

A millennium of history in the Secaş Valley, III–XIII centuries

--Abstract--

Keywords: Migration Period, Gepida graves, Middle Ages, preventive research; medieval settlement, Miercurea Sibiu IV; oven, housing, pit, Hungarian currency, prick spurs, bronze bracelet, Roman funerary stele, weights, metal arms and metal ornaments.

The archaeologically researched settlement in the north of the Miercurea Sibiului city, being the core of the present archaeological analysis, is part of a larger site, conventionally named MS IV, where a group of archaeologists has conducted an archaeological research with features from different historical periods (Middle Bronze Age, Wietenberg culture; Late Bronze Age, Noua culture; the Second Period of Iron Age, Mid Latène, two-phase housing; Migrations Period and Early Middle Ages).

From the geographical point of view, the MS IV site is situated in the Sibiu County, on the Secaş Valley, in a temperate zone, favourable to living in all historical ages. Furthermore, the area has mineral water springs and salt deposits, underground riches that have been exploited ever since the ancient times and have been appreciated by all human communities.

This area, so rich in historic and archaeological testimonies, obviously drew the attention of researchers ever since the 19th century, when the first references of archaeological discoveries were made, followed by the research of the archive documents, of the linguistic evidences and of the architectonic monuments. Several evaluation programs and archaeological researches have been conducted in this area by several researchers from Sibiu during the second half of the 20th century and after 2000 the archaeological repertoire of the County has appeared. Nevertheless, only after the field evaluation and the first test trenches of the archaeological diagnose for the A1 highway's project, five areas with archaeological potential have been identified all around Miercurea Sibiului (MS). The identified sites were given numbers from 1 to 5, from west to east following the highway. This study refers to the discoveries from the site MS IV, especially the period between the IIIrd to the XIIIth centuries.

The preventive archaeological research took place during 2012. On the first stage cross-sectional trenches were made in order to observe the expansion of the site and to achieve the overall stratigraphy of the site. They were followed by the uncovering and the research of the entire area. During this work more than 900 archaeological complexes were identified in the settlement. Among these there were partially sunken houses of a rectangular almost square plan with rock ovens (mostly situated on the northern corners) and in some cases with domestic ovens or fireplaces; pottery kilns; pits with various purposes and some traces of surface structures. The research of these features has provided a vast amount of archaeological items, mainly in pottery: clay cauldrons and pot vases. Some of them were ornamented with sets of straight or wavy lines and impressions made with the stick. Some of these also show on the surface of the base potter's signs or marks. Besides these, metal tools and accessories were also discovered (sickles, knives, spurs, buckles) or stone devices (hand-mills for grinding cereal crops).

Given the high volume of artefacts discovered in recent years due to archaeological preventive rescue excavations undertaken during construction of the Orăştie-Sibiu highway is

imperative to carry out a comprehensive study dedicated housing in the Secaş Valley, a first step in this direction has already been realized in 2015 when the Medieval Settlement from MSI was published. Perhaps the most famous researcher of these historical epochs, K. Horedt, underlined, more than fifty years ago, the necessity of some study directions: the research of late ancient periodicals, the beginning of migrations era, the Gepida period, the research of the Avar and Slavic population and the early penetration of the Hungarians in Transylvania. Significant efforts have been made lately, but we strongly believe that the new data will ignite further interest among specialists.

The unpublished materials presented in this work are stored in Brukenthal National Museum deposits. In addition to the artefacts themselves, the museum holds all documentation site colleagues who participated in digs (photos, plans, drawings, topographical plans, worksheets complex form object, notebooks site) that were a source great achievement a presentation as concrete situation of the settlement of land proposed for study.

Thus, a first stage in the development of work was to collect all the information available regarding the archaeological site. I then held the photos from the site into a system enabling easy access to information by creating a folder dedicated to the research, and then sub-folders containing the name of each complex and the information on it from all sources. Regarding drawings of the site, the transformation in its current format was a lengthy one because most of them were made on graph paper, for those that were drawn on tracing paper process was somewhat faster, so to be translated into digital format all the lines were drawn by hand and scaled suitable program CorelDRAW. Another issue of great importance was the washing and selection of the ceramic and metallic material and also the restoration process that followed. Following this process I photographed and drawn all the objects present in this paper, using the same program combining photographs with the drawings.

To better understand the factors behind housing throughout history in Miercurea Sibiu IV I decided to start the paper with the description of the physical and geographical environment of the area, always the determining factor in establishing favourable place for founding a settlement. At the same time we considered absolutely necessary and achieve a historical framework of research conducted in the area by 2012.

Then of course we went to the presentation of discoveries made on this site in a manner that does not necessarily follow a classic pattern in which the images are presented as annexes. I decided to present my work in this way because we always find that it is easier to associate images with text when I had next to each other. Presentation discovery was made on two main categories: primarily on architectural considerations, and secondly on the basis of findings of material that we have considered essential for this site.

In this paper we tried to treat as fully as possible the last two horizons said and some materials / complexes that kept alive remains of the Roman occupation of these territories and the period which followed. That being said 282 archaeological complexes have been attributed to the medieval period and 3 other belonging to the migratory populations, namely the Gepida. Also, 48 other archaeological complexes that could not clearly be attributed to a cultural horizon were discovered, likely some of them can be classified into the Middle Ages as well. Due to a relatively short timeline for the performance objectives we decided to select only those archaeological complexes that have aroused the interest of the discovered materials, especially in

the context of clearly presented. From this point of view we admit that some interpretations could be considered subjective. However we proposed a system of classification of the archaeological complexes as follows. So, for this paper we identified a number of 36 complexes that may be considered housing with heater, 11 complex considered houses without heating or annexes, one church, 12 furnaces, 12 pits pole, 12 supply pits, 2 simple pits, a fence, in addition we decided to introduce a number of items that complete the picture on the population that ruled these territories passed through the 7 complex analysed, although lacked a clear temporarily context. We also decided that the 3 graves attributed to the migrations period are of great significance for the timeline in discussion. In some cases an assignment to one type or other archaeological complexes studied became more difficult especially because of the agricultural work that was done during time, which completely destroyed the top of them. Besides this decisive factor, we can add the fact that many of these living arrangements were superficial lifting them ever since they were builded.

The 3 Gepida graves discoveries from Miercurea Sibiu IV supplement those from Miercurea Sibiului-Petriș. Although similarities in terms of ritual burial of the two settlements are very high: archaeological complexes is rectangular shape with rounded corners and curved head; orientation of the graves is: SSW-NNE; approximately equal length, the deceased is placed on his back with outstretched hands along the body and gaze eastward; we cannot but observe the findings in MS IV are somewhat less important due to inventory funeral particularly the absence of gold objects, although there are analogies between glass beads and the combs found in two archaeological sites. Thus the view expressed in the past by the team from Miercurea Sibiului-Petris that the people buried there had a higher social status in comparison with the rest of the population on the Secaş Valley seems to be a valid one. However, the findings from MS IV are of major high scientific value because they complement the discoveries belonging to the late German population (half VI - beginning VII Centuries) in Transylvania, underlining the idea of existence in the Secaş area of a Gepida powerhouse. This would of course join those already known from Bratei, Morești, Alba Iulia și Fântânele.

The problems imposed by the extension of the Hungarian state and military organization of its borders in Transylvania X-XII centuries have been extensively debated, both of Hungarian researchers and Romanian scientists, relying in particular on the place names of historical and various attempts correlation with archaeological. The enlargement Hungarian medieval State profoundly marked the XIIth century in Transylvania.

The planimetric arrangement of the archaeological complexes researched at MS IV does not necessarily indicate a systematic organization of the settlement, the complexes are organized in „Nests" forming circles around the „Chiefs house" most likely. However, there is a complex that stands out in terms of discoveries, namely the rotonda church (C137-C138), around which we have more "white" points in where no discoveries were made. At the same time the complex has some special features mainly by the size of oversized compared to the rest discoveries, but also by the few but spectacular objects discovered in the complex.

Dwellings are alternated annexes, kilns pottery, household pits, which indicates that people have wanted to live in the vicinity of the premises in which they undergone their daily activities fact taken for granted especially in case of good weather conditions.

The alternation or the association of these “production areas” with houses may lead to the conclusion that those who worked there lived nearby them, in order to be able to keep a close watch on the technological flow. Placing the ovens at the periphery of the settlement is a normal fact due to fire hazard and this fact has also been noticed in other settlements of the same age in Transylvania. The existence of several traces of pole holes, pits, ditches and fireplaces that are not associated to houses may support the idea of people living in tents or iurta alongside with living in dug houses with stone ovens. The same clusters situated in the proximity of sunken houses with rock ovens, could represent traces of household annexes, blinds or protective screens against bad weather.

A number of 36 complexes were identified to have residential heating systems, which in turn were divided into several sub-categories depending on the features present: housing heating stone (stonemasonry), housing stoves (mason) and cooking ovens and the last sub-category is related to homes with furnaces cooking. By analysing these complex was intended primarily how that was accomplished construction, building materials used, utility construction, any special materials discovered, chronology, complex surface shape, virtually everything it could lead to an understanding more comprehensive over the study period.

The research data show that the settlement was left in an organized systematic manner, if we admit that the main role of population in the area was one of defending the border, it is very likely that the move may have occurred due to shifting defence line. There are no traces of rash desertion, no houses with usable inventory left within behind. It seems that those who have left the settlement have had enough time to recover all that they could use; furthermore they had time to dump the broken objects or those that were of no use anymore or that could not be carried in old source of material pits (turned into domestic pits) and to leave the habitations and the settlement clean. Regarding the analysis of ceramic material found in our settlement we can find strong analogies to Miercurea Sibiu-Băi (MSI) and Bratei, which indicates a similar chronology. The materials recovered in the settlement are rare. Most of the tools found are in an advanced state of decay, of course in this regard and time has left its mark, but given that there were found only a few pieces of metal to allow us even recognition tool itself we have to consider that rather the scrap pieces were discovered, that were no longer useful when the settlement was deserted, so they were abandoned.

Regarding the main occupations of the people in the community in Miercurea Sibiu IV we can conclude that they were horsemen, given the number 6 spurs discovered in the alignment, complete set of harness tracks. This activity is well suited to the breeding of cattle, unfortunately the current state of research, bone material has not been researched, and it is difficult to support this theory. Another specific activity of populations of riders is represented and defensive tasks that members of the settlement probably had them. This assumption is substantiated by the large number compared to the rest of the metal objects recovered attributed to knife blades, but also spear tip found. Another activity that people in the community certainly had is related to farming, citing the presence sickles and wrinkles, but also fishing, substantiated by the discovery of a load net and the presence of a river that crossed the settlement in addition to the course of the Secaş River. Meanwhile, the community certainly tissue practice because of the difficulty belonging to a loom, and other hardships of the same nature discovered. These findings remind us of a sedentary life in the settlement, also stated by the evolved potteries discovered, or the

presence of household annexes, which were used only at certain times of the year. Thus, discoveries made with the environment with the mild climate, the presence of salt nearby, diverse vegetation and fauna, soil elevation meet all necessary factors for the establishment of a municipality and to practice agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting and fishing.

On the oldest map of Transylvania (1532-1539), on the area of our concern there is a graphic symbol of a ruin and a string of forest, the entire area being named "*The country in front of the forest*". This ruin led to the name of the place in the German and the Romanian toponymy on most historic military maps (1769-1773, 1806 – 1869, 1869-1887, 1910 and 1916), under the form "*Biserica Alba*", "*Alba Ecclesia – Weisskirch - Albele*". At the same time, the string of forest appears on all these maps in association with toponymes reminding of a "defence forest". The present day and historic toponymy reminds of the historical presence in this area of a Szekely population (*Secaş, Zekesch, Zekeschdorf*). These groups of guardians of the border were moved in an organized manner at the middle of the 12th century in the eastern Transylvania, on the new alignment of the border of the Hungarian kingdom, while in their place, on the ancient *terra deserta*, the Transylvanian saxons were settled down, who placed themselves in serving, defending and supporting the crown.

The upper limit in terms of chronological timeframe of the settlement at Miercurea Sibiului IV is given by the discovery spurs, a bronze bracelet, medieval coin of Bela III, type of housing reviewed, analysed and the ceramics discovered here. We can safely say that we have researched medieval settlement upper chronological limit between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries AD.

We can then take into account a possible affiliation of this medieval settlement to a system responsible defensive, especially since in the vicinity were discovered three settlements (MSI already published MS II and MSV) arranged in line from V to E. Of course this information may be supplemented by analysis of the other two archaeological sites.

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