodišnjeg promišljanja, ličnog i profesionalnog, iščitavanja stručne literature i lepe književnosti. Polazeći od profesionalnog usmerenja u istorijskoj geografiji i ekološkoj istoriji, otisnula sam se u refleksivniji narativ, pripovedajući o pejzažima svog detinjstva u novobeogradskom bloku, koji je nastao devastacijom srednjovekovnog sela Bežanije. Neki krajolici kojih se sećam su sačuvani u fotografijama profesionalaca i iz privatnih fondova stavnovnika sela dostupnih na društvenim mrežama, a pristupila sam i istorijskoj analizi njihovog formiranja na osnovu kartografske građe, čiji je samo mali deo ovde predstavljen. Sama povest Bežanije je detaljnije ocrtana na osnovu osmanskih popisa, a potom i savremene literature iz urbane istorije i istorije arhitekture koja tretira širenje Beograda na levu obalu Save. Na kraju, kao ekološki aktivista, nadam se da će autentične građanske inicijative za zeleniji i humaniji grad odneti prevagu nad sebičnim interesima investitora i međunarodnog kapitala koji, kako je još Mamford sažeo, počiva na pohlepi i nije zainteresovan za trajne vrednosti niti dobrobit šire zajednice.

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