

## NOTES ON THE EARLY CHURCH ORGANISATION IN NORTHERN TRANSYLVANIA (10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> CENTURY)

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A number of historiographical contributions have focused, during the last decades, on identifying the siege of the earliest Catholic bishopric in Transylvania. Most of the approaches have noted that, unlike the other nine bishoprics attributed to the age of King Stephen the Saint, the Transylvanian bishopric was the only one bearing the name of an entire province, and not that of the bishop's siege<sup>1</sup>. It has been assumed that, at the time of its constitution, this bishopric still had no precise and permanent headquarters, but only an itinerant one. In any case, between its establishment and its first historical mention – be it the one in 1081<sup>2</sup>, or the more credible others from the 12<sup>th</sup> century –, the bishopric's headquarters had already moved to Alba Iulia from a possible different initial location, somewhere in northern Transylvania. The unclear initial location of the bishop's residence made thus possible the above mentioned impact on its very name, causing to the bishopric to receive the denomination of the entire province its members were preaching in, and not that of its place of residence.

One cannot identify the initial residence of Transylvania's bishopric without heeding the epoch it was established in. The analysis of the toponyms like: *gyepü / presaca* [fence line], *kapu / căpuș / poarta / porț* [gate, passage], *ör / straja* [watch point], *reci / recea* [ditch, trench]<sup>3</sup>, mentioned in the historical documents or still present in the Northern-Transylvanian toponymy, provides enough evidence to identify a territorial structure which is, probably, the first area of Hungarian domination in northern Transylvania. Its western limit was the line of the Meseș Mountains, already mentioned by Anonymous' *Gesta Hungarorum*, the eastern one a line of *indagines* [fence lines] stretching in between Bonț and Mociu, and its

<sup>1</sup> Jakó, Zs., ed., *Erdélyi okmánytár: Oklevelek, levelek és más írásos emlékek Erdély történetéhez / Codex diplomaticus Transsylvaniae: Diplomata, epistolae et alia instrumenta litteraria res Transylvanas illustrantia*, I (1023–1300), Budapest, 1997, no. 17: *episcopus Ultrasilvanus* (1185–1195), etc.

<sup>2</sup> Kristó Gy., *Ardealul timpuriu (895–1324)* [Early Transylvania, 895–1324], Szeged, 2004, p. 128–129.

<sup>3</sup> T. Sălăgean, *Țara lui Gelou. Contribuții la istoria Transilvaniei de Nord în secolele IX–XI* [The Realm of Gelou. Contributions to the history of Northern Transylvania in 9<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries], Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p. 103–112.

southern the watershed between the hydrographical basins of Someșul Mic and Arieș rivers. The fence line Unguraș-Cătina, also very well mirrored by the historical toponymy, needs to be interpreted as a result of the territorial expansion of the Hungarian rule in northern Transylvania during the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>.

This early Hungarian realm superseded a confederation of three not very large territorial units, representing valleys and clusters of valleys – a type of organisation that characterizes the political structures in this area and period. The internal limits of these units can also be found in the toponymy. They follow the valleys of (I) upper Someșul Mic and Nadășu rivers, (II) Almaș river and (III) Borșa, Lona and Lujerdiu rivers<sup>5</sup>. Partially, they were preserved after the Hungarian conquest, and were employed in the territorial delimitations of the archidiaconates and counties attested in the region as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In the last two of the above mentioned territorial units of this early “Transylvanian realm” (*terra ultrasilvana*), the localities with a Hungarian majority were mere exceptions.

The most important unit, where the political centre of this “Transylvanian realm” resided, was that in the upper Someșul Mic and Nadăș valleys. This is where we can find the greatest number of localities with a significant percentage of Hungarian population in the whole northern Transylvania, gathered in a compact group (see figure 2)<sup>6</sup>. This conglomerate – which expanded, including its westernmost and southernmost prolongations, to the accessible and fertile regions of the upper Someș Mic basin (I., figure 1) – indicates, very probably, *the earliest Hungarian settlement in Transylvania*. Such massive early colonisation could only have occurred in a territory annexed after a full scale military victory that would have completely wasted and replaced previous ownership. The Hungarian groups present in some of the localities in units II and III (figure 1) might have come about at a later date, either in relation to the development of royal castles’ system, or to the process of constitution of noblemen’s courts.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 114–126.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 130/167. There may have been two more besides the main three units: the *Agrij valley* (IV, figure 1), which might have been rather a protection area under the supervision of the defenders of the *indagine* line from the Meseș hills, and the *Căianu Valley* (V, fig. 1), a marginal unit probably subordinated to the rulers of the area Cluj-Gilău.

<sup>6</sup> B. Crăciun, I. Bolovan, *Consignatio statistico topographica singulorum in magno principato Transylvaniae (Transilvania la 1829–1831)*, Cluj-Napoca, 2003; T. Rotariu, ed., *Recensământul din 1850. Transilvania* [The Census of 1850. Transylvania], Cluj-Napoca, 1996; T. Rotariu, ed., *Recensământul din 1857. Transilvania* [The Census of 1857. Transylvania], ed. a II-a, Cluj-Napoca, 1997; T. Rotariu, ed., *Recensământul din 1880. Transilvania* [The Census of 1880. Transylvania], Cluj-Napoca, 1997; T. Rotariu, ed., *Recensământul din 1900. Transilvania* [The Census of 1900. Transylvania], Cluj-Napoca, 1999; T. Rotariu, ed., *Recensământul din 1910. Transilvania* [The Census of 1910. Transylvania], Cluj-Napoca, 1999.

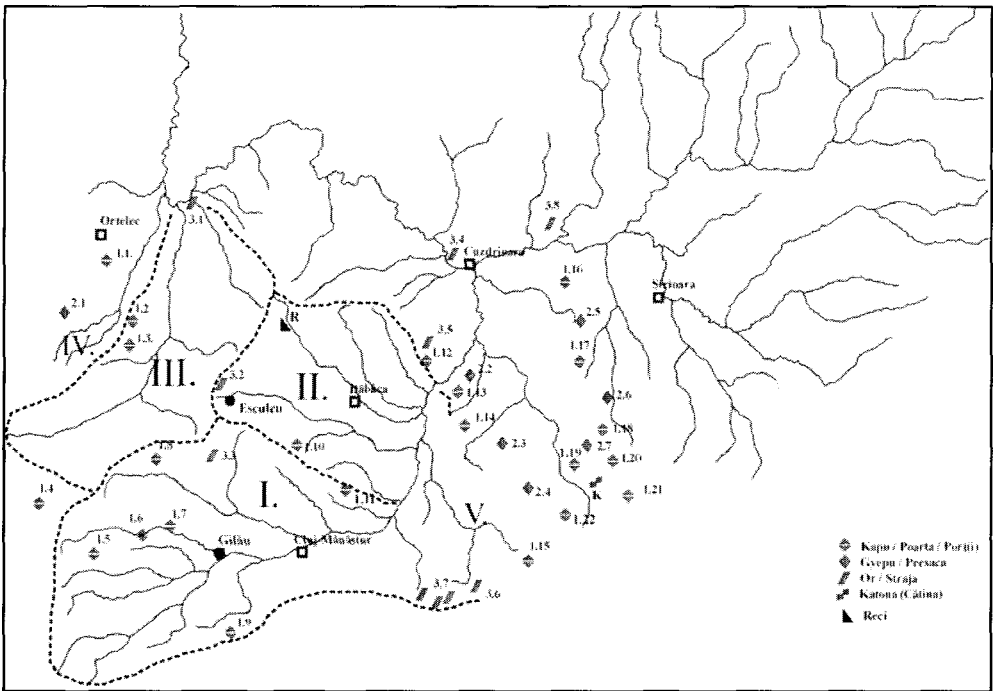


Fig. 1. – Historical toponymy in Northern Transylvania: 1.1. Poř (Porcz). 1.2. Vaskapu. 1.3. Kopus. 1.4. Poarta de Fier. 1.5. Kopus. 1.6. Felkopusi. 1.7. Kaputat. 1.8. Kopus. 1.9. Capul. 1.10. Kerthvelykapus. 1.11. Kapus. 1.12. Kepus. 1.13. Kapusvölgy. 1.14. Naghkapws, Kiskapws. 1.15. locum Kapuus nominatum. 1.16. Kapusd, via~. 1.17. Kapus. 1.18. magnus Kapus. 1.19. Geuchkapusa. 1.20. Kopur. 1.21. Kapus, mons. 1.22. Căpuș. ■ 2.1. Presaca. 2.2. Gyepesfar, Gyepüsfar. 2.3. Gyepü, rét. 2.4. Gepusberche. 2.5. Gyapul, terra. 2.6. Gyepü. 2.7. Gepuserdeu, silva Gepus. ■ 3.1. Eurmezeu. 3.2. Wrtelek. 3.3. Orneghiu. 3.4. Alewr, Al Ewr. 3.5. Vrlman, Vrman, Orman. 3.6. Eur. 3.7. Straja Mică, Straja Mare; Straja. 3.8. Fel Ewr, Felewr. ■ R.1. Recea. R.2. Recea. ■ K. Katona.

It was but natural that all direct properties of the ruling family of this early Transylvanian realm be included in the royal estates after the “Transylvanian” regions had been attached to the Hungarian Kingdom’s political system, consequent to king Stephen’s victory over the last Gyula and his sons and the removal of the latter from power. In this respect, we must note that in all the initial area of the Hungarian conquest in Northern Transylvania, the only relatively large and centralised royal domain was that in the upper Someșul Mic and on the Nadăș valleys, in an area which is to be seen as the core of the medieval county of Cluj (Kolozs). By the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, after the royal expansion over north-eastern Transylvania as a consequence of the victories over the Pecenegs, this royal domain was donated, almost entirely, to the ecclesiastic institutions developing in this area and strongly supported by King Ladislas I and his successors, mainly to the bishopric of Transylvania and the Benedictine abbey settled in Cluj-Mănăștur

(Kolozsmonostor). The royalty only kept hold of the lower Someșul Mic river, possibly only downstream from Apahida; yet the controlled area was restricted to the mere river flow and the lower parts of the side valleys.

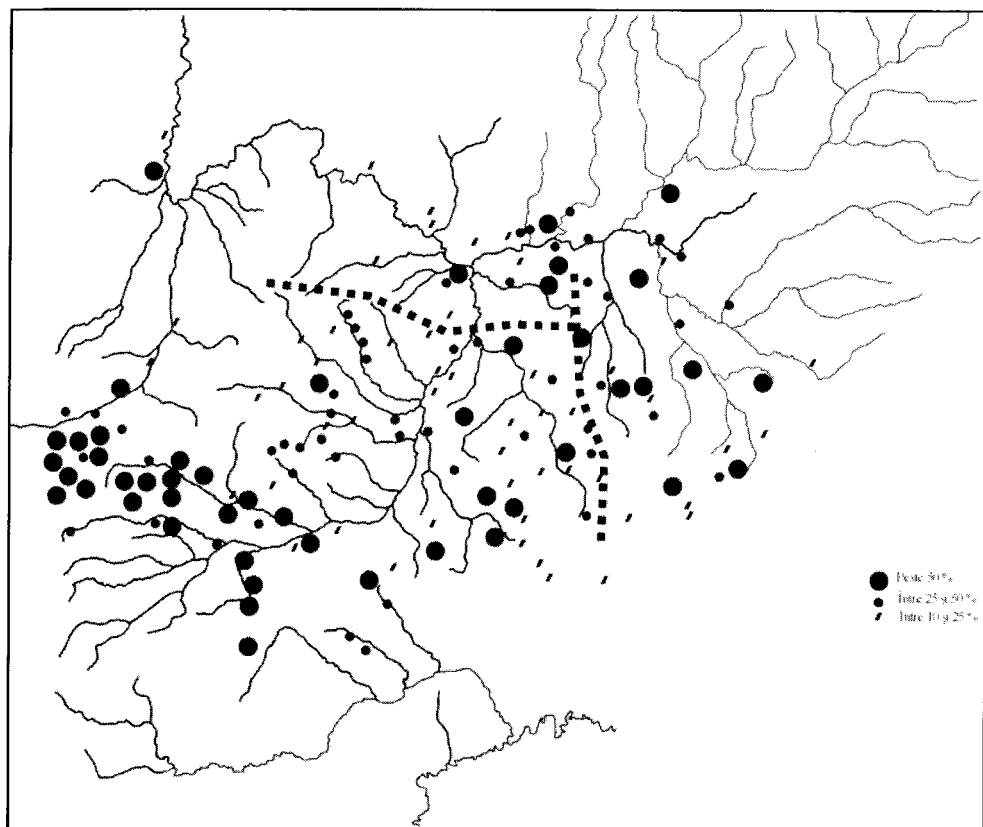


Fig. 2. – Localities with Hungarian population in Northern Transylvania: over 50%; between 25 and 50%; under 25%.

This was the territorial areal where was probably located the earliest residence of the rulers of the “Transylvanian realm”, either before the first Hungarian conquest or after it. A series of clues lead us to the supposition that the first political centre of this realm was located somewhere in the area of the locality Gilău, the name of which has a clear connection with that of the “duke” (*dux*) *Gelou*, mentioned by Anonymus. The fact that a number of researchers suppose that the chronicler of King Bela derived or composed the name of Gelou from the above mentioned place name has no relevance for our case. Even if one finds this hypothesis acceptable, it is easy to see that it only demonstrates that Gilău still had, at end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, a preeminent position in Northern Transylvania, the one

of a centre of power<sup>7</sup>. Current research nonetheless does not altogether exclude the Cluj-Mănăştur variant<sup>8</sup>. Another theory is related to the location of this residence in Cluj, in the area of the ancient Roman city of Napoca<sup>9</sup>, where the archaeological researches led to the discovery of an early medieval necropolis, and possibly a trace of an early fortification which is supposedly confirmed by the topographical configuration of the Central Square of the city.

Things are however different for Dăbâca, nowadays all argumentation endorsing its being a residential centre previous to the conquest proving unacceptable<sup>10</sup>. Anonymus wrote Gelou's siege of residence was located *iuxta fluvium Zomus*, and we know that he used the adverbial place modifier *iuxta* to indicate a very strong closeness between the terms in the phrase. Dăbâca is yet some 10–11 km away from the Someşul Mic river, and its position offers no chance of keeping a visual contact with the river valley. In addition, Dăbâca has no possible connection with the area described by the Anonymous Notary as being the theatre of military operations. Moreover, Dăbâca is not located inside the Hungarians' initial Transylvanian settlement perimeter. The area in which it is situated seems to have had a different statute inside of the territory taken over by the Hungarians. As already shown<sup>11</sup>, the Esculeu agreement, sealed with the "right hand shake" (*dextram dantes*)<sup>12</sup> between the conquered and the victors, does not provide any argument for endorsing the consolidation of some of the conquerors' rights over all of the units composing the conquered realm. Notary Anonymous' account on the Esculeu agreement had the same characteristics as, for instance, the *pacta conventa* of "king Coloman", which regulated the relations of the Hungarian royalty with the Croat aristocracy, being an agreement that acknowledged the rights and the autonomy of local population.

<sup>7</sup> At the time of its first documentary mentions, Gilău was already a possession of the Transylvanian bishopric: see *DIR* I. 328; II. 239, 404, 513 etc.

<sup>8</sup> P. Iambor, *Așezări fortificate din Transilvania (sec. IX–XIII)* [Fortified settlements in Transylvania, 9<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries], Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 121–125; A. Madgearu, *Românii în opera Notarului Anonim* [The Romanians in the work of Anonymous Notary], Cluj-Napoca, 2001, p. 169–171.

<sup>9</sup> A. Madgearu, *Românii*, p. 183.

<sup>10</sup> T. Sălăgean, *Țara lui Gelou*, p. 177–178.

<sup>11</sup> See the discussion in T. Sălăgean, *Dextram dantes. Note asupra specificului raporturilor dintre cuceritorii maghiari și populația locală din nordul Transilvaniei în secolele X–XIV* [Dextram dantes. Notes on the specificity of the relations between the Hungarian conquerors and the local population in Northern Transylvania in the 10<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries], in *Relații interetnice în Transilvania (secolele VI–XIII)*, eds. Z.K. Pinter, I. M. Țiplic, Maria E. Țiplic, București, 2005, p. 121–131.

<sup>12</sup> Anonymus 27: *Tunc habitatores terre uidentes mortem domini sui, sua propria uoluntate dextram dantes, dominum sibi elegerunt Tuhutum patrem Horca. Et in loco illo qui dicitur Esculeu fidem cum iuramentum firmauerunt. Et a die illo locus ille nuncupatus est Esculeu eo quod ibi iurauerunt. Tuhutum uero a die illo terram illam obtinuit pacifice et feliciter.*

In this context, identifying the earliest residence of the Transylvanian bishopric becomes plausible, the most consistent argument in this respect being brought by Kristó Gyula, who noticed that all bishopric estates which were attested by the 13<sup>th</sup> century were located exclusively in northern Transylvania, with no reference whatsoever to any of them near Alba Iulia<sup>13</sup>. What is surprising is that although he precisely indicates the configuration of the early domains of the Transylvanian bishopric, Kristó Gyula accepts the theory of the bishopric's "first residence" in Dăbâca<sup>14</sup>, a place no bishopric estates have ever been attested anywhere near. The argument brought forth for Dăbâca was that one of the churches discovered here, the one in *Tămaș' garden*, was dated by some researchers back to the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>15</sup>. Certainly, one might naturally ask what the role of Dăbâca in Northern Transylvania's ecclesiastical life really was, given the rather early churches discovered here. On the other side, the dating of the archaeological material found in Dăbâca is still uncertain; even if wasn't, having an early well dated church doesn't necessarily mean that church housed a bishopric. The importance of Dăbâca growth only at the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, during the wars between Hungarians and Pechenegs, but at that time the transfer of the bishopric's residence to Alba Iulia had already taken place<sup>16</sup>.

It become thus extremely clear that the initial headquarters of the Transylvanian Bishopric had to be looked for where domains were simply larger: either in Gilău, or on neighbouring locations on the Someșul Mic river valley. The earliest bit of information on the bishopric's estates comes from Bela IV's royal diploma in 1246<sup>17</sup>. The mention relates to six major estates: *Alba Iulia*, in the county of Alba; *Herina* and *Domnești*, in the county of Dăbâca; *Gilău*, in the county of Cluj; *Zalău* and *Tășnad*, in the county of Solnoc. A list of later bishoprics, in 1282, includes 13 domains, the following seven joining the six above: *Șardu* (county of Alba), *Sâncraiu* (Turda county), *Cluj*, *Căpușu* and *Izvoru Crișului* (Cluj county), *Ebes* (Satu Mare county) and *Barátpüspöki* (Bihar county)<sup>18</sup>. Thus, the only sizeable domain estimated to date back to the early stage of this ecclesiastical institution is that of the upper Someșul Mic river, a region we consider to have been the nucleus of the "Transylvanian realm". This large domain preserved its denomination of "Gilău domain" up until late in the modern age, also

<sup>13</sup> Kristó Gy., *Ardealul timpuriu*, p. 118–124.

<sup>14</sup> Kristó Gy., *op. cit.*, p. 124. Ipoteza a fost lansată de Karácsonyi J., *A honfoglalás és Erdély*[The Hungarian Conquest and Transylvania], în *Katholikus Szemle*, 10, 1896, p. 472.

<sup>15</sup> P. Iambor, *Așezări fortificate*, p. 180–181.

<sup>16</sup> P. Iambor, *Ibidem*, p. 175–177.

<sup>17</sup> Jakó Zs., *Erdélyi okmánytár*, I, no. 201; Kristó, *op. cit.*, p. 119–120.

<sup>18</sup> Jakó, *op.cit.*, I, no. 391; Kristó, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

referencing the name of the most important locality in the region. A tradition that connected this locality with the earliest siege of Transylvanian bishopric survived as late as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Humanist writer Peter More suggested to the archbishop Anton Verancsics the transfer of the bishopric see of Alba Iulia to its ancient location in Northern Transylvania, which was no other than Gilău<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> I.-A. Pop, *Națiunea română medievală: solidarități etnice românești în secolele XIII–XVI* [The Romanian Mediaeval Nation: Romanian ethnic solidarities in 13<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> centuries], București, 1998, p. 124–126; A. Madgearu, *România în opera Notarului Anonim*, p. 139–140.