

# *The Historical Development of **Jarek***

*(Bački Jarak, Tiszaistvanfalva) in Batschka*

## *1. The Winter at Ruma*

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Today Ruma is a town of 30 000 inhabitants in Syrmia, which is part of today's Serbia. It is situated about 35 kilometres south of Novi Sad. For our ancestors from Jarek this place is associated with awful memories. What was their origin?

In the territories devastated by the so-called "Wars against the Turks" the emperor Josef II of Austria continued the settlement begun by his grandfather Charles VI and his mother Maria Theresia. The ensuing three periods of settlement were called the "three great Swabian immigrations".

The period of settlement initiated by Josef, the third Swabian migration, lasted from 1782 to 1786. As in the previous periods of settlement the settlers were recruited in the regions on the right and the left banks of the Rhine, but also in Franconia, Hesse and Wuerttemberg. Josef II's patent of settlement, which promised many privileges and was spread everywhere by canvassers and in newspapers, tempted many people in territories devastated by wars into selling all their belongings and emigrating. After the proclamation of the emperor's edict of tolerance Lutheran and Reformed settlers were also allowed to immigrate, which had not been permitted by his mother and grandfather.

So it happened that at the beginning of 1786 several hundreds of Lutheran and Reformed families intending to settle, among them many from Wuerttemberg, had travelled to Vienna on primitive boats called "Ulm Boxes" ("Ulmer Schachteln") only to learn that settlement had actually come to an end. They could not return as they had pulled up stakes and had also given notice of departure to their lords of the manor or paid for their freedom. Some of them had also emigrated secretly without passports to achieve "private settlement", as their lords of the manor did not allow them to leave. Later they were allotted to big noble landowners.

At the chamber of the imperial court responsible for the settlement of colonists officials then remembered that in 1784 Earl Pejacsevich had filed an application for the assignment of 700 families of German descent. He wanted to make them settle on his enormous estates round Ruma. Ruma had been founded in 1746 during the second Swabian migration. Of course the inhabitants were Catholics; otherwise Maria Theresia would not have allowed them to immigrate. Most of them were from Franconia and Upper Bavaria. At the beginning Count Pejacsevich had only given them 5  $\frac{3}{4}$  yokes of land, which was by far not as much as Josef II had later promised his settlers in the patent of settlement. In other matters, too, the earl was not as generous as the chamber of the imperial court. For example, he only offered three "free years", i. e. exemption from services and tributes. The emperor had promised the settlers 10 free years.

In April the first settlers had already arrived at Ruma after a long and troublesome voyage. From Vienna they had sailed down the Danube at their own expense. After

their registration at the Hungarian Court Chamber at Ofen and the issue of their passports of settlement they landed at Karlovac or Peterwardein. From there they had to cross the hills of Fruska Gora to reach Ruma. The disappointment of the exhausted and despairing settlers was considerable when at Ruma the passports were finally taken from them and nobody seemed to know anything about all the promises and privileges in the patent of settlement, which had enticed them into going to faraway Hungary, the "promised land".

The count now also offered his new settlers 5  $\frac{3}{4}$  yokes of field, including farm site and pasture. That was not even the eighth part of a so-called session (a session amounted to 36 yokes,  $\frac{1}{2}$  session to 24 yokes,  $\frac{1}{4}$  session to 13 yokes), besides settlers were given 2 horses and a cow, simple furniture and household articles. They only got the wood promised for the construction of the house, if they fetched it from the Danube. But most of them had no money to pay for the transport.

The count had not taken care of providing temporary board and lodging. But that was not the only problem. The Catholic old settlers were afraid of losing their privileges. They did not want to live together with Protestant newcomers. As their farms were very small, they could take fields on lease from the earl for double the amount. If the new colonists were allotted the fields taken on lease so far, nothing would be left for them. With 5  $\frac{3}{4}$  yokes of field it was even at that time impossible to support a family. The inhabitants of Ruma were poor, and as in the course of summer more and more new families arrived, their displeasure grew. At the beginning the newcomers were lodged in the houses where small families lived and there was some room left, later only the attics and stables were still available or even the naked field.

All in all 557 families had come to Ruma until summer (specification of August 4, 1786), but only 35 of them accepted the earl's offer of constructing a house at their expense and founding a farm.

The remaining families were not offered anything by the earl: neither paid jobs nor board and lodging. Their 200 and more guilders, which they had to possess to get an entry permit, had already been consumed partially or even totally and even at Ruma victuals were not available free of charge.

Among the 557 listed families of new settlers there were some who did not come from Vienna but from Hungary and Transylvania. Part of them had already settled there before 1770, because they had not been admitted to Batschka and Banat because of their religious beliefs. In the wake of Josef II's liberal settlement policy they all now wanted to go to Batschka, too, and were disappointed at being sent to Ruma.

Now the count suddenly did not want to know anything about his application for new settlers and did not intend to care for the newcomers in any way. He intimated that ". . . *even if all of them died of hunger, he would not give them anything. The person who had sent them to Ruma, should care for them, too.*"

In this desperate situation many groups of settlers wrote letters of supplication the emperor and described their plight and misery. In June already the first letters went to Vienna and they became more numerous in the course of summer. "*Our plight is so extreme that if we are not helped soon, we will all have to be early victims of death*". They asked the emperor to allow them to settle in Batschka and complained that the count's manager had taken away their passports and so they could not leave Ruma on their own initiative. These letters are still in the archives, and one can read in them how miserable the situation of these people was. (List of sources at the end of this report.)

All the same, part of the 557 families left Ruma in the course of the summer even without passports and went to Batschka. The chamber of the court did not give any

direct answer to the letters of supplication, though the administrative authorities at Ruma and Novi Sad had pointed out the difficult situation of these people.

At the end of summer about 300 families were still staying at Ruma, for whom there was not any help yet. Some "*moved to the surrounding area*". The rest helped one another as much as they could.

This year winter began early, and people did not know where to spend the cold season. So at Barunovac 100 cave homes were dug in the hills to be at least sheltered from the precipitations. But there was no shelter from cold and hunger. The consequences which these miserable shelters and the lack of nourishment entailed were illnesses of all kinds, dysentery, typhoid, scurvy and other diseases caused by scarcity and infections. So 338 of the people died, most of them were probably aged or children. One can assume that there were victims in every family.

A receipt written by gravedigger Eisele on December 31, 1786, still exists "*certifying eight Guilders and 25 Kreuzers for burying 35 deceased colonists without money*". In the registers of the Catholic parish the names of Protestant immigrants who had to make use of the priest's services are listed until February, 1887. Among them there are 17 names of families later settling at Jarek.

But at last there was a reaction from Vienna. Finally the emperor himself had intervened, and in the spring of 1787 the time had come for some of the remaining families to hopefully leave for the "promised land". This time their hopes should be fulfilled. A small "corner" of 1800 yokes on "imperial territory" had actually been found, a "Praedium" called Ireg; near Novi Sad. The "Hotter" (boundary area) was shaped like a triangle and situated between the small and the big Roman entrenchment.

And so it happened that the period of settlement under Joseph II only came to an end with the foundation of Jarek in 1787. With 80 families and 300 persons it was the last and the smallest of the 9 Protestant settlements in Batschka (after Torschau, Tscherwenka, New Werbas, Kischker, New Siwatz, Schowe, Sekitsch and Bulkes). Jarek was indeed the smallest but not the least important village as the course of time proved.

But not all of the first families settling in Jarek came from Ruma. In the list of names on the monument for the ancestors (Heimatsbuch pp 55-71) there are also names not contained in the specification of August 4. Where those families were staying in the period between their registration at Ofen and their settlement in Jarek cannot be ascertained anymore.

The Jarek families, however, who had survived the winter of hunger at Ruma gloomily remembered it for a long time. Of course they did not know that Count Pejacsevich had temporarily fallen out of the favour with the emperor at Vienna because of the settlers treatment and was not allowed to appear at the court any longer. But that did not revivify the dead. At Ruma, however, the remnants of the caves where the people of Wuerttemberg had spent the winter were still visible for a long time. But their graves were soon levelled off. People did not want to be reminded of their inhospitable behaviour.

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*List of sources:*

*1. J. Schmidt et al: Batschki Jarak-Jarek, Werbas 1937 2. Oscar Feldtänzer: Joseph II und die Donauschwäbische Ansiedlung, München 1990, S. 442-448 3. Karl Freiherr von Czoernig: Ethnographie der Österreichischen Monarchie, Bd. III, Wien 1857*

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