

DETA AND BIRDA COMMUNES – HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY STUDY

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Abstract: *Denta and Birda Communes – Historical Geography Study.* The article entitled Denta and Birda communes - historical geography study proposes to present the main aspects connected to the historical evolution of the two communes starting from the earliest ages to our days. If we look back in the past, we can realize that almost all villages that belong to Birda and Denta nowadays, were someday individual villages, having their own history and evolution. The history of the two communes fits perfectly into the specific history of Banat region due to the archeological vestiges belonging to the bronze age, iron age and neolithic, vestiges and cultures that attest a process of living from ancient times. The Turkish and Austro-Hungarian submissions left deep marks on the territory of Birda and Denta villages, marks that consisted of poverty, sufferings and loss of human lives. The instauration of the communist regime characterized by the collectivisation of the agriculture and the opening of the C.A.P.s as well as the period after 1989 represent other historical features discussed in this article.

Rezumat: *Comunele Denta și Birda - studiu de geografie istorică.* Articolul își propune să prezinte cele mai importante aspecte referitoare la evoluția istorică a celor două comune începând din cele mai vechi timpuri și până în zilele noastre. Dacă aruncăm o privire în trecut, realizăm că aproape toate satele care aparțin astăzi de comunele Birda și Denta, au fost cândva sate individuale, având propria istorie și evoluție. Istoria celor două comune se potrivește perfect cu istoria regiunii Banat datorită vestigiilor arheologice aparținătoare Epocii Bronzului, Fierului și Neoliticului, vestigii și culturi care atestă un proces al locuirii acestor locuri încă din cele mai vechi timpuri. Dominația Turcească și Austro-Ungară și-au lăsat urme adânci asupra teritoriului satelor Birda și Denta, urme reprezentate de sărăcie, suferințe și pierderi de vieți omenești. Instaurarea regimului comunist caracterizat prin



procesul colectivizării agriculturii și prin deschiderea C.A.P.-urilor, la fel ca și perioada de după 1989 constituie alte trăsături istorice prezentate în articol.

Key words: *historical geography evolution, cultural relevance, Denta and Birda communes.*

Cuvinte cheie: *evoluție geografico-istorică, relevanță culturală, comunele Denta și Birda.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The reason why I chose to write this article is the desire of finding out more details about the history of two villages neighbouring the locality where I was born, representative history for the entire region of Banat. Denta and Birda communes are worth studying from a historical point of view because they represent testimonies of a hard past because of the Turkish and Austro-Hungarian submissions or because of the communist regime.

The deep marks left not only by the Turks, Austrians or Communists, but by the two world wars too, are represented nowadays by some monuments that can be found almost in every locality of the two communes.

2. USED METHODOLOGY

The article entitled Denta and Birda communes - Study of geographical history- is addressed both to Geography students and specialists as well as to all the persons interested in historical geography.

In the first part of the article I decided to present the historical evolution of Denta commune, starting with the antique period until nowadays, including Rovinita Mare, Rovinita Mica and Brestea too.

The second part of the article offers the readers some information about the history of Birda commune, history that I tried to present in a detailed way starting from antiquity till nowadays, for each locality that belongs to Birda commune (Sangeorge, Manastire, Berecuta).

For offering a clear and complex image not only about the history of Banat, but about each locality too, I used maps containing the geographical position of the localities, old maps, from different historical periods and images with the heroes' monuments, these ones being representatives for the memory of the natives who lived during the hard periods of the two wars.

3. DENTA COMMUNE

3.1. Geographical position

Denta commune is situated in the west of Romania, in the south-west of Timis county. From a geographical point of view, Denta belongs to Timis plain (Birda plain according to Posea).

The localities belonging to Denta commune (Rovinita Mare, Rovinita Mica and Brestea) lie in the north-east of Denta (Rovinita Mare) as well as in the south and south-east (Rovinita Mica, Brestea).

3.2. Historical evolution

The history of Denta commune overlaps with the one of Banat plain, history-geographical region that this one belongs too. The favourable life conditions- soft climate, fertile soil, the abundance of water and forests, the rich and vary natural resources, that these land offered led to the settlement of the first human communities starting from the prehistoric period.

Many archaeological vestiges discovered in the village or somewhere around it witness an early living. Only a few kilometers away from the centre of the village, on the banks of Moravita river, have been discovered some objects belonging to the Starcevo-Cris culture, that proves the practicing in the region, even from the beginning of the neolithic of the agriculture and some domestic handicrafts, such as pottery and weaving.

Starting from the bronze age, the material marks of living are richer and varier, being spread on a quite large area, fact that indicates an intense living of the area during this period. In the north of the village, on the actual territory of Deta, have been discovered stone prints used for making brass, which proves the practice of the metalurgy since the eneolithic on a local plan, fact that assumes a long and thorough knowledge by the producing of the territory they lived in. Other objects discovered in the sand pit beside the forest between Banloc and Denta proves an uninterrupted process of living of the region during the entire bronze period.

The iron age, with its two subdivisions- Hallstat and Latene, is poorer in discoveries. This thing can be explained through climate causes. It is known the fact that at the beginning of the iron age, the climate changed suddenly, becoming cold and rich in precipitations, that led to the flooding of some large areas of plains which this way became impossible to be lived. In spite of all these, according to the material marks discovered at Rovinita Mare and Brestea, since Latene period, one can realize that at least the east part of the village was lived during this age.

The archaeological discoveries above mentioned, that belong to the second life of iron are Dacic, which indicates the integration between II i. Hr-I d. Hr. centuries of the actual territory of Denta commune in the great area of Dacic civilization. On Denta's territory has been discovered a coin made by emperor Augustus, a coin that is specific to the economy of Dacia.

The Quaternary age also brings some discoveries on the territory of Denta commune, the remains of elephants found at the edge of the village dating from this period.

A neolithic settlement from the end of last century was signaled on the territory that separates Denta from Partos. A pile of earth from the edge of the road to Gaiul mare is probably a tower that can be dated at the end of the 3rd century BC (The Sustainable Development Strategy of the Village Denta, 2007, p. 11)

At the beginning of the 2nd century AD, the entire Banat was included in the boundaries of the Roman Empire, where it remained until the end of the 3rd century. During the Roman conquest the scientists assume that it would have existed Potula Roman camp and through this centre would have passed one of the side Roman roads that used to connect Canonia (Varsetul) with Zambara or Zurubara (Timisoara) (The Sustainable Development Strategy of the Village Denta, 2007, p. 12)

The lack of some systematic researches in the area made the archaeological discoveries for this period be more reduced, the most Roman vestiges being found during

some agricultural works or while arranging the territory. Though only a few, they are rich in information, consisting of stamped bricks, coins or even a military post whose inscription led to a disagreement between the researchers as far as Malva's settlement at Denta and Malvenis in Banat are concerned. These Roman pieces that come from Denta and Rovinita Mare indicate the existence in those places during the 2nd and the 3rd centuries of some simple rural settlements included into the economical and administrative system of Dacia Province. Due to these proofs, the researchers and the historians identified Potula as being at Denta. This also seems to be confirmed by the fact that the area was crossed by a side Roman road that passed through Vrsac, Denta, Timisoara.

The withdrawal of the administration and Roman authorities in the south of Danube, in 271 didn't put an end to the existence of these settlements and didn't interrupt the connections of the autochthonus with the Roman Empire. The monetary circulation in the 4th century, proved archeologically through the discoveries from Denta, Deta or Voiteni, confirms this. One can even speak about the reappearance of the Roman conquest in this area in the 4th century, if we consider the fact that during Constantin cel Mare's reign was raised a pile of earth that crosses Stamora Romana, Denta, Opatita and Jebel from south to north. If the theory of the reappearance of the Roman conquest is correct, it means that in the 4th century the territories of Bretea, Rovinita Mare and Rovinita Mica were a part of the Roman Empire and the eastern boundary used to pass right through Denta village.

From the end of 3rd century until the 12th century, the inhabitants of this region faced the shortcomings made by Sarmatic, Hunnish, Avar, Slav and Hungarian populations. Most of them left naturally or stayed and was assimilated in time, without leaving any persistent and consistent marks. Their presence here did not modify in a substantial way the ethnical structure and the native's way of lives that continued their existence in some ways inherited from the Romans.

Without insisting on this subject, one should notice that certain scientists consider that some of these populations had a remarkable ethnographic and linguistic influence on the autochthons. M. Sampetru believes that the Sarmatic's settlement in the Banat Plain and their living together with the autochthon population for about a few centuries determined the apparition of a strongly individualized Romanian folk culture in comparison to the one met in the other territories lived by the Romans. So, according to the mentioned author the western Romanian language, as well as the folk costume have been submitted to some strongly Sarmatic influences.

The testimonies about the inhabitants of these places are missing for a long period of time. In their absence we can only assume that they had a common history with the entire Banat Plain- after their formation as a nation, the inhabitants of this area continued their traditional way of life. In 1241 king Bela the 4th built defensive fortresses in the localities from Banat and in Denta village too (Caius Pascu, 1939, p.5)

The first documentary attestation of Denta commune dates back to 1322 when king Karol Robert agrees that Denta commune that belongs to Caras county, should be donated by Theodor Weytheni to Gal, the royal notary (Caius Pascu, 1939, p.5). In 1329 Teodor Weytheni sells Gal his ownings from Cenad, Timis, Szerem and Caras on 1000 silver marks, ownings including Dench commune and Kulsfok land. In 1370, Denta is mentioned under the name of Dench as being the property of master Ladislau (Pascu, 1939, p.6). Rovinita mare (Omorul Mare) is documentary attested for the first time in 1343, while we had no dates about Rovinita Mica (Omorul Mic) till 1895.

Till the end of 14th century a lot of Serbian emigrants settled in Banat Plain, which will have an important role in the history of these places beside the Romans. From now on, the Serbians become an integrated part of the western ethnic landscape. They have a significant military role, an orthodox religious structure that subordinates the local one. The process of serbization of Romanian last names begins now, so that during the Turkish conquest was hard to make a difference between a Serbian and a Romanian. In 1552 the Plain Banat was conquered by the Ottomans, the Pasaç of Timisoara being organized here. It was divided into six districts, Denta being a part of Ciacova District, while Rovinita Mare was a part of Bocsa district.

In 1597 the village received the name of Dente (Denta), being given by Sigismund Bathori to Andrei Barcian (Tocilescu, 1880, p. 256). Between 1660-1666, according to the register of Maxim de Pecs priest, most of the inhabitants of Denta commune were Romans, the same register containing the first serbian inhabitants of the village.

In the 165 years of Ottoman submission, the situation of the inhabitants was not harder than it was in the previous period when the feudal exploitation reached maximum levels. In general, the Ottomans had a benevolent attitude, allowing them to keep a certain autonomy of traditional organizing forms, offering them a great religious freedom at the same time. In 1690, the peasantry received the right to assign the possession of the land they worked, as well as the other imobiliars, which actually equaled with an allotment. If until now, the documents just mentioned the localities of Denta commune connected with a legacy or a tax establishment, the information from the Ottoman period is richer, having some news that describe Denta commune.

In 1686 the commune was plundered by the Turks (Borovsky, Temes, vm, p.36), but it doesn't suffer considerable traumas, being mentioned by Marsigli under the name of Denta. So, in the 17th century we can find out from Travelers book written by Elvia Celebi that Denta, situated on the banks of Timis river, was fortified with strengthens in all the four corners. The security of the fortress was assured by a captain who had 50 soldiers under his command. The fortress also had a military deposit, a restaurant and some tiny shops. There were also many fertile gardens here (Pascu, 1939, p. 7).

The fact that Denta was a developing settlement seems to be confirmed by the Austrian Conscription of 1717 as well, which attested that Denta (called Tenta during that period) had 100 houses at that time, a quite large number, if we take into account that during the Middle Ages the villages from Banat Plain had about 20 houses (Iliesiu, dos.2 a, p.105).

In 1720 the first German colonists are brought to Denta, that inaugurated the Catholic parish of Denta (this was the first colonization between 1717-1722), (Iliesiu, dos.2a p.106).

After the victories from 1716 obtained by the Austrian armies against the Ottoman troops, led by Eugeniu de Savoya, the region of Banat becomes a component of the Habsburgic Empire, which was confirmed by Passarowitz Peace from 1718. The conquered territory is treated like a personal domain of the emperor and submitted to the military administration. The entire province was divided into 11 districts ruled by military administrators. The villages kept on choosing the rulers that represented them in front of the authorities. Denta, with the 100 homes mentioned in the conscription from 1717, took part of the Ciacova district (Iliesiu, dos,2 a, p.106).

There are still kept pieces of old maps of the village dating since the Austro-Hungarian period (Figure 1).



Figure 1: *Denta - Map of the commune from the Austro-Hungarian Period*
(Source: *The Sustainable Development Strategy of the Denta commune*)

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The situation of the inhabitants got worse after the starting of the Hasburgic administration. The peasants were forced to pay some taxes for the army, to participate in the fixing and preserving of the fortresses, the roads, to pay some expenses related to the troops' accommodation.

From economic, military, political and religious reasons, the hasburgic authorities brought numerous colonists to Banat, especially German, but Italian, Spanish and Bulgarian too. Their presence here was not very convenient for the local inhabitants, the former mentioned being settled in the villages lived by Romanians and Serbians and being given the most fertile lands. So, German colonists start to settle in Denta since 1721, and since 1745 some Bulgarian families have come here, in the same year being built a channel that meant to get from Barzava to Timis (Iliesiu, dos 2a , p.108).

According to the foreign travellers, the gipsy communities from Denta existed even from the 18th century.

In 1753, there were both Serbian and Romanian communities in the area, and in 1773 there were 132 houses (Figure 2).

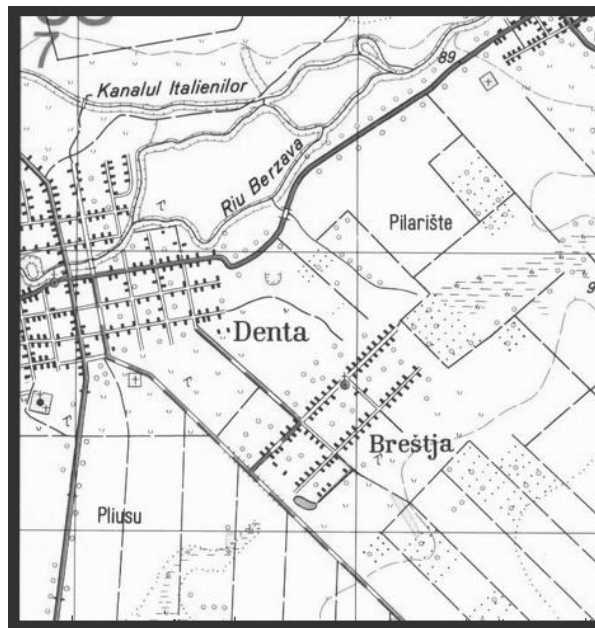


Figure 2: *Denta - Map of the commune during the Serb Communities*
(Source: *The Sustainable Development Strategy of the Denta commune*)

At the beginning of the colonization, the authorities did not take any measure as far as the organization of the villages is concerned, the new houses were placed chaotically in the old village. There were no rules regarding the settlement of the houses or the general orientation of streets. Only in 1766 the Hasburgic authorities adopted some measures for the foundation of the new colonies. These rules were imposed even over the old villages

starting with 1772. The sistematization of the old villages by commasating the small settlements and by organizing the villages according to economical and urbanistic criteria was established through Impopulationis Haupt Instruction, adopted on 11th January in the just mentioned year. These urbanistic rules required that the villages should have had a geometric shape. The households were situated in a rectangular plan, being placed one beside the other, with the short facade of the street orientated towards the street. Each settlement was supposed to have a civic centre that consisted of the church, school, city hall and market.

The sistematization plans were supervised by some special comisions. The authorities did not bestow any repairing or construction authorization any more without respecting the sistematization plan. After these rules had been applied, Denta gradually lost its characteristic of scattered village, fitting the geometric village type which it still has today. In spite of all the inconveniences owed to the sometimes hostile attitude of the Hasburgic authorities, their presence here had a beneficent role for the development of this area. The orientation towards modernity is obvious. They are making massive works now for arraging the stream of the rivers and the draining of the moors. In 1745 they started to sewer Barzava River on the portion between Denta and the place were it drains into Timis River. The modernity of the localities that form Denta village today continued even the next period of time. In 1761 is installed the first post-office in the history of the settlement.

In 1785, after the uprising of Horea, the emperor Iosif the second ordered that all the families whose members took part in the uprising should be deported to Banat. With this ocaasion in 1786 passed 94 families through Denta commune with the purpose of getting to Sabmihai (Iliesiu, dos 2 a, p.109). A map of the village dates starting from the Iosefin period, a map where one can see even the old names of the neighbouring localities.

On 14th July 1777 the parish school from Denta is mentioned in a report of Teodor Iancovici. In 1795 a beautiful Serbian Orthodox church was erected and in 1796 Denta receives the authorization of organizing weekly fairs (Pascu, 1936, p.13). we have to mention that during the reign of emperor Iosif the 3rd, between 1770-1790, Denta had 395 families (Pascu, 1936, p.12).

In 1788 starts the Austro-Turkish war, the Romanians from Banat trying to get rid by the Turks by all means. That is how it can be explained the presence of 53 refugees on 12 October 1788 between Deta and Denta. In 1842 Brestea was founded, with 110 families of Romano-Catholic Bulgarians brought from Dudestii Vechi, each receiving a lot of land. After 1880, a part of the Bulgarian population came back in Bulgaria where they set up Bardaski Geran village (The Sustainable Development Strategy of the Village Denta, 2007, p 13). In 1855 the school from the locality was inaugurated, Clementie Dina being the first teacher. After the constitution of the Austro-Hungarian dualism, in 1867, the Banat region was incorporated to Hungary. The legislation adopted by the Hungarian authorities, led to many unsatisfactions as far as the inhabitants of this area are concerned. The politics of forced hungarization was persuing the making of some colonies in the region besides the acceptance of Hungarian as the official language. The outburst of World War I stopped these plans.

In 1884 Omorul Mic was inaugurated by 80 families of German colonists from Becicherecu Mare. During the communist period the name of the locality was changed into Rovinita Mica. In 1918 took place more revolts of the peasants against the dualist authorities and on 1st December 1918, Denta was represented by the teacher Vasile Stoica at Alba Iulia.

During World War I many inhabitants from here were called to war. Some of them did not come back any longer, but in 1928 was erected the monument from the center of the village in their memory (Photo 1).



Photo 1: The Heroes' Monument
(Source: Covaci Raluca, 2011)

After World war I, the inhabitants of Denta commune, whose main occupation was agriculture and the cattle raising, were put in possession of land.

During the interwar period, the Roman authorities gave a bigger attention to the cultural and spiritual life of the locality. So, on 15th August 1928 "The National House" was inaugurated, which led to the opening of "The Students' Cultural Organization of Denta", that had a mixed chorus made of 30 persons. They bought a big religious ship from the money they managed to collect from the concerts. In 1928, the engineer R. Munck made the first plan of building the village house, but they decided to build the edifice of the city hall on the spot where it was the old village house.

Starting from 1935, Denta village had its own notary, midwife, forest brigade, an agency and a bank. The normal development of the commune was stopped by the outburst of World War II and by the instauration of the communist regime. The installation of the communist regime was hardly accepted by the Romanians from all over the country, but especially by the ones from Banat region.

The inhabitants of Denta commune who did not agree to the ideas of the party had a lot to suffer. In April 1956, the deported persons came back to their homes after long sufferences and deep losses. The tragic communist period, lacked of fulfillment ends in 1989, when a new beginning started for the inhabitants of Denta commune.

4. THE COMMUNE OF BIRDA

4.1. Geographic position

The commune of Birda lies in the south-eastern part of the Timis county, having as neighbours the town of Gataia and the villages of Tormac, Voiteg, Opatita and Denta

The other three villages Berecuta, Manastire and Sangeorge are located in the southern part of Birda, lying along the Barzava River like a pearl necklace (Enasel, 2008, p.10). From a strict geographical point of view, the village of Birda is situated in the south-eastern part of the Birda Plain.

4.2. The historic evolution

The optimal conditions of the landscape have favoured the appearance of rural settlements in this area since ancient times. There are several archaeological discoveries confirming the presence of people from ancient times.

Thus, in Semlacu Mare was discovered a part of a mammoth' tooth, which certified the presence of human settlements in the region since the Neolithic period, because during that period, the presence of the game was identified with the presence of the people.

During the Neolithic, the typical cultures that characterized that period were the Tisa I and Tisa I cultures, but also the Decea Muresului culture (Tisa III). In the Eneolithic there were the Cotofeni and Baden-Pecel cultures and in the Bronze Age Pecica-Periam culture. The Iron Age is marked by the Geto-Dacians, and in the Birda commune were found small urns and glazed vases dating from around the year 1800 BC.

Traces of early dwellings in Bird were found not only there, but also in the neighboring villages. Thus, in Deta there were discovered polished stone axes, in the northern part of village Gataia were discovered the remains of a settlement from the Romanian period (Enasel, 2008, p.15).

During the Roman domination throughout the western part of the Banat and the current territory of Birda commune was lost during the reign of Marcus Aurelius in favor of the Iazyges, who settled in this area until the arrival of the Huns. But within the village there has not been found any archaeological evidence specific to the Iazyges.

Once the Roman rule ended, the entire region was affected by the invasions of the migratory peoples. Thus the whole area was facing the invasions of the Goths, Huns, Gepids, Avars and since the 7th century the area had to face the appearance of the Slavs, some of which would established in the Banat region.

Currently, in what the Birda commune is concerned, there can be remember four smaller villages belonging to Birda: Sangeorge, Manastire, Berecuta and Birda each with its own history and evolution.

4.3. The villages belonging to the commune of Birda – historical evolution

4.3.1. The village of Sangeorge

Sangeorge is a village located on the right bank of the river Barzava and by the end of the First World War it had a population where the Serbs formed the majority.

The 1319 Diploma attested for the first time the existence of this village within the Caras county, period in which the Serb despots started colonizing Orthodox people in the monastery of St. George in order to take action against the Catholic propaganda.

In the Papal tithe records from the years 1332-1337, the settlement is mentioned between the Carasova deanery parishes.

In the year 1421 it is mentioned in a Hungarian Diploma called Zenthgyiorgh, as belonging to the prince of Transylvania at that time, Csaak Nicolae (Enasel, 2008, p.17).

Albert Nagymihalyi is also referred to as the owner of this village in 1427 and in 1471 the place is donated to the families of Ongor and Orszagh under the reign of Matei Corvin.

Since 1503, the village is an Orthodox parish but belonging to the Saint George Monastery.

Under the Turkish domination there are no data referring to this village, but we can say that it existed because it appears in the statistics after the Austrian occupation.

In the census of 1717 the area was known by the name of Sankt Georg, it had 30 houses and it belonged to the Ciacova district. The name derives from Sant George, St. George's Catholic version.

Between 1723-1725 the village is mentioned in the map of Count Mercy under the name of St. Gory, also belonging to the Ciacova district.

Also in 1774 Ehrler mentions this village under the name of Sankt Georg, as part of the Ciacova district and being inhabited by Serbs and Romanians.

In 1782 Lorinez Cotoi and Latskovits have bought the village and called it Kamora-Sant-Georgi. After passing under the Hungarian ruling, the settlement appears in the Hungarian official documents as Szent Gyorgyi.

In 1894, the name of George Sant changes into Kincstar-Sant-Georgy, so that in 1910 to receive the name Tarnokszentgyorgy (Borovszky, p.99).

After 1866, the village extends, being part of Deta region, Timis county, until 1919. The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century coincide with a development of the village from a cultural standpoint, in this period are established various associations in Sangeorge such as the Association of Plowmen.

With the outbreak of the First World War many city residents were enrolled in the Austro-Hungarian army, many of them losing their lives. In their memory, in 1985, within the village was erected a monument to the heroes .

From an administrative point of view Sangeorge had the status of a large village between 1919 and 1925. During this period it was part of the Deta region, Timis- Torontal county and after 1925 it belonged to the Gataia region within the same county.

During the interwar period, the Serbs had their own school, church and band. But after 1924, Romanian colonists were brought in Sangeorge from the Satu Mare and Someș counties and also from the village of Igrîș (Enasel, 2008, p.18). The Romanians settled in the northern part of the village where there was a sort of colony of the Romanians. The rest of the village still remained inhabited by ethnic Serbs.

The end of the Second World War coincided with the inauguration of communism in the region. From an administrative point of view, after 1952 the area was included in the Deta region and between 1956-1967 it was part of the Gataia region.

Among the measures taken by the communists in the entire area there is the introduction of quotas which were mandatory for the whole population, founding several associations according to the Soviet model: GAS (state farms) or GAC (collective farms).

Families were attracted to these associations by promising them relief from mandatory quotas.

G.A.C. Sangeorge was one of the first associations in the country. The Association was founded in 1950 and included 43 families and an agricultural area of 992 ha. One explanation for the rapid establishment of the collective farms could be the ethnic structure of the village (in Sangeorge, the Serbs predominated and they were accused by the communists of being Titoists, therefore they had to set an example for the people who refused to obey the communist decisions- (Enasel, 2008, p.19).

The collective farms were founded in Sangeorge before the deportation in Baragan, pressure causing the inhabitants to join in the collective farms. When applying for withdrawing from the collective farms, of people were punished and forced to re-enroll.

In 1953, right on the night of Christmas, in the village was organized anti-communist plot, eventually thwarted. Those who plotted the conspiracy were sentenced to nearly 20 years of prison.

Sangeorge village was declared a border village during the communist regime. Thus in order to visit the village, you had to announce the authorities. This decision had some benefits for the residents as they had the right to travel to Yugoslavia.

Due to CAP's existence, this village was visited by some representatives of the county's leading party.

After the administrative reform of 1967 under which districts are abolished and counties were reestablished, the Sangeorge village would be part of the larger village Birda until 2004, except for a short period (1988-1990) when it belonged to the village Voiteg.

4.3.2. The village of Manastire

Another village that belongs to the village of Birda is the Manastire. The village is located on the right bank of the Barzava river near the monastery of St. George.

The first data that certify the existence of the village are not very reliable. It is assumed that during the years 1319-1333 a group of Romanian colonists settled near the St. George Monastery.

The first data that certify the existence of the village date from 1485, during which the village is inhabited by Romanians.

Hungarian name of the village is Monostorszentgyorgy or Zirda-Szent-Gyorgy but because it is situated near the monastery, the village remained under the name of Manastire. The village was even owned by the local monastery until the end of the First World War.

The monastery from which the name of the village comes has an interesting history too. In 1793, in the monastery altar was found an inscription according to which the old church was built by the Serbian despot Jovan Brankovic on 15 August 1485 (Enasel, 2008, p.21-22).

During the battles with the Turks the monastery suffered heavy damages, about which we find information from some records from the years 1623 and 1653.

Later, during the Turkish withdrawal from Banat in 1716, they burned the monastery of St. George which they have previously robbed and devastated (*** The history of the monastery).

After the peasant revolt in the years 1738-1739 and the Austro-Turkish war, the monastery is completely destroyed; a part of the land owned by the monks being transferred in the possession of a bishop since 1772.

The monastery will be rebuilt with the contribution Christian Orthodox Serbs and the bishop of Timisoara, Vincent Iovano.

In 1739 will start building the new church, the church being completed in 1794.

The separation of the Romanian believers from the Serbs was achieved in 1869, but Serbs would come back in 1872, so that the final separation would be achieved only in 1903 when the Romanian church would be built under the guidance of the priest Ioan Margineantu of Birda (Corneanu, 1940, p.404).

A census of 1918 says that at that time the Manastire village consisted of 239 Romanians, 77 Serbs, 14 Germans and 3 Hebrew.

The village of Manastire was often mentioned in history precisely because of this monastery in its vicinity, the monastery being a place of pilgrimage for both Romanians and Serbs.

With the First World War broke out, many villagers were enrolled in the Austro-Hungarian army, some of them losing their life. In their memory, there would be built a monument in the center of the village, monument which would be destroyed during the communist period. However the plaque with the names of those missing was rescued, being kept on the wall of the local church today.

In 1925, 16 Romanian families were colonized there, families coming from the territory of Turda and Somes, colony located on the left bank of Barzava.

In 1909, the year coincides with the last decade of domination, the neighbouring villages also begin to use the name of Manastire (Corneanu, *ibidem*).

Manastire will acquire the status of a larger village during the interwar period, the City Hall being located in the current local school.

After the establishment of communism in 1947, the neighbouring villages of Berecuta and Sangeorge would be included in the Manastire region. But its status will not last for a longtime, being included in the Birda region, and later in the village Gataia

During the dictatorship many people will leave the area emigrating to neighbouring cities.

Manastire belongs to the village Birda since 2004, the floods causing heavy damages the following years.

4.3.3. The village of Berecuta

The village of Berecuta is located on the left bank of the river Barzava.

The first document that certifies the existence of this settlement dates from 1458 when the village was mentioned by the name Berek, being owned by the Doczi family.

Until the communist period, in that village could be seen the traces of the so-called Roman wave which crossed the Banat region from north to south, from the Mures river to the Danube river.

Nowadays, according to popular tradition, instead of the village, initially there were only a few huts scattered over the entire estate, one of its owners, a Hungarian named Berek will order that all the huts to sit along the left bank of Barzava. Thus, the new settlement was named Berek ucza, in Hungarian this means the street of Berek (Enasel, 2008, p.24).

In the Middle Ages the village is mentioned as belonging to the county of Caras.

During the Turkish occupation, in 1554 the area again appears in documents as having eight houses.

In 1717 the area was attested again in documents, this time as part of the Ciacova district and as having 28 houses. On the map from 1723-1725 it appears under the name of Bereckuza and belongs to the Varset district. On 16 May 1724 is mentioned the first arrival of the first German colonists in Berecuta (Simu, 1924, p. 26).

According to the 1737 census there were 14 German families in the Berecuta territory that came from Lotharingia, who were exempt from contributions for a period of four years.

But in 1738, with the Turkish invasions, many settlers will leave the village to establish in Deta. Those who remained were taken captive by the Turks.

Both the census of 1743 as well as Ehrler mentions the village as being inhabited only by Romanians.

In 1779 the Timis district is established, and during that period the village belonged to Deta region which included 18 villages.

In Borovszky's paper the village appears under its Hungarian name: Berekutca.

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, after the recent departure of German settlers to the town of Deta, the Romanian settlers will prevail in the village.

The village was in the possession of Imperial erariului and in 1834 according to statistics compiled by the imperial authorities around 14% of the population were serfs (Borovsky, p.29).

The cholera epidemic of 1873 is devastating for the village, killing one third of the population. Thus, if according to the census of 1869 there were 273 inhabitants, after the 1880 census, as a result of cholera epidemic, their number had fallen to 187 (Enasel, 2008, p.25).

The separation of the Serbian Orthodox Church takes place in 1903, this being particularly important moment in the history of the village, and as a result of this separation there will begin the construction of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Due to the outbreak of war the church will be finished only in 1924 with the help of the priest Ioan Margineantu from Birda.

During the First World War the entire village was engulfed in misery and poverty, many villagers having lost their lives in war. In 1968, in the center of town, across the street from the Orthodox Church was built a monument in memory of those heroes (Photo 2).

The interwar period brought many changes in the Berecuta village. Thus, in 1924 it became a larger village; the same year has been the application of agrarian reform by which many villagers were given land. From the same period dates the Hunters' Society of Berecuta, an organization that had Gheorghe Ciorba as leader.

The period of the Second World War coincides with the requisition which affects the living standards of the residents. Thus from the villagers' yards have been requisitioned animals, carts and grains. Even the local youth were recruited for the pre-military period as they were due to enroll in the Romanian army during the war.

Red Army's arrival in Berecuta caused robberies and damage, stealing many things that belonged to people such as grains, livestock, clothing, shoes, money or other valuables.

The end of the Second World War has not brought peace in the village. In 1944 the representatives of the communist regime begin to spread the party organizations at village level.

In 1945 the Berecuta villagers have benefited from a new agrarian reform: each family was given land 5 ha.

The process of collective farms began in Berecuta in 1953, and the people who joined the team were primarily the poor who owned no land or plots.

Today it belongs to the village Birda.



*Photo 2: The Heroes' Monument from Berecuta
(Source: Covaci Raluca, 2011)*

4.3.4. The village of Birda

Birda village is situated on the river with the same name, right tributary of Barzava.

In 1690 (during the Turkish occupation) the village was mentioned as having Romanian population and belonging Bocsia district. According to local tradition the name comes from the heavy taxes that the Romanian population was subjected to during that period.

In the census of 1717 the village appears to be inhabited by Romanian villagers and as being composed of 80 houses (Borovsky, p.30).

In the map of 1761 the village is mentioned as Pirda. Grisellini mentions in his paper the village as being situated 25 miles from Timisoara in the region of the Romanian

grooves (Enasel, 2008, p.29). In Ehrel's work the village appears under the name of Burda and as belonging to the Ciacova district.

In 1760, 95% of the population (about 668 Orthodox people) belonged to the deanery of Jebel and the dieceneza of Timisoara.

After 1779 the village had its own post and railway station and belonged to the district of Timis, Deta region. Until 1828 the village was in the possession of an erriu, after which it was acquired by the family Termacici. This family has built a mansion in 1830 which today no longer exists. Then the settlement is bought by Baron Lo Presti and in 1852 the property enters the possession of baron Uckermann. After his death the village is owned by the baron Uckermann Aladar from which it is bought in 1892 by Montag M.

Eventually the area is bought by the Baroty family which built a mansion in the middle of the village that was later used as school. Now this place is the headquarters of the City Hall.

In 1850 there were 200 Germans in Birda, most of whom were Evangelical, followed by the Reformed or Catholic. Since there were two churches in Bird, the Evangelical church and the Orthodox Church, all Germans regardless of religion went to the Evangelical church.

In the early nineteenth century the Germans will come to represent more than half of the population. From 1908 until 1912 there will come immigrants from Franzfeld to Birda, known as Franzfelders, their number being of 15 families (Enasel, 2008, p.30).

In the First World War took part about 100 people of which 65 were of German nationality, 24 of them losing their lives either on the Russian battlefield, especially in Galicia, or on the Italian one. In their memory a monument was built with a metal plaque containing all 24 names and data for each (Photo 3). There also Romanians with the ethnic Germans on the battlefield. Some of them have died and others fell prisoners to the Russians or Italians.



Photo 3: *Plaque in Memory of the Germans from Birda who Died in First World War (Source: Enasel, 2008)*

The period of the First World War was a disaster for the population of this village, being engulfed in a long line of requisitions that have led to lower living standards of the residents.

At the Grand National Assembly from Alba Iulia on the 1st of December 1918, as representatives of the village Birda we can remember the priest Ioan Margineantu and George Ciorba.

Also after the First World War came back some of those went to work in America, using the money they have earned to buy large areas of land.

These cases are among the happiest because those who have returned before the war began they were enrolled in the Austro-Hungarian army and sent to the battlefield where some of them would lose their lives.

Between the wars, after the application of agrarian reform developed in 1921 during the Averescu government in the village were laid the foundations of a market economy.

Many people have received land so they had the opportunity to improve their living conditions (Enasel, 2008, p.31).

At the beginning of the Second World War many young men were enrolled in the Romanian army, some of them losing their lives on the eastern front.

In the Second World War, in the German army fought 162 Germans, of whom 17 died in 1944 in Yugoslavia or on the Eastern Front.

After the Germans retreated, the village was occupied by the Russian troops who were stationed in the village for two weeks. During their staying there, the Russian troops would take many of the villagers' property, turning to robbery and theft and devastating the farms of the ethnic Germans.

In the same period in the village will set new Romanian families coming from Moldova and Bihor.

In 1945, when the communist regime was established in Romania, it was decided the forced deportation of ethnic Germans from across the country in URSS. From 14 to 26 January 1945 from the village Birda were deported 65 Germans (Enasel, 2008, p.32).

With the Communist regime there were introduced the mandatory quota system in all the regions of Banat and was forced the collectivization of agriculture.

In neighboring villages of Birda, there was an attempt to reject the mandatory quota system, manifested by trying to attempt to hide their products, to avoid to give them or to harvest them at night.

Until 1990, on the territory of the village Birda there were two CAP associations. These were the two GAC's, the first being GAC Birda founded in 1954 and which included the village Birda, Manastire and Berecuta, and the other being GAC Sangeorge that occupied the agricultural area of the homonymous village for a short period of time. At the beginning of G.A.C. Sangeorge there appeared the village Berecuta and Manastire, then transferred to GAC Birda (Enasel, 2008, p.35).

In the village Birda the collectivization took place in a different way than in other places from Banat because of the presence of the Germans. Some of the German people have left the village in 1944 at the same time with the withdrawal of the German army from Romania (Enasel, *ibid*).

Although people were extremely recalcitrant to the notion of collective, on April 24, 1954 GAC Birda was founded comprising an area of 252 ha and 28 families. Those who were enrolled in the collection came from poor families who owned land or at all, thus

having nothing to lose after their enrollment in the collective. In this G.A.C. the agricultural land was very large compared to the number of families precisely because it came from the confiscation of land from the deported ethnic Germans and other deported in Baragan.

In 1971 the collective included an area of 1979 hectares and 383 families, indicating that almost the entire active population of the area was part of the collective.

In the mid-'60s the four villages that are part today of the Birda commune were developing considerably from an economic point of view due to the complex construction for fattening pigs.

Because of the construction of this complex the area will come to be known around the country and even abroad, appearing in the press (Enasel, 2008, p.35).

But Comptimul suffered a setback with the outbreak period of the revolutionary movement of 1989.

After the Law 84/2004 Birda became a larger village, its components being the villages Sangeorge, Manastire and Berecuta. Until then the four villages belonged to Gataia, which by the same decree became town.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion we can say that the two communes, Denta and Birda, are basically two testimonies of several centuries of history lived, not only by the residents of these villages, but by the entire Banat region. Their historical evolution coincides both with an economic development and long suffering and hardship endured by the villagers, and heavy shortcomings due to both Turkish and Austrian rulers and the establishment of the communist regime in the area.

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