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## REVIEW AND TIMELINE OF THE BANAT'S COLONISATION

**Abstract.** In the early 1700s, Banat was one of the least developed parts of the Habsburg monarchy. Because of its strategic position on the southern border with Turkey, the interests of Austria, Hungary and Turkey overlapped at Banat. To ensure and strengthen control over the territory of Banat, the Habsburg monarchy set up a loyal population and established Banat military border. The first settlers of Banat met mostly marshland and a sharp continental climate. Not adapting to such conditions, some colonists became ill, and most of the rest left Banat. Realizing the problems, subsequent plans for the settlement of Banat included activities aimed at providing acceptable living conditions and independent employment for the settlers and the local population. This article provides a concise overview of 250 years of the Banat's colonisation.

**Key words:** Banat, colonisation of Banat, migrations, Banat military frontier, timelines

### 1. Introduction

The organized mass colonisation of Banat began in the 18th century. After 250 years, it finished in the middle of the 20th century. At that time, Banat was part of Austria and Hungary (until 1918), the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941) and the Federal Democratic Republic of Yugoslavia from 1945 onwards.

During the period 1800-1945 taking control of Banat was a long-term strategic objective of powerful empires (Austria, Hungary and Turkey) and finally, to the newly formed state of Yugoslavia. Banat's borders were changing in accordance with the success of wars. To consolidate the fluid state's borders, among others, the current owners of Banat have tried to ensure an acceptable national and religious structure of the people of Banat. To achieve this, they carried out continuous settlement of the loyal population.

During two centuries, Germans and Hungarians had more privileges compared to other nationalities and domiciled population (Serbs and Romanians). Nevertheless, in addition to the achievement of military and economic objectives, the authorities had tried to improve the life and economy of all residents. Urban plans have been prepared for the construction of new settlements and the development of existing. The mainly marshy environment has been cultivated, roads and bridges have been constructed, and artesian wells have been drilled to provide healthy water. Special attention has been paid to building schools, churches and fighting infectious diseases. Since the second half of the 19th century, a rail network has been built in Banat. An efficient connections with the developed European countries contributed to the development of the economy of Banat.

Such a long history has involved many key events and participants. Therefore this article presents only a brief overview of the colonisation of Banat. Finally, the

timelines created could help to overview the colonisation of Banat as a whole and at a glance.

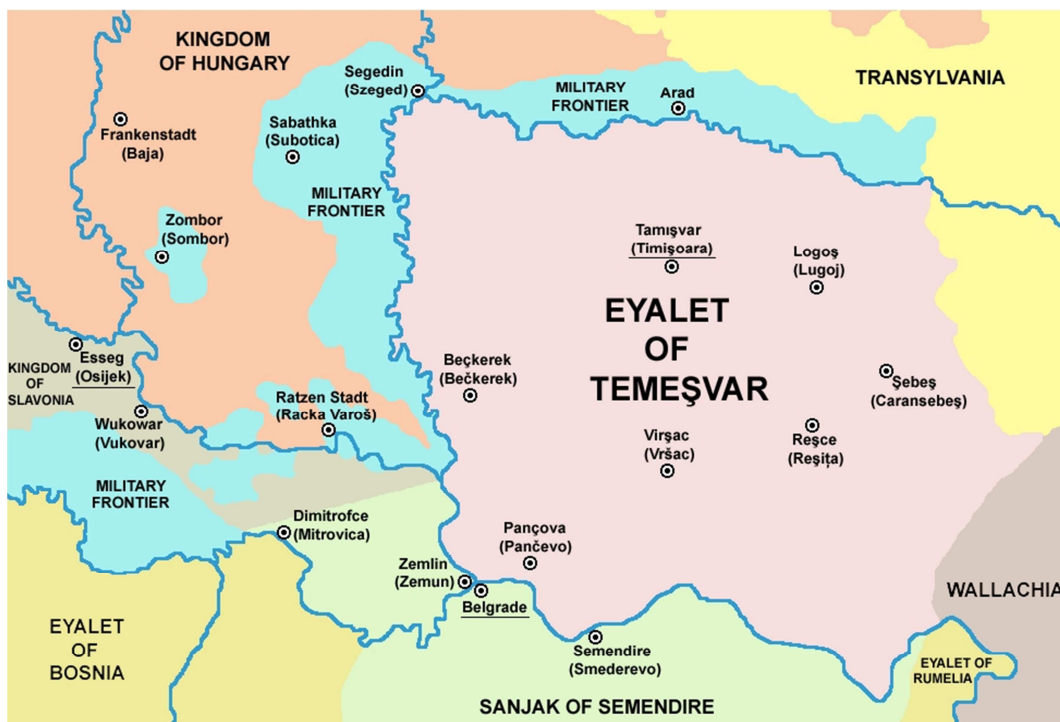
## 2. The review of the colonisation of Banat

During the 18th and 20th centuries, no significant natural and spontaneous migrations to Banat took place. Instead, the planned and organised colonisation were forced. The colonisation were done in cycles. There have been several typical periods, according to state jurisdiction, geopolitical, military, economic and social conditions and objectives [1]:

1. Colonisation during the reign of Charles VI (1700-1739).
2. The Teresian colonisation (1740-1780).
3. The Josephine colonisation of Germans (1781-1792).
4. The colonisation of the 19th century that predominates the agricultural and industrial character.
5. Following the World War I, the new Kingdom of Yugoslavia colonized Banat from 1918 to 1930.
6. After the World War II, Federal Democratic Republic of Yugoslavia carried out colonisation from 1945 to 1950.

### 2.1 Colonisation during the reign of Charles VI (1700-1739)

By the early 18th century, the Austrian monarchy of the Habsburgs was a conglomerate of states, principalities and provinces. The Austrian monarch Charles VI was in charge. The Figure 1 illustrates the political situation of Banat in 1702.



Political situation in 1702:

1. Ottoman territories:

- - Eyalet of Temeşvar (existed with these borders from 1699 to 1718)
- - Sanjak of Semendire (existed with these borders from 1699 to 1718), part of Eyalet of Rumelia

2. Habsburg territories:

- - Military Frontier (existed with these borders from 1702 to 1743)
- - Kingdom of Slavonia (existed with these borders from 1702 to 1718)
- - Kingdom of Hungary (existed with these borders from 1702 to 1732)

Figure 1. Political situation in 1702

(Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Eyalet\\_of\\_temesvar1699.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Eyalet_of_temesvar1699.png))



- - Banat of Temeswar (existed with these borders from 1718 to 1739), part of Habsburg Monarchy
- - Military Frontier (existed with these borders from 1702 to 1743), part of Habsburg Monarchy
- - Kingdom of Slavonia (existed with these borders from 1718 to 1744), part of Habsburg Monarchy
- - Kingdom of Hungary (existed with these borders from 1702 to 1732), part of Habsburg Monarchy
- - Kingdom of Serbia (existed from 1718 to 1739), part of Habsburg Monarchy
- - North Bosnia (from 1718 to 1739), part of Habsburg Monarchy
- - Little Wallachia (from 1718 to 1739), part of Habsburg Monarchy
- - Principality of Transylvania, part of Habsburg Monarchy

Figure 2. Political situation during 1718-1739

Note: Kingdom of Serbia, as a part of Habsburg Monarchy existed from 1718 to 1739

(Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tamis\\_banat1718\\_1739.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tamis_banat1718_1739.png))

Under these circumstances, the first settlement of Banat began in 1712 by the Austrian Emperor Charles VI. After the Austro-Turkish War of 1716-1718 and the Peace Treaty of Požarevac, Habsburg Monarchy took control over Banat and colonisation continued intensively. Several years later, the political situation changed when Habsburg Monarchy took control over Banat. After the division of Banat had occurred (Figure 2), Emperor Charles VI achieved the first colonisation of Banat in the 18th century.

In addition to military goals, the settlement of Banat had distinct development and economic goals. The settlers' first tasks involved draining swamps, building roads and bridges, and developing agriculture. The new inhabitants, native to Tyrol, Carniola, Bohemia, Silesia, the Upper Danube and the Rhine, were experienced craftsmen, miners and builders. Other group of settlers were Italian, French, and Spanish. The plan was to develop industrial agriculture, gardening, fruit cultivation and viticulture. But the settlers were greeted by a highly problematic natural and political environment. Much of the Banat's territory consisted of steppe-type land and unhealthy swamps (Figure 3). So, many colonists died from malaria and other infectious diseases [1].



Figure 3. Swamp near Starčevo, May 2023  
Still today, three centuries later, there are a lot swamps in Banat  
(image: Z. Cvetkovic)

Another threat to the population was posed by the Turks, who used to cross the Danube River and enter Banat. Finally, most of the surviving settlers left Banat and returned to where they had come from. Turkey's claims to Banat did not cease after the Peace Treaty of Požarevac. The new war between Austria and Turkey took place from 1737 to 1739. It was ended by the victory of Turkey and signing of the Peace Treaty of Belgrade on 18 September 1739. The new boundaries are shown in Figure 4.

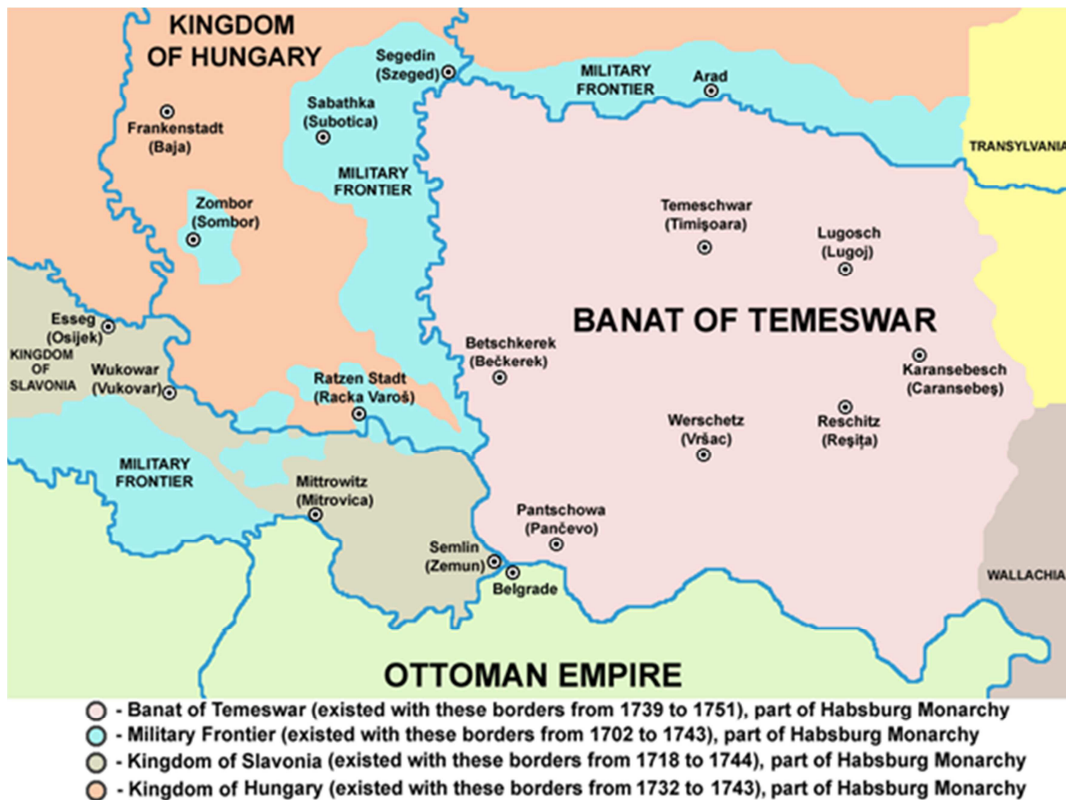


Figure 4. Political situation in 1739  
(Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Banat03.png>)

## 2.2 Teresian colonisation (1740-1780)

Following the war, the Habsburg Monarchy began a new cycle of colonisation of Banat. The so called Teresian colonisation was carried out during the reign of Maria Theresa, daughter of Charles VI. It covered the period 1740-1780. Bearing in mind the problems from the past, the settlement strategy includes activities for a better and more acceptable existence of new inhabitants. It was planned:

- To cultivate the surroundings and to dry marshlands. The intention was to obtain new agricultural areas and to reduce the risks of infectious diseases.
- To provide healthy water by digging deep and artesian wells.
- To reconstruct existing settlements and to build new ones on the basis of detailed urban plans. The detailed plan of Baron Anthony von Cothmann was accepted. [1]
- To improve the social, health, cultural and educational system. The plan was that every settlement had to have a church, school, municipal buildings, store, and a tavern. Building of churches and schools should consider the national and religious structure of the population. Also, the plan was to obtain a doctor, at least for several villages, and a small hospital and pharmacy in every settlement.

At the end of this period, in 1771, Maria Theresa issued a decree, allowing the settlement of Hungarians in Banat. [1]

### 2.3 Josephine colonisation of Germans (1781-1792)

In 1781, Joseph II, the son of Maria Theresa, received the authority to manage the further colonisation of Banat. Intending to improve the lives of natives and new residents, Joseph II announced a decree on September 21, 1782 [1]:

- Every family must be provided with a comfortable house, suitable for that time.
- Farmers should receive working tools, livestock for draft and reproduction, and craftsmen should receive tools.
- Newly founded settlements were supplied from Vienna, until the inhabitants became economic and production active.
- Settlers are exempted from paying taxes for ten years.
- Residents are guaranteed full religious freedom, regardless of nationality (Figure 5, Figure 6).

To organise and operate on the introduction of an overall education, regardless of nationality (Figure 7).



Figure 5. Catholic church in Opovo from 1776 (October 2022, image: Z. Cvetkovic)



Figure 6. Orthodox church in Opovo from 1831 (October 2022, image: Z. Cvetkovic)

By the end of the 18th century, the establishment of the Banat Military Frontier had a significant impact on the colonisation of Banat. Officially, the Banat Military Frontier was established in 1787. [2] In order to form new military formations, the Habsburg Monarchy colonized experienced German soldiers. In addition to them, the Serbs were involved. The frontiers were housed in newly formed colonies, and occasionally in existing settlements that had been adapted to military requirements. Also, they had to build necessary military infrastructure (Figure 8).



Figure 7. Serb elementary school from 1843 in Idvor, attended by Mihajlo Pupin (October 2022, image: Z. Cvetkovic)



Figure 8. The bridge from the time of the Banat Military Frontier in Pločica. It was built across the marsh to connect military settlement Pločica with the watchtower on the Danube (May 2023, image: Z. Cvetkovic)

The inclusion of Serbs has been followed by their internal migrations - from their previous residence to organised military settlements.

## 2.4 XIX century

By the early 19th century, there were already a large number of organised settlements in Banat. That is why Austria had redefined the objectives of colonizing Banat, giving priority to the agricultural and industrial development of the region. The intention was to settle up experienced farmers, craftsmen and other professionals, needed to improve the life in Banat. The result was that, besides the Germans and Hungarians, came people of other nationalities: Czechs, Slovaks, Bulgarians and Romanians.

One major event in the history of Banat was the Hungarian Revolution (1848-49). After its failure Banat became the Austrian Crown Land (Figure 9). The weakening of Turkey and the disagreements between Austria and Hungary, concerning the military border of Banat, led to its abolition in 1872. Following its abolition, more mass internal migration took place. Some of the soldiers, mostly Serbs, have relocated to the existing settlements in Banat.



Figure 9. Political situation in 1848

(Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Vojvodina03.png>)

From the middle of the 19th century, industrial development in Europe extended to Banat as well. Among others, a significant railway network was built by the end of the



century (Figure 10). The efficient transportation has facilitated the export of agricultural products and enhanced the region's economy.

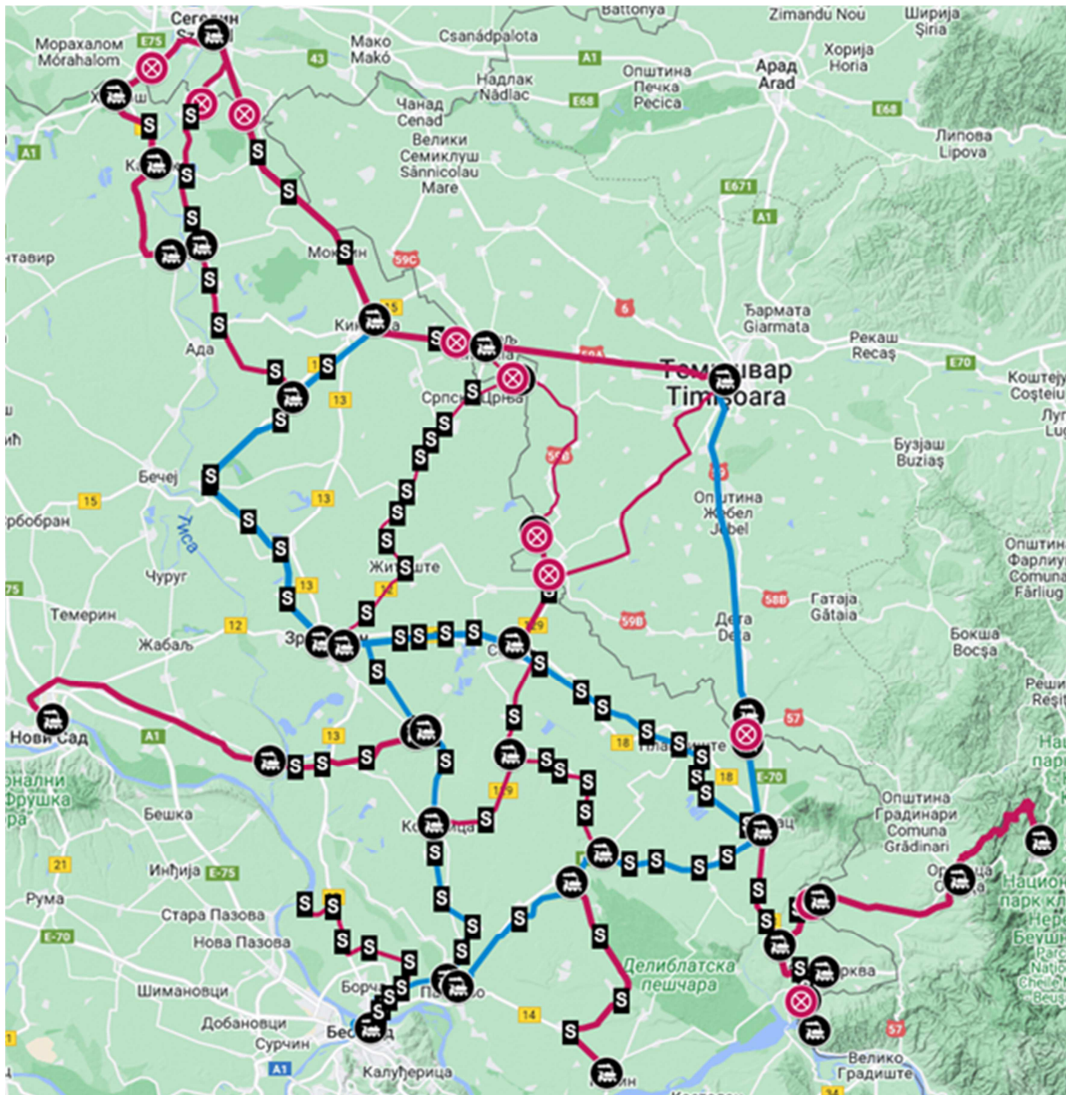


Figure 10. The railway network, by the end of the XIX century, author: Z. Cvetkovic ([https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1AqNyef9g2l11JvNUkIJ541\\_ruG-SyXH5&ll=45.51860923678934%2C20.616070375276454&z=9](https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1AqNyef9g2l11JvNUkIJ541_ruG-SyXH5&ll=45.51860923678934%2C20.616070375276454&z=9))  
More about: <https://www.ncd.matf.bg.ac.rs/issues/39/4.pdf>

## 2.5 The XX century

The wars between Turkey and the Habsburg Monarchy of the 18th and 19th centuries had a regional character and did not significantly slow down colonisation. In most cases, the inhabitants of war zones have moved to safer locations in Banat. However, both World Wars considerably altered Banat's national structure. After World War I, Banat became the part of the new Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The International borders of Banat, are defined at the 1919-1920 Paris Peace Conference (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Political situation in 1920-1921

(Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Banat\\_backa\\_baranja\\_01\\_map.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Banat_backa_baranja_01_map.png))

The new state implements agrarian reform and nationalisation of land owners' estates. The Serbs, the participants in the war, the war volunteers and the population of the underdeveloped regions of the country were established on the former landowners' estates. The Census from the 1931 illustrates the change in the nation's population structure (Table 1). The number of Serbs had grown, while the share of other nationalities had declined. The colonisation ended towards the end of the 1931-1935. Following World War II, a new state: the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia replaced the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia within similar borders. Due to various reasons and circumstances, the national structure of Banat changed. The 1953 population census (Table 1) shows the greatest decrease in the number of Germans. Some of these have been documented members of the occupying forces. Others were just suspected. And eventually, part of the German population left Banat, fearing of possible retaliation.

The state government, as in previous times, has implemented nationalisation, agrarian reform and new colonisation. Banat was mainly inhabited by people from Kosovo and Metohija, Croatia, Bosnia-Hercegovina and Montenegro. Settlement processes were completed by 1955.

The population and ethnic structure after 1955 were not the result of colonisation, but of other social processes.

Table 1. Ethnic distribution of the population in Banat (1910–2001/02) [3]

	1910	1931	1953	1992	2002
Hungarian	109,510	90,670	110,030	72,508	62,891
%	18.8	15.4	17.4	10.5	10.5
German	133,495	116,900	6,277	–	854
%	23	20	1	–	0.1
Serbian	232,009	271,900	388,268	460,929	435,685
%	40	46.3	61.5	66.7	72.6
Romanian	76,398	61,743	55,439	33,795	26,521
%	13.1	10.5	8.8	4.9	4.4
Others	29,175	45,693	69,911	124,072	74,059
%	5.1	7.8	11.3	17.9	12.4
Total	580,957	586,906	631,485	690,314	600,010

### 3 Timelines of the Banat's colonisation

The timelines were created to provide an overview of the long-term, planned and controlled processes of the Banat's colonisation (Figure 12, Figure 13). The timelines present the settlers' nationalities and settlements. The 18th and 19th centuries are covered.

To simplify, two timelines have been created. They only included external subjects of colonisation. Internal migration of the resident population, primarily Serbs and Romanians, is not indicated. Also, timelines do not include the sporadic arrival of small groups of Italians, French, Spanish and Jews.

Figure 12 depicts a timeline with a comparative view of the dominant settlers: Germans and Hungarians. There are several periods of intense German and Hungarian colonisation, such as: 1712-1739, 1760-1782, 1789-1804, 1817-1844 and 1859-1879. The timeline in the Figure 13 shows other nationalities: Romanians, Slovaks, Czechs and Bulgarians. According to the intensity, it is possible to distinguish the period from 1773 to 1818.

In the context of this article, the 20th century is not covered. The reason is that after the World Wars, only the colonists from Yugoslavia settled in Banat. Even if planned and organised, these colonisations could be considered as internal migrations.

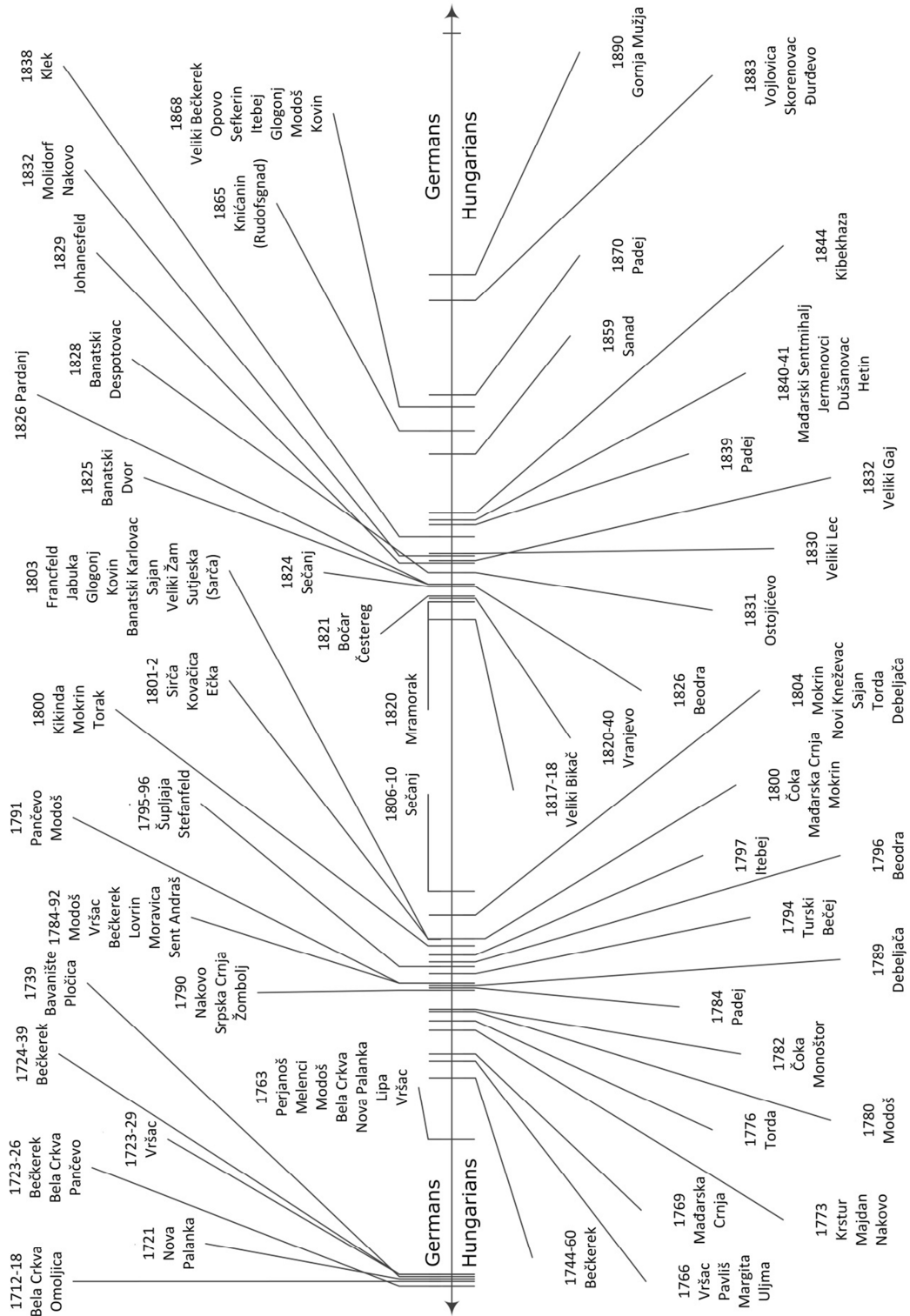


Figure 12. Colonisation of Germans and Hungarians

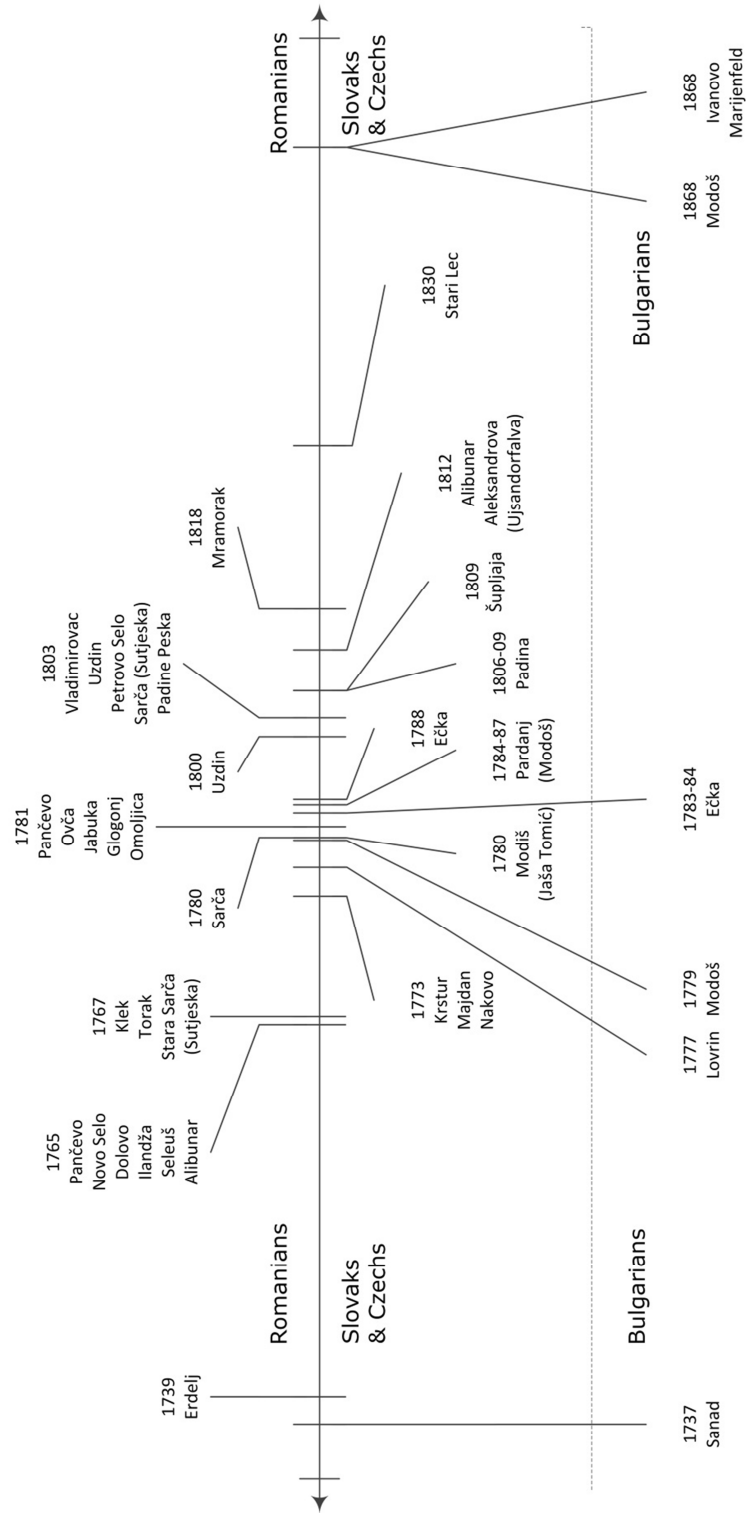


Figure 13. Colonisation of Romanian, Slovak, Czech and Bulgarian

## 4 Conclusion

The first part of this article provides a brief overview of the circumstances, objectives, topics, and temporal and spatial determinants of Banat's settlement in 18th and 19th century. It covers the colonisation of Banat within the boundaries of the former Yugoslavia and present-day Serbia.

The colonisation of Banat was a complex, long-term process. It took place under different historic circumstances, with different interests of Austria, Hungary and Turkey. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the colonisation leaders were Austria and Hungary. Colonisation began with military, political and economic interests. The military objectives were to protect the southern borders of the Habsburg Monarchy from the Turks. The policy objectives of Austria and Hungary were polarised. By colonisation a loyal population, both states have sought to secure domination in Banat. Apart from the state administration, the Germans and Hungarians had more privileges than the other residents of Banat. However, to ensure the prosperity of Banat and the whole population, the government has developed infrastructures, agriculture, education, etc. Special attention was paid to the prevention of epidemics and the supply of healthy water, culture, urbanization and the construction of healthy houses for settlers and inhabitants. Finally, Austria and Hungary were interested in establishing a regional identity in Banat and significantly improving the overall development [3].

For a better understanding of colonisation processes, the second part of this article presents the timelines of the colonisation. They visualise the temporal and spatial parameters, as well as the ethnic groups concerned.

This article does not provide a more detailed review of colonisation after World War I, when Austria and Hungary lost control of Banat. After the end of the World War I, the newly established state of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia colonised exclusively its own population. The policy of internal colonisation continued even after World War II, at the time of the constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia.

For detailed research on colonisation from 1918 to 1955 there are numerous original documentation in the historical archives in Serbia, in particular in Vojvodina.

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