

VIII. 'FROM DACIA TO ULTRASILVANIA'

THE SETTLEMENT-HISTORICAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE SOMEȘUL MIC VALLEY BETWEEN THE 3rd/4th AND THE 12th/13th CENTURIES AD

I. INTRODUCTION. THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

The principal aim of the present study is the critical assessment and systematization of the archaeological sites and finds (settlements, cemeteries, hoards, and isolated finds) dated between the 3rd/4th and 12th/13th centuries AD in the microregion of the Someșul Mic (Hu: Kis-Szamos) Basin. A further aim is the evaluation of the region's archaeological characteristics and its transformations over the respective centuries. Due to the geographic and hydrographic features of the area, along with the Mureș Valley, it was the main contact region between the Transylvanian Basin and the Great Hungarian Plain during the 1st millennium AD, both in cultural and economic terms.

II. THE GEOGRAPHIC FEATURES OF THE MICROREGION

Starting from its main headwater, the Someșul Cald River (Hu: Meleg-Szamos), the Someșul Mic Valley is 178 km long, stretching from the Bihorului and Gilăului Mountains (part of the Apuseni Mountain Range) to the north-western part of the Transylvanian Plain (Ro: Câmpia Transilvaniei, Hu: Mezőség), its width ranging between 20 and 60 km. The two headwaters of the river are the Someșul Cald and the Someșul Rece which converge near Gilău (Hu: Gyalu). Its main tributaries on the right side are the Feneș (Hu: Fenes-patak), Gădălin (Hu: Kötelendi-patak), Fizeș (Hu: Füzes-patak) streams on the right side, and the Căpuș (Hu: Kapus-patak), Nadăș (Hu: Nádas-patak), Chintenilor (Hu: Kajántó-patak), Feiurdei (Hu: Fejérdi-patak), Borșa (Hu: Borsa-patak), Lonea (Hu: Lóna-patak), and Lujerdiu (Hu: Lozsárdi-patak) Streams on the left side. The highest point of the basin is the Muntele Mare Ridge (Hu: Öreg-havas) with 1827 m above sea level, the lowest (234 m) being situated at the confluence of the Someșul Mic with the Someșul Mare River (Hu: Nagy-Szamos).

The Someșul Mic River gave rise to a valley stretching from Gilău to Dej with heights ranging between 234 and 400 m above sea level. The valley comprising of the floodplain and the first three terraces reaches a width of 4–5 km in certain points and suddenly narrows down in other areas depending on the hardness of the rock encountered by the river. The drainage basin of the Someșul Mic River is bordered from the north by the southern, sedimentary units of the Someș Plateau (Ro: Podișul Someșului, Hu: Szamos menti-hátság): the Păniceni-Huedin Hills (Hu: Kalotaszegi-dombság), and the Cluj and Dej Hills with heights reaching 500–600 m. Its southern border comprises of the Feleacului Hills which also represents the watershed between the Someșul Mic and Arieș Rivers (Hu: Aranyos), having a length of 20 km and an east–west orientation. The northern part of the Feleacului range is divided by the deep valleys of the smaller tributaries belonging to the Someșul Mic (FEIER 2010, 55–56) (Figs. 1–7).

The region under scrutiny is quite deficient in natural metal resources with the possible exception of certain gold and silver deposits. Although it has been shown that the gold and silver mines from Someșul Rece (Hu: Hideg-Szamos) and Căpușu Mic (Hu: Magyarkiskapus) are indeed medieval (WANEK 2016a, 487–488; WANEK 2017b, forthcoming), their exploitation before the Angevin period is unlikely.

The most important mineral resource of the Someșul Mic Basin is salt. Hitherto a number of six surface or near-surface salt domes are known in this region (Fig. 8; Maps 1–6): Someșeni–Dezmir (Hu: Szamosfalva–Dezmér), Gheorgheni–Pata (Hu: Györgyfalva–Kolozsapata), Cojocna (Hu: Kolozs), Sic (Hu: Szék), Nireș (Hu: Szásznýires), and Ocna Dejului – Dej (Hu: Désakna–Dés) (DUMITRESCU 1968). Presumably these mines were already active during the Roman times although the earliest clear information dates to the 11th–13th centuries (MAGHIAR–OLTEANU 1970, 61–62, 115–117; MAGYAR Bányászati 1997, 47–54; WANEK 2016b, 34–40).

In addition to these large salt domes, at least fifty smaller salt deposits are known in the area (CZEKELIUS 1854, 45–53; BERNÁTH 1880, 202–215). Salt was not merely a trading commodity, but also a staple product used by the mostly self-sufficient local communities, especially in the case of salt wells. The salt resources surely determined

the evolution of the settlement network in virtually all periods. According to Gábor Vékony, the system of salt trade already developed during the Avar Khaganate (VÉKONY 2004, 655–661), although we have no reason to presume that this did not occur even earlier. While the use of brine in trade was surely limited to instances of raw material exchange and low distance commerce, rock salt was regularly used as currency in transactions throughout most of the historical periods (Fig. 8).

III. THE STATE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE SOMEȘUL MIC AREA

This section engages in the analysis of the archaeological informational base available with regard to the Someșul Mic region during the aforementioned interval through the review of the archaeological research and publications regarding settlements and cemeteries.

Hitherto a total of 259 sites and stray finds dated to the period under scrutiny were identified in 187 modern-day townships comprising two fortifications, thirty-eight settlements and forty-one cemeteries, while in further seven cases we are dealing with potential settlements. Surface surveys (field walking) and occasional archaeological surveys have brought to light a number of 101 so-called 'culture layers' indicating deposits formed by habitation during a certain period. The list also contains four hoards, while the largest category is composed by the stray finds represented in sixty-six cases (see Figs. 48–51).

The surveys carried out in the settlements (a total of thirty-eight) have produced far less finds than the cemetery excavations (see Figs. 52–53). Indeed the lion's share of research has focused on the cemeteries, which produced 1754 burials in a total of forty-one cemeteries or burial grounds, with forty-four incineration graves and 1710 inhumation burials.

With regard to the state of publication of the sites, the situation is far from favourable. All in all only the results pertaining to four site complexes were published extensively, two of which (Stolna [Hu: Isztolna] – Podurile Domnești i.e. site no. 55, and Florești [Hu: Szászfenes] – Polus Center/Șapca Verde i.e. site no. 171/A) were researched as part of the rescue excavations leading up to the construction of the Transylvanian motorway. Among the excavations systematically financed by the state over many decades (1950–2010) hitherto only two were published (Țaga [Hu: Cege] – Hrube/Sub Hrube site i.e. no. 23/A–B). Notwithstanding the relatively high amount of researched cemeteries, unfortunately in virtually all cases the informational value of the publications is less than satisfactory (see Figs. 62–63). This situation is best reflected by the fact that out of 1754 burials, only 1080 were actually published, while anthropological analyses were carried out in only 61 cases (Figs. 64–65).

It is safe to say that the state of research of the 259 sites and stray finds spanning across nearly a millennium is quite deficient. This is primarily mirrored in the incomplete field surveys, the lack of finds processing, and of anthropological, and archaeozoological analysis, amounting to systemic shortages in the handling of the archaeological heritage of the region. All the same certain positive developments must also be underlined. Owing to the major infrastructural works undertaken during the last decade and a half, a large number of new sites have emerged, bringing about good quality field research and high standard publications (Jucu de Sus [Hu: Felsőzsuk] – Râtul Boilor/Tetarom III, sites I–III, Vlaha [Hu: Magyarfenes] – Pad, Iclod [Hu: Nagyiklód] – Pământul Vlădicii, site 'D', Florești – Polus Center/Șapca Verde).

IV. THE EVOLUTION OF THE SOMEȘUL MIC BASIN FROM AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

With regard to the long-term evolution of the region under scrutiny the following aspects are discussed in detail: -

1. the effect of the natural resources on the evolution of the settlement network from the collapse of the Roman administration to the founding of the Hungarian Kingdom;
2. the question of continuity and discontinuity at a multidimensional level and the chronology of the archaeological material;
3. the interpretation of phenomena related to population movement (migration);
4. the diffusion of Christianity in the area;
5. the question of the 11th century power centres, more precisely the issue concerning the first North Transylvanian county seat (Dăbâca [Hu: Doboka] or Cluj-Napoca – Mănăștur [Hu: Kolozsmonostor]).

1. The Effect of the Natural Resources on the Evolution of the Settlement-Network from the End of the Roman Administration to the Founding of the Hungarian Kingdom

A further decisive factor which determined the settlement network in the region under scrutiny, besides the hydrographic realities and the natural resources of the area, were the remnants of the Roman infrastructure, especially the road system and the presence of the only major conurbation of the region: Napoca. In the centuries following the end of the Roman administration, subsequent power centres were established in the area by the 'Gepids' and the Conquest period 'Hungarians', followed later by medieval Arpadian town also founded within the confines of the former Roman city. The ancient road network which converged on Napoca was therefore put to use during the Arpadian period and beyond.

It is self-evident that the Roman settlement network in this part of the province was centred around Napoca. Due to the overlapping of the ancient, the medieval and the modern city ground plans, very little is known concerning the topography of the Roman city. Hitherto, archaeological data regarding two cemeteries belonging to the town are available (see HICA-CÎMPEANU 1977, 221–222, 230). The archaeological literature conventionally refers to these as 'late-Roman' and 'post-Roman' necropolises established or at least still in use during the 4th century AD based on the reuse of dismantled gravestones. The argument made in the book is that the line of reasoning based solely on the recycling of dismantled funerary monuments is fallacious, as similar phenomena were quite common during the existence of the province, probably due to shortages in the stone supply in certain periods, probably towards the end of Roman rule. The retreat of the Roman administration and army eventually caused the substantial reduction of the settlement network and the gradual decay of the infrastructure.

The existing data indicates that the areas with considerable Roman infrastructure in the vicinity of Napoca continued to be inhabited. Furthermore the cemetery from Pălatca (Hu: Magyarpalatka) established in the proximity of a number of salt wells indicates a clear link between the natural resources and the birth of new settlements (see Map 2).

Conversely the occurrence of sites belonging to the 5th–6th centuries usually does not seem to be determined by the existence of major elements of Roman infrastructure in the area, as many of them were identified on the terraces or hills of secondary valleys where no Roman settlements are known. All the same, the numerous cemeteries identified in the area of Cluj, especially along the tributaries of the Someșul Mic indicate the existence of a dense settlement network (see Map 3).

Notwithstanding the obvious changes in material culture and funerary habits, in terms of the settlement patterns the situation is similar in the case of the period between the 7th and 9th/10th centuries. The principal difference concerns the size of the settlement area which has increased considerably during the respective interval, with sites located at some distance from the Someșul Mic Valley such as Lăpuștești (Hu: Felsőszamos) and Șardu (Hu: Magyarsárd) (see Map 4). Conversely, sites belonging to the 10th century hitherto could only be identified within the confines of modern-day Cluj-Napoca (Hu: Kolozsvár) and in the surroundings of Dej (Hu: Dés) (see Map 5). The settlement network was radically changed in the 11th century with the emergence of totally new political, military, economic, and clerical structures, most notably the founding of the Benedictine monastery at Cluj-Napoca – Mănăștur.

2. The Question of Continuity–Discontinuity at a Multidimensional Level and the Chronology of the Archaeological Material

Studies that put forward comprehensive analysis of the evolution of microregions over multiple centuries based on the typo-chronological assessment of the archaeological finds assemblages pertaining to these regions are quite rare in the archaeological literature concerning Transylvania. The ultimate goal of such an enterprise is the assessment of the evolution and the dynamics of the settlement network, the funerary practices, and the various external influences in the material culture, thus allowing for the evaluation of various instances of continuity and discontinuity over the period under scrutiny. This subject is closely linked to the question of 19th century nationalism, nation-building, and the nation-state (GELLNER 1983; HOBBSAWM 1997; ANDERSON 2006). This is reflected in archaeology by the constant tendency of homogenisation (GELLNER 1983, 6; BOIA 1997, 157) in the interpretation of the finds assemblages in keeping with the sovereign territories of modern nation-states and the discounting of our understanding of long-term archaeological phenomena at a microregional level and indeed the rejection of the microregional perspective in general. This is closely linked with the concept that views the archaeological cultures as ethnically homogenous communities.

With regard to the Someșul Mic Basin, the discussion is centred on the following aspects of continuity and discontinuity during the respective period:

- A. The effect of to the former Roman province of Dacia on the human habitation in the region
- B. Aspects of settlement archaeology
- C. Aspects regarding funerary practices

This approach clearly indicates the multifarious nature of the question of continuity and discontinuity, with several aspects overlapping, while others reflecting contradictory evolutions. Moreover our understanding of these processes are heavily influenced by the Romanization paradigm, the acculturation model put forward at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (FREEMAN 1993, 438–445; SANTA 2017, forthcoming).

The abandonment of Roman Dacia by the imperial authorities in 271 AD or possibly two decades earlier effectively meant the end of Roman civilisation in the region. With no administration in place and without public financial resources, the means of sustaining the cities and their infrastructure were no longer available. Furthermore the industrial infrastructure was also depleted and the province was disengaged from the long-distance trade network which up to then maintained the supply chain of 'Roman' commodities into Dacia. As mentioned above, the infrastructure of the former Roman province, especially the roads, played an important role in the development of the post-Roman and medieval settlement network. As such, the Someșul Mic Valley continued to be the central artery of the communication system in this part of Transylvania just as during the Roman period (see Maps 1–11).

The settlement network developed under the Roman administration disappeared gradually following the abandonment. This process of a rural transformation probably took a few decades and had serious demographical implications. Consequently it can be said that with regard to the settlement network the discontinuity between the Roman and post-Roman period is quite clear (see LĂZĂRESCU 2015, 12–16). This is further corroborated by instances in which 4th century sunken houses discovered inside the ruins of Roman buildings e.g. in Chinteni (Hu: Kajántó) – Tulgheș/Tölgyes and Suceag (Hu: Szucság) – Orat/Órád. A similar level of discontinuity can be asserted in the case of the settlement structure of the 11th century. A set of fortifications which emerged during the respective century, such as Cluj-Napoca – Mănăștur, Dăbâca and possibly Cuzdrioara (Hu: Kozárvár) set the tone for a new wave of urbanization and can effectively be viewed as the precursors of the medieval cities (FÜGEDI 1994, 710–711).

With regard to the changes occurred in the funerary practices it must be underlined that there are virtually no instances of continuity of Roman period cemeteries. The 4th century incineration burials from Baciú (Hu: Kisbács) and Suatu (Hu: Magyaraszovát) – Somoș/Somoșa as well as the inhumation graves oriented north–south and south–north from Cluj-Napoca – Mănăștur – Calea Florești and Pălatca – Tag display totally different funerary practices compared with the earlier funerary horizon linked with the Sântana de Mureș (Hu: Maroszentanna) Culture (see BÓNA 1988, 118–120, fig. 7; LĂZĂRESCU 2015, 100: Fig. 62.) (Map 2; Fig. 66). Based on the current state of the research, a similar cleavage can be asserted between the funerary customs of the 4th and the 5th centuries. Funerary finds dated unequivocally to the Hun period are hitherto unknown in the Someșul Mic Basin. The latter half of the 5th century displays changes in the archaeological scenery that at the moment can only be explained with the influx of a new population. The princely graves from Apahida as well as the Someșeni (Hu: Szamosfalva) hoard dated to this period indicate that this region was home to probably the most important power centre in the eastern half of the Carpathian Basin. Moreover the persons buried in the Apahida I and II graves display the hallmarks of international elite representation. A series of development-led archaeological excavations carried out in the region (e.g. Vlaha – Pad, Florești – Polus Center/Șapca Verde, Iclod) prompted the reconsideration of earlier notions with regard to the shifting significance of the area in the context of the regional power relations of the 6th century. The analysis of the cemeteries clearly indicates that the region retained its political significance until at least the first three decades of the 6th century (Map 3; Fig. 66).

Although there are still debates with regard to the chronology, it is rapidly becoming evident that around the turn of the 6th and 7th centuries, i.e. during the early-Avar period, the so-called '*Reihengräberfelder*' horizon (DOBOS 2011, 171–206; DOBOS 2013, 247–263) is replaced in the Someșul Mic Basin by a new funerary horizon defined by incineration graves. This marked discontinuity is also evident in the changes within the material culture of the period, and can either be attributed to rapid transformations in the composition of the population or to outside influence in the form of acculturation or integration (see Map 4; Fig. 66).

With regard to the 10th century, the distribution map of the cemeteries in the Someșul Mic Basin highlights the total lack of inhumation burials with modest funerary inventory as well as the low incidence of burials

overwhelmingly containing the weapons and parts of the deceased's horse, such as the ones discovered in and around Cluj-Napoca (GÁLL 2013a, Vol. I: 826–831, 911–915; GÁLL 2013e, 461–481).

This indicates a chronological hiatus between the horizon of incineration burials and the churchyards which emerged at the turn of the 11th and 12th centuries, which in turn may suggest the cohabitation between the newly arrived and the local population (Map 5; Fig. 66). It is likely that the population linked with the incineration graves was integrated (rather than annihilated) into the new political, military and economic structure by the Conquest period Hungarian 'steppe-state' (POHL 2003, 272). It is therefore in our view potentially precocious to place the end date of the incineration burials from Northern Transylvania to the 9th century without any solid evidence.

At any rate, the immense gap between the funerary practice and material culture of the 7th–9th, the 10th, and the 11th–13th century is quite startling, and was hitherto explained in terms of population influx and migration. In many cases however it is more likely that we are dealing instead with acculturation processes and the consequences of changes in the power structures. This can at least partly be inferred with regard to the region under scrutiny here (see Map 6; Fig. 66).

3. The Question of Migration in the Someșul Mic Basin

Migration as a sociological phenomenon is as old as humankind itself (HAUTZINGER–HEGEDÜS–KLENNER 2014, 5, 18), however the notion was generally adopted as a topic of investigations by historians from representatives of the German classical studies school (hence the term '*Völkerwanderung*'). The investigation of the phenomenon was for a long time profoundly influenced by the frame of mind of Romanticism, prompting Stefan Burmeister to assert that 'A striking gap is revealed here between archaeological research and that of the other social sciences' (BURMEISTER 2000, 539). Consequently it can be said that the phenomenon of migration is atemporal as it periodically crops up being fuelled by external factors and the predilection for mobility of human communities. Among the most common external factors that drive migration, the following stand out: 1) existential hardship, 2) natural and political calamities, and 3) the drive for conquest, usually on the part of the elites. Notwithstanding the relative nature of the notion, in terms of the geographical distances involved, three categories can be determined: 1) short-range, 2) mid-range, and 3) long-range migration. These can involve both small and large groups of people.

Migration is not necessarily restricted to groups of individuals, as there are cases of certain institutions and political structures actively taking part in the process. This is especially common in the case of Asian political structures. Instances involving the migration of political institutions and the related population with regard to the Carpathian Basin can be inferred in the case of the Avar Khaganate and the Hungarian Principality (POHL 2003, 272–273). A similar process took place with the implantation of the western order in the 11th–12th centuries (LASZLOVSKY 2004, 337–349).

The question is, what particular cases of migration can be identified in the Someșul Mic Basin between the end of the Roman administration and the 12th/13th century? The first such case occurred subsequently after the abandonment of the Roman province which became the target of several waves of migration dislocating population groups that found themselves in its way (see e.g. the cemeteries at Pălatca – Tag/Coastă, Suatu – Somoșa/Somosa).

A possible instance of institutional migration can be inferred in the case of the Gepid power centre at Apahida hallmarked by the famous princely graves and connected to a number of other finds around Cluj-Napoca (BÓNA 1988, 146; HOREDŢ 1958a, 80–81). The sudden increase of burials dated to the latter half of the 5th century is conventionally linked to an influx of population, i.e. migration (Florești – Polus Center/Șapca Verde, Sânpaul [Hu: Szentpál] site no. 9, Cluj-Napoca – Memorandumului, Vlaha – Pad, and Iclod).

The incineration grave horizon emerged in the early-7th century (Dorolțu [Hu: Nádasdaróc] – Dâmbu Mic) can probably be attributed, as mentioned above, to a new wave of migration (BÓNA 1988, 181), similarly to the 7th–8th century tumular incineration burials which according to some researchers indicates a population influx (STANCIU 1999, 245–263; STANCIU 2016, 142, Fig. 25–26).

The next clear instance of migration which changed the political power structures of the region was the Hungarian Conquest (GÁLL 2013a, Vol. I: 826–831, 911–915; GÁLL 2013e, 461–481) subsequently followed by the 'westernization' of the political structures (NYÁRÁDI–GÁLL 2015, 96–98). This was accompanied by further waves of inward migration into the Someșul Mic Basin especially with the establishment of new power centres at Cluj-Napoca – Mănăștur and Dăbâca (KRISTÓ 2002, 93). The arrival of the Benedictines clearly meant the implantation of a major western clerical structure into the newly organised land (LASZLOVSKY 2004, 337–349).

Some of the migration cases highlighted above imply a strong sense of uncertainty, mainly due to the limits of the archaeological methods, which became obvious in such cases. It is our view that considerable progress regarding this subject is conditioned to the implementation of chemical investigations, mainly strontium isotope analysis (see Fig. 67).

4. The Question of Christianity in the Someșul Mic Basin from the Post-Roman Period to the Beginning of the Arpadian Age

One of the central aspects regarding the evolution and distribution of Christianity between the 3rd and the 10th century is the fact that the Christian identity had not yet reached a fully consolidated state at this stage (BROWN 1999; MARKUS 2010), being susceptible to various changes and shifts in its belief system and its expression. Accordingly, the main question concerns the possibilities and pitfalls of identifying instances of Christian identity and belief with archaeological methods. Indeed can we speak at all of archaeological finds and contexts clearly indicating belonging to a religious community in this period? The assertion put forward by Karl Mannheim that the transplantation of symbols and belief systems from one socio-cultural context to another significantly alters their meaning and function, is highly pertinent in this case (MANNHEIM 1995, 176). Accordingly, it must be underlined that the imported objects bearing Christian symbols such as lamps or cross necklaces, cannot be readily associated with the potential Christian identity of their owners as it is highly likely that their meaning underwent a process of transformation in the new cultural environment in which they entered the archaeological record. This notion is closely linked with the results of the investigations carried out by Ádám Bollók, which are outlined below. Firstly, it is important to emphasize the apotropaic function of the cross, similarly to other non-Christian symbols worn as necklaces during Antiquity as protection against demons (BOLLÓK 2016, 133, 135). It is therefore safe to say that the pagan practice was adopted by the Christian belief and over time it has replaced it with its own symbols which were also meant to contrast the pagan amulets (e.g. stamped glass bells). The crosses as Christian symbols spread in the Eastern Mediterranean already during the 5th century, followed by the Balkans and reached the Carpathian Basin in the 10th–11th century (BOLLÓK 2016, 137). For a long time pagan symbols cohabitated with Christian representations as shown by the evidence of the grave goods.

The identification of objects actively linked with the Christian faith within the material culture of the Transylvanian Basin during the 3rd and the 10th century is totally dependent on the researcher's critical attitude. That is not to say that the sheer existence of Christian communities is excluded, but rather that it is unverifiable with archaeological means. At any rate, the lack of any proof regarding Christian institutional structures means that the existence of any hypothetical community sharing this religious belief can only be viewed as transitory. Without the corresponding institutional system, it is unfeasible to talk about Christianity in the Carpathian Basin on the same terms as in the Byzantine Empire. Implicitly, there is no argument for the existence of Christian communities in the Someșul Mic Basin between the 4th and the 10th century based on the archaeological record, as not a single find from this region can be clearly linked with the expression of the respective faith.

The situation changed dramatically in the 11th century with the emergence in Transylvania of institutionalised Christianity accompanied by its most clear physical expression: the church. In contrast with vernacular Christianity, the institutional expression of the faith displays a conspicuous presence in the Someșul Mic Basin in this period represented by numerous churches and church cemeteries. Furthermore the process of diffusion of church cemeteries from certain focal points to the periphery can also be traced starting with the latter half of the 11th century. All the same, not a single clearly Christian object (e.g. crosses)⁶⁸⁰ could hitherto be identified from the over 1100 burials within the churchyards of the Someșul Mic region. Based on the later evolution of these cemeteries, it is possible to assert that the beginnings of institutional Christianity in the territory under scrutiny here cannot be dated before the 11th century, furthermore at the moment there is not enough data to support the unequivocal existence of large-scale vernacular Christian practices.

⁶⁸⁰ The presence of crosses in the burials of this age from the Carpathian Basin are extremely rare, and as asserted by Mária Vargha, they probably reflect past traditions (VARGHA 2015, 59, 61).

5. The Question of the 11th Century Power Centres. Where was the First North Transylvanian County Seat: Dăbâca or Cluj-Napoca – Mănăștur?

The present study argues that contrary to the opinion expressed by historian Gyula Kristó (KRISTÓ 2002, 119–133), the county seat was most likely situated at Cluj-Napoca – Mănăștur. This assertion is based on the following arguments:

1. The first phase of the fort at Dăbâca, dated to the early-11th century is merely a small triangular earth-and-timber fortification, its perimeter roughly measuring 50' 50' 10 m, and as such, less suitable for the position of county seat compared with the much more impressive Cluj-Napoca – Mănăștur fort measuring 220' 100 m (BÓNA 2001, 84).

2. The somewhat isolated location of Dăbâca, placed at a considerable distance from both the salt mines and their transportation route (most likely in the Someș River) again renders it unsuitable for the position of county seat.

3. From a strategic point of view the situation of Cluj-Napoca, placed at a crucial cross-roads is extremely favourable in the period, as shown by the countless 5th–6th century (DOBOS 2017, 412–413) and Conquest period burial grounds along the Roman roads (GÁLL 2013a, Vol. I: 826–831, 911–915; GÁLL 2013e, 461–481). By comparison, the location of Dăbâca is quite peripheral.

4. The churchyards at Dăbâca are somewhat later and their inventory is poorer than the ones from Cluj-Napoca – Mănăștur (GÁLL 2013f, 183: Fig. 35–36).

5. The situation from the 10th century is similar, the multitude of warrior burials from around Cluj-Napoca (GÁLL 2013a, Vol. I: 826–831, 911–915; GÁLL 2013e, 461–481) is contrasted by the lack of such finds in the valley of the Lonea Stream.

These observations are corroborated by the visibility analysis carried out in the case of both fortifications in ArcGis Spatial Analyst Tool as part of the European Commission's Copernicus Program, and based on the Digital Surface Modell ('DSM'), implemented in the framework of the same programme. The measurements were undertaken from an above-ground height of 1.8 m with a vertical range of -90°–90° and a horizontal range of 0°–360°. The results have shown that in the case of Cluj-Napoca – Mănăștur the fortification enabled the visibility onto the eastern and western part of the Someșul Mic Valley, to the territories north of Gilău and Someșeni, as well as to the entrances into the valleys of the smaller tributaries of the river (with the exception of the Nadăș Stream). In comparison, the visibility offered by the Dăbâca fortification was limited to a radius of approx. 1.5 km, much of the Lonea Stream Valley (its south-eastern and north-western side) without the point of junction with the Someșul Mic River. Accordingly, the fortification at Cluj-Napoca – Mănăștur offered a considerably larger visibility on the area, again indicating that it enjoyed a much more important strategic role in the control of the region. All in all it seems increasingly likely that the fortification at Cluj-Napoca – Mănăștur was effectively the most important 11th century county seat in Northern Transylvania.