

THE STRUCTURE OF THE MEDIÉVAL TOWN OF RUPEA

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Abstract: *The town of Rupea, set up at the beginning of the 12th century, was the capital of the county of Rupea between 1337 and 1876. Its urban structure and organization prove that it belonged to group of Transylvania's German medieval towns. Here, alongside with the German (established in the central area), Romanians lived in the outskirts. This structure was preserved until the early 1800s, and even until nowadays although the initial ethnical composition has altered.*

Key words: *town, urban structures, Germans, Romanians.*

1. Introduction

Rupea is located at the confluence of Hartibaciului plateau and Tarnavelor area. It was one of the first German colonies in Transylvania, and drew the attention of the young Hungarian kingdom nearby. Hungarian kings such as Geza the 2nd and Andrew the 2nd focused on attracting the German population towards the Hungarian territories.

Due to severe noblemen's persecutions, high taxation, and lack of trade freedom, small tradesmen from Flanders and eastern Rhine and Saxony answered the Hungarian kings' invitation, and left their original territories.

The Germans' invitation was made under the supervision of a local authority called *greav*. He is the one who will sign the contract with the Hungarian royalty – the location agreement. The German population came in successive waves, between the 12th and the 13th centuries, and they settled in wide areas: in southern Hungary (the Danube basin), and the inter-

Carpathian region. The Hungarian royalty's intentions were clear from the very beginning: to set up new towns and to develop crafts and commerce. Also, they aimed at instilling Catholicism in the region.

In Transylvania, the Germans settled down between Orastie in the west and Drauseni in the east.

The colonists enjoyed the privileges granted by the Hungarian royalty, that is, autonomous administration and economic freedom. The territory had not been vacant, as **Diploma Andreeanum** mentions, but was inhabited by Romanians.

The Germans cohabitation with the Romanians was harmonious, although the new-comers settled down in the best areas, and enjoyed commercial privileges.

In towns, the urban structure was clearly distinguished, whereas the villages were relatively homogeneous.

The present study focuses on a town that, in the Middle Ages, was neighbored by other similar settlements such as Sebes, Cincu, and Miercurea Sibiului.

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2. The Setting up of the Town and Fortress of Rupea

The exact date of the Rupea fortress setting up is not known until first mentioned in documents from the 14th century, which makes it difficult to put it into a certain class of fortresses. Stefan Pascu argues that it is “a feudal fortress which became a royal fortress with its own nobleman” [8]. Initially, it must have been erected by the local community (probably Romanians), and then fortified in order to shelter the Rupea nobleman’s garrison.

Starting with the 14th century we have more information regarding the fortress of Rupea: during Ludwig the Great’s time it was a royal fortress, as “the king tells the castle men of Deva, Tarnava and Rupea to cease collecting the church taxes, and in 1380 the Rupea Castle man is told to send the tax to the catholic bishop of Alba Iulia”[10]. The fortress was located on a basalt column, which sustained the settlement. The upper part of the citadel was occupied in 1324 by German Henning of Petresti, the head of the riot, and thus the German control started.

In 1289 “the capital of Rupea was attested on the valley of Kohalm-Rupea”[6]. The 14th century is richer in events and attestations. In 1309, “the capital Kosd is mentioned in connection with a trial between the bishop of Alba and several German deans”[11]. The fights for the Hungary’s throne affects Transylvania, and the crowning of Carl Robert of Anjou in 1310 did not calm down the situation. People such as Paul of Lodomosz, Nikolaus of Talmaciu, and Solomon of Brasov claim authority over the territory. In order to control the Germans, the king appoints Toma, his subordinate, “a ruthless and greedy man whom people hated”[6] as a territorial ruler, which leads to the Germans’ upheaval. Toma issues an edict that “gives Ladislav of Saint Martin the

fortress, and the title of Rupea captain and subordinate of Hungary”. [10] This is the first attestation of the fortress. As a result, the fortress of Rupea will be sieged and conquered by the troops led by Henning of Petresti.

Meanwhile, Carl Robert rushes to Transylvania and asks for Toma’s support. The citadel is surrounded by Toma’s soldiers in late August 1324. “The citadel was well fortified, but water shortage caused problems. It had to be brought at night, by carts, from a well or from the valley... The Germans attacked the ruler in the field, and Henning was killed as the attackers outnumbered the rioters”[11]. Thus, the fortress was used as a trade object between the royalty and the nobleman.

For approximately 200 years, between the 12th and the 14th century, there were numerous conflicts between the local noblemen, the Rupea castle men, and the Germans to gain control over the territory.

In 1332, Johann, the son of Peter of Kohalm, is mentioned in documents, whereas in 1340 “the priests of Rupea send a letter to the bishop of Alba Iulia asking to be exempted from taxes due to significant damages. They will receive from the bishop 3 golden coins, and will be forbidden to collect taxes”[11]. The taxation right was disputed over a long period of time by the castle men of Rupea and the catholic bishop of Alba Iulia.

The following century brings the German control over the territory, and the fortress of Kods is mentioned to have been under German ruling.

The German control took a while to be accepted. The name of the fortress and of the settlement appears under different forms: RUPES from the Latin “rock”, and KOSD from the Hungarian “rock”. In 1324, it appears as KUHOLOM, in 1375 as KOBOZ, in 1437 as RUCKPASS, in

1572 as RUPPES, in 1615 as RAPES, and in 1670 as REPS.

Nowadays, the fortress is in a severe condition due to the local authorities' measures taken between 1950-1985, when there was no protection of the monument, and wall stones were used for various buildings. For the last years, there have been initiatives in order to include the citadel in the cultural programs of the region. Also, European funding will be invested in the next two years for its major overhaul.

3. The Urban Structure of the Town

Rupea is granted the right of a yearly fair in 1509, and in 1589 "king Sigismund Bathory renews the right of a yearly and weekly fair" [5]. The fair takes place in summer, on St. Jacob or St. Ilie, between 22 – 25 July. Also, four other fairs were held every year, one of which in January.

When the German population came to Rupea in the early 12th century, the Romanians lived in the east, on a hill. The Germans settled down in the future center of the town, at the foot of the fortress. But this was an area prone to flooding. It took several years to drain the area in order to make it inhabitable. Until the 14th century several buildings appeared, as well as a main street.

Downtown the city hall was erected, and in front of it the fairs were held. After 1930, a park was to be arranged there. Next to the city hall a pharmacy and a coffee shop owned by Zerbers were situated. This was the town's walking part or the promenade, and on Sunday afternoons a band played there. After 1900, because of the severe flooding affecting the Kohalm valley every spring, the German authorities decided to dam the valley.

Along the main street the affluent Germans lived, that is, the tradesmen,

merchants, and aristocrats. They had solid houses and large gardens. Also, here one could find the main shops: bakery, butchery, construction materials and general stores. It was not until the year 1800 that rich Romanians could buy houses in this area, following an edict of the emperor Joseph the 2nd of Austria.

a) The Lutheran-Evangelic Fortified Church of St. Jacob

Placed in the town center next to the old market, it was built in the 15th century in a Gothic style. It has a large structure as a fortified church, and its courtyard hosts the parochial house, the school, and the clock tower. Most of the initial wall is now destroyed, and so is the building itself.

Being a Gothic building, the west portal seems to be best preserved. The church has large windows with stone frames. On the southern wall there are some pre-Reform frescoes revealed after the painting was removed and representing "some odd compositions with natural size characters in various positions and moves similar to far-east paintings, but naively made. There is no connection between the two artistic manifestations" [7]. The vault erection works were completed in the 17th century, according to the county records. Repair works were performed in the 18th century, as well as between 1930-1931.

What gives this church special elegance is an impressive collection of oriental carpets, some of them in a very good condition and exposed afterwards in the Black Church of Brasov.

The church shrine was built in 1709 with four columns delineating three entrances. In the center there is a representation of Jesus Christ's crucifixion between the pictures of the apostles Peter and Paul. In the upper part there is a representation of God and the evangelists.

Another special element is the stone grave of Emeretia Weichrauch, David Weichrauch's widow, dead in 1631.

The organ is placed on the northern wall (there may have been no other possibility), and it is a normal, manual, ten-pedal one. It was purchased between 1726-1727 during the royal judge Andreas Helwig's time. Inside the church there is also a flag of the shoemakers' guild dated 1868. The ornaments are typical German.

The bell tower was built in 1730 in the western part of the church, was square, and showed the town's "right to judge" [4] as a royal court. In 1765 it was demolished and replaced in 1782 with a new Jesuit one. Two bells were used: the older one dated 1488 contained a Latin inscription and an Arab date, and the newer one from the 18th century until the Second World War.

The clock tower, built near the entrance gate, is mentioned in 1639 in the county documents, when a clock master was also mentioned.

In the church courtyard the German school functioned, with primary and secondary classes.

The central structure is a rectangle: on one side, there are the fortified church and the clock tower, on another side there are the shops, on the third side there is the city hall, and in the center there was the river area, where the fairs were organized.

Despite being a small town, the German settlement of Rupea had a vivid life. Starting with the 14th century, more than 20 guilds are mentioned here as governing all the other guilds of the county of Rupea.

b) The Romanian Inhabitants' Area of Rupea

The Rupea Romanians' origin is difficult to demonstrate. The family names encountered in the area – Repede, Spornic, Borcoman, Danciu, Costea, Haizea – may have *Cuman* or even Ottoman roots. Fact is that they were present here upon the Germans' arrival in the 12th century. Also, they were the labor force of the latter. Possibly a proto-Dacian settlement, some archeological artifacts were unearthed on

the Strajii hill (opposite the fortress). Some of them were taken to Bruckental Museum of Sibiu, but many of them were lost. The first information regarding the Romanians' presence is late, after 1600, and is recorded because the Germans wanted to prove that the county capital was intensely populated. The Romanian community lived in the eastern part of the settlement, in areas called Romanians' hill, Hudisa, Parau, and Deal (today's 15 November and Cetatii streets). These were dwelled by Romanians, and after 1920 Romanians were allowed to buy land in the areas where the Germans grew cabbage and in the back street (German name being *Gusgas*) – today's 1 December 1918 street.

Here numerous houses were built, and the Romanians' area expanded to the side streets, that is, Targului valley and Intre Gradini.

Until 1750-1800 a large Romanian community was established around two churches: an old orthodox wooden one built on the Greek merchants' expense, and a Greek Catholic one, built by the Greek Catholic population, who would erect a large brick church. Romanians gradually grew in number, and so a census of 1800 mentioned an equal number of Romanians and Germans.

C) The Hungarian Population of Rupea

Hungarians settled down in small numbers in Rupea after 1850. They came from the neighboring villages of areas such as Odorhei and Trei Scaune. First, intellectuals came in: doctors, lawyers, and also tradesmen. They will come in larger numbers after 1900, encouraged by the politics of the Austrian-Hungarian kingdom. Religion-wise they were Roman Catholics, and religious ceremonies and masses were held in the small Dominican church at the foot of the hill. Here, a public school will function until 1918, and no taxes were paid, therefore Romanian children attended the courses of the

Hungarian school. They lived in houses which they could buy in the central area or in Cetatii street.

Hungarians never represented more than 10% of the Rupea population.

4. Conclusions

Many architectural elements make us position the settlement into a certain framework or pattern. Thus, Rupea follows the western urban pattern. The German population has brought with it these patterns, which concentrated political, administrative, and religious power of the town. Between the city hall and the evangelical church there was a vacant area where the fair was organized. The settlement was located on the valley of Kohalm, where the soil was saturated with salt and sulfur. Also, the Germans used the sulfurous water in order to build a spa called Belvedere. The town was crossed by a main street along which homes and shops were aligned in an orderly manner. There were also two other parallel streets, where the dwellings were strictly delineated. Germans and Romanians lived here together, and the relations between the two populations were economically driven. There were no mixed marriages, and the ethnic criterion in this respect was thoroughly followed until the 20th century.

This structure was broadly maintained until 1950, when the communist regime ordered the demolition of the German houses and gardens and built blocks of apartments instead. However, the central structure is still present, although other buildings accompany it.

The German' demographic presence in the region decreased particularly after 1990, when most of them emigrated to Germany. Their houses were either given to the state (as they used to be during the communist regime) or looked after by the neighbors. The Germans come back once a

year, in August, when they have a reunion. However, those who left Rupea at a young age are no longer bound to these places and rarely return here.

Ins county of Rupea between 133 and 1876. Its urban structure and organization prove that it belonged to group of Transylvania's German medieval towns. Here, alongside with the German (established in the central area), Romanians lived in the outskirts. This structure was preserved until the early 1800s, and even until nowadays although the initial ethnical composition has altered.

The urban structure of downtown Rupea has remained unchanged for centuries. The central part marks the administrative and economic aspects of the town: the city hall, the main banks, the park, and the post office. The old German shops have been replaced by new ones. However, the ethnic structure has changed and is now mainly Romanian. The things reminding of the history of Rupea are the evangelical fortified church (well preserved nowadays) and the local German yearly reunion.

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