

# CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TOWNS IN THE UPPER SEAT OF SIGHIŞOARA IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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**Abstract:** *The young Hungarian Kingdom established in the 10th century aimed from the beginning at occupying Transylvania, the neighboring province across the forests. This was partly done in the next century, but especially through a colonization process of the territory with Szeckler and German population. The territorial organization of the province after the 14th century was done according to two independent administrative areas: The Szecklers' territory and fundus regius (the territory inhabited by Saxons in Transylvania) and under the institutional and administrative form of Seats. One of these, perhaps the oldest, i.e., the Seat of Sighişoara, is treated in our article.*

**Key words:** *colonization, Seat, fortified church, count, altar, dica (duty), tax.*

## 1. Introduction

The history of Transylvania province has experienced various forms of organization and structuring over the centuries, all of them contributing to the multi-ethnic organization of the province. From the beginning of the Middle Ages, the province across the forests was a temptation for the recently formed Hungarian kingdom from the Pannonian Plain. Under the pretext of offering protection from the frequent invasions of the Tatars, the Hungarian Crown extended its rule in Transylvania until the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. On the newly conquered territory, they formed, in stages, royal citadels led by captains, who obeyed the prince of Transylvania and he in his turn obeyed the King of Hungary. These were vassalage relations, specific to the

Middle Ages. But their freedom was very high and some of them created small kingdoms, independent of Hungary. The crown strengthened the fragile ruling for 150 years by colonizing people who were loyal to the kingdom policy and to the Pope's tendencies of converting new territories to Catholicism. Thus, at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Szecklers were brought here (military contingents that had accompanied the Hungarians from Asia to the Pannonian Plain) with the stated aim of defending the Southern and Eastern borders of the Province. Then, at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and in the next one, German settlers were brought, this time with exclusively economic declared interests. Both the Szecklers and the Saxons (as the German settlers were generically called) were offered by the

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crown territories for administration as well as the right to freely organize these areas and economic and political privileges. Thus, the Szecklers' territory was placed in the Eastern part of Transylvania (Târgu Secuiesc, Sfântu Gheorghe, Ghimeş pass) and the Saxons' in the southern part of Transylvania between the River Olt, the two Târnava Rivers and the River Arieş.

## 2. Sighișoara Seat

### 2.1. The old age of the citadel

The Saxon fortress, located above the Târnava shore according to the existing data was built after the Mongol invasion, which apparently had caused damage there, towards the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. There had been an older settlement and the territory had been organized by the Hungarian Crown as a county, over which the Saxon Seat would later emerged.

The name of Sighișoara citadel aroused interest and was analyzed in the "Transylvanian Saxon Dictionary" by Johann Wolff, who considered that "From a documentary perspective, *Castrum Sex* is attested in 1280, *Castrum Sches* appears in 1349, *Schespurch* in 1429" [16]. It is also considered that "... the name comes from the Hungarian *seges*, meaning citadel and it appears as *Seguswar* in documents" [2]. The Romanian name of the citadel comes from the Hungarian toponym *Segeswar*, from where *Schägesburh* appears in German and "the Latin form *Castrum Sex* appears recorded for the first time in a document from 1320" [5]. Later, in the Saxon Seats, it appeared as: *Castroschez* (1402), *Castroschesch* (1423) "... not having an order to that effect (among the citadels of Transylvania), but simply an organization of the territory, perhaps according to the function that the Seat representative held" [5]. The name of the locality designated the upper part of the citadel and "the Romanian name of *Schegischone* (was) first used by Vlad Dracul, Prince of Wallachia in a document

dated July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1435" [4], and "the citadel after which Sighișoara was named was one of the border citadels of the Hungarian kingdom, built to strengthen the Hungarian state in Transylvania after 1100, when the extreme southern border of Hungary was the line of the River Târnava Mare" [3].

The oldest documentary attestation of Sighișoara dates from 1298 "... when a papal letter was sent from Rome with privilege for the St. Mary Church in Sighișoara". [5] Originally a settlement of merchants, it evolved as an important urban center, located on Târnava valley and near the valley Şaeş, and in "1337 the Seat of Sighișoara first appeared with the county capital at Sighișoara" [15] (together with Sibiu, Mediaş and Rupea), becoming an important center for coordinating the activity of the guilds.

These were associations of craftsmen grouped on crafts, and there were 10 in Sighișoara apart from which there were many craftsmen who were not organized in guilds... considerably, as compared with Cluj – with 11, Sibiu – the same, and Braşov – 9 guilds" [6]. The guilds fought against those who practiced the profession illegally and enjoyed the protection of the University and the privileges of the Wallachian rulers. We can see the important role of the guilds in the citadel by the fact that they each received a tower of the citadel's fortifications into administration and the richest ones held public functions (from judge to mayor).

Sighișoara is situated at a height of 350 m above sea level and due to this fact Târnava river has many meanders. The hills around the citadel on both sides of Târnava are high up to 150 m and they are terraced. In the south of the city, two affluents of Târnava flow: Şaeş Valley and the little Cânelui (Dog) Valley. They divide the city into three sectors:

\*The fir tree forest (< Germ. *Gelben Burg*)  
Băii Street, at 692 m high

\**Galtenburg* – the central part of today  
(the post office)

\*The upper plateau, the highest part

### 3. The UPPER Seat Structure

Sighișoara Seat is among the largest such structures of the territory administered by the Saxons (*fundus regius*) in Transylvania. Its neighbors were Rupea Seat: to the East, two Seats (later, Mediaș Seat) to the West and several noble properties-enclaves of the Alba Higher County, and to the South – Cincu Seat. The territorial organization of Sighișoara Seat was done in three smaller units: The UPPER Seat (which included the villages Saschiz, Archita, Rodeș and Bunești), The Middle Seat (which included the villages: Șaeș, Apold, Brădeni, Nețuș and Daia) and The Lower Seat (which included the villages Daneș, Laslea, Hoghilag, Prod, Seleușul Mare, Criț, Melindorf and Cloașterf).

My article will consider the settlements in the Upper Seat.

#### 3.1. SASCHIZ

It represents the largest settlement of the Seat, considering the number of inhabitants and the value of the taxes. The statute of borough and the residence of the *capitlu* (college – religious organization), as well as the economic development, made Saschiz compete very early with the Seat residence. It is about 30 km away from Sighișoara, on the road from Rupea between the villages Mihai Viteazul and Vânători. The colonization of the German population in this settlement was carried out before the one in Sighișoara, in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The *capitlu* was probably organized at the same time, but it was only documented in 1309 in a document regarding the diocese of Alba Iulia and several Saxon deans living there and in 1419, in a document called *civitas Zaaskysd'* [5]. The borough's counts were mentioned until the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the

function of Royal Judge is constituted (there was a royal judge especially for Saschiz, in parallel with the head judge of the Seat). It had the second largest population in the Seat; "...the oldest population census dating 1488: 209 households, 1 school headmaster, 2 mills, 7 foreigners and 8 shepherds" [5]. The settlement had been in conflict with the nobles from Vânători for a long time, since the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and it managed to escape their tendency to enslave it.

In the Western part of the settlement there is a rural citadel, dating from the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which has the structure of a fortification with defense towers 10m high. It certainly served many times as a refuge and shelter to people. Separately there is the fortified church which has "...the appearance of an enormous and proud building, with the roof from one piece, with no difference between the nave and the choir, having inside a lot of beams to support it, and with no tower at sunset" [14]; it represented the actual image of a medieval fortification. From an extract of the Saschiz *capitlu* in December 1573, we learn that the dean there had possessions in Archita, i.e. an orchard (DJAN Bv. A.M.1833 no. 2843, Annex 3). The economic evolution of the borough in the Seat can be seen by obtaining the right of a weekly and annual fair, granted by Sigismund of Luxemburg in 1419. In the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the following guilds are listed: the shoemakers in 1508, the blacksmiths in 1535 and the potters in 1585 (this is linked to a long conflict regarding the recognition by the same guild in Sibiu and to the fact that they were subordinate to the one in Sighișoara). In April 1615, in Alba Iulia, Gabriel Bethlen, the prince of Transylvania, confirms the right of the coopers' guild to organize itself freely, with the right to teach apprentices and sell their products like the

other coopers guildsmen from other boroughs and towns of Transylvania, without being hindered by anyone (DJAN Bv. – File with different copies – guild document – Saschiz no. 3). The tension kept accumulating towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the people in the town reacted against the magistrate of Sighişoara, in 1673 “...in which an important role was played by the school rector Simon Fabritius” [6]. The magistrate intervened with armed force in 1678.

### 3.2. ARCHITA

It is a town located to the north of Beia and Mihai Viteazul, and it remained with this Seat structure until 1876. Since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, local nobles were certified in the settlement: Nicolaus from Archita, who ruled parts of the village. The Seat would be engaged in many lawsuits because of this.

From the 14<sup>th</sup> century as well there is “...the first documented certification of Archita, in 1341, as *Erked*” [7]. This was a little settlement of the Seat, which was assigned a tax of  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the unit,  $\frac{3}{8}$  and even  $\frac{1}{4}$  (Zahlhaus represented 1 unit, i.e. 10 households, applied in large settlements; it was reduced in small settlements). In the 1488 census, Archita appeared with “105 households, 1 primary school teacher, a mill, 9 uninhabited houses, 2 poor people and 7 shepherds ... and in 1532, 98 households” [7]. The young villagers went to Sibiu to learn the trade of shoemaker.

The fortified church in this place dates from the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, being a Roman basilica over which a Gothic hall was built. The belfry is located in a tower with six corners, dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, built with a ground floor and two other stone floors. Above it, there is a pyramidal roof. The wooden gallery which crosses all the yard is also covered by a roof. On August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1748, a devastating fire destroyed a great part of the

settlement, including the church, which was soon restored. The double wall surrounding the church dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it has a rectangular shape, and at the height of 3 m on the walls there are shooting holes. Parts of the walls were rebuilt in 1811, 1866 and 1899.

The school had an important role in the town: Johannes Schinken went from the town to go to the University in Vienna, in 1474. The economic situation in Archita is reflected in the tax registers of the Seat from the years 1504-1508, when the settlement would often require lower taxes, due to the inability of paying either because it was making an effort to raise the church, or because of the fires or other damage. In extreme situations, they even sold a property (June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1608, in Sighişoara: at the request of the Archita representative, Georg Gräff the villicus, the magistrate and the jury confirmed the sale of a part of the border to the village Beia, for 340 florins. The witnesses in the sale are from Saschiz, Roadeş, Beia, Dârju, Petca and Moşna (DJAN Bv.A.M. 1832, no. 2612). For this property, a long lawsuit would be held, going even to the Court of Vienna, in 1832.

We have information about the Romanians in the settlement from around 1700, when the Wallachians were brought here and in 1778 they received the right of citizenship. In 1711, there were 10 families in the village, and in 1721, in the reckoning protocols of Sighişoara Seat it was recorded that the Romanians in Archita, Beia and Roadeş had to perform plowing work for 3 days and manual work for 4 days. This piece of information makes us think about obedience and this contravened to the declarations of the Transylvanian Saxon authorities, according to whom all the inhabitants were free on their lands!

Their community built a neighborhood on the hill and a small Orthodox church at

the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in the second half, they also had a Romanian school (but 1/3 of them were Gypsies).

The neighborhoods of Archita date from 1668, together with the associations of boys and girls. About the latter, there are some important things to note: they were structured in Bruderschaften of boys aged 20-30, fellowships and sisters' associations. We have information about them from F. Fronius.

Thus, boys' associations had a number of obligations:

- The members' meeting was held three times a year: the third Friday after Advent; the second Friday after Christmas and a Friday in July.
- The leader's son, the big and the small innkeeper, the judge and a secretary were in charge.
- Their obligations consisted in helping the priest, cleaning his yard, participating in the field work, and in bringing the tree for the church at Christmas.

The girls were required to clean the church periodically. The fellowships were other groups which were formed in the villages. They were either of children from kindergarten to primary school, or youth groups who went out hunting, or of those who were in the army together, or were deported to Russia after 1945, or groups of musicians. All this reveals an active community, with a special cultural and religious life.

### 3.3. BEIA

It is a town located on the border between the Seats and Alba County, the last on the river Olt Valley, and it makes the transition to the areas watered by the river Târnava Mare. The town's name "...comes from Hungarian: the Hungarian name of the mountains *Leanyhalom*, today's *Bene*, and in German *Mädchenburg*" [8] (Gustav Kisch was the one who translated the name). The first

documentary certification, dates from "...June 15, 1442 (although the town was older) in a document by which Iancu de Hunedoara, the voivode of Transylvania, confirmed to the castle lord of Hălchiu, in Bârsa County, that he had paid the damages caused by the Saxons in Mercheașa" [8], and the document was written in Beia. Towards the end of the century, from 1476, the town appeared in the decisions of the magistrate in Sighișoara as buying a pasture from the people in Rodeș: "...what is interesting in this document is that the first family names that we know of the settlement appear now" [1].

In the 1488 census, Beia was referred to having: 39 households, 4 shepherds, 1 school director, 1 abandoned house and in 1532 with 45 households, being among the small settlements of the Seat. In 1500, Beia is first recorded as a settlement of Sighișoara Seat. In the tax register of the Seat from 1504-1508 it appears with ¼ of the tax unit. In the council documents in Sighișoara we also have a decision recorded on March 17, 1536, related to the habit of cleaning the stones from the fields in the spring and throwing them to the neighbors. The local authorities, the hann (mayor) Georg Schellen and the juror Petrus Klösch will be responsible for monitoring and preventing such things from happening and for giving fines (12 silver marks) to those who do not comply with the decision.

In 1604, the settlement had to give 7,732 guilders, wine, grain and gunpowder to the troops of General Basta. In 1608 the town had a long lawsuit with Archita settlement, because of a piece of land. The lawsuit was sent to Sibiu and from there to the princely court.

In 1663, the village was the district of prince Apaffy for 2 months, and this led to the damage caused by the Turks in the

village. During the Kurucs' actions, the town was strongly affected.

After 1876, the towns Beia, Archita and Dărăușeni were part of a unit, a county, which sent delegates (proportionally to the number of its inhabitants) to Vienna.

We have two impressive old buildings in the town: the church and the fortified church. The church was "...built in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as a Gothic hall and a choir coming out. The choir is provided with a ribbed vault" [9]. For this, the settlement received numerous tax exemptions from the magistrate of Sighișoara. The fortified church was raised in 1500, with thick walls and four defense towers. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the church also had floral motifs on a wall. The wooden altar dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and it is probably the work of Johann Stoos from Sighișoara. The organ from 1785 has pedals and 7 registers.

The fortified church dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The surrounding wall forms an irregular angle and the old school was built in one of the bastions. Some of them were destroyed, and in 1900, in the south tower, a school was built.

With regard to the school we have data from the 16<sup>th</sup> century of some graduates who graduated from the Honterus secondary school in Braşov. In the transcripts in 1552 there was registered Thomas Weingolth, in 1561 Stephanus Roth, in 1596 Georgius Klein-*Beianul*, who became rector at Honterus in 1609" [10]. In the transcript of Saschiz the priests of the place were recorded: in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Johannus Klein of Sighișoara, Emericus Greb of Şaeş, Mathias of Saschiz.

In the archive there is a document dated May 20, 1619, issued in Alba Iulia, by which Gabriel Bethlen, prince of Transylvania at the request of the jurors in Beia Martinus Kraph and Michael Zekely, sent and confirmed the magistrate's

document from Sighișoara, from June 20, 1608, regarding the sale for 340 florins of a part of the border by Archita village to Beia (DJAN Bv. A.M.O.S. 1832. No. 2612, Annex 1, p. 1-7).

#### 3.4. BUNEȘTI

The settlement is situated on the border between Rupea and Sighișoara Seats, near Roadeş, and it represented, after Saschiz, the largest town of the Upper Seat. The documentary certification of the town is from the document of December 18, 1337 when the institutional organization of the Seat and a man called Petrus, son of Stefan de Boda, are mentioned" [10]. During the entire 14<sup>th</sup> century, the conflict between the Saxons from the neighboring villages continued: Jibert, Viscri, Saschiz, Daia, Hoghilag, Roadeş, Criş, Meşindorf, together with those in Bunești, against the nobles in Mălincraş and Roandola, from 1345 until 1356, and it ended with the devastation of Bunești and its church.

The population of Bunești is recorded in 1488: 88 households, 1 primary school teacher, 2 mills, 2 shepherds and 3 poor people, and in the next century it certainly had more inhabitants. The town was involved in several property conflicts with neighboring settlements in the 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries: with Viscri in 1497 "...for which the royal judge Laurentiu Haan came from Sibiu, together with the senator Jacobus Sartor, and later judges from Braşov" [11]; with Criş between 1506-1509, between 1548-1550 with Roadeş, in 1574 with Grănarul. The University sent a commission for investigations each time.

There aren't any guilds recorded in the settlement, but we know about early activity of the youth who went to learn a trade in Sibiu, either from the shoemakers' association registers in Sibiu, or from the official records of the mayor in Sibiu, or from the tax registers of Sighișoara Seat (where it is recorded in 1526, 1538, 1544 that the town benefited from a tax

exemption because of the devastations and the fires).

In order to build the church in the town, tax exemptions were obtained during "...Johann Schebell in 1528, until 1548 with Alexius Dominicus and Georgius" [23]. These priests were also those who coordinated the school activity, along with the director, whose training was high (Honterus secondary school graduates: Petrus Literatus 1554, Simon Hyrlung 1580, Johannes Hendermann 1583, Philippus Hermann 1587, Johannes Herlick 1598, and Michael Sartorius 1600).

### **3.5. ROADEȘ**

It is a settlement located 16 km north-west of Rupea, at the same border between the Seats and Alba County. It was an area of intense colonization (no inhabitants of German nationality have remained in today's settlement). The documentary certification of the town dates back to the "...1356 in the complaint of count Iacobus, Geubel's son, to the voivode of Transylvania about the behavior of the Saxons in Saschiz, Archita, Roadeș, Criș, Meșindorf and Cloașterf, who destroyed his property in Vânători" [1]. Then it appears in the conflict with Beia in 1476, because of the pasture and in 1523 King Louis of Hungary granted it tax exemption for 3 years, because of a devastating fire.

The population of the settlement consisted in 1488 of 58 households, 1 school director and 3 shepherds, and in 1532 of 72 households, in 1663 of 63 households and in 1671 of 100 households. In the official records of Sighișoara, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century there are many tax exemptions for building the church and the fortified church in 1504-1508, 1552-1554, 1556-1557" [12]. Due to hardships of time at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the inhabitants of the neighboring town, Zoltan, were colonized in Roadeș (because of the plague). In 1620, the settlement is

taken into a lawsuit since it had bought a place of the village abandoned by the noble owner of Zoltendorf, Stefan Haller and Sigmund Haller for 380 guilders" [13] and the noble judges of Târnava county ruled in favor of Roadeș.

The church was built over an old Gothic basilica, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and it is located on a hill in the north part of the town. The old belfry was also pulled down and covered as a defense base, with a bunk tower. The building was repaired several times until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and it is important in terms of the interior equipment. Thus the altar wing belongs to the period of time from Gothic to Renaissance, being one of the best known altars in Transylvania before the Reformation" [1]; the organ was made by a craftsman in Brașov and the church bell was cast in 1550. In this church, the following preached: Dominicus Stamp (1573-1593), Thomas Frank of Sighișoara (1593-1600), Petrus Listerius of Feldioara (1603-1605) and Caspar Molanchius (1605-1608).

As with the other settlements, from the Honterus secondary school transcript we know about the names of some students originating here: in 1577, the first was Valentinus Rhodlines and in 1585 Andres N. Rodleus.

### **4. Conclusions**

Sighișoara Seat was early created, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and it represented a border area of the royal land until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its structure and the fact that it kept several villages under control, made it a specifically medieval form of organization.

The Seat unity and the good organization are given by the hierarchy of the officials and of the community structures developed in the settlements. The Capital of the Seat, Sighișoara citadel, was a witness, during the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, to numerous events and political changes occurring in

the Principality of Transylvania (many *diets* – representative political meetings, were held in Sighişoara, many troops quarters were created in the settlements of the Seat, and many predatory incursions of the Turks happened).

There are numerous sources telling us about this period, including: documents attesting the formation of guilds or confirmations of older ones; donations made by the princes of Transylvania for the church or tax exemptions; various rulings of the magistrate, highlighting aspects of daily life and the administrative and economic organization; lawsuit protocols, both for individual cases, and especially for the border conflicts between neighboring towns; records of mayors and notaries for issues regarding the proper organization of the school, and others.

All these complete the image of a well-organized administrative structure, which continues to exist based on an old foundation and carrying on an old tradition.

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