

MIGRATIONS AND THE SACRED TOPOGRAPHY OF THE DELIBLATO SANDS: THE VILLAGE OF DELIBLATO¹

Annemarie SORESCU-MARINKOVIĆ

Institute for Balkan Studies, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade

e-mail: annemarie.sorescu@bi.sanu.ac.rs

Valentina ŽIVKOVIĆ

Institute for Balkan Studies, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade

e-mail: valentina.zivkovic@bi.sanu.ac.rs

Abstract

This paper focuses on the co-shaping of nature and the sacred landscape of the village of Deliblato, located on the margins of the Deliblato Sands, in Vojvodina, Serbia, also known as the “European Sahara”. This study illustrates how ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ landscapes are inseparable, mutually shaped by human and non-human forces. We take two directions of research into how environmental reality impacts human-created sacred spaces: 1) we explore how migrations and cultural interactions, defining this area, constructed the sacred spaces on the margins of this specific landscape, and 2) we analyse how the landscape is represented and reflected in the sacred topography of the village of Deliblato. The object of our study is two rural Christian Orthodox churches – the Serbian and the Romanian, as well as the village cemetery, in which we investigated whether certain landscape features favoured the formation of certain types of religious or sacred representations.

Keywords: migration; sacred topography; linguistic landscape; natural landscape; Banat.

1. Introduction

The Deliblato Sands (Serb. *Deliblatska peščara*, Rom. *Dunele Deliblata*), also referred to as the “European Sahara” or “one of the last deserts in Europe”, is a large sandy area of around 300 km² located between the Danube River and the southwestern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains, in South Banat, Vojvodina Province, Serbia. The sands are named after the village of Deliblato, which will be the focus of this paper. Once part of a vast prehistoric desert that originated from the withdrawal of the Pannonian Sea, the Deliblato Sands are today comprised of forest steppe, sand steppe, and fragments of sand dunes. However, records from the Middle Ages, but also remnants of bones and horns of deer represent evidence that in the past the area was covered by forest vegetation (Stankević & Pavićević, 1963). The changes in

¹ Article History: Received: 09.09.2025. Accepted: 07.11.2025. Published: 15.05.2026. This paper is a result of the research carried out at the Institute for Balkan Studies at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, funded by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development, and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia, based on the Agreement on the Implementation and Financing of Scientific Research Work in 2025, no. 451-03-136/2025-03 dated 27 January 2025.

vegetation until the 18th century were the result of historical circumstances: the successive migration waves of different populations, accompanied by frequent battles and wars, led to the reduction or increase of the forest surface (Sedlak, 2019). Maps of the southern part of the Pannonian Plain drawn in the 18th and 19th centuries reveal that this region was at that time already dominated by sand, and almost entirely devoid of woody plants (Čuk et al, 2023).

Nonetheless, starting with the 19th century, this sandy area has been subject to afforestation projects, some of which are still ongoing. This was undertaken primarily to combat wind erosion and stabilize the sandy terrain, which was hindering agricultural development in the region. The first program of intense afforestation of the Deliblato Sands was instituted by the authorities of the Habsburg Empire in 1818, and it was coupled with human activity in the form of vineyard plantation and cattle grazing. All these drastically changed the profile of this zone, leaving behind only sporadic or mosaic sandy areas. As early as 1909, Austro-Hungarian conservationists recognised the importance of the legal protection of the Deliblato Sands and made the first steps to preserve its unique flora and fauna (Kaán, 1914). However, the Deliblato Sands became a special nature reserve only in 1977; it is now home to many endemic species of plants and animals that are rare or endangered in Europe and globally, as well as to new non-local species, brought by human intervention.

Given that this protected area has a unique profile, which has influenced the development of special flora and fauna, the Deliblato Sands aroused the interest of scientists from different disciplines. Studies on the vegetation of this nature reserve prevail, be it that they are of a general character (Čuk et al., 2019; Gajić, 1983) or deal with specific issues, such as the role and use of wild flora in traditional phytotherapy (Popović et al., 2014) or the impact of invasive plants on biodiversity degradation (Kalinić et al., 2020). Microclimate studies are also numerous, and they deal, among other things, with the aeolian dynamics of the Deliblato Sands (Marković et al, 2024) or aridity indicators (Kadović et al., 2014). Lately, the potential of sustainable tourism in the area has also been investigated (Trišić et al., 2021).

As shown, most studies on the Deliblato Sands have focused either on its vegetation and geo-morphological characteristics or the impact of the human factor on the profile and biodiversity of the natural landscape of this area. Nevertheless, in modern scholarly discourse, the *landscape* functions as a complex and polyvalent concept, which should not be understood as independent of people, or even as made by people, but as the outcome of the physical and symbolic implication of people with their surroundings. Anthropologists have convincingly demonstrated that the environmental setting is an integral element of the society and culture (Christian, 1972), and an ongoing “cultural process” by which we mentally and imaginatively locate ourselves in the world (Hirsch, 1995, p. 5). More recently it has been reiterated that the phenomena designated as *natural landscape* and *cultural landscape* are inseparable (Cosgrove, 2003; Descola, 2013; Maddrell et al., 2015; Popović, 2024), and that *landscape* is something constructed by humans in the course of their daily lives and interactions, both physically and symbolically, “by being invested with meaning, memory, and value” (Filippucci, 2023, p. 2).

In light of the recent switch from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric paradigm, even in the case of religious landscapes (Campopiano, 2025), we advocate for a change of perspective on the Deliblato Sands: we focus on the co-shaping of the natural and cultural landscape, in this case, the sacred landscape. More precisely, we analyse the influence of ecosystems on individuals, and in the same time the way in which the human-created sacred spaces impact the environmental reality, focusing on how the natural landscape is represented and reflected in the sacred topography of the village of Deliblato. The object of our study is two rural Christian Orthodox churches – the Serbian and the Romanian, as well as the village cemetery. We also investigate whether certain landscape features favoured the formation of certain types of religious or sacred representations. In addition, we explore how migrations and cultural

interactions, definitory for this area, constructed the sacred spaces on the margins of this specific landscape, situated in the liminal zone of the border – a natural one at all points in time, as well as political and military in certain periods.

We base our study on a set of primary and secondary sources. Apart from consulting the relevant literature, we made several field trips to Deliblato during 2025, when we interviewed the residents and used a photo camera to collect visual material. In addition to open-ended interviews with locals conducted in Serbian and Romanian, we had extensive discussions with local Serbian and Romanian Orthodox priests, who explained to us in detail the specific history of the village and their respective churches, as well as their relationship with the inhabitants and the surroundings of the village. The collection of more than 200 photographs from the two churches and graveyard, taken during our fieldtrips, is deposited in the Digital Archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies (DABI), and available upon request.

2. The Village of Deliblato: Nature and Migrations

The map of human settlements forming a network on the margins of the Deliblato Sands comprises Šušara, Grebenac and Kajtasovo in the east, Šumarak and Dubovac in the south, Gaj, Deliblato, Mramorak and Dolovo in the west, Vladimirovac and Banatski Karlovac in the north. The village of Deliblato, which gives the name to the Deliblato Sands, is situated in the Kovin municipality of Vojvodina, at an altitude of 94 m, and has an area of 164 km². There are several hypotheses about the origin of the name Deliblato. It is most likely that it is derived from the Turkish word *deli* (“mad”) and the Serbian word *blato* (“mud”), so the full meaning in English would be “mad mud”, probably because this sandy area became very muddy during long rain periods in ancient times.

It is not certain when the village of Deliblato was founded. However, it was first mentioned in 1660 and described as populated by ethnic Serbs (Meza, 2022, pp. 28–29). Following the First Great Migration of the Serbs, during the Habsburg-Ottoman War of 1683–1699 under Serbian Patriarch Arsenije III Crnojević, more Serbs settled there (Erdeljanović, 2013; Krstić, 2022a, 2022b; Maticki & Jović, 2010; Stojančević, 1981). During the wars between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy, Deliblato suffered considerable damage. Therefore, the settlement was listed as uninhabited on the map series created between 1723 and 1725 by Count Claude Florimond de Mercy (Bataveljić, 1964).

A decision of Empress Maria Theresa in 1770 included Deliblato in the Military Frontier, the borderland of the Habsburg Monarchy, which from the 16th to the 19th century served as a protective barrier against incursions from the Ottoman Empire (more in Ilić Mandić, 2020). This was roughly the period when more Serbs and Romanians colonised this settlement, in exchange for land-grants, religious freedom and favourable tax rates offered to all frontiersmen of the Habsburg Monarchy. The first wave of Romanians came in 1765 from around Sighișoara and Alba Iulia in Transylvania. A few years later, in 1771, another wave of Romanians migrated from Oravița, Goruia, Giurgiova and Răchitova in the Romanian part of Banat, and in 1800, Romanians from Șoșdea, Ilidia, Răcășdia, Jam and Naidăș arrived in Deliblato (Popi, 1993, p. 250).

It should not be overlooked that, besides its security function, the Military Border itself has been subject to the population policy of the Habsburg authorities throughout the centuries. In fact, the Military Frontier was the result of carefully planned, controlled immigration, since adequate population size was a precondition for the sustainability of the frontier system and the justification for its initial role as a “protective wall” in the 16th and 17th centuries, and for its later role as a “manpower reservoir” in the 18th and 19th centuries (Ilić Mandić, 2022, p. 48). In the 18th century, when the migration of different ethnic groups shaped the modern ethnic profile

of Deliblato, the Habsburg migration policy was based on the principle of a comprehensive mercantilism, which highly valued population size as the basis for state self-sufficiency and power (Ilić Mandić, 2022, p. 48).

According to data compiled by the Romanian priest in Deliblato, in 1916, an all-time high number of Romanians was registered in the village: 2,336 (Meza, 2022, p. 85), accounting for almost half of the village population, with the Serbian community being only slightly more numerous. In 1921, according to the official population census, Deliblato had 4,366 inhabitants; the ethnic structure of the village was as follows: 2,393 Serbs, 1,810 Romanians, 117 Germans, 32 Hungarians, 11 other Slavs and 3 “others”. Therefore, Romanians represented 41.5% of the population. The population of the settlement has been steadily declining during the last century, following a similar trend as most other settlements in Vojvodina and generally in Serbia: in 2022, Deliblato had only 2,409 inhabitants, with Romanians accounting for approximately 10% of the total population, as per official statistics.

In the village of Deliblato, the life of the different populations that migrated and settled there at different points in time has been inextricably linked to nature, waters, plants, and animals. Deliblato was also the seat of the Banat Border Management Directorate, which officially began its activity in 1818 and was in charge of the afforestation of the territory of the Deliblato Sands (Sedlak, 2019, pp. 47–48). Afforestation was accompanied by the introduction of control measures related to the prohibition of woodcutting and grazing of cattle. Kraljevac Lake, registered already in 16th-century maps, lies in the vicinity of the village (Meza, 2022, p. 24).

3. Sacred Topography of Deliblato

Sacred topography is defined as the creation of holy spaces where miracle-working icons and relics, iconographic programs, and tombs are all woven together in specific sites, comprising churches, shrines, cities, villages and landscapes. Sacred topography shows how places are imbued with symbolic meanings and how these meanings contribute to religious practices, serving as repositories of collective memory (Della Dora, 2016; Erdeljan, 2017; Lidov, 2006, 2014; Walsham, 2012). The environmental setting is understood as a matrix where the relationships among people and the powers that preside over their world, in other words God, are articulated physically and imaginatively (Christian, 1972). Specific divine figures are implanted in the landscape through shrines, which are “transaction points in the landscape between the human group, the land, and the powers that influence the success of the group’s enterprises” (Christian, 1972, p. 45).

The sacred topography of Deliblato is closely intertwined with the history of migration, especially of the two main ethnic groups that live in the village – Serbs and Romanians. We will investigate how these aspects of migrations are reflected in interpretations of the local landscape, but also the imaginary (sacred/nationalistic) landscape/space/cultural imagination that might differ between ethnic groups and migration trajectories.

After their arrival in Deliblato, the Serbs and Romanians attended religious services in the shared church (the present-day Serbian Orthodox church), as they were both Orthodox Christians. A law issued in 1868 approved the separation of the Serbian-Romanian Christian Orthodox communities in the Habsburg Monarchy. The process of separation in Deliblato started in 1890 and lasted until 1896. In the beginning, the Romanians attended religious services in a rented house, until the local Romanian Orthodox church was finished in 1925. Hence, much of the history of today’s Serbian Orthodox church also relates to the Romanian Orthodox community. Therefore, the phenomena discussed below cannot be observed and

interpreted as belonging exclusively to the Serbian community of Deliblato, but to both the Serbian and Romanian communities.

3.1. The Serbian Orthodox Church

The Serbian Orthodox church, dedicated to the Translation of the relics of Saint Nicholas from Myra to Bari situated on a hill overlooking Kraljevac Lake, shows an astonishing integration with the landscape,² creating a particular sacred space (see Fig. 1). Kraljevac Lake was formed after building a dam that collected the water from several streams flowing down from the Deliblato Sands. As the sandy formation is tens of metres higher than the surrounding plains, these streams have formed characteristic cuts at the edge of the sandy terrace. These cuts are now filled with water, forming the long and winding Kraljevac Lake, surrounded by reeds, grassy hills and pastures, sandy cliffs, and arable lands. A protected area today, the lake is inhabited by extremely rare species of flora and fauna. The lake is characterised by floating peat islands, formed when deposited peat from the lake's bottom pops up to the water surface, giving it a dynamic appearance and creating a specific landscape (Stojanović et al, 2024).



Fig. 1. The Serbian Orthodox church, dedicated to the Translation of the relics of Saint Nicholas, on a hill overlooking Kraljevac Lake, Deliblato (photo credit: Valentina Živković, 2025)

The present-day church on the lake shore was preceded by two older structures that were subsequently demolished. The oldest Orthodox church in Deliblato was built in the second half of the 17th century, and it was located, together with the original village settlement, near Velika Vrela (“the big springs”), a drinking water spring, after which the place got its name. This place was closer to the Deliblato Sands and the village of Šumarak (Emanueltelep) (Meza, 2022, pp. 161–162). It was a timber church, built of logs and planks, which speaks of the economic resources of the church-goers at a given historical moment; still, we can also assume that this type of construction involved a special way of fitting the man-made structure into the natural environment.

After the locals demolished this church and moved to the area of today's village, they built another wooden church in the middle of the 18th century.³ According to the church chronicles, the old church was demolished in 1778 and replaced by a new one, whose construction was jointly funded by Serbs and Romanians. The new church was made of hard building material

² It has been noted that many shrines are located at “critical points in the ecosystem”, such as mountain peaks, springs, and caves (Christian, 1972, p. 181).

³ The place where this church used to be is today marked by a stone cross.

– specifically, bricks produced in the nearest town, Kovin. This sacred site, as a place of liminal experience, since the church building is a threshold between the earthly and the divine realms (Bacci, 2017), and the transformative experience (the church is dedicated to the translation of the relics of Saint Nicholas), is situated in a liminal zone: the end of the village and the beginning of the lake wilderness (Tilley & Cameron-Daum, 2017). The special connection of Deliblato with the original settlement can be seen precisely in the location of the cemetery on the other part of the village, which is linked by ploughed fields and a country road to Velika Vrela and, further, to the forest of the Deliblato Sands.

In the west and south parts of the churchyard, there are several tombs of people significant to the village and church, dating from the 18th century. Among them are the tombs of priest Maksim and his daughter, Anđelija Maksimova (Meza, 2022, p. 33). They are made of pink stone and are typologically similar to the tombs located on the north side next to the apse of the Church of Saint Peter and Paul in the neighbouring town of Bela Crkva (Biserica Albă).

According to the *Chronicle of the Deliblato Church*, written in 1861 by the chronicler and priest Jovan Grigorijević,⁴ the iconostasis was made in 1788 by Jakov Orfelin, a famous Serbian painter whose iconographic designs combined the traditional Orthodox heritage and contemporary Baroque models that had migrated from Central European religious art (Kostić, 2007; Vlăsceanu, 2023). Orfelin's dissemination of Western iconography is also evident in the iconostasis of Deliblato, which bears a strong resemblance to the iconostasis in Sremski Karlovci, his previous work from 1780. Although the iconostasis was damaged and has layers of later coating, it is one of Orfelin's better works, with his recognizable bright rococo colours (see Fig. 2). The scenes from the Passion of Christ cycle are among his finest works, especially the scene *Christ before Caiaphas*, which shows an aspiration towards freedom in his draughtsmanship: Orfelin skillfully avoided the frontality of the composition with a boldly foreshortened soldier in the foreground. In the composition *The Descent of the Holy Spirit*, he created a lively scene by turning the head of an apostle completely towards the viewer, as he had done on the Sremski Karlovci iconostasis (Bataveljić, 1964, pp. 395–398; Medaković, 1968, pp. 76–77; Stojančević, 1981).



Fig. 2. Jakov Orfelin, iconostasis, 1788, Church dedicated to the Translation of the relics of Saint Nicholas, Deliblato (photo credit: Valentina Živković, 2025)

⁴ In 1859, the military command of the Banat Military Frontier ordered its priests to collect historical, ethnographic and geographical data about the places in which they served and send them to the Protopresbyterate in Pančevo. The Serbian priest in Deliblato, Jovan Grigorijević, wrote the *Chronicle of the Deliblato Church*, fragments of which were published in the magazine “Javor” in 1880 (Meza, 2022, p. 161).

On the Virgin Mary's throne, there is an icon (see Fig. 3) which is a replica of the miraculous *Mother of God of Bezdin* (Serb. *Bogorodica Bezdinska*) (Timotijević, 2003), in the Banat region of what is today Romania, with the inscription:

This is the true icon of the Miraculous Image of the Purest Virgin of Bezdin, who abideth there even unto this day, granting healing to all who draw near with faith. Upon Thine all-pure and sovereign countenance, O Lady, the faithful set their gaze.⁵



Fig. 3. Icon, replica of *Mother of God of Bezdin*, Church dedicated to the Translation of the relics of Saint Nicholas, Deliblato (photo credit: Valentina Živković, 2025)

The *Mother of God of Bezdin* is a replica of the *Mother of God of Vladimir* (Serb. *Bogorodica Vladimirska*) (Tatić-Đurić, 1985), which was brought from Kiev by the monk Paisios (Serb. *Pajsije*) the Greek in 1727. It was kept in the Belgrade Cathedral before being transferred to the Vinča Monastery. After the monks fled from Vinča before the Turkish onslaught in 1739, they settled in the Bezdin Monastery, taking the miracle-working icon with them. In 1743, the Serbian Patriarch Arsenije IV Jovanović decided to transfer this icon from Bezdin to Sremski Karlovci as the protector of the new patriarchal throne (Timotijević, 2003).⁶ The *Mother of God of Bezdin* became famous for its thaumaturgic powers as a miraculous healing icon, especially of those with mental and spiritual disorders. A number of painted and print replicas of the miraculous icon from Bezdin were created, often accompanied by votive texts celebrating the miraculous icon which as a miracle worker who heals everyone who approaches it with faith, as was the case with the icon from Deliblato. As a replica of the original miraculous icon, the icon from Deliblato inherited not only the form and iconography, but also miracle-working powers, which can be explained by the concept of “sacred likeness” (Holmes, 2018). The presence of a

⁵ We thank our colleague Milena Davidović for transcribing and translating this inscription. Original source text: “Сіе истинное изображеніе Чудотворнаго вбраза пре(чи)стыа Б(огороди)цы Без[ь]дин[ь]скіа, идѣже и доселѣ пребываетъ и цѣленіа источаа всѣмъ вѣроу приходашти. На твои пре(чи)стыи вбразѣ царице вѣзм[ь]рираю.”

⁶ After the death of the Patriarch, by the decision of Empress Maria Theresa, in 1748 the icon was returned to Bezdin. It stayed there until the end of the World War I, when it was transferred to Kikinda, and then to Vršac, where it remains today, in the diocesan court chapel (Timotijević, 2003).

replica of the highly revered miracle-working icon reflects the careful construction of the holy site in Deliblato, as well as the entire sacred topography of Banat.

The “migratory” miraculous icon that has been transferred to another seat reflects the same concept as the translation of the relics. The very essence of the sacred life of Deliblato can be expressed via two phenomena: migration and transfer. The translation of the body of Saint Nicholas from Myra to Bari was depicted in a painting created in 1906 by the painter Milutin Dejanović on the church ceiling (Meza, 2022, p. 165). This painting is of particular importance for our topic, as it demonstrates the layers of reinterpretation of the sacred space (see Fig. 4). In the usual iconography of this topic, in the background of the translation of Saint Nicholas’ body, a church is shown, typically on a seashore, which should suggest the basilica in Bari.⁷ However, the painting by Milutin Dejanović shows a church tower that strongly resembles the tower of the Deliblato church. The changed landscape of the holy event points to its adjustment to the perception and needs of local believers. The holy event is transposed to a space that is recognizable and builds a connection with the natural environment (Carta, Michetti & Noce, 2024). This demonstrates how the sacred was imaginatively reinterpreted and experienced (Bacci, 2023) by the people in Deliblato. Namely, the procession carrying the saint’s body from Myra on a bier passes through a brick-walled gate, with a typical Banat village, very much like Deliblato, visible in the background. The houses in the painting are characteristic Banat houses with an elongated shape and a thatched roof, as they were until the end of the 19th century. Behind the houses rises a church tower like the tower of the Deliblato church. The procession moves along a sand-coloured road bordered by a meadow. The vegetation consists mainly of bushes and two tall trees that, with their slender shape, suggest that they could be poplar trees or junipers. Therefore, the visual language indicates that Deliblato was chosen purposely for the stage of the translation of the relics of Saint Nicholas (whose feast day is 22 May).

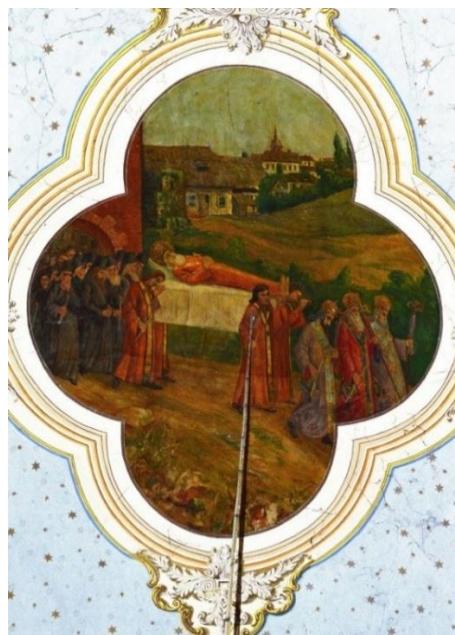


Fig. 4. Milutin Dejanović, *The translation of the relics of Saint Nicholas from Myra to Bari*, 1906, Church dedicated to the Translation of the relics of Saint Nicholas, Deliblato (photo credit: Valentina Živković, 2025)

⁷ For example, in the Monastery of the Patriarchate of Peć (the Saint Nicholas Chapel) there is the usual iconography of the translation of Saint Nicholas’ relics to Bari, painted in 1673–1674 by the Serbian painter Radul (Rakić, 1998, pp. 106–119; Todić, 2013, pp. 104–110).

This leads us to the question of how we can understand and explain the topic of the translation of relics at a certain historical moment (Geary, 1978; Papasidero, 2019, 2025). The act of translation is intimately bound with migration: the Latin *translatio* (“to ferry” or “carry across”) was originally used to name the process of moving and transplanting sacred relics (Maher, Polezzi & Wilson, 2025.) The *translatio* of the relics should presumably be seen as an important ritual within migration, when people transfer icons, relics, valuables, feasts and holidays to a new settlement. When it comes to this particular settlement on the edge of the Deliblato Sands, which, according to some geographical parameters, can be considered a desert, the transfer of relics and the enrichment of the desert with temples acquire a special symbolic meaning (Popović, 2009; Lidov, 2014).

Likewise, the translation of the relics of Saint Nicholas from Myra to Bari took place in the 11th century due to the invasion and devastation caused by Ismailians. As soon as the relics arrived in Bari and were placed in the church, miraculous healings began (Bacci, 2009). The legend about the translation of the relics (*furta sacra*, in fact) is based on the idea of rescue from the Islamic conquerors. Serbs from the country’s south migrated to the Banat and Vojvodina regions precisely because of the Turkish conquest. It is not by chance that churches dedicated to the Translation of the Relics of Saint Nicholas from Myra to Bari are common in the Deliblato Sands. For example, in Dolovo, there are two Serbian churches dedicated to the same holiday, as well as the village feast, which testifies to the power of the cult of Saint Nicholas as the protector of all those who leave their places of origin (Bacci, 2009; Živković, 2010).

3.2. The Romanian Orthodox Church

The Romanian Orthodox church in Deliblato is dedicated to the Holy Trinity. It is located in the relative vicinity of the Serbian Orthodox church, but without the spectacular view of the latter. In the beginning, after the separation of the Orthodox churches along ethnic lines, before purchasing the land needed for the construction of a new church, the Romanian parishioners gathered in a rented house for religious services. The construction of the church began in 1924 and ended in 1925 (Đurić Milovanović & Măran, 2019, pp. 57–58; Meza, 2022, pp. 184–185). By the time the church was finished, the parishioners no longer had the money to pay for its painting, so the interior of the church was decorated only in the 1980s by two painters from Romania, namely the Bucharest-based painter Grigore Popescu, who painted the iconostasis, and the Timișoara-based Viorel Țigu, who was in charge of the wall paintings (see Fig. 5).

The Romanian Orthodox church in Deliblato is one of the newest Romanian Orthodox churches in the Serbian Banat, being one of the only three churches built in the interwar period, together with the ones in Ovča and Kuštilj (Đurić Milovanović & Măran, 2019, p. 57). In the vestibule on the west wall above the portal, there is an inscription in Romanian stating that the cornerstone was laid during the time of the Romanian Patriarch Iustin and the Serbian Patriarch German, who are painted on the wall at the entrance to the nave. The foundation was consecrated by Bishop Iosif Traian Bădescu during the time of the local priest Cornel Jurca. During the painting of the church, the parish priest was Bujorel Lupșici (see Fig. 6), who is shown near the two patriarchs, together with Aurel Uroș, the first vicar of the Orthodox Romanians in the Serbian Banat. Bujorel Lupșici is buried in the Deliblato cemetery, and the portrait photo used on his tombstone also served as the template for the fresco portrait in the church.



Fig. 5. The interior of the Romanian Orthodox church dedicated to the Holy Trinity, Deliblato (photo credit: Valentina Živković, 2025)



Fig. 6. Viorel Țigu, *Parish priest Bujorel Lupșici*, 1980s, Romanian Orthodox church dedicated to the Holy Trinity, Deliblato (photo credit: Valentina Živković, 2025)

The Holy Trinity occupies the central place on the iconostasis, surrounded by the most important scenes of the Great Feasts: The Nativity, the Baptism of Christ, the Descent into Hades and the Ascension. Although in a solid schematic iconographic formula, one of the three shepherds from the Birth of Christ seems to be wearing a traditional Romanian long fur coat, while two wear traditional fur hats. The scene of Christ and the Samaritan woman who came to collect water from the spring also reveals the connection between the scriptural scenes and the Banat nature and landscape. Namely, the Samaritan woman is dressed in a national costume, while the background features a village with two houses and haystacks, very similar to traditional Banat houses, made of mud and straw (see Fig. 7). It is worth mentioning that the painter Grigore Popescu placed his signature among the painted plants in the scene of the Ascension of Christ on the iconostasis, where floral decoration is present.



Fig. 7. Viorel Țigu, *Christ and the Samaritan woman*, 1980s, Romanian Orthodox church dedicated to the Holy Trinity, Deliblato (photo credit: Valentina Živković, 2025)

The devotion to the Romanian Christian tradition is highlighted by the choice of Romanian martyrs depicted next to the main inscription above the entrance to the church, named in the captions as *Sf. M. Ioan Valahul* (Holy Martyr John the Vlach), in traditional attire, and *Sf. M. Ioan Cel Nou de la Suceava* (Holy Martyr John the New from Suceava).

Another characteristic of this church, which distinguishes it from all other Romanian churches in the Serbian Banat, is that the walls of the nave next to the sanctuary on both sides feature famous Romanian medieval rulers and national heroes in pairs: *Mihai de la Alba Iulia* (Michael the Brave, 1558–1601) and *Vlad Țepeș* (Vlad the Impaler, 1431–1476), *Mircea de la Cozia* (Mircea the Elder, 1355–1418) and *Ștefan de la Putna* (Stephen the Great, 1433–1504) (more about these Romanian national heroes in: Djuvara, 2014; Giurescu, 1935/2007; Iorga, 1968). The decision to paint them probably speaks of the need to showcase the glorious past of the Romanian people, which certainly played a prominent role in the cohesion of the Romanian community after the separation from the Serbian church, but also before this event, starting from their arrival in Deliblato. The four national heroes share several common features: they are all symbols of the defense of Christianity and the fight against the Ottoman conquest; they are symbols of national unity; and they are all founders of important Romanian Orthodox churches that became pilgrimage sites. Moreover, two of them, Stephen the Great and Michael the Brave, are considered the founders of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Transylvania (see Iorga, 1904).

In conclusion, it can be said that the painting of Romanian national heroes, holy martyrs, priests and patriarchs on the walls of the Romanian Orthodox church in Deliblato serves as an explicit visual reminder of the history of the Romanian people, to which the small Romanian community in Deliblato belongs. Also, the symbolic meaning of the depicted heroes and martyrs is actively reconstructed in the sacred space of the Romanian Orthodox church.

3.3. The Cemetery

The original village cemetery stood next to the old Orthodox church, built in the 18th century on top of a hill (Meza, 2022, pp. 205–208). Today, the cemetery of Deliblato is at the eastern end of the village, towards the springs that connect the village with the Deliblato Sands. The cemetery is split down the middle by the main path and, in theory, separates the Romanian and Serbian sides, but in reality, this is not the case, and the graves are mixed, although one part is predominantly Serbian. The oldest tombstones are approximately 200 years old and are made of sandstone, usually in a cruciform shape, while the most recent ones are made of marble, typically black.

As has been noticed, in the rural settlements of Banat, the biggest number of inscriptions is to be found in local cemeteries. The inscriptions and epitaphs on tombstones represent a corpus that can be used for a dynamic perspective of the linguistic landscape, as they preserve samples of written language from different time periods (Sorescu-Marinković & Salamurović, 2022, p. 72). In the context of multilingual communities, tombstone inscriptions are also “indicators of linguistic prestige, change and death of language” (VanDam, 2008, p. 31), which closely follow and reflect the ethnic and linguistic component of migrations and population dynamics. Sociolinguists have highlighted the bidirectional relationship and mutual influence between the linguistic landscape and the sociolinguistic context: the linguistic landscape reflects the relative strength and status of different languages in a specific sociolinguistic and multilingual context, but, at the same time, contributes to the construction of the sociolinguistic context itself, influencing how the status of different languages is perceived (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006, pp. 67–68).

The Deliblato cemetery contains inscriptions in Serbian, Romanian and German, reflecting the ethnic composition of the village in different periods. The several Roma and Hungarians buried here have epitaphs in Serbian. German is used exclusively on older monuments, as the local Germans were expelled from the village after World War II. Although there is a fairly large number of inscriptions in Romanian, Serbian dominates on the more recent tombstones, reflecting the village's current ethnic composition, but also language prestige. Regarding the inscriptions in Serbian, Cyrillic ones prevail, but it is not uncommon to encounter signage in the Latin alphabet, especially on newer tombstones. As for the inscriptions in Romanian, a phenomenon already noted in other mixed Banat cemeteries is present: the local, Banat variant of Romanian infiltrates many of them and is used in parallel with standard Romanian (Sorescu-Marinković, 2021; Fenner, Sorescu-Marinković & Salamurović, forthcoming). There are also several tombstones featuring inscriptions in both Serbian and Romanian.

Unlike in other regions of Europe, where minimal markings on monuments prevail as a sign of self-preservation that characterises the Protestant tradition, epitaphs in Orthodox cemeteries of Southeast Europe can be very long, complex and inventive. It has been shown that both in rural and urban cemeteries of Serbia, one can find tombstones with long epitaphs containing emotional thoughts on life, verses or details about the life of the deceased or those left behind. In his collection of new Serbian epitaphs from the second half of the 20th century, *Literature in the Graveyard*, anthropologist Ivan Čolović states that the main reason for placing epitaphs on tombstones is “the existence of a pattern of social communication on our soil, which not only allows but also encourages public verbal expression of emotions, and not only in connection with death” (Čolović, 1983, p. 10). Due to their anecdotal and documentary character, the epitaphs transform cemeteries into a kind of village chronicle. The epitaphs in the Orthodox cemeteries of Banat villages, as well as elsewhere in Serbia were, and partly remain to this day, a means by which the community learns what the deceased was like during their life and how they died, and hence their relatively high degree of narrative and documentary nature (Sorescu-Marinković, 2021, p. 54).

The Deliblato cemetery is not an exception, although the share of longer epitaphs here is slightly smaller than in other village cemeteries in Vojvodina. They include epitaphs in both Serbian and Romanian from the end of the 19th century up to the first decades of the 21st century. The beginning of one of the oldest epitaphs in Serbian contains a variant of the antique and medieval formula implying the separation of the perishable body and the eternal soul (for details, see Živković, 2020, pp. 85–88) (see Fig. 8). The whole epitaph reads:

In this dark grave rests Aleksansar Aca Ivačković, merchant. He passed away at the age of 68, in 1907. To a faithful husband and good father his grieving wife Jelena Ivačković and their children raise this memorial. (Our translation)⁸

⁸ Original source text: “У овом мрачном/ гробу почива/ Алексансар Аца/ Ивачковић/ трговац/ Преминуо у 68 год/ живота свога 1907/ свом верном/ супругу и добром оцу/ подиже спомен/ ожалошћена/ супруга/ Јелена Ивачковић/ и деца.”



Fig. 8. Epitaph in Serbian, from the beginning of the 20th century, containing a variant of the antique and medieval formula which points to the separation of the body and soul, Deliblato cemetery (photo credit: Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, 2025)

However, newer epitaphs follow different templates. Below is another longer epitaph in Serbian, found on a tombstone erected for a person who died in 2002:

Uncle, may every season bring you peace and warm sleep. May every flower on your grave smell fragrant. May my tear reach you through the black earth to bring you the last greetings now, when words are worth the least. May these words stay in the heart and memory of all those who loved and respected you, and those who hated you and spoke badly about you, you gave them nothing and took nothing from them. You owe them nothing, let that be their sin. (Our translation)⁹

As already mentioned, some epitaphs in the Deliblato cemetery are in Romanian. The one below, on a family vault, dates from 1994 (see Fig. 9):

Oh, Tavi, beautiful child, you were loved by everyone. Oh, Tavi, clever child, Ghedrement's offspring, five generations struggled to make you a nice fortune, but you did not live, you left us too young and did not inherit the fortune. Our beautiful house remained eternally mournful. (Our translation)¹⁰

⁹ Original source text: "Ујко/ Нек свако годишње доба/ Мир и топли сан ти донесе/ Нек сваки цвет на гробу твом замирише/ Нек суза моја кроз црну земљу/ Стигне до тебе да ти донесе последњи/ Поздрав сад кад речи најмање вреде/ Нек ове речи остану у срцу и сећању/ Свих оних који су те волели и поштовали/ А они што су те мрзели и лоше о теби/ Причали ништа им ниси дао ни узео/ Ништа им не дугујеш/ Нека то остане њихов грех."

¹⁰ Original source text: "O, Tavi, copil frumos/ La toti ai fost dragăstos/ O, Tavi, copil isteț/ Lăstarul lui Ghedrement/ Cinci genunchi s-au chinuit/ Mândră-avere ți-au stăcit/ Tu însă nu ai trăit/ Prea tânăr ne-ai părăsit/ Averea n-ai moștenit./ Casa noastră a frumoasă/ A rămas veșnic jăloasă."



Fig. 9. Epitaph in Romanian, in verses, Deliblato cemetery (photo credit: Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, 2025)

Although not frequently, nature is also represented, reflected or alluded to in the epitaphs, such as in the one below (1995):

Dad, you left us weak, like a bud swaying in the wind. We will bloom without you, but with eternal memory of you. (Our translation)¹¹

On the same note, the Romanian names on the tombstones in the Deliblato cemetery, be they of the deceased or their family members who erected the monuments, present a peculiarity: many of them are names of flowers or plants, with an unusually high share in such a small community. Several examples are: *Bujorel* (“peony”), *Firuța* (“meadow grass”), *Florica/ Florika* (“flower”), *Mugurel/ Muguriel* (“bud”), *Rusalin* (“flower”), *Trandafir* (“rose”), *Viora/ Viorel* (“violet”).

Apart from the linguistic elements on the tombstones, the extralinguistic elements point to an even closer entanglement between the world of the living, the world of the dead and the natural environment. Doves, roses, flower twigs, palm branches and weeping willows are frequent iconographic representations on tombstones, regardless of the period when they were constructed, as depictions of plants on graves carry the archetypal meaning of constant renewal of life (see Fig. 8). This can certainly be interpreted in the context of old Christian floral symbolism as an integral part of the *locus amoneus*, the paradise garden with a source of fresh water, an abundance of flowers and lush vegetation (Miller, 2000; Popović, 2008), while the meaning of *desertum floridus* among the first Christian hermits meant the aspiration to recreate the Garden of Eden in their desert settlements (Popović, 2009).

As already noticed, the palm tree and the weeping willow are common symbols throughout Southeast Banat, the former Habsburg borderland (Stanković, 2020, p. 121). The weeping willow made its way into Christian imagery and iconography from the semiotic systems of ancient worlds. Apart from being a symbol of sadness, death and mourning on Victorian graves (Loren, 1989), the willow tree is also a symbol of immortality. Nevertheless, its symbolic and spiritual powers have been strongly intertwined with its botanical properties and allegorical dimensions since the medieval period in Europe. However, the weeping willow, native to dry areas of Asia, is a newcomer to Europe, being transplanted here only at the end of the seventeenth century (Laforêt, 2022).

¹¹ Original source text: “Tata/ ostavio si nas/ nejakе kao/ pupoljak na/ ветру па се/ њишемо/ цветаћемо без/ тебе али са/ вечном/ успоменоом/ на тебе.”

In Deliblato, the weeping willow is particularly common on older sandstone tombstones from the 19th and early 20th centuries (see Fig. 10). The Deliblato Sands, with its autochthonous, but also migratory vegetation, hosts, among other tree species, the weeping willow. The small Orthodox chapel called “Vodica”, between the villages of Deliblato and Mramorak, was built near such a tree, considered sacred by the locals. Unfortunately, the willow was cut down a few years ago.

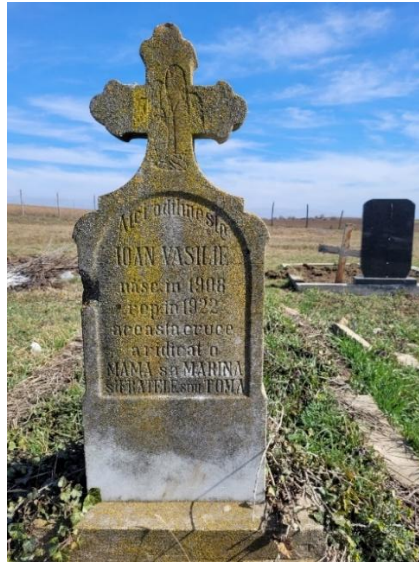


Fig. 10. The weeping willow depicted on an older sandstone tombstone, from the early 20th century, Deliblato cemetery (photo credit: Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, 2025)

4. Conclusions

In light of the recent developments in landscape studies, which do not see the landscape as independent of, or as made by people, but as the outcome of the physical and symbolic implication of people with their surroundings, we focused on a rural settlement of South-Eastern Europe: Deliblato. Being part of the network of settlements on the margins of the Deliblato Sands, a sandy region in the Vojvodina province of Serbia which is considered one of the last deserts in Europe, Deliblato has been shaped by the different populations who settled here at different points in time, and in turn it shaped their physical and imaginative articulation of the sacred space.

Our interdisciplinary analysis – historical, iconographical, linguistic and anthropological – and the triangulation of landscape-religion-migration, revealed that this village, placed in the liminal zone of the desert and forest, is a particular case, especially when compared to other environments in South-Eastern Europe. The reason for this peculiarity lies precisely in the third key-element of the triangle: migration. Just as the Deliblato Sands are today made up of autochthonous and “migratory” flora and fauna, the network of human settlements on the border of the Deliblato Sands is made up of layers of population who settled here in successive waves, at different moments in time, and lived together for centuries. These communities first faced the natural phenomena of the new environment and then adapted and changed nature to meet their needs. Nevertheless, nature and environment were not only passive objects but were incorporated into the newly created sacred landscape of the local population. All ethnic groups were influenced by the natural landscape of the Deliblato Sands and they punctually mixed up features of the local landscape with other imaginary landscapes, like general Christian motifs and particular national elements, to create their distinct sacred landscape.

Finally, the comparative analysis of the sacred topography of the village of Deliblato through history supports the hypothesis that the cultural and natural landscape are inseparable. It was shown that the sacred places of this settlement blended with the natural landscape and became important landmarks in the ecosystem. Specifically, the Serbian Orthodox church, which belonged to both denominations until the separation of the Serbian and Romanian Christian Orthodox communities in the Habsburg Monarchy, has fused and become a feature of the landscape, due to its outstanding position, on the hill above the lake.

References:

- Bacci, M. (2009). *San Nicola: Il grande taumaturgo* [Saint Nicholas: The great miracle worker]. Laterza.
- Bacci, M. (2017). Materiality and liminality: Nonmimetic evocations of Jerusalem along the Venetian sea routes to the Holy Land. In Bartal, R., Bodner, N. & Kuhnel B. (Eds), *Natural Materials of the Holy Land and the Visual Translation of Place, 500-1500* (pp. 127–153). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315210315>
- Bacci, M. (2023). On the spatialization of the sacred in Caucasian cultures. In Bacci, M., Chitishvili, N., Grigoryan, G. Kaffenberger, T. Studer-Karlen, M. & Šćepanović, V. (Eds), *Approaches to Sacred Space(s) in Medieval Subcaucasian Cultures* (pp. 5–62). “Convivia” IV. Masaryk University Press.
- Bataveljić, O. (1964). Crkva u Deliblatu [The church in Deliblato], *Zbornik Narodnog muzeja, IV*, 395–298. (Cyrillic)
- Campopiano, M. (2025). *Storia dell'ambiente nel Medioevo: Natura, società, cultura* [The story of the environment in the Middle Ages: Nature, society, culture]. Carocci.
- Carta, F., Michetti, R., & Noce, C. (2024). *Sacra Silva: Bosco e religione tra tarda antichità e medioevo* [Sacred forest: Forest and religion between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages]. Viella.
- Cenoz, J. & Gorter, D. (2006). Linguistic landscape and minority languages. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 3(1), 67–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790710608668386>
- Christian, W. (1972). *Person and God in a Spanish valley*. University Press.
- Cosgrove, D. (2003). Landscape and the European sense of sight – Eying nature. In Anderson, K., Domosh, M., Pile, S. & Thrift, N. (Eds), *The Handbook of Cultural Geography* (pp. 249–268). London: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848608252.n17>
- Ćuk, M., Ilić, M., Igić, R., Šikuljak, T., Vukov, D. & Čarni, A. (2019). Classification and diversity of perennial sand-dune vegetation in Serbia. *Archives of Biological Sciences*, 71(4), 647–653. <https://doi.org/10.2298/ABS190717047C>
- Ćuk, M., Ponjarac, R., Igić, D., Ilić, M., Oldja, M., Vukov, D. & Čarni, A. (2023). Historical overview of the Deliblato sands afforestation. *Šumarski list*, 7–8, 383–392. <https://doi.org/10.31298/sl.147.7-8.7>
- Čolović, I. (1983). *Književnost na groblju: Zbirka novih epitafa* [Literature in the graveyard: Collections of new epitaphs]. Beograd: Narodna knjiga.
- Della Dora, V. (2016). *Landscape, nature, and the sacred in Byzantium*. Cambridge University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316488386>

- Descola, Ph. (2013). *Beyond nature and culture*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Djuvara, N. (2014). *A brief illustrated history of Romanians*. Humanitas.
- Đurić Milovanović, A. & Măran, M. (2019). *Biserica ortodoxă română din Banatul iugoslav în perioada interbelică (1918-1941)* [The Romanian Orthodox Church from the Serbian Banat in the Interwar Period]. Presa universitară clujeană; Editura Episcopiei Caransebeşului.
- Erdeljan, J. (2017). *Chosen places: Constructing new Jerusalems in Slavia Orthodoxa*. Brill.
- Erdeljanović, J. (2013). *Srbi u Banatu* [The Serbs in the Banat]. Istorijski arhiv. (Cyrillic)
- Fenner, J., Sorescu-Marinković, A. & Salamurović, A. (forthcoming). Silent Echoes: Romanian Language Varieties in the Rural Cemeteries of Serbian Banat. In Bopp-Filimonov, V. & Sorescu-Marinković, A. (Eds), *Linguistic and Semiotic Landscapes of Southeast European Border Regions*. Peter Lang.
- Filippucci, Paola. 2023. Landscape. In Stein, F. (Ed.), *The Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (pp. 1–12). Available at: <http://doi.org/10.29164/16landscape> (accessed: 15 May 2025).
- Gajić, M. (Ed.). (1983). *Flora Deliblatske peščare* [The Flora of the Deliblato Sands]. Prirodno-matematički fakultet Univerziteta u Novom Sadu, OOUR Institut za biologiju, Šumsko-industrijski kombinat “Pančevo”, OOUR Specijalni prirodni rezervat “Deliblatski pesak”.
- Geary, P. (1978), *Furta sacra: Thefts of relics in the Central Middle Ages*. Princeton University Press.
- Giurescu, C. (2007 [1935]). *Istoria românilor* [The history of the Romanians]. Editura All.
- Hirsch, E. (1995). Landscape: Between place and space. In Hirsch, E. & O’Hanlon, M. (Eds), *Anthropological studies of landscape: perspectives on space and place* (pp. 1–30). Oxford: Clarendon Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198278801.003.0001>
- Holmes, M. (2018). Reproducing the sacred likeness in early modern Italy. In Heisterberg, M., Müller-Bechtel, S. & Putzger, A. (Eds), *Nichts Neues Schaffen. Perspektiven auf die treue Kopie, 1300-1900/ Creating Nothing New: Perspectives on the ‘Faithful Copy’ 1300-1900* (pp. 27–44). De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110431148-003>
- Horton, L. (1989). Messages in stone: Symbolism on Victorian grave markers. *The Palimpsest*, 70(2), 62–72.
- Ilić Mandić, J. (2020). *Banatska vojna krajina (1764–1800)* [Banat military frontier (1764–1800)]. Istorijski institut. (Cyrillic)
- Ilić Mandić, J. (2022). The military frontier and emigration challenges in the 18th century. In Brzozowska, Z., Kręzel, P. & Lis-Wielgosz, I. (Eds), *Migrations in the Slavic Cultural Space: From the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (pp. 45–62), Łódź University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18778/8331-033-6.04>
- Iorga, N. (1904). *Ştefan-cel-mare și Mihai-Viteazul: Ca întemeietorii bisericii Românilor din Ardeal* [Stephan the Great and Michael the Brave: Founders of the church of Romanians in Transylvania]. Minerva.

- Iorga, N. (1968). *Istoria lui Mihai Viteazul* [The history of Michael the Brave]. Editura Militară.
- Kadović, R., Spasov, P., Ali Bohajar, Y. M., Belanović Simić, S., & Košanin, O. (2014). Analysis of aridity indicators in the Deliblato Sands. *Bulletin of the Faculty of Forestry*, 109, 97–112. <https://doi.org/10.2298/GSF1409097K>
- Kalinić, A., Bjadov, I., Obratov-Petković, D., & Tomičević-Dubljević, J. (2020). Invasive plants as a factor of floristic diversity degradation in Deliblato sands SNR. *Glasnik Sumarskog fakulteta*, 121, 27–46. <https://doi.org/10.2298/GSF2021027K>
- Kaán, K. (1914). *A természetvédelem és a természeti emlékek fentartásának kérdéséhez* [On the issue of nature conservation and the preservation of natural monuments]. Pallas Részvénytársaság Nyomdája.
- Kostić, M. (2007). *Jakov Orfelin i njegovo doba* [Jakov Orfelin and his time]. Novi Sad: Galerija Matice Srpske. (Cyrillic)
- Krstić, A., (2022a). The emergence of “Sırf Vilâyeti”: Serbian migrations to the territory of Banat by the mid-16th century and their Results. In Brzozowska, Z. A., Kręzel, P. & Lis-Wielgosz, I. (Eds), *Migrations in the Slavic Cultural Space. From the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (pp. 95–111). Łódź University Press.
- Krstić, A. (2022b). Srbi u Banatu tokom 15. i 16. veka: Istoriografski rezultati i mogućnosti za dalja istraživanja [The Serbs in the Banat during the 15th and 16th centuries: Historiographical results and possibilities of further research]. *Glasnik Attendite*, 18, 49–60. (Cyrillic)
- Laforêt, A. (2022). ‘Eve was a fruitless willow’: Botanical properties and spiritual dimension of an ambiguous tree. In Lamsechi, G. & Trínca, B. (Eds), *Spiritual Vegetation: Vegetal Nature in Religious Contexts across Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (pp. 49–70). Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. <https://doi.org/10.14220/9783737014267.49>
- Lidov, A. (Ed.) (2006). *Hierotopy: Creation of sacred spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*. Moscow: Progress-tradition.
- Lidov, A. (2014). Creating the sacred space: Hierotopy as a new field of cultural history. In Carnevale, L. & Cremonesi, C. (Eds), *Spazi e percorsi sacri: I santuari, le vie, i corpi* [Sacred spaces and routes: Sanctuaries, roads, bodies] (pp. 61–89). Limena: Libreriauniversitaria.it Edizioni.
- Maddrell, A., Della Dora, V., Scafì, A., & Walton, H. (Eds) (2015). *Christian pilgrimage, landscape and heritage: Journeying to the sacred*. Routledge.
- Maher, B., Polezzi, L., & Wilson, R. (Eds) (2025). *The Routledge handbook of translation and migration*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003287797>
- Marković, R., Perić, Z., Gavrilov, M., Marković, S., Vandenberghe, J., Schaetzel, R., et al. (2024). Aeolian dynamics at the northern edge of Deliblato (Banat) Sand Sea, Vojvodina, Serbia, at the time of the last deglaciation. *Quaternary Research*, 121, 59–72. <https://doi.org/10.1017/qua.2024.13>
- Maticki, M., & Jović, V. (Eds) (2010). *Banat kroz vekove: Slojevi kultura Banata* [Banat through the Centuries: Layers of Banat cultures]. Vukova zadužbina. (Cyrillic).
- Medaković, D. (1968). *Srpski slikari XVIII-XX veka. Likovi i dela* [Serbian Painters of the 18th–20th

- Centuries. Persons and Works]. Matica Srpska. (Cyrillic)
- Meza, V. (2022). *Deliblato: Tragovi prošlosti* [Deliblato. Traces of the past]. Centar za banatske studije.
- Miller, P. C. (2000). 'The Little Blue Flower is Red'. Relics and the Poetizing of the Body. *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 8(2), 213–236. <https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2000.0030>
- Papasidero, M. (2019). *Translatio sanctitatis: I furti di reliquie nell'Italia medievale* [Translatio sanctitatis: Thefts of Relics in Medieval Italy]. Firenze University Press. <https://doi.org/10.36253/978-88-6453-943-0>
- Papasidero, M. (2025). *Thefts of relics in Italy. From Late Antiquity to the Central Middle Ages, 300-1150*. Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789463723879>
- Popi, G. (1993). *Românii din Banatul Sârbesc* [The Romanians in the Serbian Banat]. Libertatea.
- Popović, D. (2008). Cvetna simbolika i kult relikvija u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji [Floral symbolism and the cult of the relics in Medieval Serbia]. *Zograf*, 32, 69–79. (Cyrillic)
- Popović, D. (2009). Desert as heavenly Jerusalem: The imagery of a sacred space in the making. In Lidov, A. (Ed.), *New Jerusalems. Hierotopy and Iconography of Sacred Spaces* (pp. 151–175). Indrik.
- Popović, D. (2024). The landscape of the monastic endeavour: The choices of St Sava of Serbia. *Balkanica, LV*, 99–122. <https://doi.org/10.2298/BALC2455099P>
- Popović, Z., Smiljanić, M., Kostić, M., Nikić, P., & Janković, S. (2014). Wild flora and its usage in traditional phytotherapy (Deliblato Sands, Serbia, South East Europe). *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge*, 13(1), 9–35.
- Rakić, Z. (1998). *Radul, srpski slikar XVII veka* [Radul, Serbian Painter of the 17th Century]. Novi Sad: Galerija Matice srpske. (Cyrillic)
- Sedlak, M. (2019). Afforestation as a factor of physically geographical changing: A case study of Deliblato Sand. *Collection of Papers – Faculty of Geography at the University of Belgrade*, 67(1), 45–59.
- Stanković, S. (2020). *Worldness behind the Cemetery: Stories of Absent Germans and Jews in the Former Habsburg Borderland*. PhD thesis. Available at: <https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/items/d8bdf0df-e94f-4705-b3cf-995d01fd76e3> (accessed: 15 May 2025). <https://doi.org/10.18452/27371>
- Stojančević, V. (Ed.) (1981). *Istorija srpskog naroda V-2* [The history of the Serbian People V-2]. Srpska književna zadruga. (Cyrillic)
- Stojanović, T., Trišić, I, Brđanin, E., Štetić, S., Nechita, F., & Candrea, A. N. (2024). Natural and sociocultural values of a tourism destination in the function of sustainable tourism development: An example of a protected area. *Sustainability*, 16, 759. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16020759>
- Sorescu-Marinković, A. (2021). Jezički pejzaž banatskog rumunskog groblja: Epitafi, priče o identitetu [The linguistic landscape of Banat Romanian cemeteries: The epitaphs, identity stories]. *Acta Pannonica*, 2, 53–69. (Cyrillic)
- Sorescu-Marinković, A. & Salamurović, A. (2022). The rural linguistic landscape of Banat. *Eastern European Countryside*, 28(1), 51–79. <https://doi.org/10.12775/eec.2022.003>

- Stankević, P. & Pavićević, N. (1963). *Deliblatski pesak: sastav – osobine – problematika* [The Deliblato Sand: Composition – Characteristics – Problematics]. Institut za šumarstvo i drvnu industriju SR Srbije.
- Tatić-Đurić, M. (1985). Bogorodica Vladimirska [Mother of God of Vladimir]. *Zbornik za likovne umetnosti Matice Srpske*, 21, 29–50. (Cyrillic)
- Tilley, C. & Cameron-Daum, K. (2017). *Anthropology of landscape: The extraordinary in the ordinary*. UCL Press. <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781911307433>
- Timotijević, M. (2003). Bogorodica bezdinska i versko-politički program patrijarha Arsenija IV Jovanovića [Holy Virgin of Bezdin and religious and political program of Patriarch Arsenije IV Jovanović]. *Balkanica*, XXXII-XXXIII, 311–346. <https://doi.org/10.2298/BALC0233297C>
- Todić, B. (2013). *Srpski slikari od XIV do XVIII veka* [Serbian painters from the 14th to the 18th centuries]. Platoneum. (Cyrillic)
- Trišić, I., Štetić, S., Maksin, M. & Blešić, I. (2021). Perception and satisfaction of residents with the impact of the protected area on sustainable tourism: The Case of Deliblatska Peščara special nature reserve, Serbia. *Geographica Pannonica*, 25(4), 317–325. <https://doi.org/10.5937/gp25-33196>
- VanDam, K. (2008). Dutch-American language shift: Evidence from the grave, *LACUS Forum*, 34, 31–40.
- Vlăsceanu, M. (2023). Rethinking tradition and individualism as key traits of Jacov Orfelin's Style: A case study on iconostasis painting in the historical Banat. *Ishodišta*, 9(1), 391–407. <https://doi.org/10.46630/ish.9.2023.26>
- Walsham, A. (2012). Sacred topography and social memory: Religious change and the landscape in early modern Britain and Ireland. *Journal of Religious History*, 36(1), 31–51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9809.2011.01154.x>
- Živković, V. (2010). Kult svetog Nikole u religijskoj praksi Kotora XIV–XVI vek [The cult of St. Nicholas in the religious practice of Kotor, 14th–16th centuries]. In Martinović, J. (ed.), *Dvanaest vjekova Bokeljske mornarice* [Twelve centuries of the Boka Navy] (pp. 95–102). Bokeljska mornarica Kotor.
- Živković, V. (2020). *Legati pro anima. Testamenti Kotorana 1326–1337* [Legacies pro anima. The Wills of the Citizens of Kotor 1326–1337]. Beograd: Balkanološki institut. (Cyrillic)

Acknowledgements

We want to express our deepest gratitude to Vera Meza, author of the only monograph about Deliblato and a former schoolteacher in the village, who selflessly provided us with invaluable information every time we visited Deliblato and made us feel at home. We also want to thank schoolteacher Stojanka Kolarski, who guided us through the local cemetery and answered all our questions, Romanian Orthodox priest Emanuel Veveriță and Serbian Orthodox priest Zoran Jovanov, who opened the doors of their churches and homes to us.