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## **Institutional Resilience of ‘Soft Infrastructure’: A Microhistorical Analysis of Path Dependence at the Municipality of Kragujevac 1930s-1950s**

### **Introduction**

Infrastructure is most commonly understood as the basic structures and systems needed to serve the functioning of a society, mostly associated with what is called “hard infrastructure”. On the other hand, the “soft infrastructure” is made up of the services necessary to sustain the very same systems, mostly contained within the framework of public institutions.<sup>1</sup> Studying institutional resilience and path dependence in public institutions illuminates some of the persisting structural difficulties and failures that cause those institutions to deviate from their original purpose, often evolving into self-serving entities.<sup>2</sup> This kind of structural analysis also brings to light the institutional discontinuities associated with big breaks, such as changes in policies, regime change, or funding. This study will focus on the investigation of institutional resilience leading up to the times of the massive turmoil of WWII, and the significant changes that followed, through a microhistorical analysis of the Municipality of Kragujevac in the period of the 1930s-1950s. Since the aim of the wider project is to explore continuities and resilient infrastructure in the Yugoslav 20<sup>th</sup> century beyond the standard framework of political history, I have decided to venture outside of the main political and economic centers and investigate the (low) institutional capacities of an institution in a small town in Central Serbia. The aim of this study is therefore *to uncover patterns of continuity/resilience as well as the discontinuity, in the institutional capacities of the two Yugoslav states, through a microhistorical analysis of the documentation in the fond of the Municipality of Kragujevac in the period of the 1930s - 1950s.*

The first part of this paper consists of a discussion regarding the main methodological considerations, followed by a brief introduction to the history of Serbia in general and Kragujevac in particular. The main contribution of this paper is to be found in its empirical offering, which analyses the institutional

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<sup>1</sup> William Niskanen, “The soft infrastructure of market economy”, *Cato Journal* 11:2 (1991), 233-238.

<sup>2</sup> Omer Mayada, Ali Mostashari, Udo Lindemann, “Resilience analysis of soft infrastructure systems”, *Procedia Computer Science* 28 (2014), 567.

continuities and discontinuities of practices in the Municipality of Kragujevac, ending with a discussion in which empirical insights are placed in the context of a wider framework of path dependence.

## Methodology

In this segment, I will outline the theoretical concept of path dependence, as well as explain the benefits of studying it using a microhistorical approach. Following that, I will present some of the key factors that have been identified as root causes of underdevelopment in the region of Southeastern Europe (SEE). This part will conclude with some considerations regarding periodization, and reflection regarding the choice, ordering, and treatment of sources.

The main theoretical concept guiding this study, from the tradition of historical institutionalism, is the concept of path dependence, which generally means that set institutional practices “have a tendency towards inertia”.<sup>3</sup> Since the aim is to uncover institutional continuities in a period (1930s-1950s) when three distinct political systems were in force, this concept will be used to illustrate the relationship between structural conditions (macro level) and local agency (micro level). The main benefit of this approach is the acknowledgment that macro level conditions (institutional, legal, or economic) interact with local practices and personal agency by means of shaping the boundaries of social reality.<sup>4</sup> In other words, by contextualizing local practices over time and observing the interactions between the macro and micro levels, this study will attempt to show the persisting factors of resilience in the institutional setting.

The method of this analysis is inspired by global microhistory, which can best be described as “an aspiration to combine the study of global historical processes with a focus on the close analysis of primary sources as well as the work of contextualization necessary to decipher their meaning”.<sup>5</sup> The study of a single institution, in our case the Municipality of Kragujevac, becomes interesting when it can be placed into relation with global phenomena, such as the resilience of infrastructures and path dependence, by identifying some of their root causes. From existing literature on SEE, we can highlight the following factors as some of the root causes of underdevelopment:<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ian Greener, “The potential of path dependence in political studies”, *Politics* 25-1 (2005), 62-72, 62.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 65-68.

<sup>5</sup> John-Paul A. Ghobrial, “Introduction: seeing the world like a microhistorian”, *Past & Present* 242 (2019), Suppl. 14, 1-22, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Stergios Babanassis, “Long-term economic development trends in South-Eastern Europe (1850–2003)”, *South Eastern Europe Journal of Economics* 1 (2003), 19-40; Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, Ramin Dadašov, “Measuring control of corruption by a new index of public integrity”, *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 22:3 (2016), 415-438; Klaus Buchenau, “What is Justice? Complaints about Courts in Interwar Yugoslavia”, *Südost-Forschungen* 77 (2018), 121-136; Luca J. Uberti, Carl Henrik Knutsen, “Institutions, human capital and economic growth”,

- Poverty (both as cause and effect)
- Corruption of the bureaucracy (abuse of power/position)
- Lack of independence of the judiciary
- Primacy of public interest over private property rights

These are not the only root causes of underdevelopment in SEE, but the ones identified as relevant for this study. In the next part, concerning the history of Kragujevac, I will explain the role of the above factors at a local level. It is also important to highlight that this short exposé of root causes of underdevelopment presumes a certain view of historical progress that is eurocentric at best and orientalist at worst. My hope is to alleviate this issue by persistently presenting the broader geopolitical and socioeconomic context in which Serbia found itself during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Background: Kragujevac in the Period of the 1930s-1950s**

The history of Serbia, in the short 20<sup>th</sup> century, is framed by the massive destruction and death caused by the two world wars, which each resulted in two very different state-building projects. Both of those projects had to be carried out by a decimated, traumatized, and heavily impoverished population.<sup>7</sup> The first Yugoslavia, which will in the rest of this paper be referred to as that in the prewar (pre-WWII) period, was initially a difficult democratic project under the monarchic tutelage of the Serbian Karađorđević dynasty until 1929 when, due to failures in establishing a functional political system, a royal dictatorship was instituted. The period studied in this paper starts at around the assassination of King Aleksandar in 1934, during a worldwide economic crisis. The continued tensions between Serbs and Croats, under a significantly weakened royal rule, were heavily influenced by the rise of Nazi Germany, who would eventually invade the country in 1941. The postwar Yugoslavia introduced a radically different system of state socialism under the single-party rule of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ). The period between 1945-1957 is marked by a forced and often brutal modernization effort, retaliation against real and perceived internal enemies, the nationalization of most private property, and the introduction of a socialist economic order: the Yugoslav brand of "worker self-management".<sup>8</sup> A macroeconomic overview of the 1930s-1950s shows that until 1945 a mostly agricultural economy prevailed, in which most of the sur-

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in Elodie Douarin, Oleh Havrylyshyn (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Comparative Economics* (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2021), 461-492.

<sup>7</sup> Spencer Tucker (Ed.), *World War I: Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 273; Alex Danchev, Thomas Halverson, *International perspectives on the Yugoslav conflict* (London, New York: Springer, 2016), 133.

<sup>8</sup> Бориша Радовановић, *Историја Крагујевца 1944-1991* (Крагујевац: Интерпринт, 2021), 16f.; Srđan Cvetković, "Politička represija u Srbiji i Jugoslaviji 1944-1985", *Istorija 20. veka 2* (2008), 272-315.

plus production of the country's agricultural and industrial sectors was being extracted by foreign corporations and corrupt local elites, keeping the per capita GDP (gdp-pc) relatively static in the entire interwar period.<sup>9</sup> The nationalization of private property, including companies, after 1945 meant that the surplus production of the state could be reinvested into domestic growth, a process which led to more significant economic growth (50% growth in the gdp-pc in the first postwar decade), especially following the economic reforms of the 1960s.<sup>10</sup>

As the regional center for the Šumadija-area, the town of Kragujevac was placed under the purview of the Danubian Administrative area in 1929, meaning that the faraway city of Novi Sad became its regional headquarters.<sup>11</sup> In the period of 1929-1933 it was the Municipal Court of Kragujevac that served as the executive branch of the municipality, with the head of the court serving as its president.<sup>12</sup> This symbiotic relationship between the executive and the judicial branches of government would continue to function after 1935 (when party political activity was slowly restored), making it difficult to discern in the archival documents whether the decisions being made were coming as orders from the municipality or as judgements by the court.<sup>13</sup> The period of 1934-1941 can generally be considered one of weakening dictatorial rule, during a time of rising tensions, instability, and economic stagnation. During WWII, the town of Kragujevac was one of the most impacted places in Serbia, as demonstrated by the infamous "Kragujevac Massacre" (Kragujevački oktobar) in 1941, the single-day mass execution of about 3,000 citizens of Kragujevac and the surrounding villages as an act of retaliation for uprisings against the German occupation.<sup>14</sup> The German-controlled administration of the town during the war was marked by exploitation, hunger, and rape, following a philosophy of keeping order through torturous conditions.<sup>15</sup> In the immediate postwar period, the main tasks of the municipality lay in establishing law and order, retaliation against real and perceived internal enemies, as

<sup>9</sup> Милен Николић, *Трговина у Србији 1804-1957* (Крагујевац: Народна библиотека Вук Караџић, 2008), 312-315, 344-246; Miloš Lecić, "The Evolution of Anti-Corruption Legislation in Interwar Yugoslavia (1918-1941)", *Tokovi istorije* 3 (2021), 37-70; Rade Pantić, "Jugoslavija v mednarodni delitvi dela: od periferije k socializmu in nazaj k periferiji", *Borec: revija za zgodovino, antropologijo in književnost* 73 (2021), 787-789.

<sup>10</sup> Jutta Bolt and Jan Luiten Van Zanden, "Maddison style estimates of the evolution of the world economy. A new 2020 update", in *Maddison-Project Working Paper WP-15, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands* (2020); Carl-Ulrik Schierup, *Migration, socialism, and the international division of labour: the Yugoslavian experience* (Gower: Aldershot, 1990), 59-66.

<sup>11</sup> Бориша Радовановић, *Историја Крагујевца од најстаријих времена до 1944* (Крагујевац: Интерпринт, 2017), 587.

<sup>12</sup> Катарина Лековић, Вељко Лековић, *Крагујевац између два светска рата, Књига прва: Поглаварство града Крагујевца 1918-1941* (Крагујевац: Друштво историчара Шумадије, 2019), 48.

<sup>13</sup> Радовановић, *Историја Крагујевца од најстаријих времена*, 589-599.

<sup>14</sup> Boris Tomanić, "Mass shootings in Kragujevac during and after World War II (1941-1945). Testimonies and memorization", *Istorija 20. veka* 1 (2020), 83-106.

<sup>15</sup> Радовановић, *Историја Крагујевца од најстаријих времена*, 723f.

well as opening a large number of public kitchens for feeding the many poor citizens.<sup>16</sup> In the following years, citizen participation in the local governing body of the municipality gradually increased, as did the responsibilities of the institution. In 1953 the Municipality of Kragujevac became directly responsible for health institutions (including institutions of social care), schools and high schools, as well as a great portion of the significant investment budget, especially with regard to the construction of new housing.<sup>17</sup> The main areas of economic investment were in the arms and the automotive industry, which became the industrial engine of growth for this area.<sup>18</sup>

### Continuities and Discontinuities

In the following section, I will critically review four distinct clusters of documents from two different funds at the AŠ, both of which were funds of the Municipality of Kragujevac, regulated under two different titles, namely the Fond *Poglavarstvo grada Kragujevca* (1934-1941) and the Fond *Skupština Opštine Kragujevac* (1945-1957). These four clusters of documents represent the main areas of responsibility of the local municipality, the key soft infrastructure services necessary for the efficient functioning of a local community. The poverty cluster of documents refers to the joint services of social welfare, while the building cluster details most of the projects and permits connected to the construction of hard infrastructure. The complaints cluster encompasses the feedback of the populace towards the municipality: the requests and complaints illuminate the clashes between institutional logic and the realities of the regular citizens. Finally, the reporting cluster outlines the flow of information between the higher-level institutions (usually ministries) and the municipality. It is a crucial cluster, as it connects developments at the state level (macro level) to those at the municipal level (micro level), showing the extent to which the wider framework manifests itself on the periphery.

### The Poverty Cluster

The type of documents in this cluster include attestations of poverty status, requests for social benefits, and requests for the allotment of arable land. In the documents of the prewar period there is a prevalence of requests (*molbe*) and attestations (*uverenja*) for the purpose of attaining poverty status (*stanje siromašnog*) in applying for different kinds of monetary social aid. When analysing the specifics of the justifications for attaining poverty status in the prewar

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<sup>16</sup> Радовановић, *Историја Крагујевца 1944-1991*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 21.

<sup>18</sup> Ranka Gašić, "'Jugoslovenski Detroit.' Automobilska industrija u Kragujevcu 1953-1991" (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2017); Ian Davis, "Small arms and light weapons in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" (London: Safe World, 2002), 48.

documents, it becomes clear that the primary reasons for the poverty claims of the applicants were old age (inability to work), handicap, the support of children, and lack of a spouse (with spouses either having been lost in the war or abandoning the family).<sup>19</sup> The most interesting fact about these requests in the prewar period is not the contents of the requests, as most of them followed a standardized application form, but rather their abundance through the entire prewar period examined in this work. These were some of the most numerous requests in almost all the folders from 1934-1941, which indicates that the issue of poverty was systemic and prevalent.

In the postwar documentation, poverty status was claimed for the purposes of a more varied set of benefits, such as monetary aid, arable land allotment, rice and grain support, as well as housing allotment.<sup>20</sup> The bases for these requests were very similar to those of the requests from the prewar period, primarily old age and handicap. Most of the documentation regarding these requests, both in the prewar and postwar period, is fragmented and sporadic, preventing a full insight into the local procedures and decision-making processes within the municipality. An exception to that is found in the folder from 1951, in which there are over a hundred requests made for the allotment of arable land to the needy around the area called *Palilulsko groblje*.<sup>21</sup> Most of these requests were hand-written on different types of paper using different writing styles that matched the signatures, indicating that they were written by the applicants themselves, rather than lawyers or the employees at the municipality. All of the requests have a similar structure, containing a formal request for land (usually around 0.2 hectares), explaining the grounds for the application (poverty, handicap, etc.) and ending with the official salutation “death to fascism, freedom to the people”, appearing just above the applicants’ signatures. Reading closely through these requests allows for certain patterns to be observed. For example, some of the requests contain an additional sentence under the signature of the applicant, usually stating something along the lines of: “I am of the opinion that comrade B.Z., living at H.F. Kraljić street 33, should be accommodated and be given 1 parcel of arable land [...]”.<sup>22</sup> All of these requests with the additional sentence are signed by the Secretary of the City Council, M. Popović. The interesting fact about these additional sentences (which are only to be found in a minority of the requests) is that they were all written and dated in the same handwriting as the main text of the requests and signatures of the applicants.

<sup>19</sup> Arhiv Šumadije (AŠ), Fond Poglavarstvo grada Kragujevca (1937 – XXVII), Molba A.T., 18.1.1937; AŠ, Fond Poglavarstvo grada Kragujevca (1939 – LVIII), Molba Ž.Č., 2/1/1939; AŠ, Fond Poglavarstvo grada Kragujevca (1940 - LXXXIII), Molba S.M., 30.6.1940.

<sup>20</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1951 – XIII), Molba za dodelu zemlje za obradu S.S., 1.2.1951; AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1953 – XVI), Rešenje o dodeli socijalne novčane pomoći D.S., 22/6/1953; AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1955 – XX), Pretstavka S.S., 16.12.1954; AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1957 – XXXVII), Spisak lica za dodelu pomoći u pirinču i pšenici, 1.2.1957.

<sup>21</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1951 – XIII).

<sup>22</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1951 – XIII), Molba B.Z., 8.3.1951.

The only differing handwriting on all of these requests is the actual signature of Secretary Popović. Another anomaly connected to the requests with the additional sentence is that the texts of the requests are shorter and more concise, not containing many detailed descriptions of the misfortunes that most of the other requests contained. It is also my assessment that the grounds for these requests (justifications for why the applicants should be allotted land) were generally of a milder nature than those offered in support of the majority of requests that did not include this defacto pre-approval of Secretary Popović. This observation could indicate that the applicants, who themselves added the approval of their own requests in their own handwriting, received preferential treatment compared to other applicants. In addition to this indication, there are two lists among the many individual requests in this folder, showing the names of people from the 11<sup>th</sup> basic unit (*XI osnovna jednica*) who are being awarded the same limited land plots that were intended for the poor.<sup>23</sup> Taken all together, this evidence suggests that the people who were a part of the system or otherwise connected to the Party or Secretary Popović received preferential treatment during allocations of this type of poverty aid.

### **The Building Cluster**

The types of documents in this cluster are primarily building permits and demolition orders/complaints. Most of the documentation coming from the period from the 1930s to 1950s is of technical nature, such as blueprints for houses/buildings and administrative approvals. This type of documentation could certainly be comparatively analyzed in a meaningful way to determine differences in city planning, safety measures, or the level of investment in infrastructure in the two periods. Such an endeavour would require more in-depth investigation, so the documents selected for the analysis in this study are only those relatively few cases wherein citizens encountered issues with the municipality, thereby uncovering some of the inner dynamics of this institution. It should therefore be noted that the vast majority of building permits in the entire period studied were approved without further written remarks by authorities, who were aware of the shortages in living and commercial spaces.<sup>24</sup>

One of the cases in the prewar period, in which a citizen was confronted with several departments within the municipality, was the building demolition case of B.R. from Belgrade.<sup>25</sup> This is the only case encountered in this cluster in which the citizen involved was not a resident of Kragujevac and the building was an investment property (being rented out) rather than a living space of the

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<sup>23</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1951 – XIII), Spisak, 9.3.1951.

<sup>24</sup> Aleksandar Miletić, "Tenancy vs. ownership rights. housing rent control in Southeast and East-Central Europe, 1918–1928", *The City and History* (Mesto a dejiny until 2019) 5:1 (2016), 51-74.

<sup>25</sup> AŠ, Fond Poglavarstvo grada Kragujevca (1934 – XXI), Predmet: Žalba B.R. iz Beograda, 15.8.1934.

complainant. The case starts with a concerned letter from a citizen Lj.R., a pensioner from Kragujevac, who shares the same last name as the building owner (unknown whether they are related), in which the concerned citizen submits a request saying that the aforementioned building is “totally prone to collapsing” and the “walkers-by are endangered”, asking the municipality to demolish the building.<sup>26</sup> Not knowing whether this is a family feud, but knowing that the owner is a man of above-average wealth, one can observe a possible “Freudian typo” in this initial request, namely where the requestee writes that “it should be ordered for money [sic!] to be made”.<sup>27</sup> Several inspections followed this request and the owner was ultimately ordered to demolish the building. However, in an official complaint from the lawyer of the building owner, several issues can be highlighted that show an experience of selective justice by the now accused B.R. from Belgrade. In the formal part of the complaint, the lawyer points out that the legal procedure was not followed by the municipality and that the order (*rešenje*) was created based on an administrative decision (*odluka*) and not by a court-mandated judgement (*presuda*).<sup>28</sup> This seemingly technical remark substantiates a well-known issue with the impartiality of the legal system in the whole country.<sup>29</sup>

Under the material reasons for the complaint, the lawyer highlights some inconsistencies in the assessment of the city architect, whose assessment is the basis for the demolition order, and suggests subtly that the architect is either incompetent or corrupt. Analyzing all of the documents in this case file, one finds it difficult to conclude whether the processes at the municipality were truly unjust/corrupt or whether decisive and justified action was taken to secure the well-being of the citizens. On the other hand, it is possible to conclude that despite the engagement of a lawyer, the suggestions for a second opinion or a compromise solution (such as a proposed fortification of the building), the original decision of the inspectorate was forced through all the different levels at the municipality, including ultimately the court. It seems that when the decision was made to demolish the building, the complaints and rights of the building owner were not of primary concern for the authorities. Indeed, it is no wonder that the citizens preferred to avoid formal processes and remain under the radar when it came to the authorities. This is confirmed by various police reports to the municipality in which the problem, lasting for several years, of “certain streets with no names and a certain number of newly-erected houses with no house numbers”, show that the property owners did

<sup>26</sup> AŠ, Fond Poglavarstvo grada Kragujevca (1934 – XXI), Molba Lj.R. Okružnom Inspektoratu, 15.6.1932.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. In this machine-typed request the word “money” (*novac*) was typed initially, possibly indicating that the requestee expects money to be made from the building owner. Since this was a typo, the last letter of the word was crossed over with a blue pen, so that a word “new” (*nova*) remained, referring to a new fence which should be erected.

<sup>28</sup> AŠ, Fond Poglavarstvo grada Kragujevca (1934 – XXI), Žalba Z.M. punomoćnika g. B.R., 17.5.1933.

<sup>29</sup> Buchenau, *What is Justice*, 121-136.



not rush to register their properties and engage in a formal relationship with the municipality.<sup>30</sup>

In the early postwar period, the lack of housing due to wartime damage or general decay resulted in demolition requests having to be well-argued and not infringe on the affordable housing rights of poor tenants.<sup>31</sup> This meant that the format of the requests changed to include the explanations of how the requested demolition would impact the "housing interests" (*stambeni interesi*) of the populace.<sup>32</sup> As the centrally-planned modernization project of the Party took form, the main concerns when issuing building permits were no longer primarily the lack of building material, but that the new buildings should not clash with the investment and urbanisation plans being made in the capital. This resulted in building approvals in 1951 that contained caveats stating that the owner should be ready to "demolish and remove [the building] in the case that such is foreseen by the new regulatory plan of the town of Kragujevac, which is now being made at the Urbanism Office of the People Republic of Serbia in Belgrade".<sup>33</sup>

The rapid modernization is also evident when analyzing the types of permits being issued in the prewar period (mostly private citizens erecting housing) compared to the large-scale investment projects of the postwar period. An example of this is to be found in the folder titled "The list of planned structures for 1952", in which more than 20 buildings (some with movie theatres inside) are to be found next to the following infrastructure projects – summer bath facility, water supply extension, electrical grid extension, town theater, plumbing, underground shelters (!), town bakery, healthcare center, and more.<sup>34</sup>

As the shift from private building requests towards large public projects takes place, building permits for the private needs of regular citizens become more scarce. In the few that are to be found among the archival material, the tone of the requests is apologetic and there are explanations stating that the construction will be done with materials salvaged from the rubble.<sup>35</sup> Towards the end of the period researched in this work, in the second half of the 1950s, building and demolition requests seem to have been approved more easily, as the general housing supply in Kragujevac improved significantly through the decade. The main concerns of the municipality in this period seemed to have been that the demolitions should not be done before tenants have secured housing in new apartments.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> AŠ, Fond Poglavarstvo grada Kragujevca (1934 – XXI), Sudu opštine grada Kragujevca od Predstojništva gradske policije, not dated.

<sup>31</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1948 – VII), D.J. moli odobrenje da uruši dućan, 27.5.1948 and Z.V-M. iz Kragujevca moli da joj se dozvoli da poruši kuću, 26.7.1948.

<sup>32</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1948 – VII), M.M. Molba za rušenje kuće, 29.6.1948.

<sup>33</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1951 – XIII), Građevinska dozvola R.P., 23.6.1951.

<sup>34</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1951 – XIII), Spisak planiranih objekata za 1952. god., not dated.

<sup>35</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1953 – XVI), Molba Lj.R. za zidanje šupe, 18.6.1953.

<sup>36</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1955 – XX), Rešenje za rušenje kuće M.J., 21.12.1953 and AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1957 – XXXVII), Rešenje za rušenje stambene zgrade, 2.3.1957.

Examining the documents in the building cluster and observing the contents, tone of argumentation, and respect for private property, one clearly sees that continuities between the two periods are primarily to be found in the paternalistic relationship between the authorities and the citizens. The needs and decisions of the municipality and the state were enforced with very little room for compromise. On the other hand, the postwar modernization project was a clear break with the status quo that accepted general poverty and lack of housing. The large-scale projects attempted to solve these persistent problems on a fundamental level and in a very short period of time, without diverging from the paternalistic treatment of the “small” citizen by the “large” institution.

### The Complaints Cluster

This is one of the more interesting clusters, as it contains complaints by citizens of Kragujevac aimed at the various decisions of the municipality or its departments. In the prewar period, complaints to the municipality concerned everything from zoning issues to unlawful imprisonment. The only commonality among all of the prewar complaints uncovered during the course of this research was that the vast majority of them were either not acted upon formally (leaving no paper trail in the case files) or were outright rejected as unfounded.<sup>37</sup> Unlike other types of documents analyzed in this study, the complaint documents can tell us more about the structural issues of the institutions that caused the grievances, as it is in the very nature of a complaint to express a problem with one or more decisions of the involved institutions.

In a case from 1939, M.P. was convicted to five days in prison and given a sizable monetary fine, because some of the livestock from his field crossed over to the neighbouring field and grazed on the neighbour’s grass.<sup>38</sup> In the complaint of M.P., which was submitted six days later, he highlights a series of issues with the conviction not only questioning its legality, but also including accusations regarding the way that this case was handled by the authorities.<sup>39</sup> The primary grounds for the complaint was a statement asserting that there was no legal basis for the five-day prison sentence that was handed out. A whole series of logical inconsistencies were outlined, such as the inability to determine the amount of grass eaten by some livestock on a field where the livestock of both neighbours were grazing simultaneously. With hints towards selective justice, M.P. concludes the complaint by stating that the punishment was “overly harsh and excessive” (*suviše je stroga i preterana*).<sup>40</sup> As with other cases

<sup>37</sup> Cf. AŠ, Fond Poglavarstvo grada Kragujevca (1934 – XXI), Prepis prigovora J.D. iz Kragujevca, 12.10.1934; (1937 – XXVII), Žalba na presudu Gradskog Poglavarstva g. Kragujevca, 16.6.1936; (1940 – LXXXIII), Žalba M.P. na presudu poglavarstva, 5.10.1939.

<sup>38</sup> AŠ, Fond Poglavarstvo grada Kragujevca (1940 – LXXXIII), Presuda Gradskog Poglavarstva g. Kragujevca nadležno po krivici M.P., 30.9.1939.

<sup>39</sup> AŠ, Fond Poglavarstvo grada Kragujevca (1940 – LXXXIII), Žalba M.P. na presudu poglavarstva, 5.10.1939.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 2.

from different prewar clusters, it is difficult to conclude whether the citizens were right in their complaints only on the bases of the available documents. What we can conclude is that the feelings of injustice and subtle hints at corruption were being expressed on a regular basis. In the following case, we will see that the accusations of corruption were not only expressed as hints, but also as direct official statements by employees of the municipality. In a complaint from 1939 by M.M., an employee of the municipality of Kragujevac, he explains that he as a certified and experienced city surveyor has a substantially lower salary than does an unqualified colleague of his in the same department.<sup>41</sup> In describing his credentials, M.M. states that he was the one who discovered the “cement scandal” (*afera sa cementom*) in which he saved over half a million dinars for the municipality by exposing the use of poor quality materials in the construction of the riverbank at the Lepenica river.<sup>42</sup> He further explains that he is impacted both “morally and monetarily” and that the citizenry is talking about it and laughing at both him and the municipality. These sharp accusations are concluded by him stating somewhat sarcastically that he “has nothing against the unqualified staff (!) and that the municipality can pay them as much as it wants, but that the municipality should reward the qualified staff, if not more than, then at least as much as the unqualified staff”.<sup>43</sup> There is no reply to this complaint in the case file, so it is unknown how it was resolved, but the descriptions of the situation provide a clear image of the lack of meritocratic hiring and remuneration at the municipality.

Additionally, this source highlights that the general public is fully aware of these issues, and the mockery of the public, as well as the dissatisfaction of M.M., is not directed at the corruptive injustice of hiring unqualified staff, but rather towards the fact that the qualified staff members do not demand more money for themselves. This indicates that both the citizens of the town and the employees of the municipality were aware of and somewhat apathetic towards corruptive practices of the municipality, as long as their personal interests were not infringed upon. This way of viewing public institutions, which are supposed to maintain the common good, indicates a certain level of acceptance of powerlessness in the face of the “way that things are done”.<sup>44</sup>

In the postwar period, the span of the types of complaints found in the records of the municipality increases significantly to include firing disputes, disputes between municipal departments, complaints regarding social benefits,

<sup>41</sup> AŠ, Fond Poglavarstvo grada Kragujevca (1940 – LXXXIII), Žalba M.M. Gradskom Poglavarstvu, 31.7.1939.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Predrag Cvetičanin, Misha Popovikj and Miloš Jovanović, “Informality in the Western Balkans: A culture, a contextual rational choice, or both? ”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 19:4 (2019), 585-604; Alena Ledeneva, “Economies of favours or corrupt societies: Exploring the boundaries between informality and corruption”, *Baltic Worlds* 7:1 (2014), 13-21.

workplace arbitration, and even direct complaints to president Tito. In the early postwar period, during the time of fuel scarcity, most complaints were submitted regarding public transportation, namely aimed at the Municipal Auto Company (*Auto Preduzeće pri Gradskom Narodnom Odboru*), which was in charge of bus transport to and from Kragujevac. In a complaint from 1948, by a bus conductor known as J.Đ., he complains to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (*MUP*) about the behaviour of a police officer who delayed a bus departure by 20 minutes by demanding that four so-called “public official seats” (*službena mesta*) be vacated in an already full bus.<sup>45</sup> Describing the way the police officer was behaving towards the passengers and the bus crew, threatening them with incarceration if the seats were not vacated, shows a different aspect of the abuse of power in public service.<sup>46</sup> That the feuds between different state and city departments went both ways is evident in a report filed by an employee at the Ministry of Transportation in 1950 over the reckless behaviour of a bus crew on a ride he took from Kragujevac to Belgrade.<sup>47</sup> In this report, which resulted in the firing of the entire bus crew including the trainee driver, the accusation states that the drivers (among other smaller transgressions and rude behaviour) were driving dangerously fast in order to have time for lengthy breaks at the bars along the route, where they were eating and drinking alcoholic beverages, primarily brandy (*rakija*).<sup>48</sup> In a less-than-convincing defense statement, the bus driver explains that he is “absolutely not an alcoholic, but as any other man drinks a glass or two daily”, as he did during that ride.<sup>49</sup> This and other complaints regarding numerous conflicts between various public officials on buses reveal an interesting increase in reporting on unprofessional behaviour and abuse of power in the early years of the postwar state. As transportation was a scarce resource in this period, the many clashes between different public officials and the reporting of those instances mark a clear break with the practices of public officials in the prewar years, who were much subtler and more understanding towards the lack of professionalism among their colleagues.

On the other hand, the increase in complaints by public servants could have resulted from the fact that the nationalization of the private sector, following the communist revolution, drastically increased the number of public sector employees. Following the passage of the *Regulation on the Management of Residential Buildings* in 1954, a large number of complaints started appearing in 1955 regarding its implementation. The regulation specified the implementation of public management (*društveno upravljanje*) of all larger buildings (more than

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<sup>45</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1948 – VII), Žalba J.Đ. konduktera Grad. Auto-preduzeća, 21.9.1948.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>47</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1951 – XIII), Izveštaj Ministarstvu Saobraćaja N.R. Srbije, 19.7.1950.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1951 – XIII), Zapisnik po predmetu saslušanja D.L. šofera ovog preduzeća, 20.6.1950.

two apartments), in which the rights of the building owners were severely curtailed with regard to property management and rent seeking.<sup>50</sup> Most of the complainants specified that the size of their property was smaller than the legally defined large size that was outlined by the regulation.<sup>51</sup> The main basis for the complaints was that assessments made by surveyors from the municipality were wrongfully overestimated in order to strip the owners of their private property rights. Most of the buildings being put under public management were actually private houses in which rooms being rented out were defined as apartments. From the lengthy argumentation of these complainants, it is clear that the property owners considered the municipality's implementation of the 1954 regulation an unlawful and unjust seizure of their property. Apart from the sizing issues, the complaints stressed the injustice of implementing public management in buildings that "were not made for rent seeking, but made for personal housing needs".<sup>52</sup>

Similar complaints continued to be filed until 1957, when the municipality moved towards labelling agricultural storage spaces as housing units, prompting such decisions to be assessed as having been conducted "without a conscientious and professional review".<sup>53</sup> Complaints like these show how the legal decisions of authorities in this period took on a character which was radically different from that in the prewar state, yet shared uncompromising resolve when it came to the execution of even the most illogical decisions. One such decision can be seen in the case of A.P., who complains regarding the fact that he cannot move into a house that he owns because he already lives in an (according to him, too small) apartment. This complaint resulted in a municipal court ruling that sounded like this:

"Decision: The request of A.P., to be allotted an apartment in his house in the JNA-street number 82, for the needs of his family, is rejected."<sup>54</sup>

The other major group of complaints in this cluster are those addressed to the *Municipal Arbitration for Work-related Disputes*. Just as the private property seizures can be said to be in line with the ideology of the ruling party, so too can be described many of the decisions around worker complaints to the municipality, namely by most of them being resolved in favor of the aggrieved workers and not the employers.<sup>55</sup> The

<sup>50</sup> Nada Mrkšić, "The Legal Nature of Tenancy Right", *Collection Papers Fac. L. Nis* 5 (1966), 238.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1955 – XX); Žalba M.M. na Rešenje gornjeg Saveta, 11.1.1955; Žalba M.F. na rešenje Saveta za komunalne poslove, 12.11.1954; Žalba Z.K. protivu rešenju toga odbora, 4.12.1955.

<sup>52</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1955 – XX), Žalba M.M. na Rešenje gornjeg Saveta, 11.1.1955.

<sup>53</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1957 – XXXVII), Žalba V.R. zemljoradnika iz Kragujevca, 4.2.1957.

<sup>54</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1957 – XLI), Žalba A.P. iz Kragujevca, 20.11.1956.

<sup>55</sup> Examples of worker complaints that were settled in favour of the workers: AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1955 – XX), Žalba J.G. točioca pića Samostalne ugostiteljske radnje

contents of these complaints are illuminating vis-à-vis certain issues such as abuse of power in the workplace, and are as such interesting objects for further study. However, apart from the fact that the Municipality of Kragujevac showed an overwhelming leniency towards workers in these disputes, the examples from these types of complaints are outside of the scope of this study.

### The Reporting Cluster

This cluster is the least standardized cluster, as it includes reports found during research on topics ranging from yearly municipal budget proposals to yearly reports on the Home for the Deaf. This varied nature of the reports provides a challenge, as it requires a lot of interpretation and contextualisation of smaller parts of the reports in question, rather than a systematic comparison of the same types of a report (e.g. yearly budgets) and a determination of changes over time. An additional problem in doing a systematic analysis of the same types of reports is the fact that a lot of material from the studied fund is missing for various reasons.<sup>56</sup> This section will therefore contain an extraction of relevant details from the uncovered reports and use them to improve our understanding of the topic.

In the prewar period, most of the reports concern budget proposals. In the budget proposal for the financial year 1935-36, we can see the actual budget spending for 1934 versus the approved budget for 1934, as well as the planned spending for 1935-36.<sup>57</sup> The report shows that most of the budgeted salary expenses for lower level public servants are close to the actual expenses in 1934, except for the salary of the president of the municipality whose expenses were more than double the budgeted amount (budgeted: 60k, spent: 136k).<sup>58</sup> With a salary that high, the president had roughly ten times the salary of a skilled worker (e.g. the salary of a nurse was 14k).<sup>59</sup> In the table below, I have calculated the share of the total budgets for five selected areas:

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Prvi Maj, 7.1.1955; (1957 – XXXVII), Žalba R.S. po predmetu otkaza radnog odnosa, 8.2.1957.

<sup>56</sup> In my conversations with the main archivist, I was told that systematic comparisons (particularly quantitative) would be very difficult, because big parts of the documentation are missing due to flooding, censorship and various types of negligence. In addition, a lack of standardization and systematic ordering of the archival material is a general problem in Serbian archivalistics (Cf.: Бориша Радовановић, “О неким аспектима некритичког публикавања архивске грађе, са посебним освртом на архивску грађу Шумадије”, *Архивска грађа као извор за историју Шумадије, Зборник Историјског Архива Шумадије*, 2003, 117-119).

<sup>57</sup> AŠ, Fond Poglavarstvo grada Kragujevca (1934 – XXI), Projekat budžeta rashoda i prihoda Gpg. Kragujevca za 1935/36 godinu, 30.12.1934.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 4.

Table 1: Percentage of the total by expenditure type  
– Municipality of Kragujevac 1934-1935<sup>60</sup>

	Suggested for 1935/36	Approved for 1934	Actual spending 1934
Municipal staff salaries	26,21%	24,47%	29,48%
Building branch	20,32%	14,38%	15,28%
Education	7,28%	9,07%	11,41%
Social aid	2,28%	2,27%	2,16%
Humanitarian aid	1,99%	1,81%	1,89%

From this overview, it is clear that  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the municipal budget was used in payment of staff salaries, with the actual spending for salaries in 1934 being 5% higher than the approved. The building branch accounted for merely 15-20% of the municipal budget, while the three remaining budget items, which can together be labelled the welfare items (education and poverty aid), only accounted for around 10-15% of the yearly spending. Considering the insights from the previously analysed clusters within the areas of poverty and building, this breakdown adds to the perception that institutional maintenance (salary spending) took precedence over much-needed infrastructure or social spending.<sup>61</sup> It should be noted that the preponderance of building costs for new buildings in the prewar period was incurred by private building developers, who were responsible for over 70% of new building costs in the period of 1934-37.<sup>62</sup> To put that into perspective, private development in 1954 accounted for just 3% of the total building activity.<sup>63</sup>

As the investment into construction and infrastructure was moved to central planning in Belgrade (as was already remarked upon in the building cluster section), one of the main tasks of the municipality in the postwar period was to shape the future through education. This fact is also visible in the reporting records, as the vast majority of reports after the war pertained to the many newly established primary and high schools in Kragujevac. The main ideological foundations of the new socialist state, work and the National Liberation Struggle (*NOB*) permeate the earliest reports from the educational institutions. The exam topics for all students attending the Second All-boys High School of

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>61</sup> Infrastructure projects were both planned long term and implemented in the interwar period, but due to the lack of funding, the amounts allotted to maintenance and renewal were very low compared to the post-war period. Cf.: Лекковић, *Крагујевац између два светска рата*, 101-104.

<sup>62</sup> Calculation based on data from: AŠ, Fond Poglavarstvo grada Kragujevca (1934 – XXI), Projekat budžeta rashoda i prihoda Gpg. Kragujevca za 1935/36 godinu, 30.12.1934; (1935 – XXII), Zapisnik prve sednice Gradskog veća g. Kragujevca, 4.3.1935; (1937- XXVII), Predmet: Godišnji izveštaj za 1936. godinu o radu građevinskog Odbora, 23.1.1937.

<sup>63</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1955 – XX), Godišnji izveštaj o radu građevinske inspekcije grada Kragujevca u 1954. godini, 6.1.1955.

Kragujevac in 1947-48 were: “My future depends on my work” and “Work is the strongest force in nature, which changes the old and creates the new”.<sup>64</sup> The field trips for the boys that year were to the various execution sites, including that of the October 1941 mass executions in Kragujevac, as well as to local factories.<sup>65</sup> The trauma of WWII was to be confronted and overcome by rebuilding the country. In the various reports to the Ministry of Education, it becomes clear that the municipality was also responsible for alleviating the worst effects of wartime poverty and the resulting health problems among children by turning the school into a sort of social welfare institution. Feeding the children and treating them for disease were therefore among the cardinal tasks described in these reports, in which during the school year of 1947-48 55 children had tuberculosis, over 1500 had various diseases of the heart/lungs/skin, 37 were hospitalized, 155 were sent to treatment (5 of them to the seaside at the expense of the municipality), and 3 girls died from tuberculosis.<sup>66</sup> In addition to social care, the other key reporting area for the municipality in the 1950s was the education sector (especially with regard to manufacturing). From the various school reports in 1951, the reports from the Technical High School of Military Industry of Kragujevac, and the All-girls High School, show the gradual merger of the military industry and the educational sector in Kragujevac.

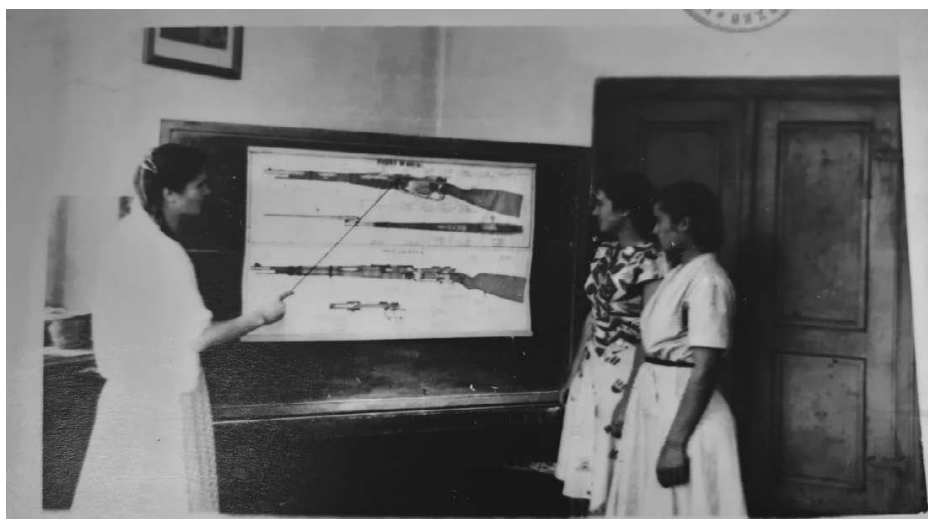


Image 1: AŠ, Archival Fund Parliament of the Municipality of Kragujevac (1951 - XIII), Report of the Women's High School for the school year 1950-51, 24.

<sup>64</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1948 – VII), Izveštaj II muške gimnazije u Kragujevcu za školsku 1947/48 godinu, not dated, 10.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 12. An additional pillar of the new state, “brotherhood and unity” (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*) was also to be achieved through the educational sector, which can be seen by various excursions of the teacher-trainees to Croatia. (AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1948 – VII), Mešovita učiteljska škola – Kragujevac – Izveštaj za školsku 1947/48 godinu, not dated, p. 5).

<sup>66</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1948 – VII), Izveštaj Ministarstvu Prosvete N.R. Srbije – odeljenje za škole, 21.7.1948.



The first report highlights that this high school has been put under the direct management of the "Administration of the Military Industry" and that this governing body is responsible for not only the curriculum, but also the daily management of the high school.<sup>67</sup> The report from the All-girls High School accounts for the various activities of the previous year, and among the files are pictures of girls studying detailed schematics of assault rifles.

Considering the massive suffering of regular people in Kragujevac from both the German invasion and consequent poverty and disease, this picture provides a strong symbolic clue as regards the ideological desire to defend the country both with force of arms and by straightening out its economy through industrialisation.

### **Discussion: When Modernisation Is Not Enough**

The above analysis shows that the main continuities are to be observed in the areas of the corruption of the bureaucracy, the lack of impartiality of the legal system, and the relationship between the public vs. private interest. The corruption of the bureaucracy has been demonstrated through the examples of the hiring unqualified staff, the doubling of the municipal president's salary in 1934, the abuse of power and position by both police officers and bus drivers, as well as the cases of preferential treatment in land allotments by secretary Popović. The impartiality of the legal system has been questioned in the various complaints and their handling, including complaints where logical inconsistencies were ignored, and where impartial assessments or compromise was rarely even considered. [Both the impartiality of the legal system and the manner of handling of complaints are questioned in the documentation, and complaints often elicited responses that ignored logical inconsistencies of the municipal apparatus, and in which impartial assessments or compromises were rarely even considered.] In the postwar period, the impartiality of the judiciary was formally abolished, so this could be observed as an evolution rather than simply a continuation. Finally, the primacy of public interest over private (usually property) rights is visible through cases of the demolition of private property due to supposed hazard to the public and the hesitancy of property owners to formally register newly built properties. In the postwar period, the disregard for private property (in addition to being formalised through nationalizations and expropriations that are not covered by this study) reached absurd proportions when officials from the municipality did not allow citizens to move into their own homes, and designated animal barns as housing units that fell under public management. A common theme emerging, in all of these cases and in both periods, is a paternalistic relationship between authorities and the citizens.

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<sup>67</sup> AŠ, Fond Skupština Opštine Kragujevac (1951 – XIII), Srednja Tehnička škola Vojne Industrije – Godišnji izveštaj 1950-1951, not dated.

A clear discontinuity between the two periods is visible in one key area of the management of public interest, namely in the alleviation of poverty through different types of aid, construction of public infrastructure and housing, as well as the establishment of systems of education. Comparing the amounts spent on new structures, welfare, and education in the municipal budgets makes it clear that this segment was radically improved in the postwar period. However, the question is this: At what cost did the citizens of Kragujevac, and the country as a whole, gain such material improvements? Did the continuities of corruption in the bureaucracy, lack of impartiality of justice, and the primacy of the public good over private interests continue to propel the region on a course of path dependence that could not be overcome with modernisation alone? This limited microhistorical study cannot answer these questions, but can add insight to the growing field of methodologically innovative approaches that look beyond the dominant historical narratives of 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe and, through microanalysis of the experiences of regular people, attempt to answer some of the ever-relevant questions in the macro realm. In this sense, we can hope to add to the study of path dependence, show that history matters, and contribute to the growing field of historians attempting to “create a ‘new social history’”.<sup>68</sup>

### Conclusion

This study has uncovered patterns of continuities/resilience and discontinuities in the institutional setting, by critically interpreting sources from the fund of the Municipality of Kragujevac. The main continuities concern the corruption of the bureaucracy, the lack of impartiality of the legal system, and the relationship between the public vs. private interest. The main discontinuity is to be found in the modernisation drive of the postwar state, which is also reflected in the efforts of the local municipality. A common theme across the studied documentation in both periods is the paternalistic relationship of the institutions of power towards the citizens. The aim of this study, and the wider project, is to show that shifting the focus from grand political narratives towards the study of resilient infrastructures and path dependence can both shed light on the understated root causes of underdevelopment in the region and hopefully contribute to an increased focus on the underresearched field of social history in South-eastern Europe.

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<sup>68</sup> Jeremy Popkin, *From Herodotus to H-Net: The Story of Historiography* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 130-132.

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