

**Transylvania, Maramureş, Crişana
and the Romanian Banat during the early-Middle Ages.
Archaeological and historical sequences**

Habilitation thesis

-Abstract-

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The habilitation thesis entitled '*Transylvania, Maramureş, Crişana and the Romanian Banat during the early-Middle Ages. Archaeological and historical sequences*', was elaborated according to the standards currently in place, offering a detailed insight into the three requirements put forward.

My main archaeological pursuits following the defence of my PhD thesis in 2001 can be ascribed to three lines of research:

1. The first one, entitled '*Archaeological sequences*', comprises studies dedicated to a series of artefacts from western Romania which thus far have not received the attention of the specialists despite their significance with regard to the interference of economic, ethnic, political and cultural aspects between the 7th and 10th century AD on the Transylvanian Plateau, Maramureş, Crişana and the Romanian Banat. The artefacts were subjected to a complex analysis resulting in the determination of their proper chronological, typological and ethno-cultural framework. Based on the analysis of the *digitated brooch with a human mask decorating the foot* from Aşintiş (Mureş County) corroborated with further published artefacts of this type from different parts of Europe, I managed to define a new specific type of brooch.

Furthermore I brought together and analysed in detail the 7th-8th century swords, sabres, broadswords, axes, spurs and bridles from Transylvania, Maramureş and the Romanian Banat. All of these artefacts have a very heavy bearing on the reconstruction of the socio-political realities of western Romania during the early-Middle Ages, a reconstruction which was presented in detail in the conclusions of the aforementioned papers.

2. The second category, entitled '*Funeraria*' comprises studies and books concerning 7th-10th century cemeteries, some hitherto unpublished. The gravegoods, especially the

pottery material of the aforementioned cemeteries from western Romania were also analysed in detail.

The comprehensive study entitled '*Köttlach type cemeteries discovered in western and north-western Romania*', in addition to the already published cemeteries of this type from Deta and Sălacea, have integrated into this line of research a new site discovered in Zalău after 1990. The analysis of the respective site resulted in the identification of the presence of Carolingian communities on the territory of present-day western Romania during the latter half of the 9th century and the first half of the 10th century AD.

The in-depth study of the pottery material of 7th–10th century cemeteries from western Romania was the main focus of the book entitled: C. Cosma '*Funerary pottery in Transylvania in the 7th–10th centuries*', Mega Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca 2011. Within this study I pursued the detailed analysis of the pottery material from both the incineration and inhumation graves dated between the 7th and the 10th century AD. The respective study resulted in the drawing up of a complex typology for the entire pottery material taking into consideration aspects such as: the production technology of the vessels, their firing, and the fabrics involved in the production. This analysis was carried out separately for the incineration and the inhumation cemeteries, for every chronological sequence within the period between the 7th and the 10th centuries AD. The data made available by the aforementioned set of analysis did indicate the existence of a specialised production of funerary pottery. Furthermore I undertook a comprehensive discussion regarding the significance of the vessels as gravegoods from a religious and social perspective.

3. Within the framework of the third line of study entitled '*Historical sequences*', two extensive studies have been published thus far.

A number of scientific conclusions articulated in the study entitled: '*Avar warriors in Transylvania, Maramureş, Crişana and Banat. Archaeological data regarding the political status of western Romania in the Avar Khaganate*', are worth mentioning here. The leaders of the Avar Empire did not regard the four Romanian provinces as a unitary territorial entity, instead choosing to handle the respective area according to its geographical subdivisions and their economic and strategic significance. Accordingly, north-western Romania belonged to the central Avar power-base from the Upper course of the Tisa River, with its nucleus in the area of present-day Nyíregyháza in Hungary. Crişana, until the Crişul Alb River was under the control of the warriors based on the central course of the Tisa River. The Lowlands between the Mureş and the Crişul Alb Rivers as well as the Banat lowlands were under the authority of the Avar chief controlling the lower course of the Tisa, with its centre at

Kunágota. Only a small part of the Transylvanian Plateau was conquered by the Avars, i.e. the central region of the Transylvanian Basin in the area where the Mureş River turns its course towards the south. In the respective area, an Avar power-base with the status of an 'Aul' was created, being coordinated by the elite warriors under the direct command of the Avar Khan. Thus, territories such as the hilly and mountainous areas of Oaş, the historical region of Maramureş and the Banat highlands remained outside the Avar Khaganate.

A number of conclusions formulated in the study entitled: '*Considerations concerning the political status of Crişana and Maramureş in the 9th and 10th centuries AD based on the archaeological data*'. During the 9th century AD, western and north-western Romania being a peripheral region from the perspective of the powers of the time, remained outside their control. Consequently it is possible to talk about a power vacuum in the area, a circumstance used to his advantage by the chief known as Menumorut from the Chronicle of Anonymus, in order to found his own political entity. The territory that came under his control was however much smaller than that mentioned in the chronicle, furthermore Menumorut's origin cannot be linked with the conglomerate of warrior groups who entered the Carpathian Basin during the second half of the 9th century and took part in the armed struggles between the Germanic and Moravian groups. The aforementioned political structure was probably quite short-lived, existing between the late-9th century and the first decades of the 10th century AD. The Hungarians upon reaching the hills at the eastern outskirts of the region under scrutiny here, halted their advance in the first half of the 10th century, remaining for the time in the plains situated to the west of this area. Their political domination gathered momentum however during the latter half of the century, as reflected in their determination to defend the conquered territories, the eastern frontier being settled on the Meses Pass. Thus the territories such as Oaş and the historical Maramureş until the Rodnei Mountains remained outside the control of the Hungarians.