

# Constantinople as Center and Crossroad

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# Belgrade Toponyms along the Bosphorus

## *From the Belgrade Forest to the Belgrade Gate*

MILOŠ PETROVIĆ

Most Belgrade toponyms in Istanbul date back to the beginning of the early modern period and testify to a shared history. Toponym research can be used to shed light on cultural relations that date centuries back, and in many ways, this kind of investigation hovers between documented history, scarce material remains, mostly circumstantial and secondary references, folk tales, and presumptions. Nevertheless, for many scholars place names often serve as valuable and rare traces of bygone settlements in the present-day Balkans and investigation of etymology remains an interesting instrument for understanding the history and myths behind the place names. In light of the time that has passed and turbulent events since Belgraders first came to Constantinople in 1521, it is rather remarkable that some of the Belgrade toponyms in Istanbul have survived centuries, until this day. This essay discusses the genesis and evolution of Belgrade place names in relation to the wider question of the mobility of people, goods, and knowledge between the Ottoman capital and the Balkans.

## Belgrade *Mahala* area today: a different setting

In November 2014, I visited the Byzantine city walls in Istanbul. Between the twenty-second and twenty-third tower, not far from the Yedikule Fortress, stands the Belgradkapi—the Belgrade Gate. It once marked the nearby neighborhood (*mahala*) of Belgraders who were settled in the area after the Ottoman conquest of Serbia in 1521.<sup>1</sup> The gate's doorway has a stone arch, with brick arches and vaults supporting the structure. It was last renovated in 1987. My personal impression was perhaps somewhat compromised by the fact that the modern Belgradkapi is used primarily for traffic. On the bright side, due to this daily use by Istanbul drivers, the gate appears to be in a better overall condition than the other towers along the way leading from Yedikule to Belgradkapi. The World Heritage Site

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<sup>1</sup> For the ethnic composition of Belgrade by the time of the Ottoman conquest, see J. Kalić-Mijušković, *Beograd u srednjem veku* (Belgrade 1967) 169–80, 264–66.

status of the Byzantine walls in Istanbul may eventually result in a more balanced conservation program for the different parts of the fortifications.

The Byzantine walls are very long and the space between neighboring towers on either sides of the Belgradkapı (Silivri and Yedikule) amounts to 600 or 700 meters, in contrast to the small alleys behind the walls, criss-crossing in a typically Ottoman manner. Entering the Belgradkapı, I found myself in the area of the former Belgrade *Mahala*. Centuries ago, this neighborhood was packed with homes and small markets, filled with noise and workers passing through the walls towards small farming areas; now it was almost vacant. A parking lot, sports grounds, and some neglected trees surrounded the walls, but there were hardly any people around, except for those in the cars. The neighborhood, which until recently was infamous for squatters and crime, now appeared very quiet in contrast to the loud motorway just outside the Belgradkapı.

About a hundred meters up Hacı Hamza Mektebi Sokak, on the right-hand side, stands a church, separated from the street by stone walls and a barbed wire fence. Maps are not very useful in this area and many sites remain undocumented, despite some efforts in the past decade to map Istanbul's Christian heritage. The area is known by the name of the gate, Belgradkapı, but except from the walls only the small church testifies to the lost identity of this neighborhood. Information is scarce and even finding the Belgrade *Mahala* and its small church turned out to be an effort, considering the size of Istanbul and its neighborhoods. Hidden behind barbed wire, the church seemed deserted from the outside. After I had waited in front of the churchyard door for half an hour, a lady in charge of watching over the premises appeared. I was eventually allowed to enter the church garden, but not the interior of the church. However, from the garden I was able to make some observations of the church's exterior. The Turkish-speaking family in charge of taking care of the church are using the premises. Wet linen and other laundry were drying in the churchyard, leaving the impression of a private residence. A dozen steps away, close to the main entrance to the church, there is an engraving that indicates 1837 as the year of reconstruction of the church. This is consistent with the findings of the renowned academic and former ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, prof. Stojan Novaković, who cited that very year in the same context.<sup>2</sup> This structure surely resembled his nineteenth-century description of a somewhat elongated church with a low ceiling, built in stones which had a reddish tone.

During the September riots that took place in Istanbul in 1955, churches administered by the Greek Orthodox Church were targeted, including the old Church of the Holy Mother near the Belgradkapı (now known as Belgradkapı Panagia Kilisesi). The church was desecrated and torched, but the damage done to the interior of the church was not documented.<sup>3</sup> At the end of the previous decade, this church and its possessions had been among those taken away from the Greek Orthodox community.<sup>4</sup> In light of the time that has passed since the Belgraders came to Constantinople in 1521 and turbulent events such as the ones cited above, it is rather remarkable that some of the Belgrade toponyms in Istanbul have survived centuries, until this day.

<sup>2</sup> S. Novaković, "Naselje Beograđana od 1521. u Carigradu i njihova crkva Uspenija Sv. Bogorodice," (Settlements of Belgraders in Constantinople since 1521 and their Metropolitan Church of Ascension of the Holy Mother) in S. Novaković (ed.), *Balkanska pitanja i manje istorijsko-političke beleške o Balkanskom Poluostrvu 1886–1905* (Belgrade 1899), 249–55.

<sup>3</sup> R. Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus, 1954–59* (Oxford 1998) 75–77.

<sup>4</sup> D. Kurban & K. Hatem, *The Story of an Alien(ation): Real estate ownership problems of non-muslim foundations and communities in Turkey* (Istanbul 2009), 47–50.

## Belgrade and Constantinople: a tale of two cities

Most Belgrade toponyms in Constantinople-Istanbul date back to the beginning of the early modern period and testify to a shared history. The continuous rule of the Ottoman dynasty enabled the city to remain among the most well-preserved in Europe, which has also allowed old toponyms to survive. During the territorial expansion of the Ottoman Empire, the incorporation of Belgrade and adjacent areas, starting with the siege of Belgrade in 1521, strengthened its regional dominance as a strategic foothold in central Europe and ‘gate-keeper’ of the Balkans. During the century that preceded its fall to the Ottomans, Belgrade had evolved from a Hungarian border-town into the capital of the Serbian Despotate, before being forced back under the rule of the Kingdom of Hungary and used as one of its most important defensive forts. Before most of the city disappeared during the Habsburg-Ottoman wars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and that area once again became a border-fortress, Belgrade counted among the chief towns of Ottoman Europe, having reached over 50,000 residents in the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from the dominant explanation of the resettlement of Belgraders in 1521 in the context of Ottoman security concerns, there might have been additional reasons for deporting the Belgraders and placing them in various areas of Constantinople, which then were named after the newly-settled communities. Surviving toponyms include not only the Belgradkapı and the nearby Belgradkapı Panagia Kilisesi, but also the Belgrade Forest (*Belgrad Ormani*). Although other toponyms, such as the Belgrade *Mahala*, the Belgrade village and the Belgrade Aqueduct, no longer exist, inquiry into the origins of these place names offers an interesting subject of study.

## The pre-Ottoman development of Belgrade

The Ottoman conquest of Belgrade (1521) was preceded and followed by a gradual loss of independence of different Serbian territories. Central Serbia was conquered in 1459 with the fall of the last medieval capital, Smederevo, to the Ottomans, but Serbian territories under Hungarian rule held out longer: the Mačva region and the Šabac castle resisted along with Belgrade until 1521. Despite some revolutionary attempts such as the domain of Jovan Nenad (1526–27), Vojvodina was gradually absorbed between 1521 and 1552. After 1690, when the Ottomans again lost control of Hungary, the Habsburgs conquered Vojvodina (including northern Belgrade), and periodically also governed most of central Serbia as part of the Habsburg-Ottoman wars.<sup>6</sup>

The Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, which led to the fall of the short-lived Serbian empire in 1371 and its fragmentation into principalities, pushed the center of political power northwards, as remaining Serbian regional lords and people from different peripheral regions began migrating away from the conquered territories. This process was probably sealed as early as 1389, following the Pyrrhic victory of the Ottomans in Kosovo, when both sides lost their monarchs, but the Serbian

<sup>5</sup> G. Agoston & B. Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York 2009), 89–90.

<sup>6</sup> T. Katić, “Serbia under Ottoman rule,” *Österreichische Osthefte* 47 (2005), 145–58, here 146.

side also suffered the loss of most of its army, along with the core of its political and social elite.<sup>7</sup> Northwards, the principedom of the so-called Moravian Serbia (the Despotate of Serbia since 1403) continued to retain most of its independence until the second half of the fifteenth century, while acknowledging the suzerainty of Hungary and the Byzantine and Ottoman empires respectively. The Moravian prince Stefan Lazarević, Ottoman vassal since the Kosovo battle, obtained the title of despot from the Byzantine court in Constantinople. In 1403, Lazarević also accepted a formal vassal-ship under the Hungarian king Sigismund of Luxemburg, becoming his knight, and in return received the ancient city of Belgrade and the lands along the Sava and the Danube.<sup>8</sup> A power vacuum in the Ottoman Empire enabled a further enlargement of the despotate's territory towards the southern Adriatic, following a peace treaty with Venice in 1423 at Sveti Srđ (San Sergius), the Benedictine premises in the vicinity of Skhodra.<sup>9</sup>

The proclamation of Belgrade as the royal capital of the Despotate of Serbia in 1405 triggered its development from border-town into a large Balkan city with some 50,000 inhabitants. This was further supported by the use of strategic settlement of people from the countryside and other areas.<sup>10</sup> The citadel was an important strategic point at the confluence of Sava and the Danube, between the Balkans and the Pannonian plain of central Europe. Belgrade, the new capital, was fortified and expanded, including the walls of the civilian lower town along the confluence of the Sava into the Danube.<sup>11</sup> The upper town, a little more than hundred meters above water level, continued to serve as the nucleus of the fortress with a royal castle and a military garrison. A double chain of fortifications was built across the upper and lower towns, merging with the restored Roman, Byzantine, and Hungarian walls. Watchtowers were added, along with a trench that divided the lower from the upper part of the fortress, additionally divided by walled check-points. The despot's palace, the royal library, chambers for courtiers and noblemen, treasury, etc., were built on the ruins of a Byzantine castle. These were also surrounded by walls, which were encircled by a trench and defensive drawbridges. In line with the spiritual patronage over the city, the Metropolitan Church of the Ascension of the Holy Mother began assembling relics and sacred items from across the Ottoman-occupied Balkans, due to the persistence of Lazarević to profile the city as the Balkans' 'New Jerusalem'.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> T. A. Emmert, "The Battle of Kosovo: Early Reports of Victory and Defeat" in W. S. Vucinich & T. A. Emmert (eds.) *Kosovo: Legacy of a Medieval Battle* (Minneapolis 1991), 19–40.

<sup>8</sup> F. M. Federici & D. Tessicini, *Translators, Interpreters, and Cultural Negotiators: Mediating and Communicating Power from the Middle Ages until the Modern Era* (Basingstoke 2014), 11.

<sup>9</sup> J. V. A. Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest* (Ann Arbor 1994), 519.

<sup>10</sup> V. Jagić, "Konstantin Filozof i njegov Život Stefana Lazarevića despota srpskoga," *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva* 42 (1875), 225–528, 320.

<sup>11</sup> J. Kalic, "A millennium of Belgrade (Sixth-Sixteenth Centuries)," *Balkanica* XLV (2014), 71–96, here 79–85.

J. Kalić, "Fortress and settlement in the medieval period," *SANU Belgrade Fortress in the Past, Present and the Future* (Belgrade 1963), 122.

<sup>12</sup> I. Biliarsky, *The Tale of the Prophet Isaiah: The Destiny and Meanings of an Apocryphal Text* (Boston 2013), 122–23; J. Erdeljan, "Beograd kao novi Jerusalem – razmišljanja o recepciji jednog toposa u doba despota Stefana Lazarevića," *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 43 (2006), 97–111, here 108. Lazarević's vision may have contradicted the supreme claims of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which was keen to gather as many holy pieces as possible in Constantinople. See also further below.

## Belgrade as Hungary's 'Balkan gate' and the Ottoman 'key to Central Europe'

Following Lazarević's death in 1427, the Serbian capital moved to Smederevo, which the Ottomans conquered in 1459. The reconstructed Belgrade citadel and other north-central Serbian regions were ceded back to Hungary, eventually becoming the two *banovinas* (Belgrade and Mačva). The despot's castle was turned into the seat of the Hungarian *bans*, who were appointed and selected from the very best military commanders, aware of the importance of securing the southern frontier. Serbian civilian settlements were limited to certain areas of the lower town and outside of the city walls. Belgrade's Metropolitan status within the Orthodox Church remained, and the reconstruction of Catholic property was intensified. The city walls were modified for the use of cannons.<sup>13</sup>

Along with the growth of the city population, the increased settlement of craftsmen from Dubrovnik and other areas for the building of cisterns and arches began to take place. This implies that there were personnel for the management of the water system in Belgrade. The system must have been technically advanced, considering the topography of the upper town and the *de facto* enclave status of the city between the rivers and the surrounding Ottoman Empire.<sup>14</sup> Construction workers were in charge of maintaining the fortifications. The technology of the water system maintenance relied heavily on a Byzantine model, although Hungarian and Venetian craftsmen are also reported to have helped in maintaining its infrastructure. Proper water management surely contributed to the sustainability of the Belgrade fortress during the turbulent period which preceded its conquest in 1521.

The Belgrade area remained under Hungarian control for almost a century, being the last major Balkan city to be conquered by the Ottoman Empire and the first large town in the Pannonian basin to fall. It endured two major Ottoman sieges in 1440 and 1456. During the latter one, a large force, including 200 ships, was pushed back by a remarkable army of foot soldiers and river battleships led by Janos Hunyadi and Giovanni di Capistrano, European crusaders and Christian inhabitants of Belgrade.<sup>15</sup> Both Hunyadi and Capistrano, who were hailed by Christian Europe for their triumph, died of a plague, which also decimated the city's population. In memory of this important victory, Pope Callixtus III ordered the bells of every Catholic church to be rung every day at noon.<sup>16</sup> Still Belgrade suffered great damage, as most of the lower town was wiped out and many defense towers were damaged. As Hunyadi noted: "The town has become a field."<sup>17</sup>

Although non-fortified areas in north-western central Serbia and Belgrade were ravaged by yearly raids, it took another seven decades for a comprehensive Ottoman offensive in this area, as part of the strategy to conquer central Europe under the new Sultan, Süleyman I, also known as Süleyman the Magnificent (1520–66). At the time, the Hungarian kingdom had suffered a deep internal crisis and was unable to offer a proper defense for the city: its soldiers did not receive salaries for two years; there was no mobilization or external aid for the impoverished popu-

<sup>13</sup> J. Kalić-Mijušković, *Beograd u srednjem veku* 276.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>15</sup> G. Agoston, *Guns for the Sultan: Military Power and the Weapons Industry in the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge 2005), 48.

<sup>16</sup> L. Rombouts, *Singing Bronze: A History of Carillon Music* (Leuven 2014), 36.

<sup>17</sup> J. Kalić-Mijušković, *Beograd u srednjem veku* 169.



lation. One thousand demotivated soldiers and a large civilian population were faced with a vast force of Ottomans who encircled the city, including the Great War Island beneath the fortress. The conquest and severe damaging of the Belgrade and Zemun fortresses in 1521, along with the Šabac castle and Mačva banate, secured the Ottoman entry into the Pannonian lowlands. Within only a couple of years the rest of Hungary was overrun, and in 1529 the Ottomans besieged Vienna. The Ottoman Empire thus reached its highest territorial extent in Europe, enabling the large part of its army to focus on Rhodes and Egypt.

Following the conquest of Belgrade, all churches, whether Catholic or Orthodox, starting with the oldest—the Metropolitan Church of the Ascension of the Holy Mother (after which the church in Istanbul was named)—were soon turned into mosques. However, the Hungarian and Serbian defenders of Belgrade were not treated equally. Records state that Süleyman, who remained in the city for 15 days, granted the right to Magyars to cross the Danube into the Hungarian territories. By contrast, he issued an order on the ninth of September 1521 that Serbian fighters and their families should be deported from Belgrade to Constantinople. A rationale for this choice of action might have stemmed from a fear that the Serbs would not serve as loyal citizens in this border area; but rather, might contribute to subversive activities in league with compatriots in Hungary. There are also indications that some of the deportees—those in charge of water system maintenance and the construction of fortifications—were needed in Constantinople as a skillful labor force. Serbs seem to have constituted almost the entire population of the lower town in 1521, with Hungarian nobility being a minority, mainly concentrated in the upper town.<sup>18</sup>

Belgrade began its steady evolution into an Ottoman town, acquiring new settlers—Turks, Greeks, Vlachs, and Jews. By the time of the first Habsburg takeover in late seventeenth century, the city acquired a cosmopolitan identity with over 50,000 Christian, Jewish, and Muslim inhabitants.<sup>19</sup> In a letter of Lady Mary Wortley Montague to her friend, the poet Alexander Pope, only a few months prior to the second period of Habsburg rule over Serbia (1717–39), Belgrade was depicted as a place where one could learn “beautiful Arabic poetry.”<sup>20</sup> Throughout the following century, the Habsburg-Ottoman wars destroyed most of its urban infrastructure and drove a large part of its population into the neighboring territories. Belgrade became known as Dar al Jihad, “House of the Holy War.”<sup>21</sup>

## The arrival of Belgraders and relics in Constantinople

Clerical and other contemporary sources stated that the Serbian inhabitants of Belgrade had been given a short time to prepare and head to their new capital. They were permitted to bring relics and sacred objects, including the icon of the Holy Mother (traditionally attributed to Luke the Evangelist, taken from the homonymous Metropolitan church) and the remains of the Byzantine empress

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 180, 266, 264 and 311.

<sup>19</sup> G. Agoston & B. Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* 89.

<sup>20</sup> L. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford 1994), 42

<sup>21</sup> U. Heyd, “The later Ottoman empire in Rumelia and Anatolia,” in P. Holt, A. K. S. Lambton & B. Lewis (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1 (Cambridge 1970), 157–58.

Theophano, wife of Leo VI (886–912).<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the remains of the tenth-century St. Parascheva (Sveta Petka) who, interestingly, originated in the Constantinople area, were taken from the St. Parascheva Chapel and brought back to the Bosphorus region. Fragments of her relics remain in the Belgrade chapel to this day, along with a spring of ‘healing water’ which bears her name, and she is still venerated as one of Belgrade’s patron saints. Clerical testimonies state that the relics from Belgrade were saved because of the ‘good will’ of the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople to purchase them: otherwise the Porte would have them destroyed. The relocation of relics thus would have seemed as a logical solution to the displaced people in their new homeland, which the new overlords did not prevent. Besides, as early as 1463, following the conquest of Smederevo, the Serbian Church had been dismantled in favor of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople: the spiritual seat of all Orthodoxy would have aspired to concentrate relics in the capital city.<sup>23</sup>

The remains of St. Parascheva and Empress Theophano had been held by the Bulgarian church prior to its abolition (1393) and were afterwards sent to either Edirne or Bursa; however, during a diplomatic visit to the Porte by Princess Milica and a Serbian church delegation in 1398, these remains were granted for safe-keeping to the Moravian Serbia representatives.<sup>24</sup>

In 1641 Saint Parascheva relics were purchased from the Ecumenical Patriarchate by Prince of Moldavia Vasiliy Lunul, an Ottoman vassal who found a new resting place for this saint in Iasi, where she remains to this day. This source also describes the circumstances under which the remains of St. Parascheva were handed over to the Moldavian Prince by Patriarch Partenius II: Vasiliy Lunul first needed to defray the debts of Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the entire debt of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Such ‘trade-offs’ were not unusual and might have happened also in the case of the Belgrade relics. A French contemporary interpreter in Constantinople documented the Sultan’s insistence that the Patriarch should purchase the Belgrade relics for 12,000 *ducattos*, or otherwise he “would have them thrown into the sea;” the Patriarchate agreed to this bargain.<sup>25</sup> Generally speaking, bringing the relics to Constantinople would have been favorable for all sides: for the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which wanted to assemble as many relics as possible, for the displaced population which wished to continue nurturing their culture, and for the Ottoman authorities which would have benefited from improved cooperation with the Orthodox community.

The relics of Empress Theophano were respected as “the protectress of the Serbian scepter” during the Lazarević reign.<sup>26</sup> Theophano’s remains today rest in

<sup>22</sup> J. Kalić-Mijušković, *Beograd u srednjem veku*, 264. See also S. Niketić, *Istorijski razvoj Srpske crkve* (Belgrade 1870), 160.

<sup>23</sup> Stojan Novaković (1842–1915), president of the Serbian Royal Academy of Sciences and Arts from the late nineteenth century, a renowned intellectual, historian and philanthropist, sustained these claims in a short chapter of his book *Naselje Beogradana od 1521. u Carigradu i njihova crkva Uspenija Sv. Bogorodice* (Settlements of Belgraders in Constantinople since 1521 and their Metropolitan Church of the Ascension of the Holy Mother). Novaković relied on a report made by Archimandrite Ilarion Ruvarac (also a member of Serbian Royal Academy of Sciences and Arts, rector of Saint Arsenius Orthodox seminary of Karlowitz, introducer of critical method in Serbian historiography), consistent with earlier findings of the Serbian Church regarding the artefacts. See S. Novaković, “Naselje Beogradana od 1521” 249–55.

<sup>24</sup> S. Marjanović-Dušanić, “Dinastija i svetost u doba porodice Lazarević: stari uzori i novi modeli,” *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* XLIII (Belgrade 2006), 90–91.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 250–52.

<sup>26</sup> J. Erdeljan, “Beograd kao novi Jerusalem”, 186.

the Holy Patriarchal Church of St. George in Istanbul. Likewise, Belgrade may have also temporarily served as a resting place for the remains of the right hand of Emperor Constantine I, which could have been guarded in the royal court chapel in the Upper Town, before their further journey between Constantinople and Moscow.<sup>27</sup> The fragments of the relics of Constantine I would have been especially important for the church.<sup>28</sup> This relic may have arrived in Constantinople in 1521 from the “Serbian lands.”<sup>29</sup> The main religious symbol of medieval Belgrade and its Metropolitan church—the icon of the Holy Mother—was documented in the city between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries. This most important sacral object was also brought to Constantinople by the new settlers. Likewise, the Saint Parascheva relics also seem to have arrived in Constantinople in 1521.<sup>30</sup>

## A ‘professional’ aspect of the Serbian settlements?

The deportation of Serbs to Constantinople is traditionally perceived as a retribution against the defenders of the city and a sign of the frustration of previous defeats of the Ottomans. Their settlement near the Belgradkapı, one of the gates that was renamed to commemorate an important military conquest, supports such a theory. Alexander van Millingen, in his nineteenth-century study of the walls of Constantinople, identified this gate with the Second Military Gate (*Porta tou deuterou*), an interpretation that was repeated more recently by Stephen Turnbull.<sup>31</sup> Turnbull also noted that it received its present name, the Belgrade Gate, to mark the adjacent settlement of Belgrade deportees. Turnbull mentions the year 1521, immediately following the conquest of Belgrade, and the intention of Sultan Süleyman to resettle its residents in Constantinople. This military gate had at the time, according to Turnbull, been granted a civilian purpose, possibly in line with the increasing civilian population in the area.<sup>32</sup> This identification of the Belgrade Gate with the *Porta tou deuterou* is no longer considered valid.

Instead, recent research suggests a gate that is located several hundred meters away from the large gate: the Xylokerkos Gate. In Byzantine times, this gate was associated with apocalyptic scenarios, such as the Muslim Arabs conquering Constantinople.<sup>33</sup> After being sealed off by Isaac II Angelos to prevent the prophecy of Frederick Barbarossa entering the city through that gate in 1189, it became known as Kapalı Kapı (the Sealed Gate) in early Ottoman times, and it was sealed until the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> The gate was not reopened again until 1886, then to facilitate access to a nearby hospital.<sup>35</sup> The Xylokerkos Gate is today identi-

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 186–187.

<sup>28</sup> R. Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine at the Milvian Bridge* (Cambridge 2011), 29–30.

<sup>29</sup> J. Erdeljan, “Beograd kao novi Jerusalem”, 186–188.

<sup>30</sup> A. G. Parasca, I. Muntele, “The impact of Saint Parascheva pilgrimage on tourism in Iasi County,” *Ecoforum* (Iasi 2015), 176–179.

<sup>31</sup> S. Turnbull, *Walls of Constantinople AD 324–1453* (Oxford 2004), 22. The work by van Millingen was published in 1899.

<sup>32</sup> Turnbull, *Walls of Constantinople*, 22–24.

<sup>33</sup> A. Berger, “Magical Constantinople: Statues, Legends, and the End of Time,” *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and modern Greek studies* 2 (2016), 16–18.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> B. Meyer-Plath & A. M. Schneider, *Die Landmauer von Konstantinopel* (Berlin 1943), 63–64. It is curious that Novaković never mentioned that the Belgrade Gate was sealed, given that he served as a Serbian ambassador in Istanbul between 1885 and 1892, with a second term until 1900. He did note comparable events, such as the abolition of the Belgrade village in the homonymous forest in 1898, so

fied as the Belgrade Gate (Belgradkapı).<sup>36</sup> It is interesting that a gate which was associated with fear of a foreign invasion during the Byzantine era had, during the Ottoman period, received a name which is related to the Ottoman victory and resettlement of Belgraders in that part of Constantinople.

There are no uncontested explanations why Serbs were settled in this particular area, nor any reliable sources which address this particular issue. Since the gate was closed for much of the medieval era, it seems likely that Serbs were moved there in order to revive that part of the city. Writing in the early twentieth century, Vladimir Ćorović, member of the national Academy of Sciences and Arts, mentioned the possibility of the deportees being in charge of maintaining the Byzantine walls and sources of drinking water, without much elaboration.<sup>37</sup> There are no sources which explicitly state that the settlement of Belgraders in this area possessed a deeper, symbolical character, although this does not mean that no such intention existed. Nevertheless, it could be assumed that *Belgradkapı*, being among the larger military gates in the Byzantine walls, had the purpose of commemorating an important Ottoman victory and reminding the deported Belgraders that their resistance against Ottoman conquest was futile. But regardless of what came first—the settlement in that area or the renaming of the gate—the name ‘Belgrade’ seemed important enough to become a toponym, such as in the nearby Belgrade Gate Church of the Holy Mother (Belgradkapı Panagia Kilisesi).

Since Byzantine times, the Belgrade Forest (Belgrad Ormanı), the largest woodland in the region, has provided drinking water to the inhabitants of Constantinople via its ancient dams and aqueducts. Spread across more than 6,000 acres, this ‘green belt,’ also known as ‘the lungs of Istanbul,’ safeguards the air quality of the city, aided by the sea winds. The northern trees of the chestnut and oak forest look upon the Black Sea, while their southern flanks give way to dams of fresh water which flow through the forest. Drinking water from the forest reaches Beşiktaş before merging in Taksim, the main distribution point, which gave this square its name. But from where did the name of this large forest come?

As noted by John Murray in his *Handbook for Travelers* published in 1840, the forest village had been known in Byzantine times as Petra, but in his time as ‘Belgrade’: “and the reservoir built there by Andronicus Comnenes [sic!] in the hollow between two hills is one of the Bends, between which lies the village of Belgrade.”<sup>38</sup> This ‘Belgrade village’ and its fine qualities were also mentioned by the eighteenth-century Lady Mary Wortley Montague, who—all according to Murray—had her residence in this part of the city.<sup>39</sup> Besides the importance of the forest village in terms of its reservoirs and aqueducts, it was “remarkable for pos-

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one would presume that he would also record the opening of the Belgrade gate. This fact adds to the confusion and unreliability of sources which address the Belgrade colony within the Byzantine walls. Reading between the lines could lead to a presumption that Novaković may have considered the Belgrade Gate to be the former Second Military Gate, rather than the Xylokerkos Gate, or (less likely) that he failed to notice that the gate had previously been shut for several centuries. Cf. Novaković, “Naselje Beogradana od 1521. u Carigradu i njihova crkva Uspenija Sv. Bogorodice,” in *Balkanska pitanja*, 253.

<sup>36</sup> M. Philippides & W. K. Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople in 1453: Historiography, Topography and Military Studies* (Amherst 2011), 320–21.

<sup>37</sup> V. Ćorović, *Istorija srpskog naroda: Srpska Despotovina u Sremu* (Belgrade 1997), 304–35.

<sup>38</sup> J. Murray, *A Handbook for Travellers in the Ionian Islands, Greece, Turkey, Asia Minor* (London 1840), 216.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

sessing the loveliest walks on the whole of the Thracian side of the Bosphorus,” noted Murray.<sup>40</sup>

According to the dominant historical narrative, the Ottoman authorities forcibly moved Belgrade’s prisoners of war following the city’s conquest in 1521,<sup>41</sup> a thousand kilometers to the south-east and to the very edge of the European continent. Mainstream history and national tales have continued to perceive this event as a punishment for the disobedience of the former Serbian capital towards the new conquerors. However, the Ottoman authorities may have envisaged an additional purpose for the prisoners of war. Belgrade citizens were originally surrounded by many kilometers of riverflows and fresh water inland. Belgraders were accordingly used to defending their city from floods and they were skillful in water management infrastructure, which their city, similar to Constantinople, had possessed since ancient times. They also had long experience with safeguarding the wells and sources of fresh water, which was seen as important at the time when Constantinople was undergoing a large reconstruction in the domain of water management. The fact that Belgrade had been founded on top of over 200 cavities, including caves, quarries and ancient underground riverbeds, facilitated the underground water management since Roman times. Likewise, heavily rebuilt during the short reign of the Despot Stefan Lazarević, the fortificational structures of Belgrade were in many ways Byzantine. Ottoman officers were impressed with how Belgrade had previously held out as a non-Ottoman enclave between the Balkans and the Pannonian basin.<sup>42</sup> The successful management of water supplies in all forms was probably a great advantage to its citizens when it came to maintaining their independence.

The engineering skills of Belgraders may thus have been useful for the technological dialogue which was unfolding in Constantinople in the sixteenth century.<sup>43</sup> Apart from the Petra village in the Belgrade Forest, this may have also applied to the colony of Belgraders by the Belgradkapı, whom Prof. Ćorović noted as being potentially involved in maintaining the Byzantine walls.<sup>44</sup> Since there are no sources which more specifically address the genesis of the Belgradkapı settlement, perhaps this could be one logical explanation. Generally speaking, infrastructural projects were the guiding motives for accommodating new residents in Constantinople. The Ottomans decided to build their own dams and aqueducts, contributing to the already rich water infrastructure of the city. Although many parts of the water system stemmed from the Byzantine era, Süleyman I commissioned the famous architect Mimar Sinan to reconstruct and improve them for the new aqueduct system that would lead into the city.<sup>45</sup>

This paved way for the construction of aqueducts that intersect in the vicinity of Kemerburgaz (Eyüp), of which the Maglova aqueduct is the largest. Therefore, an additional motive to move Serbian craftsmen to this area was to use their skills to develop the communal infrastructure of the Belgrade Forest. Craftsmen needed to be experienced in order to conduct the important task of securing the purity of water through aqueducts, dams and reservoirs; running water was also in high

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>41</sup> L. Filipovitch Robinson, “Belgrade: Transformations and Confluences”, *Serbian Studies: Journal of the North American Society for Serbian Studies* 24/1–2 (2010), 3–26, here 5.

<sup>42</sup> H. Marczali, *Hungary in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge 1910), 34.

<sup>43</sup> Agoston, *Guns for the Sultan*, 48

<sup>44</sup> V. Ćorović, *Istorija srpskog naroda* 304–5.

<sup>45</sup> J. W. Meri, *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia* (New York 2006), 51–52.

demand for religious purposes (e.g., the ablution fountains).<sup>46</sup> This important toponym in the area of the Bosphorus remained long after the original population was blended into the majority of inhabitants, perhaps haphazardly, perhaps out of respect. The nearby aqueduct and a forest settlement were also associated with the name of Belgrade as late as in nineteenth-century drawings (Figs. 1–2). Murray notes that the Belgrade aqueduct was one of seven forest aqueducts.<sup>47</sup>



Fig. 1. "The Great Bent in the Belgrade Forest", from L. Meyer, *Views in the Ottoman Dominions, in Europe in Asia, and some of the Mediterranean Islands*, London, P. Bowjee (1810). © The Trustees of the British Museum

There is no way to know whether the two Belgrade toponyms emerged around the same time, although such a possibility should not be excluded. One could imagine that some of the new residents were settled in different areas of the town in accordance with their crafts and background. The preservation of the toponyms could suggest that the colonies were numerous enough to sustain the name of Belgrade in several locations of the city, or at least were locally influential for some time, so as to leave their own imprint on local history.<sup>48</sup>

## Tracing the toponyms: testimonies and memoirs from the nineteenth century

Nineteenth-century sources in the Serbian language state that the Belgrade deportees were settled in two locations: one group near the Belgrade Gate and the other one in the Belgrade Forest, for the explicit purpose of maintaining the reservoirs and aqueducts that brought water to Constantinople. Some popular narratives

<sup>46</sup> J. Mårtelius, "Sinan's Ablution Fountains", in B. Shilling & P. Stephenson (eds.), *Fountains and Water Culture in Byzantium* (Cambridge 2016), 324–30.

<sup>47</sup> Murray, *A Handbook for Travellers*, 216.

<sup>48</sup> A. Deroko, "Some monuments in Turkey and Greece regarding the medieval history of Serbia," *Matica Srpska Journal for Social Sciences* 13–14 (1956), 293–95.

state that new settlers were in charge of maintaining nine springs of the forest, where hunting and wood chopping were strictly prohibited. The forest village was populated all the way through the beginning of the twentieth century, when its workers were considered to have ‘lost their skills’ and their settlement was disbanded, although some stories associate it with sanitary concerns (fear of plague).<sup>49</sup> Today the area belongs to the Bahçeköy neighborhood of the Sarıyer district.



Fig. 2. “View of the village of Kiumurgi-Kioj” (Kömürcü Köyü), from L. Meyer, *Views in the Ottoman Dominions, in Europe in Asia, and some of the Mediterranean Islands*, London, P. Bouyee (1810). © The Trustees of the British Museum

During a visit to the Belgrade Forest in 1898, Prof. Stojan Novaković attempted to search for material evidence of the presence of Belgraders in that area. Located an hour away from Büyükdere, an area with diplomatic compounds and aristocratic villas, the forest frequently hosted diplomats in the early eighteenth century.<sup>50</sup> It is the source of many rivers which flow towards the Golden Horn; many of them have been contained by blocks and turned into water reservoirs from which water is transported via water pipes to the city. A village in the vicinity had an unnamed church with a graveyard, located outside the settlement on a plateau in the forest. Unfortunately, Novaković found no references to the earliest inhabitants of the village, neither in the church documentation, nor during field visits. According to Novaković, the Serbian population must have been long assimilated by the larger and more dominant Greek Orthodox community. A painting from 1797 by Luigi Mayer, entitled “Dance of Peasants (Belgrade near Constantinople)” depicted an Orthodox, but apparently Greek, festivity, indicating that the assimilation of the minor Orthodox community might have taken place earlier.<sup>51</sup> Novaković also documented the abolition of the settlement, stating that the Belgrade village inhabitants had been resettled to various areas in 1897—

<sup>49</sup> J. Taylor, *Imperial Istanbul: A Traveler's Guide* (London 1998), 203–204.

<sup>50</sup> S. Novaković, “Naselje Beogradana od 1521”, 253.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O146574/dance-of-peasants-possibly-in-watercolour-mayer-luigi/> (last visited 2018-10-01).

only a few years prior to his visit—as they were charged by authorities for not properly maintaining the waterflows in the Belgrade Forest. Ruins of the church walls still remain in the forest: its poor shape could be due either to neglect after the abandonment of the village or to the 1955 riots.

In the early twentieth century, Ćorović noted that a settlement called Belgrade *Mahala* was founded between the Golden Gate and the Silivri Gate.<sup>52</sup> Some of its new inhabitants were construction workers, who might have been needed to maintain the Byzantine walls. Its construction technique resembled the walls of Belgrade, which could have been an additional motive for their settlement in that specific area of Istanbul, apart from their potential role in reinforcing canals and water supply infrastructure in the Belgrade Forest. Having in mind the enclave position of the Belgrade *banovina* prior to the Ottoman conquest, some deportees had skills in urban agriculture; cultivation and farming have been present for centuries in areas adjacent to Yedikule.<sup>53</sup> In addition, argued Prof. Ćorović, another homonymous village was established behind Büyükdere. This village was exempt from taxes under the condition to manage water supplies for the city and surrounding villages. Moreover, and still according to Ćorović, the villages Bayrak (Barjačić) and Karagöl (Karadol) along the Dardanelles before the First World War contained a Serbian community of nearly 500 people, nurturing a story of origin from Moravian Serbia.

Similar details have also been noted by Novaković, who described his visit in 1898 to the Belgrade *Mahala*. Street signs contained markings in Greek script, as Novaković described his walk north of the seven towers (Yedikule), “beneath which trains (at that time) entered the city.” The Belgrade *Mahala* was populated by inhabitants in an area where urban agriculture was promoted, in the vicinity of the Byzantine walls, and existed under that name until the early twentieth century. Novaković identified the *Mahala* as a settlement with streets and an Orthodox church, 100 meters from a Byzantine gate. He referred to an earlier testimony of Skarlatos Byzantinos, who described a Church of the Ascension of the Holy Mother, and a settlement founded by Belgrade deportees, who also brought along the (above-mentioned) relics, some of which were originally Byzantine.

According to Prof. Novaković, the stone Church of the Ascension of the Holy Mother, near the entrance to the Belgrade *Mahala*, was known among residents as the Belgrade church. The Belgraders erected the church, which was famous for its homonymous icon brought from Belgrade. Novaković and others documented its presence in what used to be the Belgrade *Mahala* until at least 1898. Prof. Novaković described the church as follows:

The courtyard is spacious, as is the interior, but the church building is not tall. It is made of red stone, with some cracks evident from the preceding earthquake. Apart from a basin with holy water on the south side, old decorative icons and silverware generally contradict the humble interior of the church, its gray, wooden floors and three passages (in line with the Ottoman style), including small galleries set apart by bars.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> V. Ćorović, *Istorija srpskog naroda* 304–10.

<sup>53</sup> D. Baxter, “Meet the Istanbul Farmers Fighting to Save Their 1,500-Year-Old Urban Gardens” (2016), [https://munchies.vice.com/en\\_us/article/aea8vg/meet-the-istanbul-farmers-fighting-to-save-their-1500-year-old-urban-gardens](https://munchies.vice.com/en_us/article/aea8vg/meet-the-istanbul-farmers-fighting-to-save-their-1500-year-old-urban-gardens) (last visited 2018-10-01).

<sup>54</sup> Kalić-Mijušković, *Beograd u srednjem veku*, 264, tr. Miloš Petrović. Serbian original in Novaković, “Naselje Beograda od 1521.”



The “capital icon” of the Holy Mother of Belgrade was “covered and decorated in silver.” Four “capital icons” of silver were displayed in the church, which, according to the priests, all originated from Belgrade. Novaković further mentioned that the icons were “clearly ancient,” its wooden edges having almost eroded. A Saint Nicholas icon, also on display near the entrance, contained old Slavic words, which were somewhat hard to read due to overlays; there was also a reference to the year 1539 (some 18 years following the deportation).

In her book *Beograd u srednjem veku* (Belgrade in medieval times), Jovanka Kalić-Mijušković also referred to the fact that the relics of Saint Parascheva, Saint Theophano and Mother of God icon were placed in the southwestern *mahala* of the town where the church has been later erected; this church burned down in 1955. The traces of its original inhabitants were lost.<sup>55</sup>

Today, this neighborhood contains the Belgradkapı Panagia Rum Ortodoks Kilisesi (Belgrade Gate Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Mother), which claims 1523 as its year of foundation, built by prisoners of war. It contained the remains of St. Parascheva prior to their transfer to Moldavia: for this reason it may previously have been known as St. Parascheva Church. However, in accordance with the most valuable icon (which does not get any detailed mention in the available resources, except for by Novaković),<sup>56</sup> it was officially named after the Mother of God. The small church was last reconstructed in 1837, having suffered an earthquake and many years of neglect.

## Concluding remarks

The 1955 Istanbul pogrom was not given much attention in communist Yugoslavia, either with regard to the Orthodox Christian churches being destroyed or to the fate of their believers. The reasons are multifold. Already at the time of Prof. Novaković’s stay in Istanbul in the late 1800s, the Serbian community had long ago blended into the wider Orthodox *millet*, dominated by the Greek language and customs. By the time multinational Yugoslavia was formed, the Belgraders of Istanbul had long ceased to exist, and their heritage in the city had become integrated into the wider histories of the Ottoman Empire and the Orthodox Church. The assimilation of the Serbian community contributed to the loss of sources, but also to the lack of interest of the modern Serbian (and Turkish) state regarding the establishment and development of the colonies of Belgraders in Istanbul.

In addition, the 1955 pogrom arrived at a moment when Belgrade had started to nurture closer military ties with NATO through the so-called Treaty of Alliance, Political Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance Between the Turkish Republic, the Kingdom of Greece, and the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (1954). This treaty was aimed against the growing influence of the Soviet Union, which lay behind the foundation of the Warsaw Pact in 1955. The pogrom led to a falling-out between Greece and Turkey, which Yugoslavia on the other hand needed in order to secure its sovereignty from the Soviet Union. In that respect, from the side of socialist Belgrade, no specific attention was devoted to the jeopardy in which the Christian heritage in Istanbul found itself.

<sup>55</sup> J. Kalić-Mijušković, *Beograd u srednjem veku* 263–64.

<sup>56</sup> Novaković, “Naselje Beogradana od 1521” 250–51.

After 1955, the Belgrade Gate Church shared the fate of many Christian objects in Istanbul, having suffered destruction or neglect for decades. Its small size and obscurity, especially compared to the many other Christian buildings and objects across Istanbul, have certainly pushed it to the margin of public attention. Still, investigations into toponyms and etymology remain significant instruments for understanding the history and myths behind the place names. As symbolic traces of history, toponyms sometimes constitute rare evidence of past events. Its origins and existence, although at times difficult to establish more closely due to the lack of more reliable sources, constitute an important area of study. Belgrade place names in Istanbul continue to remind us of the colonies of Belgraders, who contributed to the development of Constantinople during the Ottoman period.



*Fig. 3. The current state of the Belgrade Gate. Photo by Olof Heilo 2019.*