

Hunting and Environmental Consciousness in Late Ottoman and Habsburg Herzegovina

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Hunters arrived in Ottoman-held Herzegovina from Dalmatia after 1815. With its mild winter, Herzegovina was regarded as unspoiled, full of birds and animals. After the Habsburg occupation in 1878, scientific research, specimen gathering, and the care of urban spaces increased. Paradoxically, at the same time, animals were being hunted, and some were in danger of extinction. Several Habsburg public intellectuals were both defenders of the environment and specimen gatherers or hunters.

• **Keywords:** hunting, Ottoman Empire, Habsburg Monarchy, Herzegovina, Dalmatia, Bosnia, environmental consciousness

Lovci so v osmansko Hercegovino iz Dalmacije prispeli po letu 1815. Hercegovina je zaradi mile zime veljala za neokrnjeno, polno ptic in drugih živali. Po habsburški zasedbi leta 1878 se je povečalo znanstveno raziskovanje, zbiranje vzorcev in predana skrb za urbane prostore. Paradoksalno se je lov na veliko število živali odvijal v času, ko so bile nekatere od njih v nevarnosti izumrtja. Številni habsburški javni intelektualci so bili tako zagovorniki narave kot tudi navdušeni zbiralci živalskih primerkov ali lovci.

• **Ključne besede:** lov, Osmansko cesarstvo, Habsburška monarhija, Hercegovina, Dalmacija, Bosna, okoljska ozaveščenost

Introduction: Hunting in the Habsburg and Ottoman lands

In this article, I explore the cultures of hunting and environmental record-keeping in late Ottoman and Habsburg Herzegovina. Most of the examples focus on the mild winter destinations of Mostarsko blato, the Trebišnjica River, and the Neretva River and its tributaries including the marshes at Hutovo blato. By using a range of sources including letters and sketches in hunting journals, I discuss the paradoxical process at the heart of expeditions into the countryside: scientific progress, social interactions and a genuine appreciation of the natural world went hand in hand with excess resource appropriation, entitlement, and antisocial behaviour (i.e. wastefulness, heavy drinking and leering). In this respect Central European attitudes and practices were typical of imperial cultures elsewhere where resources were seen as freely available for incomers to use regardless of local custom. Perhaps this paradox is clearest in the careers of individuals who were both avid hunters and assiduous specimen gatherers.

Improvements in flintlock gun technology after 1780, with shorter, lighter double barrels, combined with methods to flush out birds such as the *battue* (Griffin, 2008: 120) meant that it became easier for hunters to kill a lot of birds and other animals in a single day. In many areas of Europe, animal populations became depleted: native species such



as wild boar, jackals, lynx, and bears were in decline, while pollutants and industrialization were simultaneously changing soil, water, and air quality (Crosby, 2004: xvi). The idea that technology and rising demand were negatively affecting the environment and that people had become more disconnected from nature prompted a rise in ecological consciousness and proactive research agendas (Heise, 2016: 6–7). Nevertheless, this ecological consciousness was insufficient to halt the search for untapped resources which, in turn, drove imperial expansion. A marked tension between environmental concern and exploitation was observable in nineteenth century within the Habsburg Monarchy with its vast rich lands, transport and trade infrastructure, expansionist aims, and an increasingly well-educated population. The Habsburg takeover in Dalmatia in 1815 made Ottoman lands more accessible especially via the Neretva Delta, while the 1878 occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina opened up opportunities for Habsburg subjects to explore, hunt, and record their experiences. Bosnia and Herzegovina were described by civil engineer Andreas Knobloch as “prodigally endowed with treasures of every kind, with fertile soil, cattle, wood, minerals, waterpower as well as unparalleled scenic attractions” (Okey, 2007: 17).

Despite signs to the contrary, Europeans often perceived Ottoman territories as an “El Dorado”, a fresh, well-stocked hunting ground (*Jagd-Zeitung*, 1866: 309–310). Hunting expeditions within the Ottoman lands were seen by incomers as minimally invasive, informal, and opportunistic. One British sailor remembered how they took an opportunity when his ship docked at Yumurtalık (Ayas) in Cilicia:

[T]he country around is very wild and extremely sparsely populated, and is full of game, a veritable sportsman’s paradise. Wild boar abound, and in winter there are woodcock, snipe, francolin, plover, wild geese, and [...] ducks, and from being so little disturbed, they are not so difficult to approach as they are in more civilized countries. (Fitzgerald, 1916: 30)

Within the Ottoman territories, there were elaborate techniques of falconry and hunting which had evolved over many centuries (Hörmann, 1890: 227–233). In Bosnia and Herzegovina scenes from the hunt were found on the old *stećak* tombstones (Ćurčić, 1937: 8). Falconry was still practiced in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina after 1878 (Reiser, 1939: 685), only becoming less popular in the 1930s (Šamić, 2008: 43). There were signs even in Ottoman Bosnia and Herzegovina that overall numbers of red deer were low (Dunkin, 1897: 129), although their presence was still alluded to in myriad place names (Führer, 1902: 64) and there are records of deer hunting in the Middle Ages (Kurtović, 2014: 36–37). The ecological assault on Herzegovina took place in tandem with widespread hunting and specimen gathering in Habsburg Dalmatia after 1815. Accounts of these trips formed part of an emerging genre of writing which mixed autobiography, adventure and descriptions of peoples, landscapes, and animals.

Friends invited one writer to go hunting for rock partridges in the hills around Trebinje and he agreed because he was curious about the country and its people as much as he was keen to shoot birds (*Jagd-Zeitung*, 1867: 465). The short journey from Habsburg-controlled settlements on the Neretva River to Hutovo blato was even easier to make than the journey from Dubrovnik to Trebinje and offered the chance to hunt (or collect) pelicans in the marshlands (*Jagd-Zeitung*, 1860a: 1). Too insect-ridden in summer, the marshes were an “abundant” destination in autumn (*Journal des österreichischen Lloyd*, 1840: 1–2). Francesco Lanza (1842: 94–98) wrote about the region close to his medical practice in Opuzen, recording the birds of the Neretva and its tributaries and marshlands (Mužinić, 2011: 118–121). Military personnel and government officials had also started to visit in greater numbers (*Jagd-Zeitung*, 1860b: 72–73). Army officer and ornithologist Christoph Feldner von Feldegg was instrumental in introducing the birds of the Adriatic coast and Hutovo blato to colleagues across Europe and received some bird specimens from Lanza (1843). His stuffed birds were considered to be particularly fine by collectors and curators (Natterer, 1837). Over several years, Feldegg shot 72 Dalmatian pelicans in the Neretva Delta, 70 of which were dispatched to museums across Europe (*Neuigkeiten*, 1845: 887). Some bird species collected by Feldegg are now considered to be rare or extinct (Mlíkovský, 2012: 96–98) including the species of Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*, *Feld.*) that is named in his honour. Feldegg described how he tracked down so many birds along the Neretva which was “bordered with morasses”.

[The pelican] arrives in spring and autumn [and] comes through Bosnia, seldom alone, but generally in flocks. I have seen as many as twelve together hunting for fish; it is very cunning and extremely difficult to shoot. (Gould, 1837: 406)

There were four thousand Habsburg subjects permanently resident in Bosnia and Herzegovina before 1878 (Grandits, 2022: 65) where they fraternized with the small number of international diplomats based there (Branković, 2009: 74–79; Radušić, 2011: 33–55). This small diplomatic community enjoyed hunting, playing whist and drinking together. The French Vice-Consul in Mostar, Auguste Dozon, was a “passionate hunter” of chamois (*Jagd-Zeitung*, 1866: 310) as was his British counterpart: in October 1872 Vice-Consul Edward B. Freeman recorded in his diary that he had shot partridges in the “vineyard behind the Catholic church” and he had fished for grayling in the Neretva the previous week. Freeman especially valued Mostarsko blato as a hunting ground: it flooded in spring and winter and was about three hours on foot from his residence. He got up at six in the morning to go out to Mostarsko blato to shoot red and then grey partridges: after lunch at the “curé’s house”, his companion got so drunk that he fell off his horse before they arrived after dark to sleep at the Franciscan priory in Široki Brijeg (Freeman, 1870–1874). Another account of duck-hunting in Mostarsko blato by



diplomats noted that one of the participants had “evidently partaken” of “ardent drinks” (Arbuthnot, 1862: 214). At the same time that foreign diplomats were on excursions, landlords (*begovi*) in the Stolac region were also hunting partridges using a traditional red cloth trap, a shield and short rifles. This method of hunting was banned after the Habsburg takeover but carried on illicitly: “a good hunter could shoot a hundred or more of these splendid wild birds in one day” (Führer, 1902: 12). By about 1865, therefore, Herzegovina had distinct, but sometimes overlapping hunting communities each taking large numbers of birds or animals.

Infrastructure, regulations and transport

In Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina, still formally Ottoman until 1908, hunting continued and strict gun control in the 1880s, introduced to assert state control against insurgency, may have led to a temporary increase in some species. Six dedicated hunting reserve areas covering over 250,000 hectares were set up and run by the joint Ministry for Finance, but in Herzegovina, a small number of *begovi* still owned the land (Kamberović, 2003: 215–221). Laws were introduced very quickly including rules about fishing, hunting seasons, and regulations about size of dogs permitted. Although hunters needed prior permission to hunt in the reserve areas, state officials were usually happy to issue permits because this raised revenue. Gamekeepers were allowed to take part in hunting and local people, used to unregulated access, sometimes disregarded the new rules (Führer, 1902: 5). Incomers seem to have felt entitled to hunt quite freely especially in more remote areas (Dunkin, 1897: 1). Birds of prey, partridges, and larger animals such as bears were the primary attraction while primeval forests, wild, rocky gorges, and marshlands offered great hunting locations. Land was leased to hunting clubs and reserves were usually reasonably accessible: the new railway lines made shorter trips more viable. In 1885, Mostar was connected with the Dalmatian town of Metković and by July 1901, hunters could travel across Popovo polje to Trebinje by train. Official hunting lodges were built, for example in Karaotok in Hutovo blato, which offered comfortable accommodation, a large hearth, and outdoor spaces to hang slaughtered animals (Laska, 1910: 200). Decrees regarding forest usage were issued in 1879 and 1884, but this may not have changed the “widespread local understanding” that forest resources were free to use (Lučić, 2022: 604). Furthermore, there seems to have been spontaneous weekend hunting by garrisoned soldiers and their friends (Andrejka, 1904: 344–345). Rewards were given by the Habsburg authorities for killing of wolves and bears (both regarded as dangerous predators). One man made 40 Kronen from the state in a single day by killing two bears, not including the value of the pelts (Holbach, 1910: 162).

Herzegovina also attracted hunters and birdwatchers because it was a milder destination than Central Europe in winter. The heir to the Habsburg throne, Crown Prince Rudolf was a keen ornithologist and hunter. Mindful of the seasons and the landscapes, Rudolf kept records of the birds he observed in Hutovo blato including curlews, plovers, and sandpipers: “I was informed that the first of the pelicans had returned from their winter travels [...] their breeding place is in a marsh not far from Metković” (Rudolf of Austria, 1889: 637). Incomers also observed the ways in which local people responded to the seasons and how they had adapted to environmental challenges: in Popovo polje, there was a rush to catch the fish left behind in the limestone cavities (*ponore*) when the Karst waters receded (Capus, 1896: 342). One writer recalled his time there “some decades” earlier when the “thundering” sound of the *polje* emptying of water alerted people to the chance to take the stranded fish:

During the winter, the water is densely populated with wild ducks [...]. Like the wild ducks, the local population is also very active in fishing, as there are no special fishing rights there [...] they catch considerable quantities of fish in the smaller *ponore* using specially constructed baskets. (Waldmann, 1930: 7)

Excursions to Herzegovina could be combined with other mild weather destinations such as the Ionian Islands, which had acted as a springboard for hunting in the Ottoman lands for some decades by 1878. Under British control from 1815–1864, garrisoned soldiers in Corfu had travelled just a few miles by sea to “relieve the tedium of our imprisonment by cruising to the coast of (Ottoman) Albania [...] shooting woodcocks and other game” in “an unlimited country, over which one can range free from [...] constraint” (Best, 1842: 2, 99). After it became part of Greece, Corfu continued to be a popular destination (sometimes en route to other hunting grounds): “all day long you can hear gunfire from all sides, as if a major manoeuvre were taking place, no matter which part of the island you are on” (Führer, 1902: 122). In December 1892, it was announced in the press that a small party consisting of Hungarian notables and politicians would set off

to Hutovo blato [...] where they will hunt ibises and pelicans. In nearby Mostar a bear hunt will be held in honour of the gentlemen. The trip will end on the island of Corfu, where the population of woodcock is exceptionally high at this time of year. Bela Vermes and Geza Latinovics will travel from Corfu to Egypt to hunt crocodiles on the Nile and then travel to Jerusalem via Jaffa. (*Pester Lloyd*, 1892: 1)



Figure 1: *Jagdkähne*, hunting boats on Hutovo blato (Führer, 1902).

Paradise gained. The exploration of Herzegovina's regions

Hunting for sport was traditionally elitist and accompanied by cultural rituals, especially compared with the subsistence hunting of peasants. Excursions were perceived as a way of (re-)connecting with nature: the six-hour journey on foot from Mostar to Velež meant crossing from “an area with figs and pomegranates to that of mountain pines and chamois” (Führer, 1902: 5). Hutovo blato was prized for its natural diversity: “wild geese, wild duck, bitterns, and plovers buzz just above the hilltops around the marshes [...]. Small summer frogs fill the pleasure zone with monotonous wailing, while varieties of cricket chirp an octave higher” (Kunersdorf, 1889: 1). When the *bura* wind blew, the dry land between the lakes was an ideal spot to shoot migrating birds who were attracted there by abundant fish (Morgan, 1913: 52–53). In parallel to the recent hunting expeditions, there were ancient traditions of fishing in the waters of the marshlands close to the Neretva River including catching leeches for medicinal purposes. Local diets were varied and often supplemented with wild food, including the consumption of myriad plants and herbs as recorded in 1913 by the Sarajevo based

curator Vejsil Ćurčić who worked at the newly established regional Landesmuseum or Zemaljski muzej (Łuczaj, Dolina, 2015: 297–304). Frog’s legs, turtles, coot (*crna liska*), and trout were also consumed, and the Neretva Delta was known for its eel fishing (Clewning, 2015: 137). Ćurčić made meticulous studies of traditional fishing hooks, baskets, and lines in different regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, recording the use of pronged spears (*ostve*) in Hutovo blato (Ćurčić, 1910: 27). The wooden boats (*trupe/trupice* and *čopule*) used by local hunters were so light that they could be carried on the shoulder. They also offered some wind protection if the rower lay down and could be steered at speed around the marshlands (Macan, 1967: 161–179). Local hunters would cover their *opanci* (leather shoes) with animal fur to muffle sound (*Jagd-Zeitung*, 1866: 309–310).

Other descriptions of locals were also sympathetic, imagining an unbroken connection between people and the environment (Waldfahrer, 1888: 1–2). The painter Gyula Tornai declared “give me a fisherman’s hut in Hutovo blato and I would be happy” (Günste, 1910a: 6). As editor of the *Bosnische Post* after 1889, Milena Mrazović travelled around the region on horseback accompanied by the illustrator Augusta Bock. Her publications often contain ethnographic detail. For Mrazović there were “no better rowers and marksmen than the [...] peasants who have lived here since time immemorial [...] experts on all the countless species and varieties of the feathered inhabitants and guests of Hutovo blato” (Preindlsberger-Mrazović, 1900: 233). One author, writing under the pseudonym “Frmdbl.” (but likely to have been Milena Mrazović), described their stay in a farmhouse close to Hutovo blato with a woman called Jana, her husband Marko, their son Marko and a dog called Hajduk. They marvelled at the simple food; fish with millet gruel for supper and goat’s milk and cheese with black bread for breakfast and studied the implements used for fishing. At daybreak, they went out into the marshes on a light wooden boat. Marko knew every inch of the territory and the name of every species, a deep connection with nature which he and his son celebrated with song. The name of the marshes had nothing to do with the fort at nearby Hutovo, according to Marko, and instead they took their name from the shelduck known locally as *utva* which had golden feathers. The author felt that they had been taken back to a world where the way of life had not changed for centuries:

What strange hunting and fishing devices they were. Rods of various sizes, not a single one made of metal, fishing hooks made of thorn or fire-hardened wood, short and elongated wooden skewers, old rifles with a narrow or wide muzzle, different hammers and swatters (*Pracker*), nets of different sizes, the kind of snares used in prehistoric times. It felt as one had been transported back several centuries into the past. (Frmdbl., 1910: 1)



Constructing the local people as simple and virtuous, Habsburg officer Reinhard Günste retold a story about how he had collapsed (from malaria) while out hunting and, lying immobilized, he believed he would die undiscovered as crows circled above. He knew that if he fell into the water he would die but he could not call out. A horse discovered him, but he could not make it stay to help him, and eventually local farmers found him. He explained that they “ripped the clothes off my body and with them the leeches, four of which were already sitting on my mosquito-eaten body, and they removed them too, let me mount the horse and took me, covered with their shirts, to the train station” (Günste, 1910a: 4). Despite the obvious care with which incomers were treated, local rowers were reluctant to relinquish their light wooden boats, preferring to lead the way themselves and to retain ownership and expertise. The appearance of local men often drew comments: one hunter described his guide Marko as a “giant guy (*Riesenkerl*) as colourful as a parrot, with a bright red fez, a blue jacket with red stitching and a long flintlock duck gun” (Perfall, 1906: 124). The rowers with their “sun-tanned muscular arms” moved “as swiftly as arrows” (Kunersdorf, 1889: 1). Travelling just a few miles to Hutovo blato, one hunter recalled that “our Herzegovinian rower, tanned red-brown by the scorching southern sun, was already waiting for us with his small, light, flat boat” (Floericke, 1895: 657–658).



Figure 2: “*Blick gegen Ostrovo am Utovo blato*”, the light wooden slatted boats (*trupice*) and a local hunter (Führer, 1902).

The Habsburg paradox: Curation, care, and exploitation

Hunting for game or birds had several functions in Habsburg Herzegovina. For some people including local residents, hunting had an obvious nutritional purpose: the meat was lean, healthy, free and “extremely tasty thanks to aromatic herbs” (Hütt, 1914: 9–10). Garrisoned soldiers supplemented their modest rations: Slovene officer Jernej Andrejka remembered that “once a month, the battalion commander went to inspect the cordon posts. He always announced his arrival a few days in advance and on these occasions, dining at Visoka glavica was no less delicious than at a hotel in Vienna, including rabbit, partridge, and fried dormice” (Andrejka, 1904: 341–343). Roasting the meat was also an important ritual:

One man prepares a long spit with a *handžar* (i.e. dagger), while another skins the buck or doe *lege artis*, while a third carves a small skewer for roasting the delicacies: liver, heart and kidneys, intended as a starter to appease already growling stomachs. Now the meat is skilfully skewered, salted and slowly rotated by the hunters in turn. (Führer, 1902: 10)

Incomers got up at dawn to fish in local rivers (Oransz, 1903: 7–8). It was forbidden by law to shoot into the water and only silver hooks were permitted for fishing in rivers. Robert Dunkin (1897: 318) confessed he would have been tempted to use his gun had the fish been larger. Some sources suggest that it was possible to catch a lot of fish in a single day in the Neretva close to Mostar: “Journu [...] occupied his leisure time fishing and often returned to the hotel [...] with around forty trout” (Romain, 1896: 9). Hunters who camped out could also supplement their diet with wild berries and condiments. At the market at Glavatičevo, walnuts, rosehips, haws, and mirabelles were for sale and the hills around the town were covered with sumac (Dunkin, 1897: 231–235). Many hunters liked going out into the countryside to camp, enjoying picnics propped against *stećci* and a break from the monotony of military or administrative service. Cigarettes, flasks of coffee and rakija kept the hunters alert and facilitated discussions about strategy (Führer, 1902: 10–11). Other sources also suggest that locally based military personnel drank an “extraordinarily high amount” of local wine (Günste, 1915: 2). Wine and the prospect of female company could improve an excursion: one hunter recalled “a narrow valley [...] where the Lištica breaks into the river and we hurried towards this romantic spot on the left bank of the lake. We passed several village inns where the famously pretty Herzegovinian women served strong red wine (*Blatina*) and fragrant white wine (*Žilavka*) and were ogled by a group of hunters” (Hütt, 1914: 10). Clothing was also an important part of the hunting ritual: Crown Prince Rudolf wore a wool cloak and leather *opanci* while out close to Gluva Smokva, as well as a red waistcoat, in the style worn in Zadar (*Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1886: 5). Hunters would take a pine tuft for their



hats as they did in the Alps (Dunkin, 1897: 368). A predominantly masculine environment, excursions also allowed hunters to spend valuable time with their dogs and horses.

Scientists working in the Habsburg lands often overlapped with hunters while out in the field. More bluntly “classification meant killing, and the collection of specimens for scholarly examination and public display involved killing on a large scale” (Mackenzie, 1988: 36). In Herzegovina, the curator Othmar Reiser went on expeditions with the hunter Ludwig von Führer (Reiser, 1895; Führer, 1902: 95). Like so many of his counterparts in Sarajevo, Reiser was an inveterate correspondent and extolled the virtues of the natural environment in Herzegovina to the ornithologist Henry Dresser (Reiser, 1901). The two of them visited the “wonderful marsh” of Hutovo blato in 1902 (McGhie, 2017: 210). Like Christoph Feldner von Feldegg a generation earlier, Reiser personified this paradox between the dedicated scientist and avid specimen collector. His comprehensive work *Materialen zu einer Ornithologie der Balkanhalbinsel* was published posthumously in Vienna in 1939, and he left a large collection of stuffed birds and their eggs to the Zemaljski muzej in Sarajevo. He also sent examples of stuffed birds to his correspondents, including the ornithologist Ernst Hartert (Reiser, 1900). On a field trip to Brazil in 1903, Reiser was the first ornithologist to see the “rare and beautiful” Spix’s Macaw for 84 years: he tried unsuccessfully to shoot one but “the parrot species so desired by us was the only one to be observed but not collected” (Juniper, 2004: 25). In other words, Reiser’s need to procure specimens seems to have outweighed his desire to preserve a rare species.

In the circle of writers and intellectuals in Sarajevo, a passionate defence of the natural environment was initiated. Josip Vancaš, an architect originally from Sopron, helped push through laws protecting caves and the karst environment (Kapel, 1999: 109–114). This intellectual movement in Sarajevo was shaped by the foundation of the Zemaljski muzej in 1888 (Hartmuth, 2012: 194–205). Its journal *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini* was first published in 1889, which covered almost every area of local life (Sparks, 2015: 144). By the 1890s, hunting in Herzegovina had become a vibrant milieu for competition and friendly rivalry which often overlapped with fieldwork and research. Hunters read accounts of trips which inspired their own expeditions: journals such as *Jagd-Zeitung*, founded in 1858, contained detailed notes about habitats and species of animals as well as accounts of hunting trips and it was the journal *Der Weidmann* that first brought Robert Dunkin (1897: 1) to Herzegovina. In 1914, the Czech writer Milan Stříbrný published a brief book about the history and development of hunting in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Frković, 2009: 327).

If hunting and an appreciation of nature had become a means of environmental knowledge transfer, so too had specialist publications in geology, geography, ornithology, and speleology. This was an era of profound scientific advances, many of which were made by Habsburg scientists in Herzegovina who fit well with Wolfgang Göderle’s category of “middle-class experts who had joined the ranks of the imperial administration (and) advanced these fields with significant personal engagement and sometimes even

their own money” (Göderle, 2022: 455–456). These experts often included husband and wife teams, indicating that women were taking an increasingly prominent role in the accumulation of scientific knowledge. Clubs for speleologists were formed across the Habsburg Monarchy including one in Trebinje which spearheaded research on Popovo polje (Mattes, 2015: 234). Its first secretary was Augusta Burgmaier and her husband, a garrison postmaster, Leo Weirather classified new species of beetles – *coleoptera* (Pretner, 2011: 85–234). Museum curator Karel Absolon from Brno discovered a subterranean passage in the cave system at Vjetrenica, still called the Absolonov kanal (Lučić, 2009: 27–28), while his wife Marie Marvánková took photographs of landscapes, which also documented rural life including animal husbandry. Maude Holbach was accompanied by her husband Otto who took the photographs of Herzegovina that appeared in her 1910 book *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Some Wayside Wanderings*. It had become increasingly easy for writers to learn about the region before they set out. Journals such as *Mittheilungen des Ornithologischen Vereines in Wien* founded in 1877 published detailed accounts about birds and their habitats (Kadich, 1887: 317–320) while *Jahrbuch der Kaiserlich-Königlichen Geologischen Reichsanstalt*, which first appeared in 1857, published studies of the landscapes in Herzegovina (Bukowski, 1901: 159–169). Daily newspapers regularly covered both hunting and environmental issues (such as road or rail construction or weather events) in all of the local languages. The pluralist nature of education, communication and media in the Habsburg Monarchy may have speeded up multilingual exchanges and knowledge transfer (Marchetti, 2014: 210). Local policy initiatives especially by Governor Benjamin von Kállay encouraged cultural developments and research (Kraljačić, 1987: 268). Kállay wished to promote Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sporting destination and in 1895, an international shooting event was organized in Ilidža which was attended by his wife (Cameron, 2023: 246).

Despite laudable scientific progress, knowledge transfer and international contact, a great paradox lay at the heart of Habsburg practices in both Bosnia and Herzegovina. The ubiquitous problem of entitlement that manifested itself through heavy consumption of local resources (especially alcohol), raucous behaviour, and excessive hunting spills out of many contemporary accounts that suggest that a hunter could shoot “ten different species in a day” (Schlabitz, 1904: 89). It is quite clear that these hunters shot to excess simply because they could. British diplomat Freeman made regular hunting trips for over the four decades that he was in post: indeed, in his personal diaries it is one of the most regular themes. In September 1895 Freeman arrived in Hutovo blato with the Duke of Breganza, Henry Moser, Ferdinand Graf Trauttmansdorff-Weinsberg and other companions where eighteen boats were waiting for them. The party shot 150 birds including “a dwarf crane, a mallard, a pintail, a tufted duck, two teals, nine ferruginous ducks, five little grebes, a black-necked and a great grebe, two squacco herons, two pygmy cormorants, four moorhens, and 76 coots” (*Wiener Zeitung*, 1895: 3). They had left Sarajevo on a specially commissioned train that arrived in Gabela at five in the morning where



they met Othmar Reiser by surprise. They arrived back at the Hotel Narenta in Mostar in the evening where they enjoyed a supper in the garden to the sound of a “splendid military band”. Freeman failed to mention whether the party ate the birds they had shot, although this was his normal habit (Freeman, 1895–1897). In October 1897, Ludwig von Führer led a hunting expedition to Hutovo blato and in one day, 287 waterfowl including coots, pygmy cormorants, gulls, and ducks were shot. The following day, von Führer’s companions shot over 100 pigeons close to the Buna River. It was reported that “the hunting party returned to Ilidža [...] highly satisfied” (*Bosnische Post*, 1897: 2). The possibility of shooting high numbers of birds was repeatedly noted in contemporary texts: an officer called Wurtzbach killed 183 partridges close to Mostar in December 1895 alone (Dunkin, 1897: 178). In a veritable ecological assault, Reinhard Günste (1910b: 6) and his companions turned up at the railway station in Gabela after a hunting trip in Hutovo blato with 159 slaughtered carcasses consisting of 91 ducks and hens, 28 snipes, 16 lapwings, 14 herons and 4 wild geese as well as rarely eaten birds, including seagulls, a vulture, a grebe, a pelican and a marsh harrier. The slaughter by incomers was sometimes absorbed by the local population: in Mostar there was lively trade in animals and birds and in 1894, 3000 hare pelts were sold there (Dunkin, 1897: 178).

An interest in hunting coincided with a marked increase in ecological record keeping, particularly of birds (Kotrošan, Papes, 2007: 9–38) which allows us to assess how and where some of the damage was taking place. Intensive and well documented hunting in the late Habsburg period was certainly threatening animal population levels elsewhere in the monarchy. According to the hunting journal *Łowiec* in 1882 alone, 23 bears were shot in the Eastern Carpathians (Bajda, 2020: 107). Bears were also becoming increasingly rare in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Frković, 2009: 330). Such a meticulously documented onslaught could prompt us to consider the specific impact on the environment in what Wolfgang Göderle (2020: 215–240) has termed the “Habsburg Anthropocene”. There was an increase in logging (sometimes unauthorized) in Herzegovina in the early nineteenth century, much of it to supply imperial navies (Dursun, 2025: 76). Habsburg occupation had speeded up a process of timber extraction (Lučić, 2024: 343–344) that had been in process since the era of the Napoleonic wars: live animals, pelts, medicinal plants, honey, wine, tobacco, and wood were exported from “mountainous regions” to the Habsburg monarchy before 1878 via the market at Unka on the Dalmatian border (Grandits, 2022: 18). There was widespread concern for tree as well as animal numbers. Othmar Reiser was aware of the intricate relationship between trees and animals: he first saw a little owl (*Steinkauz*) in October 1888 in a “splendid” Juniper tree in graveyard in Tasovčići (Reiser, 1939: 664) so any decline in tree health or numbers would automatically affect bird populations. Descriptions of trees also formed a key part of ornithological narratives: for example, a pygmy eagle could generally be seen sitting on lower branches of an old beech or oak, almost like an owl (Rudolf of Austria, 1889: 435). The phenomena of taking timber and hunting

animals were closely intertwined in other colonized locations such as Myanmar (Saha, 2022: 51–82). Many writers thought that oak forests had been destroyed only in the recent historic past and had once grown to a wider extent (Beck-Mannagetta, 1901: 199–216). The Sarajevo-based curator Carl Patsch (1907: 3–4) imagined that Herzegovina had been covered with lush vegetation and believed that much of the damage to the primeval forest and deer stocks along the Trebižat River had occurred only after the mid-nineteenth century. In 1907, Carl Patsch spoke to 61-year-old Pero Alilović, who had been a woodcutter in his youth: “Sir, there were once logs so wide that two men could span them, but today we search there in vain for firewood” (Baric, 2023: 228).

Although deforestation had occurred in Herzegovina before 1878 through exports to adjacent countries including Austria-Hungary, the Habsburg occupation also led to extensive tree planting in urban spaces. In Mostar, avenues of trees were planted to create a greener centre and in Trebinje saplings of plane trees (*platani*) were brought from the botanic gardens in Trsteno in Dalmatia in the 1880s to add much-needed shade. Volker Pachauer and Filip Suchoń (2018: 86) have established that the “greening” of Trebinje during the Habsburg era also included attempts to plant traditional hedgerow plants which develop well in areas over four hundred meters above sea level, including wild roses, blackberries, blackthorns, and garland thorns. In this respect, we also seen another paradox: devoted care for urban spaces on the one hand and damaging resource appropriation on the other. Some writers, concerned about the excess, thought that they had entered a race against time to protect both the environment and animals. Carl Patsch was aware that the construction of the railway would damage the environment in the Neretva Valley, and he clearly appreciated local skills and knowledge, but he blamed the local population for not preventing the felling of trees (Džambo, 2024: 26). Indeed, he expressed negative opinions about the capacity of local people to show any interest in nature preservation at all (Baric, 2023: 224). Othmar Reiser was concerned about bird numbers in August 1911, and he blamed excessive hunting although he himself had introduced many visitors to the marshes:

There have been no breeding herons in recent years, only the pygmy cormorants have held out tenaciously. They were badly disturbed when they were establishing their nesting colony, so that they laid their eggs unusually late. On 19 July. I visited them in the most sweltering heat. No shooting took place, and I only took a number of half-down young with me, two of which I am sending you, as they are probably the last to be hatched in all of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Such a thing is sad, but unfortunately it cannot be changed! For my part, I have contributed very publicly [...] to the preservation of Hutovo blato. The more Bosnia and Herzegovina opens up to so-called culture [...] the more these lands lose their appeal for the true nature lover. (Kleinschmidt, 1936: 506–507)



An animated account of a hunting expedition published in 1904 by Ludwig Schlabitz captured the real ambivalence or paradox of Habsburg-era sentiment. Schlabitz expressed concern for the status of the bearded vulture (*Lämmergeier*), the white-headed vulture (*Weißkopfgeier*), and the cinereous vulture (*Kuttengeier*), a species now thought to be extinct in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, he believed vultures had consumed strychnine intended for rats, been heavily hunted or had lost their habitats due to the railway construction and that they might soon die out. While he knew that staff at the Zemaljski muzej in Sarajevo were attempting to preserve these birds, and despite his gloomy prognosis, he carried on hunting himself. After spending hours hunting, his arm began to hurt and he was “glad to run out of ammunition” (Schlabitz, 1904: 88). In a similar vein Robert Dunkin (1897: 95) confessed that he was ashamed after attempting to shoot an eagle despite the fact that he wanted to add this species to his personal inventory. He also believed that the bearded vulture would soon be extinct (Dunkin, 1897: 292). Hunters had strong codes of honour (Varner, 1998): hunting had originally developed within clear ethical traditions, partly attributed to the seventh century Saint Hubert, a keen hunter who abandoned the sport after a pious Easter revelation. Traditional ethics included not attacking a mother with her young, especially in winter and aiming for older stags. Hunters almost universally disliked the use of traps and appreciated the natural beauty of marshlands, forests and hills. They often expressed their affection for dogs and occasionally horses, and their keen admiration for the species they pursued. Yet most carried on despite their qualms.

Some conclusions

After the late eighteenth century, the capacity of hunters to kill a lot of animals and birds at one time “rapidly upset the precarious balance that earlier generations had achieved”, substituting “the thrill of the chase” with “the pleasure of the kill” (Griffin, 2008: 121). This new state of disequilibrium arrived later in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and these lands were regarded as a fresh place to hunt to excess by incomers, much like other Ottoman lands. A new rapacious “hunting ethos” developed, captured in Oscar Wilde’s comical phrase “the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable” (Lorimer, Whatmore, 2009: 670). Habsburg administration and occupation coincided with European colonial projects which devastated the natural environment across the globe. Many incomers in Herzegovina were primed to hunt and felt that they were entitled to drink, eat, ogle, shoot, take or waste. Nevertheless, there are glimmers of an ecological consciousness developing and a clear appreciation of the traditional knowledge of local people. Furthermore, urban planning led to the development of parks and the planting of boulevards of trees in the expanding towns in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The growth of scientific interest in Bosnia and Herzegovina intensified both record keeping and respect for tradition.

Many writers began to see that natural resources were not infinite, including those who clearly loved hunting with a passion. A sense of environmental justice was being shaped by an extraordinarily energetic generation of Habsburg writers, scientists, and public intellectuals including Othmar Reiser, Carl Patsch, Vejsil Ćurčić, and Milena Mrazović, whose work aimed to defend and preserve much of Bosnia and Herzegovina's rich natural heritage. However, extolling the countryside, collecting specimens and publishing the results of their work may have helped to increase visitor numbers and accentuated the threat to the environment. The paradox of Habsburg expansion into Southeastern Europe is that it encouraged the collation and discovery of plant and animal species, and the greening of urban spaces, but it also speeded up a process of environmental degradation through excessive resource appropriation including hunting.

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The author states that the article is based on research data that is available in public domain resources as well as publicly accessible archival and museum collections that are cited in the list of references.

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Lov in okoljska zavest v poznoosmanski in habsburški Hercegovini

Lov se je v Bosni in Hercegovini razmahnil po habsburški zasedbi leta 1878 in kasnejši aneksiji leta 1908. Lovci so začeli raziskovati osmansko Hercegovino skozi močvirja Neretve, zlasti po letu 1815. Priljubljenost lova so spodbudili strokovni časopisi, transnacionalni stiki in prisotnost garnizij. Lovskega orožja so bili večji mnogi, hercegovska močvirja pa so ponujala izvrstne možnosti za lov na divje ptice s čolnom, medtem ko so bila gorska območja primerna za lov na divjad. Mnogi so izražali veliko navdušenje nad lovnimi dejavnostmi: dajale so jim občutek svobode, moči in namena. Lov ni nudil zgolj priložnosti za druženje in pitje lokalnega vina, temveč tudi nove možnosti za raziskovanje podeželja. Pod vodstvom vedno večjega števila znanstvenikov in piscev, ki so proučevali deželo, so habsburški častniki, njihovi prijatelji in dostojanstveniki pogosto razmišljali o lepotah podeželja in tudi o morebitni izgubi naravne raznolikosti, zlasti z razvojem železnice. Instinktivno so ugotavljali, da bo streljanje živali sčasoma zmanjšalo njihovo število v divjini, morda celo trajno. Avtorica v članku raziskuje ambivalentnost lova v Hercegovini v tem obdobju. Istočasno z razmahom lova je čut za okoljsko pravičnost oblikovala izjemno vitalna generacija habsburških pisateljev, znanstvenikov in javnih intelektualcev, kot so Othmar Reiser, Carl Patsch, Vejsil Čurčić in Milena Preindlsberger-Mrazović, katerih cilj je bil braniti in ohranjati velik del bogate dediščine in naravnega okolja Hercegovine.