

THE TREASURE HIDDEN IN A SOLDIER'S TRUNK FROM THE BALKAN WARS

A Review of Rade Milosavljević's

From Vinča to Resava – In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors

(Resava School National Library, Despotovac, 2025)

The publisher of this remarkable volume deserves the gratitude of countless readers, both present and future. Their appreciation will be the finest tribute to this ambitious publishing undertaking, which comes a decade after the publication of the author's earlier work, *Radovanjci – From Vinča to Resava*. With both books, Rade Milosavljević has fulfilled a profound moral obligation to his ancestors. He has rescued their lives from the silence of oblivion and preserved them in a lasting written legacy that will remain an invaluable source for descendants, historians, genealogists, and future researchers alike.

In this new work, the village of Medveđa takes the place once occupied by Stenjevac. Yet Medveđa is far more than the author's maternal homeland or a geographical point on the map of the Resava Valley. It becomes the symbolic centre of an entire human universe—a world inhabited by real men and women whose lives span centuries and whose stories the author patiently reconstructs across more than five hundred pages.

Whether drawing upon faded archival documents, weathered inscriptions carved into old gravestones, or the fragile memories of elderly villagers, Milosavljević approaches every source with the same intellectual discipline and profound respect. The people he uncovers are never reduced to names and dates. Through his narrative they recover their individuality, dignity, and voice, returning to life after decades, and sometimes centuries, of silence. Once again they walk the roads of Resava, but also those of distant regions and foreign lands where destiny eventually led them.

The entire narrative begins almost like a historical novel—with an old military trunk discovered in the darkness of a cellar. Hidden inside lay the testament of Jakov Radomirović, who, according to the census of Medveđa in 1863, had already entered the sixth decade of his life. From that seemingly modest discovery unfolds a remarkable tapestry of family histories, historical documents, personal destinies, and collective memory. What follows is far more than genealogy. It is literature in the finest sense of the word—written with the narrative confidence of an accomplished biographer and with the documentary precision of a dedicated historian. Once the reader enters this world, the pages turn almost effortlessly.

Beyond its documentary richness, the book offers an extraordinary gallery of lives—biographical narratives that stand as literary achievements in their own right. Its protagonists range from gifted young villagers, teachers, priests, innkeepers, and craftsmen to distinguished scientists, engineers, architects, and artists whose roots lay deep in the Resava region, yet whose accomplishments reached far beyond the borders of Serbia. Whatever their profession or social standing, each of them becomes part of a broader story about the endurance of memory and the lasting significance of human endeavour.

Every biography is grounded in carefully verified historical evidence and enriched with details that illuminate not only the individual but also the world in which that person lived. Character, family life, social environment, customs, occupations, and the historical circumstances of each era are woven together into narratives that enable the reader to experience the spirit of a bygone time. Through these portraits, the history of Resava unfolds not as an abstract sequence of events but as a living mosaic of human destinies.

Among the many memorable chapters, I would especially single out *The Mad Serb*, Vukosava Šana Lazarević, Canka from Grabovac, *From Durmitor to Bosanska Posavina*, together with the biographies of Miloš Savčić, the distinguished former Mayor of Belgrade, and Momir Korunović, one

of Serbia's most celebrated architects, whose work has become an enduring part of the nation's cultural heritage.

The author's literary gift, supported by broad scholarship and decades of journalistic experience, enables these narratives to transcend the conventional boundaries of literature. They simultaneously serve as valuable source material for a wide range of scholarly disciplines, including history, anthropology, ethnology, archaeology, geography, and demography—particularly in the study of migration and the gradual disappearance of rural communities, a process whose consequences continue to shape contemporary society.

Another outstanding contribution of this work lies in its remarkable preservation of onomastic heritage. Hundreds of personal names, family names, nicknames, and place names have been meticulously recorded, safeguarding an important part of the linguistic and cultural memory of the Resava region. Complementing this achievement are numerous carefully designed genealogical charts whose exceptional clarity transforms a substantial portion of the volume into a practical guide for genealogical research.

The book is further enriched by original scholarly essays, excerpts from academic studies, and critical commentaries. Their inclusion broadens the scope of the work beyond that of a regional chronicle, establishing it as a publication of genuine scholarly relevance while preserving the accessibility and narrative appeal that characterize the author's writing throughout.

In my view, this work deserves to be regarded as a modern anthology in the truest sense of the word—a carefully curated collection of knowledge, memory, and experience that preserves what is most valuable from the past for the benefit of future generations. Although it is composed predominantly of the author's own writings, this is not a limitation but one of its greatest strengths. The unity of vision, consistency of method, and coherence of style lend the volume a distinctive identity and make it a remarkably accomplished whole.

Rade Milosavljević has succeeded in creating a work that transcends the conventional boundaries of a village chronicle or a family genealogy. Instead, he has produced a comprehensive cultural testimony in which history, genealogy, ethnography, anthropology, demography, and collective memory converge into a single, compelling narrative. At its heart stand people—their origins, their families, their struggles, their achievements, and the enduring traces they have left behind.

Without further elaboration, I would encourage every reader who embarks upon *From Vinča to Resava – In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors* to become acquainted with another remarkable publication: *The World: A Family History* by Simon Sebag Montefiore. That internationally acclaimed work has been praised as a book that reads like a novel while guiding the reader through the full spectrum of human history—its triumphs and tragedies, its loves and conflicts, its creativity and its cruelty.

The comparison is neither incidental nor superficial. While the two works differ greatly in scope, they are united by a shared conviction: that history is, above all else, the story of people. Nations, communities, and civilizations endure only because the lives of individuals and families are remembered, understood, and passed on to future generations.

For this reason, *From Vinča to Resava – In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors* deserves recognition not merely as the chronicle of a single village or region, but as a work of lasting cultural value. It is a testament to the universal importance of preserving historical memory, family heritage, and cultural identity. Through meticulous research, unwavering dedication, and profound respect for the past, Rade Milosavljević has created a book that will remain an enduring source of knowledge and inspiration for generations to come.

Aleksandar Avramović, Journalist and Publicist
Belgrade, 15 September 2025

BOOKS, BROTHERS, BOOKS — NOT BELLS AND BAUBLES

Review of the book

From Vinča to Resava – In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors

By Ljubiša Bata Vujić

Editorial Note

The title of this review echoes the celebrated educational maxim of the Serbian Enlightenment scholar and reformer Dositej Obradović (1739–1811): “Books, brothers, books, and not bells and baubles.” With this memorable appeal, Obradović urged his contemporaries to value knowledge, education and learning above empty display, superstition and outward spectacle. By invoking this well-known maxim, the reviewer places Rade Milosavljević’s work within the enduring Serbian tradition that regards books as the surest guardians of national memory, cultural identity and historical continuity.

Reading Rade Milosavljević’s *From Vinča to Resava – In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors*, whose epicentre, as the author himself states, is the village of Medveđa in the Resava region, I became increasingly aware with every page of how little I had known about the history of an area lying in the immediate vicinity of the town where I was born and where I have lived and worked for more than half a century.

The very structure of the book, carefully organized into chapters—From the Neolithic to Present-Day Medveđa; Science, the Serbs, and Serbian Origins; Prominent Citizens of Medveđa; Culture and Sports; Guardians of the Past and the Present; The Whole of Resava Under One Roof; The Mad Serb; Crafts in Medveđa from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day; Vinča and the First Crafts; and finally The Mystery of the Soldier’s Chest, together with its extensive genealogical records—forms a remarkable journey through time. Rich in historical data, human endeavour and family destinies spanning centuries, it preserves in one place a wealth of knowledge that, thanks to Rade Milosavljević’s extraordinary dedication and perseverance, has been rescued from oblivion.

It is difficult even to imagine the immense effort, the years of research and the unwavering determination invested in this monumental work—from visits to archives, municipal offices and libraries, through the painstaking collection of historical sources and countless conversations with people, to the careful classification of the material and its placement within a coherent historical context before it finally found its place between the covers of this book.

Knowing Rade Milosavljević’s long-standing journalistic career and his previous literary work, I must admit that I expected nothing less.

I also feel obliged to say that Rade Milosavljević is not only my colleague but also a long-time friend with whom I have shared countless conversations on subjects ranging from sport and current affairs to history and the rich cultural heritage of the Serbian people. Those discussions have always been of exceptional value to me, for they have revealed a man of broad education, profound reading, genuine empathy and remarkable tolerance, a man whose arguments are always carefully reasoned and whose patriotism is sincere, thoughtful and deeply rooted.

It is precisely this intellectual and moral sensibility that permeates all of Rade Milosavljević’s writings, and nowhere is it more evident than in *From Vinča to Resava – In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors*.

Reading the dedication at the beginning of the book, I was overcome by emotions that are difficult to describe: a profound sense of unease, sadness and nostalgia, yet at the same time an equally powerful feeling of pride, admiration and gratitude for belonging to the Serbian nation. Within just a few masterfully composed lines, the author succeeds in expressing the very essence of our national identity and historical consciousness.

"I dedicate this book to my great-grandfather, Bogić Jakovljević, the great-grandson of Jakov Radomirović, a participant in both Balkan Wars, where he served as a courier to Field Marshal Stepa Stepanović, and to all the people of Resava who fought between 1912 and 1918, believing in a better tomorrow on this rugged Balkan peninsula."

"I also dedicate this book to all women—to the mothers who gave birth, raised their children, celebrated their sons' marriages and their daughters' weddings, sent them to war, and, all too often, laid them to rest before their own time. So that their memory might never fade, and in honour of both their tears of joy and their sorrow, wherever I was able to discover it, beneath every married surname I have also recorded the maiden name—a lasting memorial, so that it may always be known from which family these women came."

How many people in Serbia today still think in this way? How many remain conscious that our nation was shaped through hardship, hunger, unequal wars and the sacrifices of our ancestors, who gave everything for their homeland and for the future of the Serbian people?

When did we allow the heavy dust of oblivion to settle upon the glorious periods of our history, when the world admired our achievements? How well do we truly know our own family trees, our patron saints' feast days, and the traditions that have shaped us? At what point did we cease to explore our origins, to preserve our heritage and to cultivate the culture of remembrance?

Has our lack of gratitude toward those who came before us also caused us to lose our pride and our identity? Are the difficulties we face today, at least in part, the consequence of such neglect, superficiality and indifference? Is patriotism merely the outward display of a national flag, or is it something carried much deeper—in the heart, in memory, and perhaps even in our very genes?

Countless questions arise. They unsettle us, challenge us and, at times, even frighten us, because genuine answers are too often absent—or deliberately ignored. In his book, Milosavljević modestly states that he does not intend to offer definitive answers to the many questions surrounding our past. Yet, whether consciously or unconsciously, he does precisely that, leaving his readers with a thoughtful message directed not only toward understanding the past, but equally toward shaping the present and the future.

"Our memory grows ever weaker. We neglect our past, yet it is our past that defines our identity. Without it, we become nothing more than a statistical figure. Without yesterday, there can be neither today nor tomorrow—we simply disappear."

The age in which we live imposes an ever-accelerating pace upon every aspect of human existence. Such a rhythm of life all too often gives rise to alienation, apathy and forgetfulness, gradually depriving human life of much of its social and cultural meaning. Within this ultra-modern mosaic, where an entire world seems compressed into a mobile phone and where the human mind is constantly fed with brief, often unverified fragments of information whose relevance rarely extends beyond the present moment, the intellectual horizons of contemporary life are becoming increasingly narrow.

Undoubtedly, technological progress in communication and the rapid exchange of information has brought immense benefits to humanity. Yet, in my humble opinion, it also carries the risk of impoverishing the human spirit, diminishing creativity and weakening our ability to distinguish genuine knowledge from superficial information, and enduring values from passing trends.

Perhaps this explains why such a large part of society—particularly the younger generations—has gradually lost its interest in books, in discovering who they are, where they come from and who their ancestors were. And yet, our civilisation has always been built upon the knowledge preserved from the past and upon the perseverance, wisdom and industry of those who

lived before us under circumstances far more difficult than our own. That alone is reason enough to ensure that they are never forgotten.

I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity to write these lines. In my view, the significance of Rade Milosavljević's *From Vinča to Resava – In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors* is beyond measure. It stands as an invaluable testimony to who we once were, to the roots from which we have grown, and to a historical memory that no serious and self-respecting nation should ever allow to fade into oblivion.

Ljubiša Bata Vujić
Jagodina, 18.9.2025

MEDVEĐA AND THE GREAT STORY IT TELLS

A Review of Rade Milosavljević's

From Vinča to Resava – In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors

After doing what most prospective readers naturally do—first reading the title of a book and the name of its author, and then turning immediately to its table of contents—you soon realize that you are about to embark upon a work whose breadth and thematic richness exceed even the highest expectations.

Such is the experience awaiting anyone who opens *From Vinča to Resava – In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors*, the seventh book by Rade Milosavljević. In many respects, this volume recalls his first major work, *Radovanjci – From Vinča to Resava*, a connection already suggested by the similarity of their titles. Yet the new publication expands that original vision on an impressive scale. Across more than five hundred pages, it brings together thousands of facts, historical records, genealogical findings, and cultural observations concerning Medveđa, the village in the fertile Resava plain that stands at the very heart of this remarkable undertaking.

The author's attention is directed above all toward people—those who once lived in Medveđa, those who live there today, and all whose family origins are rooted in the village. Rather than presenting history as a sequence of abstract events, Milosavljević reconstructs it through the lives of individuals and families, demonstrating that the true history of every community is ultimately the history of its people.

The structure of the book follows a carefully conceived progression from the general to the particular. It begins with broad historical and cultural perspectives before gradually narrowing its focus to families, distinguished individuals, and, ultimately, to the author's own maternal lineage. This compositional approach enables the reader to understand local history within the wider framework of Serbian historical and cultural development.

As one advances through the opening chapters, two equally compelling impressions emerge. On the one hand, the work may be read as a broad reflection on the Serbian people—their historical continuity, cultural traditions, and distinctive identity across the regions they have inhabited for centuries. On the other hand, it remains profoundly rooted in Medveđa itself, portraying the village not merely as a geographical location but as a living community whose history reflects, in miniature, the experience of an entire nation.

The first fifty pages are devoted to the distant past of Medveđa, reaching back to Roman times, when the settlement was known as Idimum. The author draws upon the pioneering research of Stanoje Mijatović while also incorporating the findings of modern genetic studies, including Y-chromosome analyses conducted in Houston, Texas. These studies, which trace paternal ancestry across many generations, complement the historical narrative by offering a scientific perspective on the origins of local families. Significantly, the results indicate that both the paternal line documented in Stenjevac and that of Medveđa belong to the I2a haplogroup, the most prevalent among Serbs and one whose origins are commonly associated with the ancient Illyrian population.

Having explored these broader historical themes, the author gradually guides the reader toward Medveđa itself—a village remarkable not only for its history but also for the richness of its people and traditions. The following three hundred and eighty pages are devoted primarily to the genealogies of the village's families. These are presented both through carefully constructed family trees and through vivid narratives that preserve memories passed down from generation to generation, as well as accounts still remembered by living witnesses.

Naturally, the author also reconstructs the genealogy of his own maternal family, whose roots are firmly embedded in Medveđa. Alongside these family histories, readers encounter chapters such as *The Entire Resava in One House*, *Vinča and the First Crafts*, *The Mad Serb*, *Priests*

in Medveđa, and many others, each illuminating a different aspect of the village's historical and cultural landscape.

A particularly distinguished place is reserved for the biographies of outstanding personalities whose origins lie in the Resava region. Figures such as Miloš Savčić, Momir Korunović, Vojislav Jakić, Dr Marina Spasojević, and Žarko Obračević are portrayed not merely through factual biographies but through carefully contextualized accounts that explain the significance of their achievements within Serbian society and culture. Each of them reached the highest standards in his or her respective profession, becoming an enduring part of the nation's intellectual and cultural heritage.

Among the most moving chapters is the section entitled *Medveđa Without Heirs – Those Who Fell in the Wars of 1912–1918 and 1941–1945*. Although deeply poignant, it is also one of the book's most valuable contributions, preserving the names and memories of individuals whose sacrifice must never be forgotten. Equally significant is the comprehensive survey of households in the villages of Roanda, Veliki Popović, and Medveđa, together with an analysis of demographic developments from 1835 to 2025. Complementing these historical data is the author's own census of Medveđa's population in 2025, prepared with the invaluable assistance of the staff of the local administrative office, whose cooperation greatly contributed to the completion of this work.

As the reader reaches the final chapters of this first volume, one impression becomes increasingly clear: the book deliberately avoids the conventional structure of a village monograph. Instead of concentrating on geography, natural resources, economic development, or architectural features, it places human beings firmly at the center of its narrative. Hundreds of family lineages—nearly four hundred and fifty in total across the two companion volumes—together with countless individual stories and biographical sketches, transform the book into an extraordinary archive of human memory. It is precisely this unwavering focus on people that gives the work its exceptional originality and lasting significance.

As noted at the outset of this review, opening a book of more than five hundred pages naturally raises the question of how such an extensive and multifaceted work might best be assessed. Summarizing a publication of this scope and diversity in only a few concluding observations is no easy task. Yet one conclusion emerges with unmistakable clarity.

From Vinča to Resava – In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors occupies a distinctive place among the numerous publications devoted to Serbian villages and local history that have appeared over the past decades. It is not a conventional village monograph. Rather than concentrating primarily on geography, natural resources, economic development, or architecture, Rade Milosavljević places people at the very center of his scholarly and literary endeavor.

The extraordinary number of individuals represented throughout the book—whether through nearly four hundred and fifty genealogical family trees spanning the two companion volumes or through countless biographical narratives and documentary accounts—constitutes its greatest and most enduring value. The author clearly believes that people are the foundation of everything that has existed, everything that exists today, and everything that will shape the future.

To preserve, with such precision and completeness, the memory of generations who created and continue to sustain the life of a single community is an achievement that commands genuine admiration. Following his earlier work dedicated to Stenjevac, the village of his paternal ancestors, Rade Milosavljević evidently felt a profound moral obligation to devote an equally comprehensive study to Medveđa, the birthplace of his mother's family. If one may venture a personal judgment, it is difficult to imagine that obligation being fulfilled in a more meaningful or dignified manner. Through this remarkable work, the author has paid tribute not only to his own relatives and forebears but also to all those who have shared in the history and life of this community.

The book also reveals much about the character of its author. It reflects unwavering perseverance in gathering and verifying an immense body of historical material; intellectual

openness in reassessing established assumptions; a clear understanding of the broader significance of genealogical and historical inquiry; sincere patriotism expressed through careful scholarship rather than rhetoric; and an impressive analytical ability to organize complex material into a coherent and accessible whole. Added to these qualities is the author's long journalistic experience, evident in a style that remains engaging, lucid, and inviting throughout, regardless of the complexity of the subjects addressed.

It is my sincere hope that every reader who approaches this work with an open mind and a genuine interest in history and cultural heritage will recognize its exceptional value. *From Vinča to Resava – In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors* is not merely a record of one village or one family. It is a testament to the enduring importance of memory, identity, and continuity—values that transcend geographical boundaries and speak to all who seek to understand the human story through the lives of ordinary people.

Sanela Simić
Communication Scholar
Despotovac, September 2025