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### Water and Man: The Zepa on the Drina River

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#### Abstract

The Zepa (Žepa) settlement is located in the Rogatica municipality (Geographical coordinates: 43°57'13.13"N, 19°07'57.61"E, elevation: 474 m). It is about 42 km from Rogatica, about 52 km from Visegrad, and about 87 km from Sarajevo (by air). The name of the settlement Zepa (Žepa) probably comes from the name of the river Zepa (Žepa) that flows through this settlement or towards the mountain Zep (Žep), which is located northwest of this settlement. It is known that this name is mentioned in an Ottoman defter from 1485. It is a summary list, made some 20 years after the area came under Ottoman administration, where, along with the names of some other villages (Slap, Podzeplje, Ljubomislje, for example), Zepa (Žepa) is also mentioned.

The aim of this work is to present an exceptional geographical area that illustrates the relationship of man to the 'natural environment' and his 'spiritual heritage', which is expressed by special physical structures: the Vratar Old Town- fortress, the Bridge on the Zepa river, Redzep Pasha's Tower and a large number of public fountain ('cesme').

The topics are elaborated according to the scientific methodology that is covered in the author's book: Hadrovic, A. (2007). Defining Architectural Space on the Model of the Oriental Style CityHouse in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia, Booksurge, LLC, North Charleston, SC, USA.

**Keywords:** Zepa, Rijeka Zepa, Rijeka Drina, Sustainability

#### 1. Introduction

The Zepa (Žepa) settlement is located in the Rogatica municipality (Geographical coordinates: 43°57'13.13"N, 19°07'57.61"E, elevation: 474 m). It is about 42 km from Rogatica, 30 km from Han Pijesak, about 52 km from Visegrad, and about 87 km from Sarajevo (by air) (Figure 1). There are 133 inhabitants in the Zepa (Žepa) village, mostly Bosniaks<sup>[1]</sup>. The following villages are located in the Zepa municipality (with distances from the center of Zepa): Vratar (1 km), Cavcici (2 km), Slap (2 km), Pripecak (3 km), Babljak (3 km), Zivaljevici (3 km), Ilijak (3 km), Gornje Stitarevo (3 km), Godjenje (3 km), Krusev Do (3 km), Sjeversko (4 km), Blazujevici (4 km), Donje Stitarevo (4 km), Brloznik (4 km), Rujista (5 km), Mislovo (5 km), Surduk (5 km), Stoborani (5 km), Zemljice (6 km), Klasnik (6 km), Agarovici (6 km), Dumanjici (6 km), Podzeplje (7 km) and Tocionik (7 km).





Source: [https://visitmycountry.net/bosnia\\_herzegovina/bh/index.php/turizam/27-vmc/geografija](https://visitmycountry.net/bosnia_herzegovina/bh/index.php/turizam/27-vmc/geografija), Accessed: 8.1.2022., left  
 Google Earth: Accessed: 8.4.2022., right

**Fig 1:** Zepa on the Drina River. Location

In this paper, the author deals with the topic of 'sustainability'. In this sense, he visited the entire area of Bosnia and Herzegovina and collected rich material, which he incorporated for the most part into his books [2, 3] and scientific works. Bosnia and Herzegovina is an extremely complex area in terms of the natural and social environment and its population. The three most numerous ethnic groups (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) live here, and thanks to its rich history, numerous people of different origins: Jews, Germans, Poles, Czechs, Italians, Hungarians... The composition of the population changed over time, but remained material and spiritual traces of their life in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The complexity of Bosnia and Herzegovina is also visible in its architecture. Hence, for elaborating on the topic of sustainability, in this paper, using the example of the settlement of Žepa on the Drina river, the most suitable scientific methodology [4] was the most suitable, which is covered in his book: Hadrovic, A. (2007). *Defining Architectural Space on the Model of the Oriental Style CityHouse in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia*, Booksurge, LLC, North Charleston, SC, USA.

The aim of this paper is to present an exceptional geographical space that illustrates the relationship of man to the natural environment and his built and spiritual heritage, which is expressed by special physical structures: the Old Town-Vratar fortress, the Bridge on the Žepi River, Redžep Pasha's Tower and a large number of public fountains ('the cisterns').

Žepa is a village with about 133 inhabitants located on the Drina river, in the far east of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 87 km from Sarajevo. The settlement was mentioned for the first time (1485) in the defter (inventory) of the Ottoman government in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the direct relationship between people and the natural environment, life has been generated here for centuries on the basis of

agriculture, animal husbandry and fruit growing. Later, people were employed in a wide range of businesses in the Rogatica municipality. As the settlement is located on the Drina river, near the border with Serbia, its history is marked by the struggle between Serbia and Bosnia for control of this area, from the Middle Ages to the last war (1992-1995).

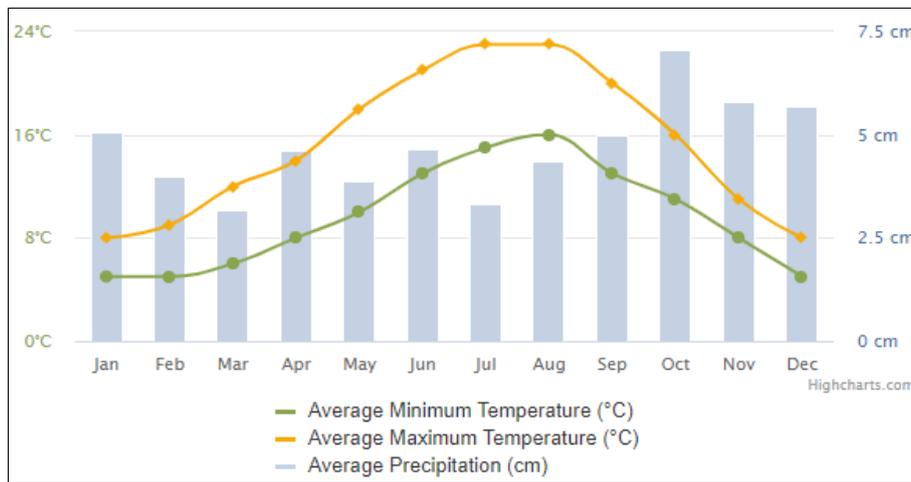
## 2. Environment

By 'environment' we mean every possibility in the space in which man can realize his existence [4].

### 2.1 Natural environment

By 'natural environment' we mean all those features that nature gave, and on which man (mostly) did not exert his influence: geographical location, geomorphology, watercourses and water reservoirs, plant and animal life, available soil, climate [4]...

Zepa is characterized by a rich natural environment. It is located in a broken basin, with many faults, grooves, sinkholes, karst caves, smaller plains, hills and other relief varieties, which were formed during long geological processes. Zepa is located in the southern part of the northern temperate heat zone, which is one of the most important factors affecting the climate of this area. In addition to the geographical location, the climate of Zepa is influenced by other factors such as the relief system, the influence of which is primarily manifested through the altitude, then the proximity of the atmospheric circulation centers, the coverage of the terrain by plant communities... During the year, these areas are replaced by warm air masses from the south and cold from the north. The influences of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic are characteristic for the summer period, and the Eurosiberian air masses for the colder part of the year [5].



Source: Zepa Weather, <https://www.holidaytravelreports.com/Weather/Zepa.aspx>, Accessed: 8.4.2022.

Fig 2: Graph of weather history for Zepa in the last 5 years

The main natural resources of Zepa are the rivers Zepa and Drina (Figures 3,5,6), arable land, pastures and forest (Figures 4). The combination of these resources with the moderate continental climate and the location of the settlement in the natural and social environment have created good conditions for people's life since the Middle Ages, which is confirmed by the traces of material culture: the Old Town of Vratnik, the stećak necropolis, the Zepa

Bridge, Redzep Pasha's Tower. ..

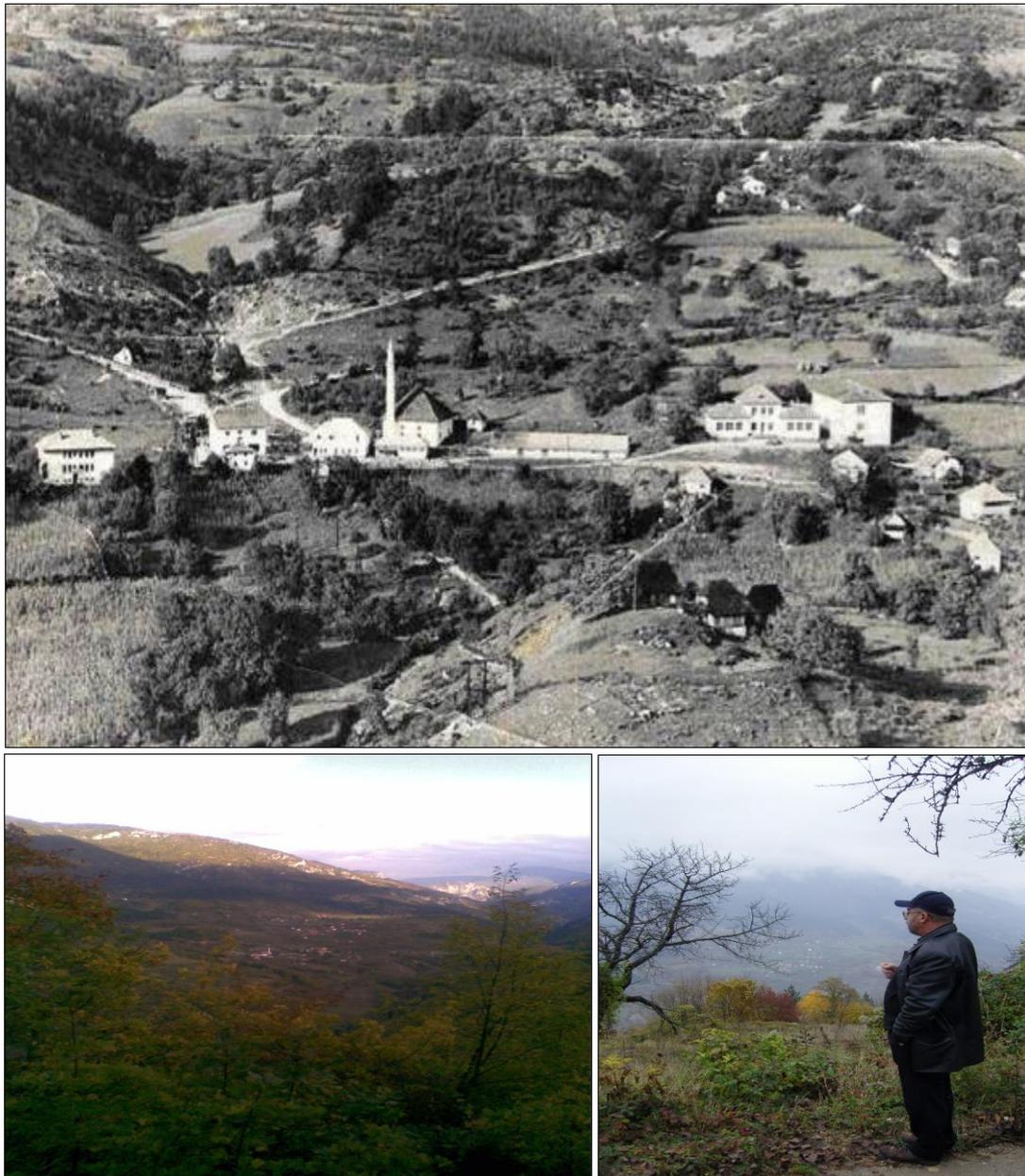
After the construction of the 'Visegrad Hydroelectric Power Plant' on the Drina river (1989), the water level of the artificial reservoir in the area of Zepa (Slap settlement) rose, so a lake was formed at the mouth of Zepa and the Drina (as a bay of The Visegrad Lake) where a fish hatchery was arranged (Figures 5,6).



Source: Author (10.4.2009.), (top and bottom left)

Source: <https://kalesijske-novine.com/06/fotozapis-bili-smo-u-zepi-pajdo-moj/>, Accessed: 8.4.2022. (Bottom right)

Fig 3: The Zepa river at its source and the former mill at this location



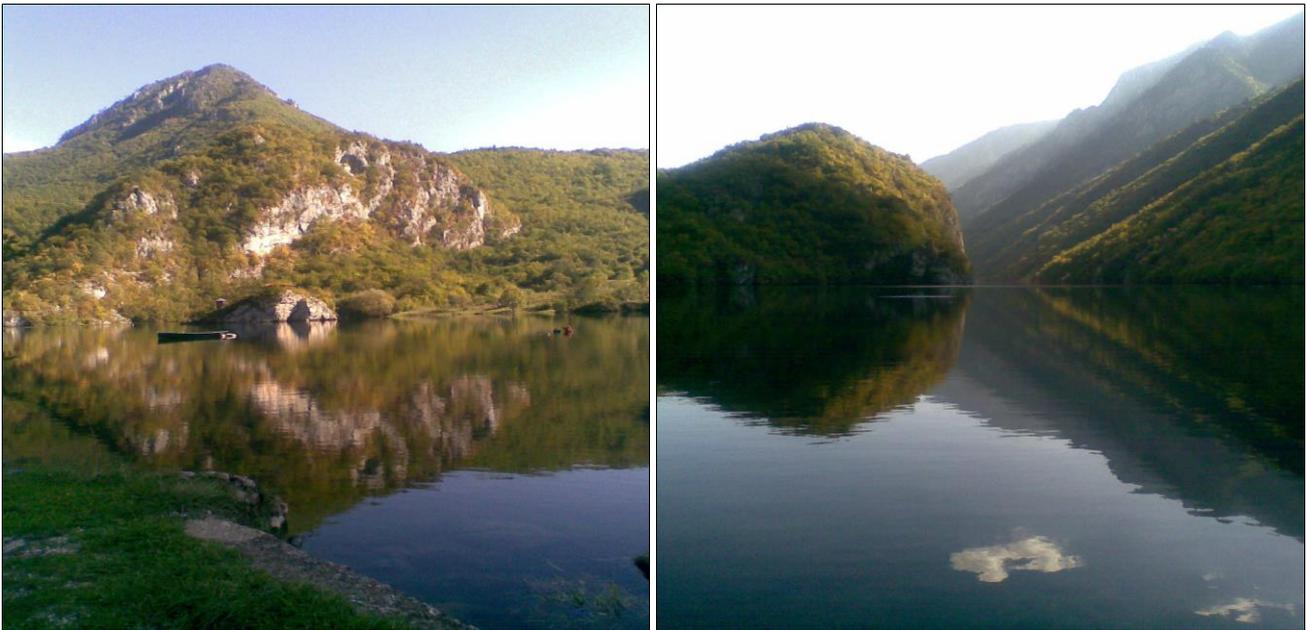
Source: <http://rogatica-bih.blogspot.com/2011/01/zepa.html>, Accessed: 8 April 2022. (top)  
Source: Architect Sakim Hodzic (April 10, 2009), (bottom left, bottom right)

**Fig 4:** Zepa, photo from 1968 (left) and 2009 (center and right)



Source: Author (10.4.2009.)

**Fig 5:** A fish farm at the confluence of the Zepa river and the Drina River



Source: Author (10.4.2009.)

**Fig 6:** The Drina River at the locality Slap in Zepa

## 2.2 Social environment

By 'social environment' we mean everything that man has created and that separates him from the world of other living beings <sup>[4]</sup>. It includes both physical structures (various material, more or less ordered products of their activity) and the immaterial world that we know with the intellect (science, philosophy, religion, law, morality) through an ordered system of abstract symbols (letters, signs) <sup>[4]</sup>.

**History of the Zepa settlement:** The name of the Zepa settlement probably comes from the name of the river (Žepa) that flows through this settlement or towards the mountain Žep, which is located northwest of this settlement. Namely, the Žepa river and the Žep mountain are 'natural entities', and the Zepa heritage is the result of the 'social environment' and 'man'. It is known that this name is mentioned in an Ottoman defter from 1485. It is a summary list, made some 20 years after the area came under Ottoman administration, where, along with the names of some other villages (Slap, Podzeplje, Ljubomislje, for example), Zepa is also mentioned. All these villages belonged to Vratar nahija <sup>[6]</sup>.

The acceptance of Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina took a long time and was gradual. It was the result of several factors, starting with guaranteed religious freedom, which is clearly evidenced by the famous Ahdnama of Sultan Mehmed II el Fatih (1432-1481), which in 1463 guaranteed to Fr. Andjel Zvizdovic (1420-1498), the then representative of the Bosnian Franciscans, „freedom of personality, religion, property and movement“ to the Catholics who were in these areas, as long as they were loyal to the Ottoman administration, and similar guarantees were given to the Orthodox population, through the provision of material assistance in the construction of sacred buildings.

The Vratar Old town was one of the fortified towns from the period of medieval Bosnia. Namely, under that name, it is mentioned as a separate parish. Its remains are still visible today on the difficult-to-access Stari Grad hill, especially on its northern side, which descends vertically into the Zepa

river canyon, while its southern slope is not only gentler, but also much shorter. Therefore, it is logical that the city fortress was entered from that direction. Since the Ottomans, when conquering the territory, mostly kept not only the toponymic nomenclature (say the names of the already mentioned villages: Zepa, Slap, Ljubomislje...), but also their new status, that is why, in this new, Ottoman, administrative division of space in Eastern Bosnia, the Vratar nahija retained as a 'market'.

In the administrative and territorial sense, Zepa is today a local community that belongs to the Rogatica municipality. After the Second World War (from 1947 to 1958), it had the status of a municipality (and it had the status of a municipality in the previous Kingdom as well), where as many as 7,000 inhabitants lived. At that time, not only was the status of a municipality revoked, but it was also divided in such a way that it is part of the villages (Godjenje, Stoborani, Brložnik, Podzeplje, Plane, Rijeka, Krivace), which gravitated to the neighboring Han Pijesk, annexed to that municipality, and in order to ensure assumptions for its survival, while the remaining, somewhat larger part, with about 15 villages (Zepa-central part, Slap, Pripecak, Cavcici, Krnjici, Purtici, Vrelo, Stop, Ljubomislje, Borovac, Mandre, Mislovo, Laze, Vratar, Ribioc), transformed into the eponymous 'Local Zepa community' and attached to the Rogatica municipality.

According to the population census from 1991 <sup>[7, 11]</sup>, there were about 462 inhabitants in the Zepa settlement, and about 2,500 inhabitants in the 'Local Zepa Community'.

**The architectural, cultural and historical heritage of the Zepa settlement.** The preserved architectural, cultural and historical heritage testifies to the importance of the settlement of Žepa. The bridge on Zepa, as an inspiration to the Nobel laureate Ivo Andrić <sup>[10]</sup>, contributed the most to the popularity of this place, which throughout its history was considered a place of capable and especially intelligent people for whom freedom was the main principle of life.

### 3. Man

Space acquires meaning only if it stands in some relation to man. This relationship ranges from the relations of the already known dimensions of space, through those that can be sensed, to those that are currently beyond the reach of human imagination. The term 'man' is a huge question, the essence of which he himself tries to decipher within his limits, within the limits of the Earth and the limits of the Universe <sup>[4]</sup>. Together with the rest of the living world, it participates in the process of circulation of matter and energy in nature, sharing the same fate with it, being born and dying against its will. Endowed with reason, will and feelings, he is the only one in the living world who can discover the given laws of the organization of nature.

This relatively small settlement gave the Ottoman Empire vizier Jusuf Ibrahim, who, by building a bridge over the Žepa river, paid tribute to his region and the people from where he came.

During many wars, from the Middle Ages to the present, the Steri town of Vratar was a fortress that the inhabitants of

Žepa used for defense, while the fertile fields in the valley were a source of food. Today, many educated people from Žepa live around the world, and in other ways and in other places, they testify to the vitality of their ancestors.

After the Second World War, a large number of young people went to school in Rogatica (high schools and trades) and in Sarajevo to various faculties (medical, legal, philosophical, architectural...), where, after completing their studies, they continued the careers of eminent experts and university professors. Among them are: Prof. Dr. Bećir Heljić (Faculty of Medicine in Sarajevo), Prof. Dr. Jusuf Ziga (Faculty of Philosophy, Medicine and Pharmacy), Prof. Dr. Benjamin Kulovac (Faculty of Medicine), Avdo Palic (Colonel of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Commander of the Defense of Zepa)...

Dans, dozens of young people (who were 'scattered' around the world as child refugees in the 1992-1995 war, most of them in the USA and England) have already graduated from various colleges and are working as successful professionals.



Source: Family photos of Zepa residents

Fig 7: Girls from Zepa (1970s)





**Source:** <https://zh-cn.facebook.com/%C5%BDepa-398133808676/photos/profdr-jusuf-%C5%BEigamjesto-ro%C4%91enja-%C5%BEepa-datum-ro%C4%91enja-01011951%C5%A1kolovanje-osmogodi%C5%A1n/10158907199473677>, Accessed: 8.4.2022.

**Fig 8:** Young people from Zepa around the world. From left to right, top to bottom: Berina Stitkovic (master's degree in pharmacy at Brighton University in England, January 8, 2019), Enis Vatres (successful police officer in the state of Minnesota, USA), Medina Jusufbegović (graduated Summa Cum Laude University with a Bachelor's degree in Medical Science), Mujo Ramic (US Army officer), Asim Cavcic (earned Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering Buffalo University, 2015), Lejla Cesko (doctorate in pharmacy at Ferris State University, May 2017), Bajro Baja Omanovic (in the security service, USA)

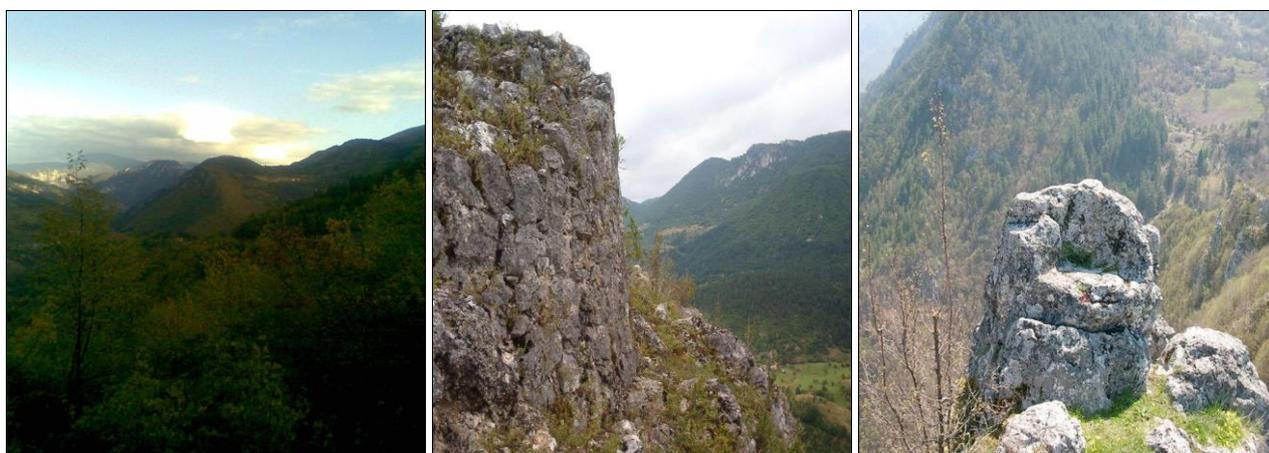
#### 4. Boundaries: architecture as a framework of life

'Boundaries' are those places in the environment where the conditions encountered are controlled according to the very specific human needs. Conditions are all those discovered and undiscovered phenomena in space that have a stimulating or degrading effect on humans. Borders, therefore, have the task of enabling the selection of influences. In an architectural sense, they enclose, but also include a person in the conditions of a certain environment [4].

Although no archaeological research has been carried out in the area of Zepa, the data we have indicates the existence of human settlements in the prehistoric period at the site of Gradina (elevation 797 and elevation 974), where fragments of prehistoric pottery can still be found today, which mostly correspond to the material from the Glasinac fortifications. During the construction of the road in 1960 on the northwestern slopes of Boksanica mountain, a stone cairn was found, which typologically could be placed in the Neolithic. Budak is housed in the Prehistoric Department of

the National Museum in Sarajevo. These data indicate that the Zep (Žep) area was inhabited in the oldest era, and probably under the Romans, because a fragment of a tablet was found in the Bara locality (between the Krnjici and Stopa villages), which corresponds typologically to Roman stelae. Ivo Bojanovski believes that the Roman road that connected northeastern Bosnia with Visegrad passed through this area, passing through Han Pjesk and Zepa.

The Vratar Old town is located on a hill about 5 km from the village of Zepa. The base of the city is pentagonal, the longest of which is 120 m, and the width is between 20 and 28 m. The Ottomans occupied it in 1463. One tower with a circular base (with a diameter of 5 m) was placed on the eastern and western walls of the fort. The hill on which the remains of the city are located is dug through with tunnels and canals. In the vicinity of this town there is a necropolis of stećaks in the village of Ljubomišlje and several single stećaks. According to legend, the city was built by Cursed Jerina, and it was destroyed by a certain Redzep Pasha (Figure 9).

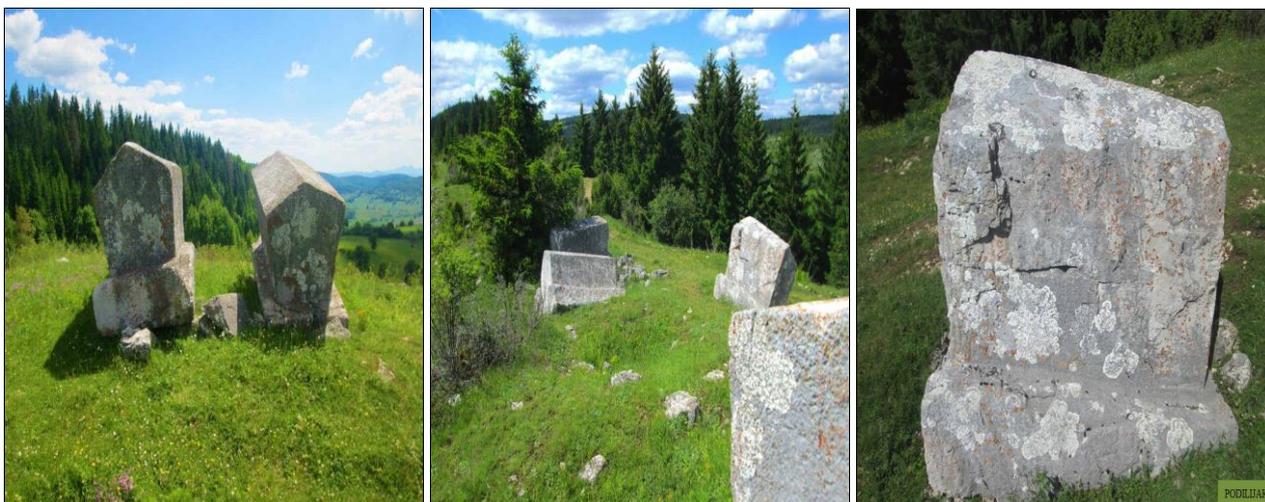


**Source:** Author (10.4.2009.), (left)

**Source:** <http://rogatica-bih.blogspot.com/2011/01/zepa.html>, Accessed: 8.4.2022., (in the middle and to the right)

View of the Old Town and Vratar village from the Rogatica-Zepa road (left). View from the Vratar Old Town of to the surroundings (in the middle). The 'King's Chair' in the Vratar Old Town (right)

**Fig 9:** Medieval Vratar Old Town near Zepa



Source: <https://stecakmap.info/nekropola/podilijak-sjeversko/>, Accessed: 8.4.2022

Fig 10: Stecak Necropolis at the Podilijak site in the Sjeversko village (Zepa)

The bridge on the Zepa river was built (16th century) in the town of Zepa, located on the left bank of the Drina River, about twenty kilometers from Višegrad downstream of the Drina [8]. The bridge was built with the aim of ensuring the continuity of communication between settlements on the left bank of the Drina [10]. The wakif of this bridge was vizier Jusuf Ibrahim, originally from Zepa, and its architect - a student of the great Mimar Sinan, originally from Italy. The Commission for the Preservation of National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared the Zepa Bridge a national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2005) [9].

After the construction of the Bajina Basta hydroelectric power plant (and raising the level of the Drina), the bridge on the Zepa River should have been submerged. As it is a work of extraordinary value, the building was 'transferred' (1967) to a location upstream from the confluence of the Zepa River with the Drina. Although there is not a lot of

exact information about the construction of this bridge, by looking more precisely at its geometric-constructive and architectural elements, it can be concluded that the time of its construction, the builders who designed it and the craftsmen who built it coincide with the time and other circumstances related to the Mehmed Bridge - Pasha Sokolovic in Visegrad. This bridge was the subject of many legends, so the Nobel laureate Ivo Andric also wrote a great short story The Bridge on Žepi, where he used this beautiful bridge as a template for an essay about life, art and the artist, good and evil, transience and eternity. The bridge, 21.60 m long and 3.95 m wide, is constructed with one arch whose frontal profiles are in the form of a broken arch with a span of 10.20 m and a boom height of 6.50 m, with strong coastal supports and a flat level. The core of the bridge is made of finely hewn stone blocks with a width of 20 cm (Figure 11).



Source: Author (10.4.2009.)

Fig 11: The bridge on the Zepa river

Mosque in Zepa. The mosque was built by a certain Junuz-beg, Bosnian Sandzakbeg (in office 1513-1515), who was appointed Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire in 1517.

Mosque was demolished in 1995, during the war (1992-1995), and rebuilt (2002) as a completely new building (Figure 12).



Source: Architect Sakim Hodzic (10.4.2009.)



Fig 12: Mosque in Zepa

Redzep Pasha's tower in Zepa. There is no precise information about the construction of this tower. Based on a comparison of this tower with similar buildings in Bosnia

and Herzegovina, it can be assumed that the tower was built in the 17th-18th century (Figure 13).



Source: Author (10.4.2009.)

Fig 13: Redzep Pasha's tower in Zepa



Source: Author (10.4.2009.)

Fig 14: Several public fountains in Zepa

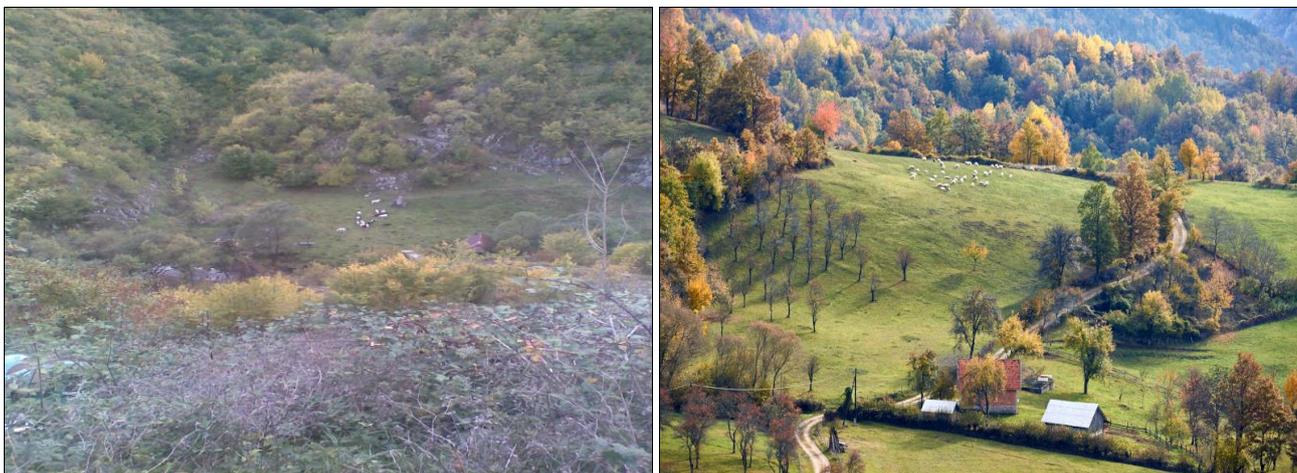
## 5. Conclusion (Perspectives)

By the term 'perspective' (in the framework of the theory of Architecturally Defined Space) we mean „that dynamic relationship that connects now - future, existing - possible, realized – desired“ [4]. The emergence of a settlement (hamlet, village) or architectural-engineering structure is never accidental, but rather the result of a synergy between the natural and social environment-man [4].

After the end of the war (1992-1995), a small number of the pre-war population of Zepa returned to their destroyed and

burned hearths, only about 250 families. This is less than one third of the pre-war inhabitants of the area, while it should be borne in mind that these are mostly elderly people.

Thanks to the centuries-old 'embodied energy', people from this area continued to live, on the basis of their properties, their knowledge and the acquired habits of 'working and having'. Some of them started to engage in agriculture (farming, animal husbandry, fruit growing, beekeeping), and some in fish farming (Figures 15,16,17,18).



Source: Author (10.4.2009.), (left) and <https://slap.ba/zepa/>, Accessed: 8.4.2022. (right)

Fig 15: Pasture with a herd of sheep and goats in Zepa



Source: <https://mapio.net/pic/p-40092538/>, Accessed: 8.4.2022.

Fig 16: Vegetable gardening and beekeeping in the Ljubomislje village (Zepa)



Source: <http://rogatica-bih.blogspot.com/2017/12/>, Accessed: 8.4.2022. (left), <https://www.facebook.com/277672952951/photos/koranaizvor-ljubomi%C5%A1lje-ljubomislje/10157828433997952/>, Accessed: 8.4.2022., (right)

Fig 17: Sterilize the Korana water well (left) o the new Korana public fountain in the Ljubomišlje village (Zepa)



Source: Author (10.4.2009.)



Fig 18: A fish farm at the confluence of the Zepa river and the Drina River (locality Slap)

Despite the difficult war days (1992-1995) and displacement, the people of Zepa return to this region at

least for a day or two, and witness life with traditional folk gatherings and festivities ('teferic'), (Figure 19).



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TjEe2TdB2Y>, Accessed: 8.4.2022. (left)



Fig 19: People's gathering (February 5, 2021) in Zepa

With this work, the author wanted to show how the rich 'natural environment' and 'creative man', despite the incidents of the 'social environment' (such as wars, for example), continue to live, under the conditions dictated by the current social environment.

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