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Thesis of the PhD dissertation

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The medieval settlement history of the Csík basin

The dissertation analyses the medieval settlement history of the Csík-basin, which is located in East Transylvania, in formal Csík-seat. This region belonged to the easternmost frontier of the medieval Hungarian Kingdom. Csík appears in the written sources only in the first half of the 14th century, but even after the written data about its history is very seldom till the end of the 16th century, when the late medieval sources enumerate almost fifty settlements along the Olt-river. Due to the absence of historical data, the archaeological remains are essentially important for the early medieval settlement history of the region.

However the archaeological research of the medieval sites of Csík was underdeveloped during the last decades. This was caused mainly by the peripheral location, by the lack of local researchers and institutes, and also by political ideologies and financial possibilities. All this circumstances led to the fact that at the start of this work we could use just two reports of earlier excavations. The situation of researches regarding the medieval ecclesiastical monuments was a bit better, there were more papers available about the medieval architecture, altars, bells etc. of the region. Even so the literature of art history did not contain any report about mural investigations or earlier building phases of the churches. I could also collect valuable information from publications about historical place names.

After the Mongol invasion the Csík-basin was never affected so deep by military campaigns as the inner, west areas, therefore the villages and the population was continuous since then. The present data suggests that the medieval settlement system was preserved without major changes till the present times. Therefore any analyses regarding the medieval settlements and ecclesiastical topography of the Csík-basin could bring useful data not just for the local history, but also for the history of the whole Hungarian Kingdom. In the continuously catholic Csík-seat the medieval churches and their furniture and arrangements were preserved in higher proportion as in reformed regions, therefore Csík is a interesting territory for ecclesiastical topography and art history researches.

The main object of the present dissertation is to describe the key elements, factors and processes of the settlement history of Csík for the 10-16th centuries. To approach this aim I used the full available archaeological and written data, historical place names.

The dissertation is divided into nine chapters. First of them makes an *introduction* into the motivation, geographical and chronological frameworks of the research. In a separate chapter are presented the *phase of the researches* and main papers of local history, academic history, ecclesiastical history, art history, and historical place names. Afterwards I present the antecedents of the local archaeological researches and the main achievements of the recent archaeological activities. The chapter *Sources, and methods* (3.) describes the general background of the actual situation, then the characteristics of the archaeological material is presented grouped by materials of field surveys and excavations. During this work I analyzed the published ceramic material from the Árpád-period, and also using my own materials and observations I tried to make a tipo-chronological classification of the 11-13th century pottery for East Transylvania. The main conclusion of this attempt is that the early medieval pottery of Székely Land has no significant individual character, the “archaism” suggested in the literature and on formal discussions could not be proved. Based on analysis of several excavations and materials from certain archeological context (Malomfalva – Morești, Baráthely - Bratei, Kustaly - Ocland, Csobotfalva - Cioboteni, Csíkszentkirály - Sâncrăieni, Kolozsmonostor - Cluj Mănăștur,) the pottery of the Árpádian-period can be divided in three tipological and chronological groups (10-11., 11-12., 12-13. centuries). Naturally the boundary between these groups are flexible, one can calculate with regional differences, but the pottery from certain stratigraphy can be creditable used for sharper dating. I definitely agree with István Bona’s earlier opinion that there is no “Transylvanian pottery“, archaeologists should rather believe and use their own methods instead of adapting to exterior expectations. The chapter is closed with a short summary of other applied methods (C14, dendrochronology, geophysical surveys, aerial photography, and antropology). A important notice has to be made regarding the differences of methodology of the field surveys made during this work and the “official” regulations. In Hungary the archaeological topographies are generally focused on sites located outside the populated area. In Csík the remains of the medieval settlements can be found almost exclusively inside the villages, or in the close neighbourhood areas. This fact has important consequences on the efficiency of the surveys. Inside the settlements there are few such surfaces where sites can be found. In the rear gardens of the houses one can hardly find interpretable findings, so the limits of the located sites, their chronology remain often uncertain.

The next chapter (4.) deals with the historical place names. Analysing the place names of the written sources and old maps a important conclusion came to light. In the literature’s opinion the majority of the place names in Csík belong to a late type (place names formed from title of the churches, those with –falva suffix). In some cases there is certain proof that the “late” place name pushed out a earlier, “archaic” place name (pl. Bedecs → Szentimre, Csobod →

Csobotfalva). In fact the proportion of such “late” names hardly reached half of the place names, the other half can be considered “archaic”. Some of them even appeared in the first written data of the region (Rákos, Tarkő, Somlyó). The quarter of the place names derives from archaic personal names of the Árpád-period (Csobot, Kotormány, Csicsó) or has Slavic etymology. The personal names have chronologically different layers, so the birth of these place names with such origin can be dated before the end of the 13th century. Even if the correlation of different kind of data, archaeology and place names, is methodologically questionable, I presume that the archaic place names can be connected with the population of the 11-12th century testified by the archaeological findings.

Before the detailed presentation of the medieval sites, I attended to make a *reconstruction of the medieval environment*. Although there are very few archaeological about this topic, but some signs indicated that the pine monoculture of the present forests, the cold climate of the last centuries can't be re-projected in the medieval times. Botanical and pollen analysis revealed the flora, the forests of the basin were composed earlier also by deciduous species, among them oaks. According to written sources forests could have been found even among the lower parts of the basin, between the villages. Accentuated deforestation started in the late medieval period and continued till the present times so the lower forests disappeared totally, their places was took by large open fields. The disappearance of the deciduous forests was influenced both by anthropogenic intervention and natural climate factors and competition between species. During the small ice age pine occupied large territories from the oak forests. Even if Csík is located in mountain region, along the Olt-river in the flood in the medieval times the role of fishing was definitely more important in the artificially created ponds, fish-holding spots as presumed earlier.

One of the most important part of the thesis is the data base of the settlements. Here are listed all of the medieval settlements with collection of written sources, their medieval monuments, archaeological sites, and findings. Here are also presented the results of excavations. In case of medieval churches I collected the full published material about each object, but these were regularly completed with my own observations.

The next chapter (7.) is a cumulative paper evaluating the data of the previous chapters about *the elements of the medieval settlement system*. The migration period precedents are not completely clear. The historical research of the toponyms suggests a relatively large Slavic population before the Hungarian settlements, but this horizon is yet not properly defined by archaeological traces. Also requires further researches to define the origins and chronology of a new group find in Csíkszentkirály, which has no analogies in the Carpathian Basin.

The archaeological field data collection identified early findings in the majority of the researched villages, some of them even from the 11th century. More sites can be dated in the middle of the Árpád-period, so the formation of the village system can be dated in the 12th century. Some of these sites can be found inside the settlements, other near them, so the relation of these sites with the later villages is not clear. The geomorphology of the area is a important

factor, because the broad floodplains, mountains and forests strongly limited the proper areas for settlements. It could easily happen that a gradually increasing village subsequently expanded over a previous site-settlement.

This problem is strongly linked to the issue of separated settlement parts called by the literature *szegek* and tents – *tízesek*. These isolated small settlement parts are interpreted as sub-units of bigger villages with parish church. In the medieval sources however they appear as individual entities, villages. Their place names indicate the same definition. The other part of such isolated settlement parts, which are also called “tízesek”, were really sub-units of villages, but they were called “szegek”. The formation of the “szegek” started already in the 13th century, some of them reached lately an independent village status. Since the 16th century one can observe the process during which the major villages with parish church subordinated the smaller isolated villages, but these were first called “tízes” only since the 18th century. The term “tízes” was surely not the synonym of the “village” in medieval times, and never appears in medieval written sources. Concluding: the “tízes” had no role in the formation of the settlement system. In the 15-16th century in Csík-basin there were almost fifty villages. In many cases inside or nearby these villages there are more earlier sites, so in the Árpád-period we can count with at least similar settlement density.

The examination of the medieval *ecclesiastical organisation* produced a large number of observations regarding the history of the region. The first mention of the parish churches of Csík is connected with the papal list compiled between 1332-1337. Our archaeological investigations in six churches revealed that all churches mentioned in the 14th century, and even those which are missing the list, and have only late gothic visible parts, have early building periods. These phases however can be surely dated only very rarely. Some data suggests that the building of the first churches could have started already in the 12th century. There is a high possibility that by the end of the Árpád-period the local ecclesiastical organisation, formed by fifteen parishes was already in function. The number of churches is a strong argument even for the number of settlements described above. Near the churches one has to calculate with more filia villages, the mean proportion of churches and villages was 1:3, but some parish churches were used only by one, other by five village. The existence of early filia villages is suggested also by *topographical observations*. In many cases the parish church is located not in the centre of the settlement, but on the border, or in other cases even between the villages. In my opinion this can be explained by the fact that the building place was decided commonly by more participating settlements, so the approach had to be proper for more communities. The ecclesiastical organisation had a major impact also on the formation of the settlement system and place names. The newly formed villages around the church took the title of the church as their place names. If the church was built in an earlier village in some cases the ecclesiastical name displaced the old place names. The common conclusion of the archaeological excavations is that all churches had a unique building history, more complicated as thought earlier.

Near the parish churches the *medieval chapels* also played a great role in the religious life of the local communities. According to my collection in the late medieval period there were around fifteen medieval chapels in Csík, and the building of these chapels started in the 14th century. Some of them are located in outside the villages, others inside them, very probably to help the possibility of local masses in filia villages. Lately, in the 18-19th these chapels developed into parishes. The building and maintenance of the chapels is strongly connected with the local elite.

The *medieval manors* of the local elite are yet less known. The medieval primor families had no continuity to the present times, so the manors of the Andrásy-, Balaskó-, Becz-, Czakó-, Lázár-family after the disappearance of their owners became deserted and ruined. In the present there is not just one civil building with certain medieval parts, although the late medieval records mention dozens of strong families (primors) in the area. The vanishing of the medieval manors was accelerated also by the social-political conflicts between the Székelys with lower status and primors. The memory of the medieval manors is kept by place names such as “Kőházkert” (garden of stone house), and archaeological findings of a high material culture. The former manors were not mentioned in the written records so the only possibility to get more information about the residences of the local elite is the archaeological research, even if in some cases the attribution to a certain family itself is unclear. The excavation of the medieval manors started just a few years ago. The last excavations and geophysical surveys on two sites revealed that the manors of the Becz-family in Csíkkozmás - Cozmeni, and a other similar manor in Vacsárcsi - Văcărești, are placed in large plots, and have considerable size, with complex plans, composed by more buildings. According to some old drawings and photographs the vanished manors of Adrásy-family in Csíkszentkirály - Sâncrăieni, and Lázár-family in Csíkszenttamás - Tomești, had similar plans. In some cases the exact location of the manors are not known. The establishment of the manors ca be dated ion the 15th century. So far there are no information about the residence of the earlier, 13-14th century elite.

Based on the available archaeological evidence these residence can not be located in the *medieval castles*. In Csík there are five such fortified places where based on the mortared stone walls, the medieval definition can be accepted. These castles however have very simple plans, without interior buildings. Only in two cases regular anomalies of the surface suggests quadratic shaped buildings, but none of these was certified by archaeological investigation. Appreciable findings came to light only from this two castles, the pottery remains date the building of the fortresses in the 13th century, and their final abandon in the 14th century. The castles are totally missing from the written records, therefore historical interpretation is hard to be made. Due to the isolated location, hard accessibility they were surely not border forts. Some of them are quite small, so a community refuge function is also not probable. One has to know, that there is no positive data speaking about that the Székelys ever build a castle on Székely territory in medieval times. In my opinion these refugee castles belonged to the local elite, so they were parts of noble possessions. After or during the establishment of the Székely community the

former social and military situation was radically changed, the owners disappeared and the castles were abandoned. Near the uncertain historical background, the castles have important aspects for the settlement history: the existence of the castles suppose many contemporary villages, so in the area of these objects we have to calculate with populated territory in the 13th century.

However *the establishment of the Székely community* in the Csík-basin is not documented in the records, and it can not be proved by archaeological data. Therefore we have to examine a larger area to understand the historical background. Based on the archaeological material of East Transylvania it seems that this region went through similar processes as the western areas. In the middle of the Árpád-period the settlement system was already stable. Among the villages the first castles and churches were also finished. The circulation of the coins shows regular connections between the different regions. In some records South-East Transylvania appears as *desertum*, but also these records mention at the same times churches and place names, so the area was surely not unpopulated. The first data about the Székely's movement towards East is dated in 1213. By the middle of the 13th century there is data about Székely nobles getting possessions from the king, and in the beginning of the next century such possessions are mentioned even in the close neighbourhood of the Csík-basin, or even inside it. The donation of a such possession was actually prevented by some Székely persons from Csík.

If we place our previous archaeological data and other observations in these circumstances the history of the Csík-basin can be summarised as follows. The first signs of the medieval settlements inside the basin appear in the 11th century, although the formation of the settlement system can be dated in the 12th century. Among the inhabitants some persons had heavier armaments, and horseman equipment so they belonged probably to frontier guards. In the 13th century the population was already stratified, some even could build refugee castles. Major changes occurred with the settle of the Székelys. The former political and social organisation gradually disappeared, the possessions vanished, the castles got abandoned. According to the place names deep changing can be reconstructed in the ecclesiastical and settlement system. By the beginnings of the 14th century Csík belonged to the Telegdi archidiaconate. The contemporary settlement, ecclesiastical and administrative system was preserved till the late medieval and in some aspects till the present times. The local elite, the primors started to build stone manors from the 15th century, but their use already ended mostly in the 17th century. In the 16th century started a longer process in the hierarchy of the villages, so some former independent villages lost their identity and became sub-units of bigger settlements which were called later as "tízsek".

Excavations

Medieval churches: Csíksomlyó/Csobotfalva (2002-2005.), Csíkszenttamás (2002-2003.), Csíkszentkirály (2002.), Csíkminsztent (2005.), Csíkszentdomokos (2006.), Csíkmenaság (2007.), Szépvíz (2010), Csíkkarcfalva (2011-2012.), Csíkszentimre (2012.)

Medieval settlements and manors: Kotormány (2007-2008.), Csíkszentkirály - Poklondfalva (2009), Csíkkozmás (2009-2011.), Csíksomlyó/Csobotfalva (2011.), Vacsárcsi (2012.)

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