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THE SUPERIOR MUREȘ VALLEY IN THE 10TH -13TH CENTURIES

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Abstract

Our work aims to depict the habitat types of the 10th- 13th centuries on the Superior Mureş Valley, based on the archaeological discoveries, supplemented by the data gathered and provided through historical, art history and geographical research. Until now, there hasn't been any attempt to study the entire area of the Superior Mureş Valley, as a whole. This territory cannot compete with the Middle or Inferior course of the Mureş River, from the archaeological material, architectural and documentary perspective, because these areas were more densely populated. The individuality of the Superior Mureş River Valley consist in its geographical position, as it is an interference zone in the administrative picture of Medieval Transylvania, comprising parts of the Cluj, Turda, Alba, Târnava counties, from the Székely seats of Mureş and Gheorgheni.

The geographical delimitation of the research area was rather a deliberate one, since the administrative principle is impossible to apply. Therefore, the area studied, from Izvorul Mureşului (the Source of the Mureş River) to Luduş, incorporates a 15 km space on the right bank of the river and 10-30 km left of the river stream. The area on the left of the Mureş River comprises the Gurghiu and the Niraj Valleys entirely. Wherefrom a seeming unbalanced report between the two regions studied, on the left and on the right sides of the river. We do not know the exact administrative boundaries that functioned in the Arpads' epoch, thus, for the pointed out area we took into consideration the limits of the modern age known administrative-territorial units. As to the ecclesiastical structures, the archdeaconries were delimited with the help of the Transylvanian diocese map from Erdélyi Okmánytár.

The geographical characteristics of the Superior Mureş Valley had major consequences on the habitat. In our case, an important difference is noticed between the areas from the Giurgeu Depression and the central-eastern part of the Transylvanian Plateau. The most favourable area to inhabit was around Luduş and Lechinţa de Mureş, from Sărmaş Plain, having an altitude of around 300 m and average annual temperature of 9 °C. The dominant soils are the mollisols, covered by grassy and dry vegetation. The most unfavourable area for living was the Giurgeu Depression, with an absolute altitude between 640 and 850 m and an

annual average temperature of 6-8 °C. The brown soils (cambisols) are characteristic for this area with forest vegetation.

In this micro region we analyzed four basic elements that completed the image of the medieval man's life: settlements, fortifications, churches and cemeteries.

With regard to the villages and the *settlement network* we relied on the documentary evidence and the archaeologically detected settlements. The 25 settlements known from documents in the 13th century reflect only a part of the actual extent of the habitat. If we add to this list the ones mentioned in the papal records we remark a spectacular increase in the number of attested settlements. They are spread along the entire stream of the river, from Aluniș to Luduș. The river's tributaries, among which the Niraj Valley is an important habitation region, are also populated. A lesser used area remained the Giurgeu Depression and the Gurghiu Valley. The settlements reflect, though, the extent of the habitat in the first third of the 14th century, which can be comparable to the end of the 13th century (map 3).

Among the *documentary attestations* studied, two are relevant for the Arpads' epoch society. In 1228, king Andrew II donated the Săplac (Goreni) domain with the settlements and the afferent possessions to the treasurer Dionisie, from the Tomaj family. Along the 13th century, generous donations of this kind contributed to the weakening of the royal power and gradual transformation of the royal counties in nobility counties. In a diploma of the Alba Iulia chapter from 1293, a group of Székely people from Sâncraiu de Mureș is mentioned, as Székely servients (*servientibus siculis*). They bought from *comes* Frata possessions in the Cluj County. The *servientibus siculis* term reminds of royal servients, who because of the military services, through an act of donation from the king, receive land and turn into the gentry (little nobles). Royal servants, through the Golden Bull of king Andrew II, are given almost the same privileges like the nobility.

We were not able to reconstruct in detail the *structure* of the 10th-13th centuries settlements based on solely the archaeological complexes available (45 in all!).

The settlement from Morești–*Podeti*, situated in the proximity of the fortification, is a permanent type of settlement, with semi-sunken square houses. The village was inhabited by those *castrensii*, who were under the authority of the castrum comites and worked in agriculture.

At Sângeorgiu de Mureș in the place called *Sub Ghera*, archaeological research identified two complexes (Cx1/2007 and Cx2/2009) which belonged to a rural settlement. They were used as waste pits and contained, apart from pottery, animal bones. After studying the osteological material from Cx1/2007 it resulted that the most important number of bones

belonged to bovine and ovine species, but there were also horse, pig and goose bones. The radiocarbon analyses indicated two levels of time sequences possible for Cx1/2007: 1020-1050 and 1080-1160. These traces of habitat from Sângeorgiu de Mureş, do not continue beyond the 12th century. It is probably a population preceding the Székely arrival.

To illustrate geographical distribution of the 10th-13th century settlements, we used the pottery discovery points (map 4). After mapping the written sources attested settlements from the 13th century (map 2) and also the pottery finds, a larger habitat area map resulted. The first area, around Lechința de Mureş (I), extended from Luduş to Moreşti. The second area, in the surroundings of Târgu Mureş (II), extended towards the east. In the Glodeni area (III) new points emerged. The Reghin region is represented by the localities Gorenî and Batoş. In the Giugeu Depression there is a single archaeological discovery point. In the case of the discovery point, problems appeared while trying to absolute dating the pottery. Lacking other archaeological materials with strict dating and due to the isolated character of the discoveries, we gave up the idea of dating separately, based on the centuries of the Arpadian epoch. Nevertheless, we can notice in many cases a presence of the early Arpadian age settlements (Târgu Mureş, Sângeorgiu de Mureş, Voivodeni, Neagra).

Essential changes in the Magyar kingdom society took place together with the emergence of the counties and the royal *castra*. The wooden and earthen fortification from Moreşti, from the eastern side of the Turda County is the only mention of territorial organisation of the Magyar kingdom from the Superior Mureş Valley. The 11th-12th century fortification, with a border *castrum* status, was probably meant to control the Mureş valley traffic. The structure of the fortification, with external defence ditch, earthen vallum and a palisade is known because of the archaeological excavations from Moreşti. To verify the planimetry of the fortification, we performed some geophysical surveys in the perimeter of the fortress. The measurements, besides from the northern defence system ditch and the stone paved area from behind the earthen wall, identified the existence of a presumed ditch and some buildings remains inside the enclosure, in areas never excavated before. The only decisive results for completing the image would be achieved through new excavations. The fortresses around Reghin were probably erected in a later phase of the *Transylvanian castling*. Among them, the Batoş fortification is in the Cluj County and the former fortification from Brâncoveneşti, from which we have only the documentary attestation, belonged to the Turda County. At the beginning of the 13th century, the fortresses from Brâncoveneşti and Batoş probably belonged to ban Simon, from the Kacsics family. Ban Simon lost the Gorenî domain because of his participation in the murder of queen Gertruda. It became the property of Dénes,

from the Tomaj family. The two fortresses were built before the Tatar invasion, and were probably noble rank fortifications.

The Arpadian kingdom, simultaneously with the administrative organization, laid the foundation of the ecclesiastical one, of Latin rite. From the religious point of view, our region was placed under the Transylvanian diocese. For the 11th-12th centuries, though the written sources are not eloquent, we know that the Transylvanian diocese, like other dioceses was organized in archdioceses and deaneries. The earliest ecclesiastical monuments preserved here date from the 13th century. They belong to the rural milieu and suffered consistent modifications later. Among the churches we have studied, there are some attested only in documents (Tirimia), others identified archaeologically (Bâra, Citfalău, Lăzarea, Sânvășii), some that only have the plan sketches preserved (Glodeni, Reghinul Unguresc) and churches that were modified in time, but kept Romanic and early Gothic elements in their architecture. Best represented we have the hall-churches, consisting of a nave and a choir with semicircular apse (Type IIA), but there are churches with nave and a square choir (Type IIB). The location of the 20 churches identified, in corroboration with the settlements attested and also with the pottery discovery points enlarge the habitat towards the east, up to the Superior Niraj Valley. In the Giurgeu Depression, we can also observe an extension of the habitat around the Gheorgheni locality (map 5). Typologically, the overwhelming majority of the churches are of the hall-church type, with nave and semicircular apse, characteristic for the Superior Mureș Valley architecture in the 13th century, being influences from the western church.

An important role in our study was played by the archaeological research as well as other complementary investigations (geophysical surveys, anthropological and radiocarbon analyses) that were performed in the last four years in the area of the former seat of Mureș.

The most important discovery, ecclesiastically speaking, is linked to the *archaeological research* from 2009 from Sânvășii, when the foundation of a three nave basilica was discovered. The basilica type church was spread especially in areas inhabited by the Saxons, being uncommon for the Székely architecture. With regard to the planimetry, the best analogy is known from Herina. It could be the case of a private possession and the foundation of a family church. The radiocarbon dated the first horizon of burials in the second half of the 12th century – the beginning of the 13th century. This information places the construction of the first church in the first third of the 13th century. We are unable to affirm whether this first church was concluded or not, but, according to its plan, it is the only one of this kind in our area of study and can be classified as a basilica type of church (Type I).

The *geophysical surveys* from Cițfalău succeeded in identifying the location of the former church and adjusting the information regarding its plan. The most significant discovery was the presence of a tower in the western part of the nave. It is unclear whether the tower was erected simultaneously with the church or was abutted later to the nave. Most of the village churches from the 13th century did not have a tower. In the Romanic architecture of the Mureș Seat, there is one single tower preserved, the one from Sâncraiu de Mureș, 9 km far from Cițfalău. The archaeological church from Cițfalău, according to the plan provided by K. Horedt, fits into the hall-church type, with choir and semicircular apse (Type IIA). The images given by the electrical resistivity method and magnetometric examination revealed a rectangular sanctuary, but they lack the necessary power of resolution to indicate the semicircular shape of the apse. The results of the future archaeological research will be decisive for this matter.

The excavations and the radiocarbon analyses for Sângeorgiu de Mureș brought new data regarding the Roman-Catholic church and the cemetery around it. These studies showed that the first chronological horizon of the graves investigated belongs to the 13th century. The foundation of the semicircular apse avoids the skull of a tomb dated to the end of the 13th century and cuts through another one, dated in the 14th century. The radiocarbon data helps us placing chronologically the construction of the choir in the 14th century. The anthropological studies showed us a medium-high stature population. The most frequent pathological cases are the periodontal diseases, caused by primitive nutrition. In two of the cases, the craniometrical analysis of the skull cap showed the tendency towards brachycephalization. This predisposition is spread beginning with the 12th century in Central Europe and it remains the main anthropological phenomenon in the modern epoch.

An important part of the artefacts in the region submitted to our study is formed by the ceramic ones. For a better understanding of the clay modelling technique we got acquainted with the ethnographical descriptions from Deda, Novi Pazar and Zlakusa (Serbia), where up to the previous century archaic methods for vessel modelling were still in use.

Most of the pottery fragments from our area do not come from closed features. Because of this deficiency, we focused on the vessel types known and their dissemination area. A more thorough analysis was applied to the cases of artefacts coming from closed features that we investigated (Târgu Mureș – *Cetate* and Sângeorgiu de Mureș – *Sub Ghera*). In our area of interest, we managed to identify six types of vessels: I. jar vessels; II. tureens; III. clay cauldrons; IV. grooved neck vessels; V. bottle shaped vessels; VI. clay trays. The novelty is the small truncated cone shaped tureen, resembling the flower pot and the bottle

shaped vessel. Both of them are very rare and characterize the early Arpadian epoch. A unique piece is the jar vessel decorated with fir trees, from Cx1 (Sângeorgiu de Mureş–*Sub Ghera*).

Between the jewellery and the clothing accessories from the 12th-13th centuries, the spherical head hair needles are spread in the Mureş Seat area. Their presence at Citfalău, Sânvăşii and Sângeorgiu de Mureş proves their popularity in this region, as opposed to other areas, where they are not generally used.

The archaeological results attained so far render difficult the recreation of the existing habitat in the 10th-13th centuries on the Superior Mureş Valley. However, they indicate the presence of a network of settlements, in a smaller area, yet from the early Arpadian. In a first phase, the settlements are missing from the Giurgeu Depression, the Niraj and the Gurghiu Valleys. The presence of some churches at the end of the 13th century at Lăzarea (Gheorgheni Seat) and the in the Superior Niraj Valley at Mitreşti and Bâra (Mureş Seat) means the extension of the settlement system in areas less favourable for living as well. In the Mureş and Gheorgheni Seats, the Székely colonists brought their contribution to a great extent to the birth of the permanent settlements.

We believe that the information contained by this work mirrors only the level which the research of the Superior Mureş Valley has achieved until the present moment. Edifying results concerning the habitat are expected from the future more extensive archaeological research of the rural settlements, churches and their adjacent cemeteries, completed by up-to-date analyses.

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