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Freehand Drawing in Representing the Vernacular Architecture of Sveti Stefan in Montenegro

El dibujo a mano alzada para representar la arquitectura vernácula de Sveti Stefan en Montenegro

O desenho à mão livre na representação da arquitetura vernácula de Sveti Stefan no Montenegro

Abstract | Resumen | **Resumo**

The Sveti Stefan luxury hotel complex in Montenegro attracts guests for its historic and cultural qualities. Endangered as vernacular heritage due to its inaccessibility to the general public, the interior of Sveti Stefan is slipping into oblivion as a result of the lack of control by the Montenegrin authorities over cultural heritage. The collection of drawings presented in this paper evokes the relationship between the island's vernacular architecture and its natural environment. The use of freehand drawing rather than digital imagery can reflect the spontaneously created quality of non-pedigreed architecture, conjuring up its ambiance. By highlighting the beauty of Sveti Stefan through pencil drawings we aim to influence the preservation of its vernacular character.

El complejo hotelero de lujo Sveti Stefan en Montenegro atrae a los huéspedes por sus valores históricos y culturales. En peligro en cuanto patrimonio vernáculo debido a su inaccesibilidad para el público en general, el interior de Sveti Stefan está cayendo en el olvido como consecuencia de la falta de control de las autoridades montenegrinas sobre el patrimonio cultural. La colección de dibujos que se presenta en este artículo evoca la relación entre la arquitectura popular de la isla y su entorno natural. El uso del dibujo a mano alzada en lugar de imágenes digitales puede reflejar la calidad espontánea de la arquitectura sin pedigrí y evocar su ambiente. Al resaltar la belleza de Sveti Stefan a través del dibujo a lápiz, pretendemos influir en la conservación de su carácter vernáculo.

O complexo hoteleiro de luxo de Sveti Stefan, no Montenegro, atrai os hóspedes pelas suas qualidades históricas e culturais. Ameaçado como património vernáculo devido à sua inacessibilidade ao público em geral, o interior de Sveti Stefan está a cair no esquecimento como resultado da falta de controlo por parte das autoridades montenegrinas sobre o património cultural. A coleção de desenhos apresentada neste artigo evoca a relação entre a arquitetura vernácula da ilha e o seu ambiente natural. A utilização de desenhos à mão livre em vez de imagens digitais pode refletir a qualidade de criação espontânea da arquitetura sem pedigree, evocando o seu ambiente. Ao realçar a beleza de Sveti Stefan através de desenhos a lápis, pretendemos influenciar a preservação do seu carácter vernáculo.

Introduction

Once a necessity to record memories and simple ideas before the discovery of other systems, freehand drawing has been repurposed by architects with new meanings and applications (Graves 2005). Many architects have developed and refined a recognizable drawing style, making drawing a significant part of their design process (Smith 2005).

Unlike in classical architecture,¹ in which drawing was often employed to anticipate the design outcome, in vernacular architecture a building design conceived in situ relied solely on its executors' practical skill. But the rich variability of vernacular forms in their intrinsic connection with the natural environment suits the sensitivity of expression characteristic of drawing, limited only by the artist's capacity for visualization. Capturing what already exists, a freehand drawing of non-pedigreed² architectural space transcends mere visual impression. Investigating the characteristics of freehand drawing that enhance the expression of vernacular qualities, the author asserts the method's superiority over digital representation.

In acquiring knowledge about buildings created by anonymous practitioners with a focus on technical aspects, scientific research only marginally conveys the need to preserve vernacular architecture. The traditional Paštrovska house of Montenegro, although researched and written about in recent years (Keković, Petrović, and Ćurčić 2019; Grbić, Tomanović, and Gabrijelčić 2016; Radulović et al. 2007), survives in just a few examples, in poor condition, and has an uncertain future (The 7 Most Endangered Programme n.d.). The highlighting of cultural heritage in Montenegro³ has scarcely benefited the situation of vernacular architecture, which remains invisible and uninteresting to the general public. The bioclimatic aspects of such architecture and their possible applications in contemporary design (Vuksanović 1998; Rajković 2012) involve only the practical side of informally designed buildings and their conditioning by local climate. By researching aesthetic aspects of vernacular architecture, this paper seeks to spotlight a qualitative side of spontaneously created human habitats and to awaken scientific and general interest.

The island of Sveti Stefan, an example of Montenegrin cultural heritage and vernacular architecture with its unique appearance and turbulent history, embodies the richness of architecture produced by non-professional builders. Founded as a temporary refuge in the fifteenth century, it gradually developed into an economic and administrative center, reaching its mature form in the late eighteenth century (Vukmanović 1960: 415–418; Luketić 1966: 159–162; Mitrović 2014). Slowly declining in number of residents, it was a fishing village in the early twentieth century before finally becoming a luxury hotel in the 1950s (Duletić 2010: 157). Sveti Stefan is a tourism site to this day, and its cultural and architectural values are acknowledged only for the purpose of attracting visitors. The freehand drawings of Sveti Stefan presented here serve not just to document the site but also to convey the appropriateness of freehand drawing in representing vernacular streetscapes.

Methods

With field research on individual architectural objects and their settings, with sketches and notes to record personal impressions, the author collected data on the island. Time restrictions and program complexity prevented the execution of final drawings in situ. Thus the finished drawings done off the island are based on these data as well as on photos, observations, and sketches pieced together to revive the on-site experience.

The level of detail was determined by the purpose of a drawing and its complexity of composition. Sometimes a simple definition of forms conveys a complex idea of architectural space. At other times, it is a detailed drawing with meticulous depiction of building materials that reveals a place's character. The pedestrian viewpoint shows the unfolding streetscape and its general effect on the observer. But the vernacular character of some spaces is more fruitfully observed in a more general context, as a part of a broader configuration or from a higher vantage point.

In the absence of technology, architects would use freehand drawing to record vernacular architecture. Though only intended as a method of documentation, drawings of folk architecture, such as those by

the architect Zoran Petrović (Babić and Antešević 2017), often possessed charm and expressiveness. Aware of the power of images, especially in freehand drawings, Gordon Cullen best explained the principles of Townscape, bringing an audience closer to the urban design issues of the time (Cullen 1971). His studies showed how many Townscape design principles spontaneously incorporated in vernacular architecture show complex spatialization.

The relevance today of freehand drawing of folk architecture lies in its expressive power to produce images that stimulate viewers' senses, transporting them to places seen only in pictures. By emphasizing the vernacular spatial qualities of Sveti Stefan, the freehand drawings presented here are an introduction to a piece of Montenegrin heritage.

Houses of Sveti Stefan

The Paštrovići tribe inhabited for centuries the middle Montenegrin coast, forming settlements in the coastal highlands and gradually descending toward the sea (Koprivica 2021). Due to the local scarcity of wood, they built houses of stone and used timber only for roofing. From a simple shelter, their standard Paštrovska house evolved into a three-floor building with a characteristic lean-to roof (Keković, Petrović, and Ćurčić 2019). The fierce Bura wind rushing down the mountainside prompted the anonymous builders to erect taller back walls so that the roofs would stay in place.

Less influenced by the Bura but responding to other climatic factors, the gable roofs of the lower coastal area significantly altered the form of the primitive house. The houses of Sveti Stefan, the historical main town of the Paštrovići, are an advanced version of the original Paštrovska format. Stone walls up to one meter thick provide a pleasant interior atmosphere in summer but are inefficient for winter insulation. The reddish stone and mortar make the rough wall surfaces warm, welcoming surroundings, although with just a few modest openings in facades, the poorly ventilated interiors mostly lack daylight. Consequently the renovated hotel accommodation units rely heavily on artificial lighting and air-conditioning systems.

The houses of Sveti Stefan adopt numerous forms and combinations, mainly due to the limited space. The typical format of three-floor row houses from the hinterland villages, adjusted to the island's terrain, gave way to new configurations: free-standing houses, houses attached by longitudinal walls, houses in a row perpendicular to the slope, houses organized around a courtyard, rows of houses with connections between them, row houses of varying heights, houses with fewer than three levels, etc. The storage area, situated on the ground floor of the traditional Paštrovska house, retained this



Figure 1: Position of the analyzed block 14 within the plan of Sveti Stefan

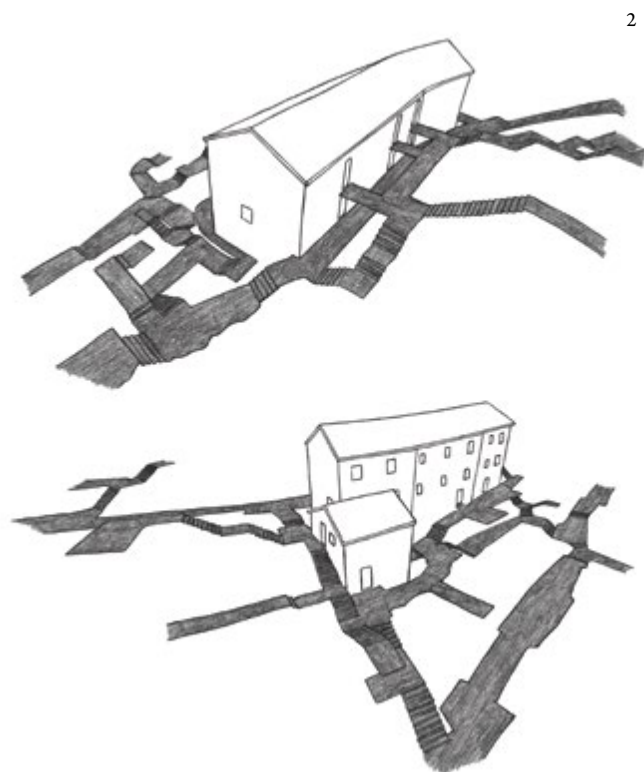
position on the island where the setting allowed for a three-story house. Otherwise a storeroom appeared as an annex. The first floor and main part of the house served as a living and sleeping area, while the top floor (whether second or third) served as a kitchen, letting smoke out directly through the roof. Used to cover roofs in former times and later replaced by clay tiles, heavy stone slabs appear at roof edges to divert water from the facades in place of a gutter.

All the Sveti Stefan houses belong to 25 “blocks”⁴ adapted to function as accommodation units or service spaces (Fig. 5). Here we consider block 14 as a typical ensemble, with most of the blocks’ shared characteristics. Oriented northwest-southeast, parallel to the contour lines, it covers about 230m² of terrain, falling into the larger ensemble category (Fig. 1). The island’s natural configuration dictated the orientation of windows to the northeast, toward the coast, with the main entrances on the opposite side (Fig. 2). Block 14 consists of four building units, three in a row as one consistent volume under a single roof and a fourth positioned one meter lower, attached at one corner (Fig. 3). The terrain allowed only partial development of the ground floor, where the poorly lit, partly buried rooms serve as installation space. Internally connecting the houses, the upper floors combine into luxury accommodation (the four suites of block 14), contrary to the normal building logic of spontaneously created architecture (Fig. 4). The interior wooden stairs of the traditional Paštrovska house which would give access to the upper floors all but disappear on Sveti Stefan, as the upper floors are accessible from outside due to the steep terrain. Annexed buildings usually take on secondary functions such as service or installation spaces, as in the case of unit D of block 14 (Fig. 4).

The simple cubic volumes of the houses, scarcely interesting as individual objects, achieve another architectural quality through their relationships with neighboring blocks. The true vernacular quality of Sveti Stefan resides in its outdoor spaces: the vaulted passages with access bridges on the southwest facade of block 14, or the short distance between unit D and the neighboring block 4. So the drawings presented here concentrate on outdoor spaces, their incredible variety in a small area, and the expressive quality of the incorruptible relationship between architecture and nature.

Figure 2: Block 14 with its surrounding street network

Figure 3: View of Sveti Stefan with the analyzed block 14 in the middle



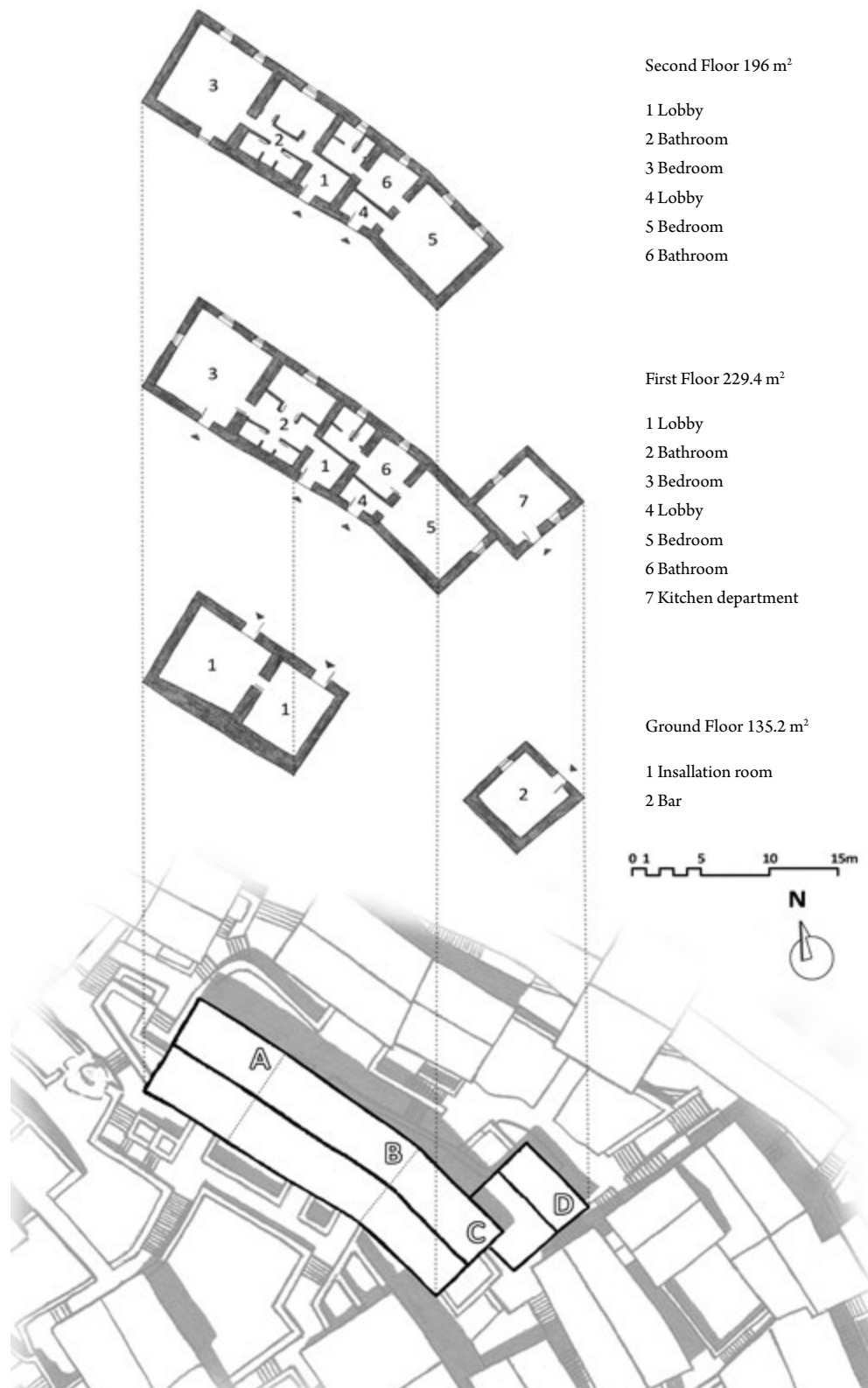


Figure 4: Plans of block 14

Results

The map shows the drawing numbers with an arrow for the direction of observation (Fig. 5). The white numbers are the island's 25 "blocks." The views referenced on the map illustrate this paper.

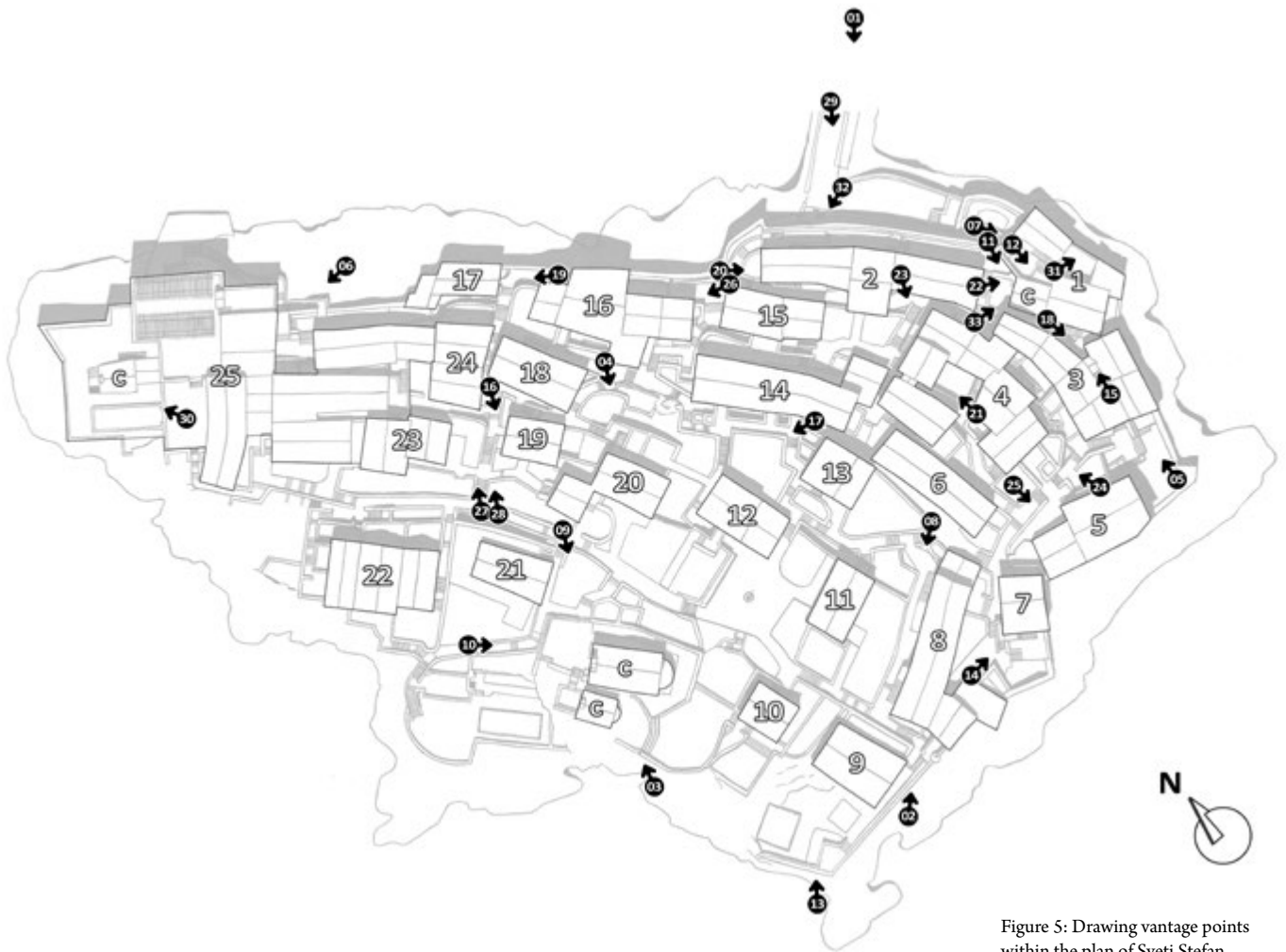


Figure 5: Drawing vantage points within the plan of Sveti Stefan

The Nature-Architecture Relationship in Drawings

Vernacular architecture fundamentally depends on its environment. The connection between anonymous builders' homes and the natural environment therefore determines the success of their design. This intimate relationship often prevents a clear differentiation of the two elements (Fig. 6). By observing how the natural environment works in different climatic circumstances over the years, the builder would have gathered the necessary knowledge to erect a house that would act as a part of its surroundings. The natural environment inspired the design of primitive shelters, which gradually evolved into complex architectural forms with multiple functions.

As is often the case in scientific research, an analysis of vernacular buildings separately from their natural environment fails to apprehend their architectural logic. Following the original terrain, the crowded houses of Sveti Stefan occupy the island's surface as a finishing touch to the natural landscape.⁵ The fortified wall and the houses at the perimeter stand directly on the rock, emerging



Figure 6: The well-known view of Sveti Stefan from the coast. Drawing 1 of Figure 5 (D01)

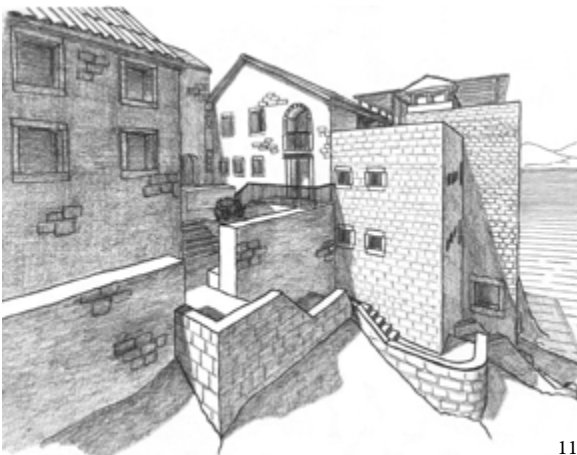
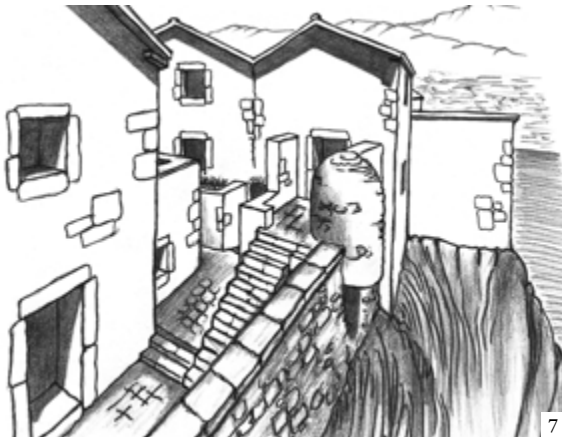


Figure 7: Portion of the fortified wall connecting with houses at the island's perimeter (D02)

Figure 8: South side of Sveti Stefan with its inaccessible slope (D03)

Figure 9: Harmonious mixture of architectural and natural elements (D04)

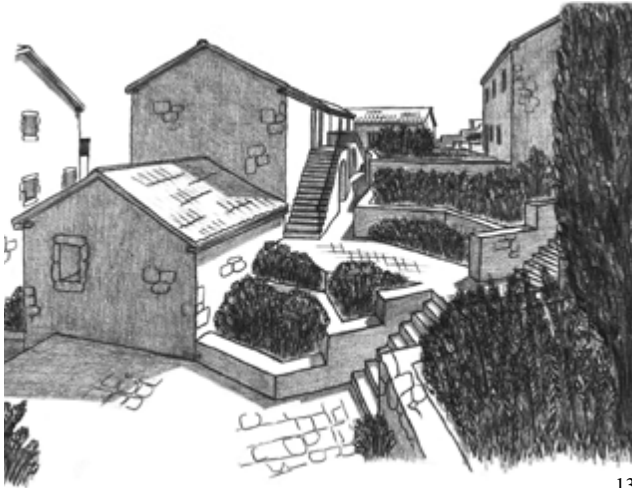
Figure 10: The small piazza's human scale makes it one of the finest scenes on the island (D05)

Figure 11: The newly built structures complement the old ones not by replicating them but by asserting their equal status (D06)

Figure 12: Entrance shaped around an old fig tree (D07)

naturally from their setting (Fig. 7). By the open sea, the rock becomes a fortification, more solid than the artificial one (Fig. 8). Paved pathways and stairways minimally reshape the original terrain. Rarely visible in the middle of the island, the natural rock, divided into sections by parapet walls, blends with the townscape (Fig. 9). The lower part, incorporated in the street, testifies to its once wild character. Shaped by climate over many years, building materials found locally best suited the anonymous builders' needs. Structural, parapet, and protective walls; stairs, streets, and piazzas; vaulted passages and arches – the architectural elements of Sveti Stefan, all of local stone, sourced on-site or nearby, produced harmonious, humane spaces (Fig. 10).

The island was converted into a luxury hotel in 1955, with the addition of several new buildings. The most prominent of these, in the form of a citadel, rises on the far right of the island (Fig. 6), built in keeping with the existing architectural composition (Fig. 11). The staircase twisting down the natural slope leads to the island's lowest point, a quay for small boats.



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Figure 13: Green areas between buildings often appear in the form of small terraces (D08)

Figure 14: Pines along the path leading up to the churches (D09)

Figure 15: View of the churches from the platform below (D10)

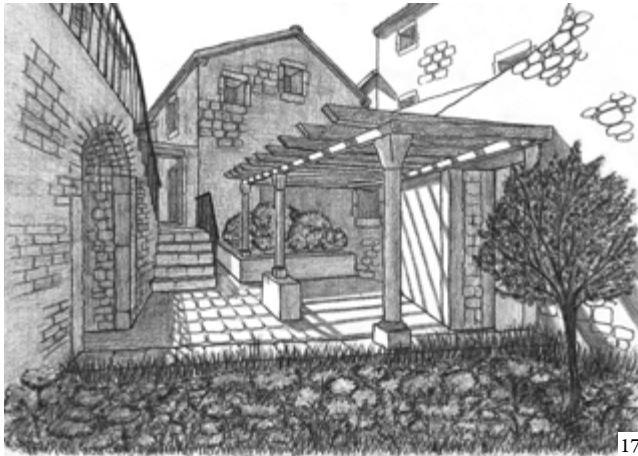
Figure 16: Church entrance in a cocoon of buildings (D11)

The greenery in our drawings offsets the architectural features: the curving forms and abstract texture of trees, bushes and grass contrast with the straight lines and solidity of vernacular buildings. Rather than capturing the currently overgrown vegetation, often a visual and physical obstruction, our drawings suggest an appropriate layout of greenery.

Vegetation properly located, with its characteristic features, evokes a visual-tactile experience. The curvature of the vestibule wall, conditioned by the bulk of the old fig tree, clearly indicates a hierarchy of elements (Fig. 12). In figure 13, greenery and architecture have equal standing in the composition. Initially for growing vegetables, most of the green areas in the middle of the island are now part of the grounds for guests. The pine in the main public piazza, planted relatively recently, is now the tallest tree on the island, slightly altering its silhouette. Once unknown here, cypresses are an appropriate choice for the landscaped environs of the church, with their symbolism of timelessness (Fig. 14) chiming with the relationship between nature and architecture. The greenery in figure 15 frames the whiteness of the church, making it more striking.

Genius Loci of Vernacular Architecture Rendered on Paper

The spirit of a place or *genius loci*, popularized in architectural theory by Christian Norberg-Schulz, is the inherent quality of a particular location that is never repeated elsewhere (Norberg-Schulz 1979). Determined by the *genius loci*, the memory one has of a place serves as a benchmark for gauging the quality of architectural and natural spaces.



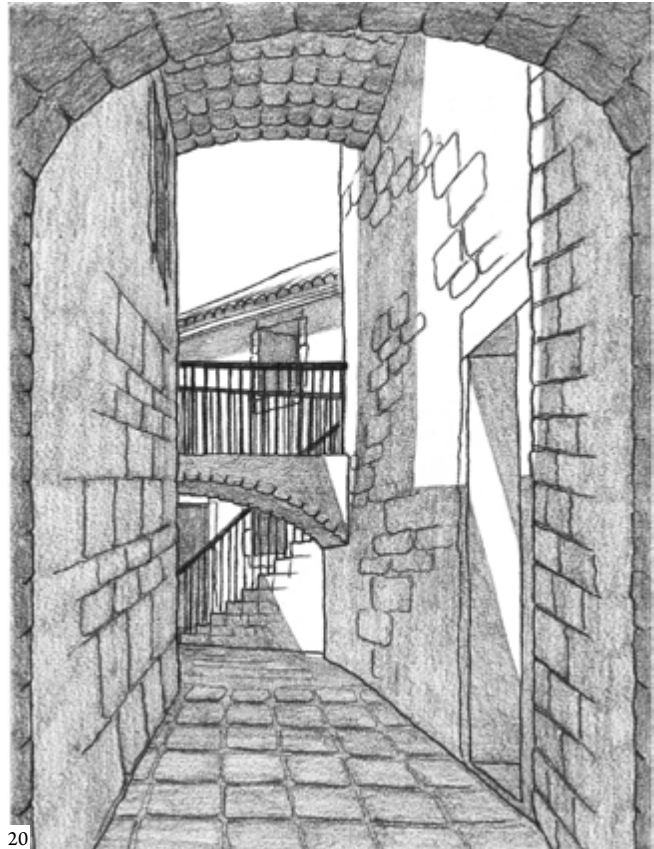
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Figure 17: Block 1 with its private courtyard (D12)

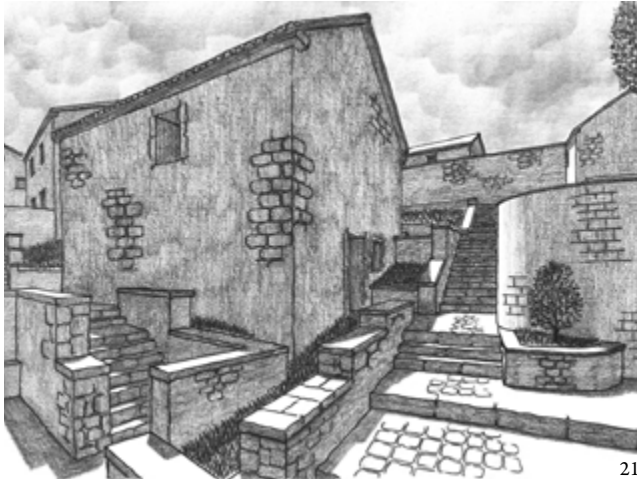
Figure 18: The corner location of the famous Villa 118 provides privacy for its VIP guests (D13)

Figure 19: Street descending sharply to the island's perimeter (D14)

Figure 20: Series of vaulted passages generating a dramatic spatial experience (D15)

Abstract in character and better elucidated in images than in words, the *genius loci* of Sveti Stefan is an amalgam of impressions, different on the surface but belonging to the same category: every part of the island creates its ambiance, but jointly they also produce an overall sense of place.

One of the most memorable images, unveiled as one approaches the island, creates expectations and an urge to discover more. The small church in the center of the scene demands the viewer's attention; the tall buildings around it fall into the background (Fig. 16). Nearby, one of the island's few private courtyards presents a truly Mediterranean scene, charming and mysterious, warm and secluded (Fig. 17). Across the island, the pergolas of the citadel's main public terrace vary the summer sunlight with streaks of shade. The garden of the best-known house on Sveti Stefan,⁶ with a stunning vista over the sea, is a cultural landscape of Montenegrin vernacular architecture (Fig. 18). Looking the other way, the strolling viewer sees an entirely different scene from that which unfolded moments ago. Behind the isolated house, the street descends toward the sea, in the background (Fig. 19). On crossing the vaulted passages, the observer experiences a dramatic change of visual impression. A marvel achieved by Sveti Stefan's anonymous builders, these passages appear to connect places otherwise separate. The one in figure 20 stretches toward a shaded architectural space with a beam of light from the gap



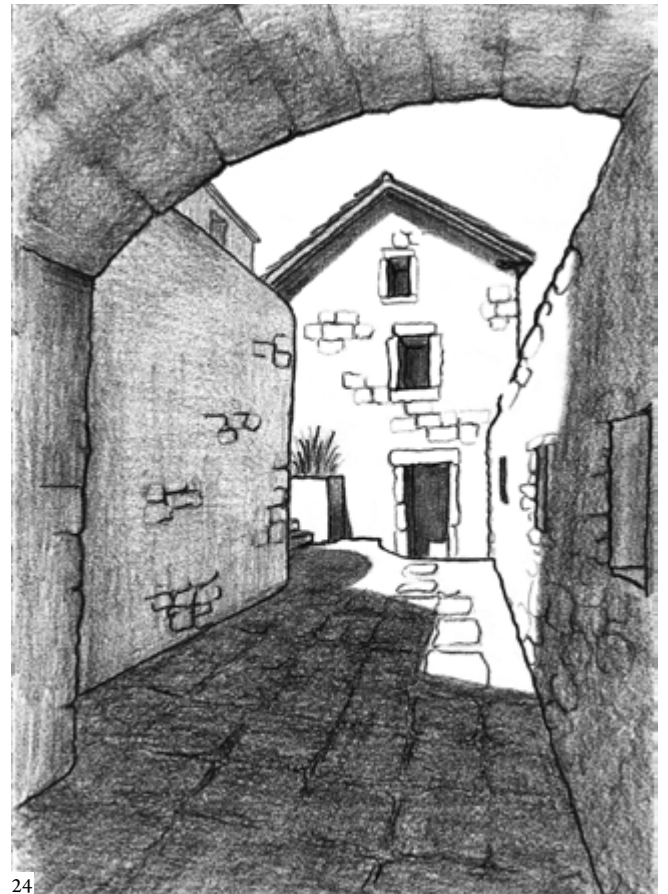
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above. The arched bridge in the background requires a passerby to duck before continuing, making a transition space a momentary stopping point. Converging about the heart of the island, ascending staircases with their parapet walls are everywhere, framing and decorating the simple building forms, providing a smooth gradation from the natural to the architectural spheres (Fig. 21).

The element of shade is important to apprehending the *genius loci* of densely built environments. Narrow streets, arched passages, and direct sunlight generate a chiaroscuro often seen in Mediterranean villages (Grundy and Atroshenko 1991). Light-and-shade contrasts evoke specific moods in the island's various parts. The side facing the coast remains largely shady, receiving little morning sun in summer.

Figure 21: Stairs with parapet walls blending with the buildings (D16)

Figure 22: The contrasting quality of the vaulted passages creates visual interest (D17)

Figure 23: The short distance between building rows results in picturesque but dark passageways (D18)

Figure 24: Transition from dark to light intensified by the facade at the end (D19)

By the open sea, the steep, sunny side is mostly without buildings or greenery. The northeast orientation of most of the buildings determines the position of the entrance on the sunnier side. Figure 22 shows the difference between the two sides: the shaded windows of the upper buildings versus the brightly lit entrances of the lower one. Acting as bridges to the upper-floor entrances of the building on the right, the series of arched elements separate the bright upper street and the dark lower passage, creating another contrast. Moving from light to shade, there is a permanently shadowy corridor on hot summer days between the buildings depicted in figure 23. By contrast, the shift from shade to light makes the sunlit facade of the building at the end of the arched passage command our attention (Fig. 24). The shady facade against the bright surroundings appears dark and solid, reminiscent of surrealist paintings (Fig. 25). The low courtyard in figure 26 is one of several on the island, its depth implied by the morning shade on the house facade. The shading also gives the background passage mystery.

Visualization Potential of Freehand Drawing

Its potential for visualization makes freehand drawing still a relevant method of representation. Separating elements, removing obstacles, adjusting perspectives, rendering materials at different levels, and other necessary manipulations all contribute to proper observation, albeit sometimes at the expense of the realistic presentation of a scene.

As an example, line intensity and detail of material texture may pick out the “block 1” ensemble from its vicinity (Fig. 27), and an imaginary vantage point may capture the cluster of buildings in relation to their surroundings. Given their proximity, the houses of different blocks often blend visually, making it difficult for an observer to apprehend their volume and construction logic. With the foreground removed, a scene of piled-up houses may come to life and a hitherto unseen logic appears (Fig. 28). A panoramic view with a slightly distorted perspective may encompass many architectural

Figure 25: The side facade without openings of block 2 appears separated from its surroundings in the shade (D20)

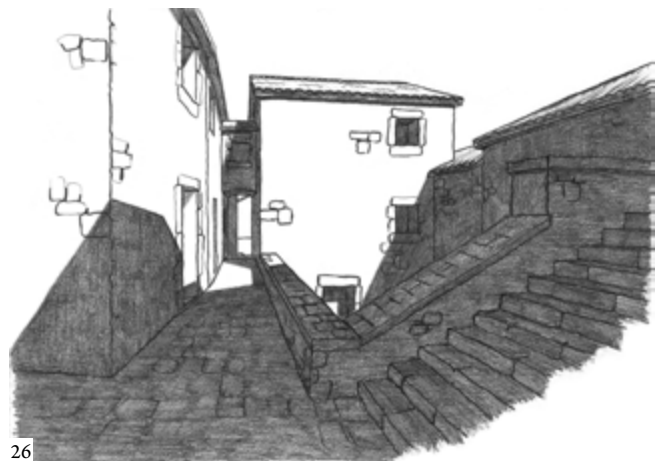
Figure 26: Mysterious impression of courtyard space created by shadows and contrasts (D21)

Figure 27: Composition of block 1 and its relationship with its surroundings captured in a bird's eye view (D22)

Figure 28: Block 4 seen without block 2 in the foreground (D23)



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objects with their related surroundings (Fig. 29). To avoid overwhelming detail, materials may be simplified down to just a hint of texture. Houses at the island's perimeter and overgrown ornamental vegetation hide the sea from the wandering observer. Standing on the natural rock, the two houses in figure 30, for instance, are a visual obstacle, with their main facades oriented to the exterior, while the connection of the house with the fortified wall appears more obvious when the two elements are singled out (Fig. 31). In this case, the extended front of a row house rests directly on the fortification, with the vaulted passage penetrating its ground floor so as to give the street continuity.

Visualization in drawing can restore the original state of a place by removing the inauthentic elements commonly seen in vernacular architecture. The lush vegetation currently flourishing on the island has overgrown this stone village and its kitchen gardens, transforming the vernacular landscape, as is evident from a comparison of figures 32 and 33. In addition to forming a visual obstacle, the thick vegetation sometimes even physically obstructs the street network (Fig. 33).

Figure 29: A slightly distorted perspective view follows the turning point in the path coming from the higher side and disappearing into the darkness of a vaulted passage (D24)

Figure 30: Hidden behind the houses of block 5, the sea comes into view only from a higher vantage point (D25)

Figure 31: Blocks shown in isolation can be better seen as the island's constituent parts (D26)

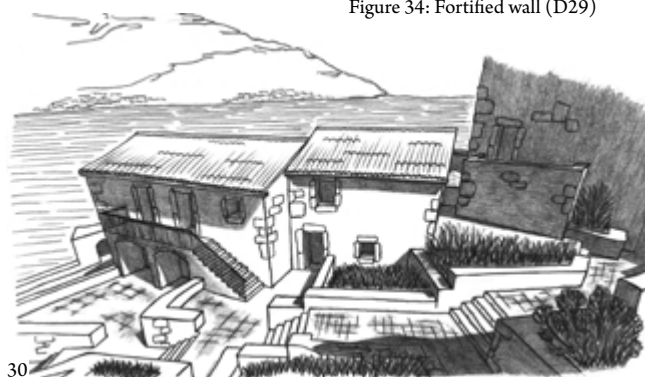
Figure 32: Original state of a Sveti Stefan view reconstructed in drawing (D27)

Figure 33: Current overgrown state of the previous view with architecture obscured by greenery (D28)

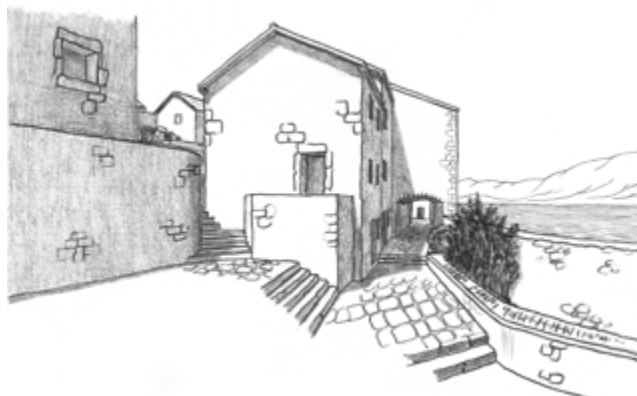
Figure 34: Fortified wall (D29)



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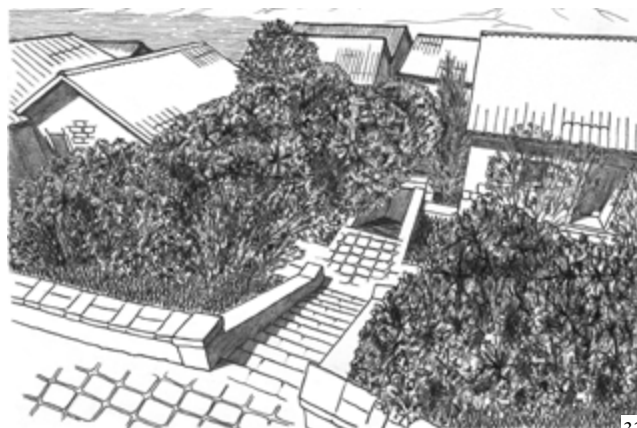
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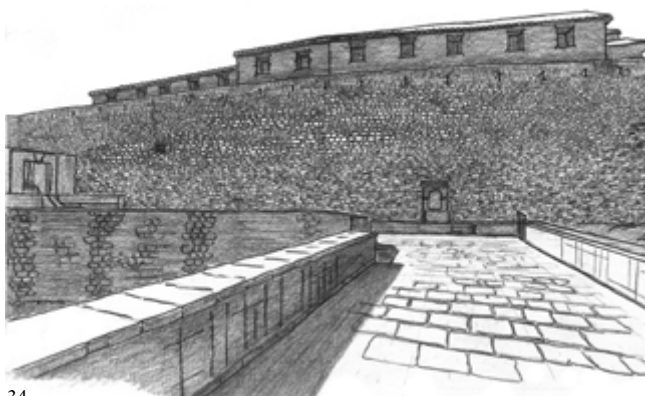
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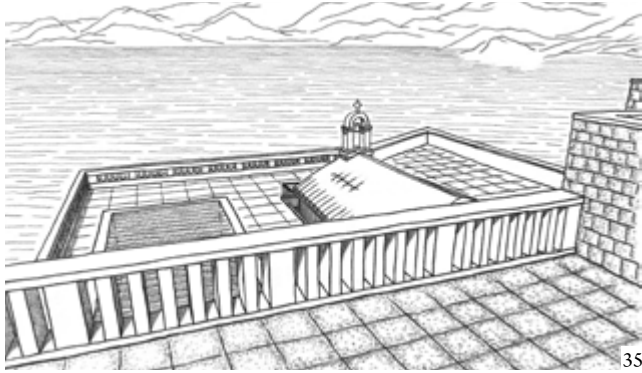
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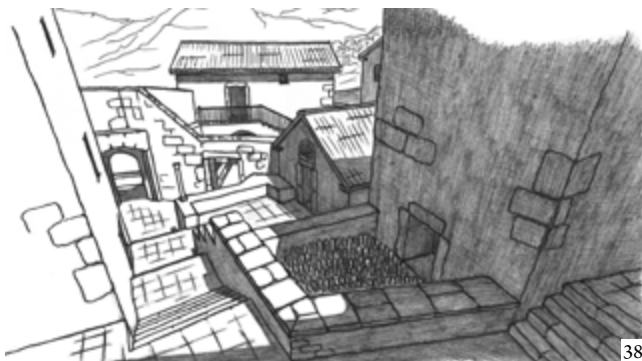
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Figure 35: The broad terraces of block 25 contrast with the island's narrow old streets (D30)

Figure 36: The wooden pergola further focuses the already framed view of the mountain (D31)

Figure 37: A recently built drinking fountain in the fortified wall (D32)

Figure 38: View down to the main entrance into Sveti Stefan (D33)

As a secondary element, the representation of materials also contributes to the expressiveness of drawings, highlighting the substantive character of particular places. Drawn in detail, the texture of the fortified wall highlights its bulk, helping distinguish the lower part of raw stones from the finer stones above (Fig. 34). The pavement's whiteness and regular pattern contrast with the rustic look of the high wall. The representation of building materials may also contribute to a three-dimensional effect. This is the case in the juxtaposition of the two terraces in figure 35, which conjures up depth of space; the scale of the pavement and the level of detail make up for the lack of shadows. The materials often determine the hierarchy of elements in a drawing too: in figure 36 the wall in the foreground evokes a visual-tactile experience, whereas the others serve merely to frame the distant mountains.

A detail of the larger scene in figure 34, figure 37 focuses on one section of the fortified wall. Various details materialize the scene: the wall, the drinking fountain, the stairs, the parapet, and the pavement. The building materials unite the architectural elements in a harmonious composition. Figure 38 highlights the stone textures of various elements. In order not to distract from the overall composition, the appearance of building materials is simplified, with a few stone blocks standing in for entire walls.

Conclusion

Every line of a freehand drawing looks different, just as every stone block in a vernacular building has a distinct character. Immediacy and spontaneity of creation apply both in vernacular dwellings and in freehand drawing. The imperfections of spontaneously created buildings, seen not as mistakes but as part of their uniqueness, appear prominently in drawn compositions. Conveying the essence of a place and expressing qualities beyond mere visual impression, a drawing pursues a public interest, contributing to the preservation of vernacular buildings (Pejković 2021).

The hierarchy established among drawn objects allows the mechanism of observation to produce impressions in the viewer. Rather than showing the literal state of a place, a freehand drawing composition suits the purpose for which the scene was depicted. Simplification of elements, absence of color, and different levels of detail help focus the observer's attention on specific qualities.

Voted in 2023 one of the most endangered heritage sites in Europe (The 7 Most Endangered Programme n.d.), the village of Sveti Stefan, today a luxury hotel complex, is largely out of the reach of ordinary people and researchers. Celebrating difference and variety of forms, our drawings of Sveti Stefan shed light on the beauty of vernacular architecture, making it more widely accessible.

¹ Architecture conceived according to established historical principles.

² A term used by Bernard Rudofsky in *Architecture without Architects* (Rudofsky 1964).

³ Such as the revaluations of Montenegro's cultural assets in 2008 and 2013.

⁴ A "block" here is a single house or ensemble forming a structural and functional unit.

⁵ Also known as "Crystallization of a landscape" (Vuksanović 1998, 75).

⁶ The famous Villa 118, reserved for elite guests, has a private garden and pool.

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Biography | Biografía | Biografia

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