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FORGOTTEN ARCHITECTURE OF THE BANAT'S VILLAGES

Abstract. Urban planning and village development in Banat are closely related to the geopolitical relationships between Austria, Hungary and Turkey. Persistent conflicts and Turkey's pretensions to possess the Banat have prompted Austria and Hungary to make strategic plans to preserve it. Among others, they proceeded to colonize the loyal population and established a military, defensive line: the Banat military frontier. An integral part of the plan was the strategic establishment of villages and reconstruction of existing ones. In addition to meeting the basic needs of life, regulations and plans called for residents to have access to education, religion, social and cultural life, etc. This article presents the results of the project: "Forgotten architecture of Banat streets".

Keywords. Banat military frontier, colonisation, village urbanisation, village architecture heritage

1. Introduction

The Banat is located south of the Pannonian plain, inside the natural borders of the Danube and the Carpathians. In this region, the Austrian, Hungarian and Turkish empires met in the 18th century. They all intended to possess the Banat territory. If Turkey conquers the Banat, the route to Buda and Vienna may be open to them. However, if Austria and Hungary cross the Danube, they can extend southward. These pretensions caused frequent wars in the Banat. In 1739 war ended and the Peace treaty of Belgrade was signed.



Figure 1. Luxury Vila Miss Helen in Opovo, built about 1935, November 2010

In addition to the uncertain treaty, Austria and Hungary have made plans to protect their borders from Turkey on a sustainable basis. They decided to organize an intense colonization of the Banat with a faithful population and to form a defensive military line. (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Map of Military Frontier sections in Banat, Syrmia and Bačka (18th-19th century)
(Source: <https://maps.geshergalicia.org/galicia/austro-hungary-rail-1916/>)

The strategic establishment and urbanisation of villages and the improvement of the surrounding were an integral part of the plan. Planned and systematic urbanisation of Banat started in the middle of the 18th century and lasted until the middle of the 20th century.

This article presents some of the results of the "Forgotten architecture of Banat's villages" project. The purpose of the research was to visit, identify, photograph and document still existing artefacts of the urban regulation and architecture of the Banat's villages from the past.

Documentary material collected is processed and permanently archived. A part is available on the web. As a whole or partly, it could be a useful source of data and images on historical phenomena of the village urbanisation and architecture in the Banat, as well as a motif for further research.

2. Urban development in Banat

The Austrian-Turkish peace treaty of Belgrade, signed in 1739, did not mean the end of the conflicts. Experience has shown that agreements between states are frequently not the final solution. For this reason, the kingdoms concerned have tried to find strategies to preserve the disputed territories. One of the options was to settle their loyal

population. They decided to colonize the territory of the Banat and to establish defence line, called Banat military frontier.(Figure 2)

2.1. Colonisation of Banat. From the beginning of the 18th century to the middle of the 19th century, Banat was the target of an organised mass colonisation. There are several periods of intensive settlement. These are: the period 1700-1764; the period of the Banat military frontier from 1764 to 1872 (Figure 2) and from 1872 to the beginning of the First World War. During the 20th century, colonization took place between the two world wars and after the Second World War. The principal reasons for colonization at Banat were national-political, economic and military. The purpose of the national political colonisation was to assure the majority nationality of the population. The economic reasons were the benefits of Banat for food production, mineral extraction and forests.

At the beginning of the establishment the Banat's military frontier, the military character of colonization was dominant (Figure 3). The goal was to provide a permanent frontier army towards Turkey.



Figure 3. Frontier Guard building in Orlovat from 1869, October 2022

At that time, settlement included Hungarians, Bulgarians, Slovaks, Czechs, Romanians, Cossacks, Italians, Spanish, French, Armenians, Jews, Gypsies and Albanians. In the 18th and 19th centuries, colonists were settled in about 150 Banat villages in today's Serbian territory. [1] Until the establishment of the Banat military frontier, colonists were established in the so-called chamber villages, which were under the jurisdiction of the Royal Chamber.

After the First World War, part of Banat belonged to the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Another part of Banat remained within Romania. As in the past, during the period 1918-1930, the new state proceeded with a new colonisation. After the

Second World War, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was replaced under similar boundaries by the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. Early activities included the new colonisation of Vojvodina and Banat, which took place between 1945 and 1950.

2.2. Banat Military Frontier. The Banat military frontier was established in 1764 by the decree of Marie-Thérèse. [2] The decree ordered that a standing army be established in the region along the Tisza and Danube rivers. According to the target location for the military regiments' accommodation, the plan was:

- Establish new settlements (Baranda, Bavanište).
- Relocate the existing chamber villages and inhabitants to new locations. (Omoljica)
- The reconstruction and regulation of existing villages at the same location (Idvor, Opovo, Sakule, Pločica, Serfkerin) and/or
- Build new parts of the existing settlement (Kačarevo). [Table 1]

Village	Expected construction / regulatory year	House type	Location and village layout
Pločica	1771	Two-room small house made of baked brick	The old location of the settlement
Omoljica	1772	Two-room small house made of baked brick	Moved from the swamp
Bavanište	1766, 1774	House of the charged soil (Royal Chamber)	The settlement founded in 1766, and was included into Military frontier in 1773
Sefkerin	1775	Captain Vegler's plan; two-room house	Regulated the existing settlement
Opovo	1776	Captain Vegler's plan; two-room house	A unique settlement for colonists and natives (with a common square)
Sakule	1776	Captain Vegler's plan; two-room house	Serbian settlement (without colonist part), regulated
Baranda	1776	Captain Vegler's plan; two-room house	Serbian settlement (without colonist part), newly built
Idvor	1777-1781	Two-room house made of baked brick	Regulated Serbian settlement
Francfeld (Kačarevo)	1777-1782; extended in 1802-1803	Three-room house made of wooden construction; extension of the settlement with three-room houses made of charged soil	Colonists from the Empire (Alsace and Lorraine)

Table 1. Typical examples of village regulation and related types of houses [1]

In the 1773, Imperial auditor Johann Jakob Erler [4] had visited 11 districts in Banat. Later, in 1774, he published a detailed report about Banat's villages and population. Among others, the report contains a list of 141 military villages, organized in the Banat military frontier. In the West Banat (today's territory of Serbia), he listed 45 military villages. The border villages had military jurisdiction (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Administrative building in Kačarevo from 1792 with the gable in Baroque style, October 2022

Compared to the 18th century, in the middle of the 19th century geopolitical circumstances and relations between Austria, Hungary and Turkey have changed dramatically. For this reason, in 1872, after 110 years of existence, the Banat military frontier was abolished.

The importance of the Banat military border is indicated by authentic documents in the state archives of the countries involved: Austria (Militärgrenze), Hungary (Katonai határőrvidék), Romania (Graniță militară) and Vojvodina.

3. Establishment and urban planning of military villages

Colonisations up to the middle of the 18th century pointed to serious problems. The new inhabitants of Banat were greeted by problematic environments: swampy and muddy land, barrens, shifting sands, cold and windy winters. This is why many colonists, especially French, Italian and Spanish, left Banat and returned to their former residences.

Based on these experiences, Austria created a new strategy for the construction and organization of military villages and surroundings. The detailed plan of Baron Anthony von Cothmann was accepted.[1]

Besides its strategic military position, the village should be located away from rivers and ponds, at a location that is not exposed to floods. The plan also involved reclaiming and improving the land.

Land restoration and enhancement had several goals:

- Protect villages and fields from flooding by draining ponds, excavating canals and altering river flows, digging public wells. (Figure 5)
- Increase agricultural land.
- Reduce the risk of infectious diseases of humans and animals that are transmitted by insects.
- Afforestation with rapidly growing wood types for construction, heating and protection against wind.
- Planting mulberry trees for silkworm production etc.



Figure 5. Public well in Deliblato (October 2022)

The urban planning rules of the village were as follows:

- The topology of the village has the shape of a rectangle that allows consistent expansion.
- At the centre of the village there is a square where frontier guards can practise.
- Around the square there are public facilities: military, administration, schools, churches, ambulances. (Figures 6, 7, 8)
- The streets intersect at right angles.
- The public wells are on the central square and at the intersections of the main streets.

- The width of main streets (approximately 38 m) and side streets (10-23 m) should ensure uninterrupted traffic.
- The houses are placed in a line, on the edge of the street.
- Towards the street, houses are positioned by their length or width.
- The households' parcels are regularly formed and each occupies approximately the same areas. Standard parcel sizes are 17X34m (approximately 20 ar).
- Behind the house, some of the land is used for agricultural buildings, gardens and fruit trees. (Figure 6)



Figure 6. Village type of house, with granary, Orlovat, October 2022

4. Architecture of Banat's villages

From the half of the 18th century, the construction and development of the settlements of Banat are done strictly according to the prescribed urban plans. Public facilities occupied the central position. Residential houses go from the central square to the edge of villages.

4.1. Public facilities. In addition to military facilities, urban plans of the frontier villages have included both public and civilian facilities. The organization of the village begins by building military and administrative facilities, and military polygons at the central square. The public buildings surround the central square of the village. They are positioned along the regulation line of the street, at the corner of two streets, or they were left alone.

A special attention was paid to social aspects. To meet the educational, cultural, religious and daily needs of the residents, churches (Figure 7) and schools (Figure 8)

were built and craft stores were opened. Which churches and schools were to be built, it depended on national and religious affiliations of inhabitants. For instance, where Serbs were the national majority, Orthodox churches and Serb schools were opened. The same rule has been applied in villages where other nationalities and religions lived.



Figure 7. Orthodox Church in Farkaždin, placed on the streets intersection (October 2022)



Figure 8. Elementary school attended by Mihajlo Pupin, Idvor, October 2022

During the years of settlement of a village, the construction materials available were wood, reed, straw and pressed soil. The applied materials had a limited useable life and the houses had a short life cycle. Since wood, straw and cane are highly flammable, many buildings have burned. These are some of the reasons why the facilities of this period are not preserved.

From the 70s of the 18th century the use of stable materials began: the fired bricks replaced wood, reed, straw and charged soil. Table 1 presents some examples of substitution of building materials.

Since the end of the 19th century, the observation towers of the volunteer firefighting society dominate the landscapes of the Banat villages (Figure 20). Their buildings were constructed according to typical design requirements. Some of them are still standing today (Figure 9). When the Banat Military Frontier was abolished in 1872, military facilities changed its purpose, and military training polygons were converted into village parks.



Figure 9. Church municipality building in Perlez built in Baroque style, October 2022

With the development of the railways in the late 19th and 20th centuries in Banat, the railway station buildings become the part of the architecture of the villages in Banat. [5]

The years from the end of the Second World War, until the end of the 1950s belong to the last period when typical public buildings were built in Banat. Those were buildings of villages' agricultural communities. At the same time, monuments dedicated to victims and heroes from the both world wars, were built in Banat's villages (Figure 19).

4.2 Private facilities. Until the middle of the 18th century, the natives in Banat, mostly Serbs and Romanians, lived in disorganized, broken type of villages. Their habitats were huts and dugouts.



Figure 10. The old village type of house with big entrance door located next to the house (Deliblato, October 2022)

When the urbanization of Banat started, the domestic population was successively displaced in the newly formed villages. Some of them have been included in the frontier guard and with families resettled in military villages. The remaining population was settled in chamber villages. Their new houses were uniform, simple and built of charged soil, wood, straw and cane.

The urban planning of villages prescribed the strict organization of the streets. Along the prescribed regulatory line, houses were located by the edge of the street. The sidewalks were built next to the house. Between the sidewalk and the traffic, there were woods of linden, chestnuts and nuts.

There are five typical periods of architecture in the villages of the Serb part of Banat:

- Until the 70's of the eighteenth century.
- From the 18th century to the late 19th century (Figure 10)
- Between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the Second World War (Figure 11).
- Period up to the 70s of the 20th century (Figure 12) and
- The last decades of the 20th century up to today.



Figure 11. Renovated village house in Sefkerin (October 2022)



Figure 12. Renovated village house in Baranda, built in 1965, with curved gable in Baroque style (October 2022)

In the late 19th century, occupational and social differentiation of the population began in the villages of Banat. Educated and wealthy were officers, civil servants, craftsmen, traders, priests, medicine (Figure 13). There were fewer economic opportunities for farmers. The finance of families projected to the location and architecture of houses. The houses of the wealthier families mostly gravitate towards the centre of the village. The houses of the other residents were situated on the periphery of the village, on the way to the fields, swamps, barrens and sandy lands.



Figure 13: City type of houses in Kačarevo, with entrances within the houses (October 2022)

At the beginning of the 19th century, because of social stratification, there were two types of village houses: city type and village type of houses. Table 1 provides typical examples of the types of houses, and Table 2 summarizes their comparative features.

The position of the house towards the street was dependent upon the type of a house. The city houses were placed along the street by length or occupied street corners. Therefore, the limited width of the plot caused that the small and large front doors forming part of the house. Village houses were placed towards the street by width. So, there was enough space left for the courtyard entrance to be separated from the house. Very often, granaries were built next to the street.

After a century, the second generation of houses in the villages of Banat has ended its lifecycle. Therefore today's architectural heritage mainly belongs to the period from the end of the 19th century until the beginning of the Second World War. After the Second World War, the houses of the previous city type were not built. Only some of the existing occasionally are adapted. According to tradition, or due to inertia, village style houses were built sporadically until the 70s. (Figure 12, Figure 14)

Village type of house	City type of house
shorter side facing the street	longer side facing the street or occupies street corners
economy entrance separate from the house	economy entrance often within the house (so-called dry entrance)
pedestrian entrance independent or part of the house	pedestrian entrance often within the house
modest street facade, reduced ornamentation	representative street facade; rich plaster ornamentation
single family building	single or multi-family building
only natural, local construction material	various building materials
orientation towards the yard, garden plot (connection to private)	orientation towards the street (connection to public)
covering the roof with straw or reeds	covering with shingles, more often tiles
functionality	representativeness
dirt floor	dirt floor possibly in the corridor, otherwise wooden floor structure

Table 2. The comparative features of village and city types of houses [6]

From the beginning of the 21st century, the ambiance and the houses of the villages of Banat disappear definitively. The new houses are set back in the depth of the plot disrupting the regulation line of the streets and the memorable ambiance of the villages of Banat. Simultaneously, from the peripheries of our cities to the villages of Banat, like an epidemic, come undefined and chaotic architectural solutions.



Figure 14. Village house and granary in Tomaševac, October 2022

4.2. Architectural styles. In the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, European architecture alternated between classicism and neoclassicism, romanticism, eclecticism and their transitional forms. As the Banat region stood on the edge of empires, further from Vienna and Pest, current architectural styles were delayed. So most often, the mixture in the form of eclecticism, has arrived.

Stylistic architectural elements can be seen on the administrative and official buildings. Their façades have rich decorations. Geometric and floral motifs were applied on the entire facade: on the walls, doors and windows. (Figure 4, Figure 9, Figure 15, Figure 16, Figure 17)



Figure 15. Rich plastic decoration on the city type of house in Tomaševac (October 2022)

The village houses have a simple construction. The main decorative part of the facade is the gable. Influenced by the Baroque style, the gables are often curved and decorated with floral patterns (Figure 12). Occasionally, on the vertical edges of the front, there are a decorations in the form of a classical Greek column.

5. Conclusion

The processes of colonization and formation of the military frontier in the Banat were supported by the planned construction and rebuilding of the existing settlements. Detailed urban plans had been drawn up and applied throughout the Banat. The plans defined: the topology of the village, the organization of the streets, the typology of public and private buildings, the household structure and the surroundings of the village. It is especially important that one of the main purposes of the urban

development of the village and the private space of the inhabitants was to improve their lives. These were everyday social, education, cultural, traditional and religious needs.



Figure 16. Rich plastic decoration on the city type of house in Opovo (November 2022)



Figure 17. Luxury entrance door of the house in Perlez (October 2022)

This article presents a part of the project: “Forgotten Architecture of Banat Villages” that was carried out during 2022. Field research was carried out to investigate and document the current condition of the old buildings and architecture of the villages of Banat. The general findings are:

- The number of public and private buildings preserved is reduced. There are several reasons: the age of the building; the necessary repairs and reconstructions are not done; the functionality of the houses does not correspond to the needs and habits of today, so the owners demolish them; the houses are abandoned, etc.
- There are examples of public buildings and homes that are preserved and adapted. Examples of successful reconstructions (Figures 13, 16, 17, 18).
- Examples of problematic restorations are (Figure 1).
- Nowadays, it is almost impossible to find an authentic ambiance in the entire village.
- A good example of the successful composition of old and new buildings is the central square in Deliblato. In the same neighbourhood there are an administrative building, dating from the early twentieth century, the monument to the victims of the Second World War, and the renovated building of the agricultural commune from the 1950s. (Figure 19).
- There are cases where monuments have been destroyed or stolen. In 2011, the robbers stole and destroyed the sculptures in Opovo Municipal Park.



Figure 18. Luxury entrance door and plastic decoration of the house in Perlez (October 2022)

It is clear that every building has its own life cycle of planning, building, use, and demolition. It is acceptable that the new house should replace the old one. However, today's new buildings completely change the distinctive ambiance of the village of Banat. They do not establish continuity with the elements of previous urban solutions;

they nullify the line of regulation of the street; they bring chaotic and indefinite architectural styles, etc.



Figure 19. Successfully renovated and integrated public buildings on the central square in Deliblato: the old administrative building, the building of the agricultural cultural centre and the monument to the victims of the Second World War (September 2022)

Obviously, it is difficult to stop the current and disruptive practice and establish a new recognisable atmosphere in the villages of Banat. However, to begin with, it would be useful to review the old planning plans and rules and apply them, adapted to new times.

Fortunately, there is still enough space in the villages of Banat. This is why, more by coincidence than by intention, the topology of most villages follows the old urban plans.

The Banat military frontier was abolished in 1872. The last organized colonisations ended in the middle of the 20th century. Although Banat belonged to different states, the prescribed urban planning rules had been applied for over 200 years. During this time, more than 100 villages were fully organised. Therefore, one can assume, without exact proof, that the urbanization of Banat (including the rest of Vojvodina and Romania) is one of the largest and most comprehensive in the world's history.

Our results on the villages in Banat we permanently archived, published on the web pages of the Magazine for National Geography, Culture and Tradition (<http://www.srbijaplus.net/arhitektura-banata.htm>) and made available to the state institutions.

It is possible that authentic and new images of architecture in Banat villages from the past are especially important because the future of the traditional houses in

Banat is extremely uncertain. This current project complements the former one: "Railway heritage of Banat", that was completed in 2021 [5].



Figure 20 . Building of the Volunteer firefighting society with the observation tower in Sakule (September 2022)

Finally, the material gathered may be an argument and an appeal to protect the remaining ambient and artefacts of the traditional architecture in Banat and other parts of Vojvodina in Serbia.

Acknowledgment

We are grateful:

- To the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia because of the financial support to our project "Forgotten architecture of Banat's streets".
- To the Ethnographic museum in Belgrade because of they suggested this project to be accepted from the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia

Notes

- The authors' conclusions do not necessarily reflect the attitudes of the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia and the Serbian Railways Infrastructure.
- Author of images: Z. Cvetković.

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