LIVING AMONG RUINS: THE MEDIEVAL HABITAT IN THE ANCIENT SETTLEMENT OF POROLISSUM AND IN ITS SURROUNDINGS*

Abstract: After more than century of archaeological research and thousands of artefacts discovered in the Roman age settlement of Porolissum, the rare medieval finds were not given much attention. Also the preoccupation of studying the roman ruins was, justly predominant at the expense of the few medieval sites that can now be sketched on the map of the Roman age settlement. The medieval artefacts found in Porolissum, dated from different periods of the Middle Ages indicates us that the same geographical features that made humans inhabit that specific area since Prehistory, through the Iron Ages and culminating in the Roman Era, made the medieval people to live among the ruins.

Keywords: St. Margret of Meseg, medieval roads, basilites, Porta Mesesina, salt trade.

In contradiction to the alluring subject of studying the medieval habitat near the old Roman ruins in Transylvania, the interest shown by the modern historiography is, with a few exceptions, extremely poor. Even if the most important medieval settlements in Transylvania were born over the ruins of old Roman fortifications and settlements like Apulum – Alba Iulia and Napoca – Cluj-Napoca, the preoccupation of archaeologists and historians fades comparing with the importance of this subject. However the few historians who approached the subject they did it either as an understatement¹, some were not thoroughgoing about their finds², others barely scratched the surface in studying this historical phenomenon while observing the lack of interest of contemporary archaeologists and historians³. A more recent study reviews all the medieval and premodern artefacts found in the Roman castrum from Potaissa – Turda. The author, a Roman age specialist, investigates with succes the history of the Roman fortress from the Late Antiquity to the Modern Ages⁴. Despite the reduced literature, the existing ones are inspirational. Those few articles pave the road for future research.

In more than a century of archaeological investigation in the ancient site of Porolissum (map.) and after thousands of artefacts being discovered,

³We thank Dan Matei, PhD.for the constructive comments and language correction in the process of writing this paper.
¹POPA 1984, 7-25.
³RUSU 2010.
⁴RĂRBULESCU 2015, 331-342.
the overwhelming majority being of Roman era, the small amount of medieval finds along with the few medieval monuments did provoke historians in the past, unfortunately limited by the level of knowledge and the amount of medieval finds of that time.5

Today, after discovering more medieval finds and locating a medieval fortress on Măgura Moigradului, the most prominent hill in the area (map), we still have missing links in seeing the whole picture. Thus summing up all the data we have so far, we know that at latest until the 12th century, Greek monks6 settled in the vicinity of Porolissum. Latter they were substituted by Roman rite monks who founded the St. Margaret of Meses Abbey over the ruins of the Roman city, along the Roman road. We also know that the important pass towards central Transylvania called since the Middle Ages Porta Mesesina was guarded by a fortress situated on top of the Măgura Hill. Around these major establishments, scattered through the Roman ruins, medieval people reused Roman walls for shelter. A glimpse at the medieval charters indicates us that the pass named in the middle ages Porta Mesesina was not only the main entrance in Transylvania from the north-west but also an important artery of the salt trade. The first medieval document that attests the St. Margaret abbey describes the privileges of the monastery in taxing the salt trade.7

At the beginning of the 20th century, right before the Great War, the Hungarian archaeologist Buday Árpád brought to light the ruins of a Roman building with hypocaust system, eastward from the Roman castrum on Pomet Hill (Rom. Dealul Pomet) in Porolissum8. The foundations were superposed by medieval tombs, some having brick cist or others with simple pits (Fig. 38-40). In the same area were discovered fragments of medieval stone work (Fig. 41, 43-45),9 a 14th century iron spur (Fig. 42)10 and up to 10 medieval coins found as oblation in tombs or just scattered through the debris11. Some of the tombs were misdated the 4th century while other tombs along with the rest of the medieval findings were associated with the lost St. Margaret Monastery. All the medieval findings were dated between the 12th and 14th century.12

Decades later Mircea Rusu highlighted the opinion that it was Buday who found the presumed 4th century remains and also dated the features of a prehistoric fortification13 on the nearby Cămin Hill (Rom. Dealul Cămin) between the 9th-11th centuries14. He also talks about two 8th-9th century earrings (Fig. 4-5), a fragment of Kiȩv type pectoral cross (Fig. 6), dated in the 12th and 13th centuries and presumably15 discovered in Porolissum, and the cave monuments that exist near Porolissum dating them in the 13th century (Fig. 30-36). The article signed by the late Mircea Rusu constitutes the prelude for future studies. Since then, the above mentioned medieval age small finds were published more than once16, or they have been published as Roman Age artefacts (Fig. 3, 11, 12)17.

Some of those artefacts were not archaeologically discovered; they came from the former private Wesselényi-Teleky collection currently in the custody of the local museum, so that the provenance of the objects can be questionable. Even so, the latest medieval objects discovered in archaeological context offer solid arguments in believing that the stellar type earrings (Fig. 4-5), the lyre type buckle (Fig. 3), the fragment of the Kiȩv type pectoral cross (Fig. 6), the spur rowel and the spur fragment (Fig. 11-12), but also some Late Medieval stove tiles originated from Porolissum and its surroundings18.

The stellar type earrings have been published numerous times before19. Other finding from the same Wesselényi-Teleky collection must be discussed in this present paper. The 10th - 11th century bronze casted buckle (Fig. 3) was initially catalogued as a Roman age piece20. Such types were used mostly as harness accessories but also as clothing accessories in the 10th - 11th or even the 12th centuries in some cases. Some authors relate this category of artefacts with the migration phenomenon in the Carpathian Basin21 while others "blame" fashion as an explication to their spreading in this part of Europe.22 Similar findings are rare in the Romanian archaeological landscape. Some specimens were found in different content at Târggör, Dinogetia23, Alba Iulia – Ţârfia de salvare24, Capidava25, Spinoasa-Èrbicieni26, Sighişoara and Blandiana.27 Dating this object with absolute

5 RUSU 1974.
6 The term reveals a member of the oriental rite, latter known as Orthodox, not to be understood as the ethnic meaning.
7 DIR C. XI, XII, XIII, 8.
8 BUDAY 1915, 52-111.
9 BUDAY 1915, 102-103.
10 BUDAY 1915, 105, Fig. 29.
11 BUDAY 1915, 101
12 BUDAY 1915, 110-111.
13 The plateau of the Cămin Hill was fortified in the Late Bronze Age. In Roman times, the slopes of the hill served as stone quarry and later cells were carved, probably serving as Late Roman age tombs (see note 38).
14 RUSU 1974, 266-267.
certainty is impossible. In adding up the shortage of data regarding the proper archaeological context of the object is a parallel situation from Kána, a perished medieval village from Hungary. In a 12th century child’s grave a similar type object was found as clothing accessory. The author concluded that the buckle was heirloom piece, and proposed that such objects reappeared in the Carpathian Basin between the second half of the 11th century and the beginning of the 12th century and could be connected with the Pechenegs.

Another important artefact that originates from the Wessellényi-Teleky collection is the fragment of a bronze casted encolpion. As all the rest of that collection, the pectoral cross was also published before. Until now such artefacts were rare in Transylvania, but not in Moldavia were the large number of such objects suggests that there were popular there in the High Middle Ages. Close analogies for this fragment of the encolpia were recently found in Dej and Herina. Also the National Museum of Transylvania from Cluj-Napoca has such a piece in its collection.

More recent finds enrich our understanding about the medieval habitat in Porolissum. In the late 1990’s a medieval tool deposit was discovered in the periphery of modern day Moigrad (Fig. 1-2). The content of the deposit consisting of multiple iron tools was initially dated as belonging to the Iron Ages. It was only after restauration and the appearance of some incised marks that it was clear that it could not be but of medieval origins. Unfortunately we had access only to three of those items: an axe, a sickle and an adze (Fig. 15-17). The axe has a capital “M” like incision on one of its sides. The place of discovery does not hold-up any archaeological burden besides the medieval objects that were buried in a small pit.

During the archaeological diggings of the Roman Age house known in literature as LM3, in the superior layers, between the inside walls of the structure many medieval items were discovered from a wide timeline. The earliest objects consist of an iron axe that can be dated largely between the 10th and the 11th centuries (Fig. 20), a half rounded buckle and some chain links (Fig. 19, 25). In an upper layer other iron objects were discovered: one buckle (Fig. 21), a wide edge axe (Fig. 18) and a 14th century rowel spur (Fig. 22). Analysing the context in which the objects were found we realize that there were multiple upper layers. For instance the early medieval axe, the half rounded buckle and the chain links were found at 0.5 m depth, and the wide edge axe, the small rectangular buckle and the spur were found at depths between 0.15-0.35m. In other words there were at least two layers from different time laps. Unfortunately we did not have the opportunity to analyse the pottery discovered inside the walls of LM3. A dedicated analysis of the findings corroborated with stratigraphy information could give us more information about the usage of the ruined Roman house in the Middle Ages. At this point we could only assume that the walls of LM3 were still standing in the Middle Ages and reutilised in two different timelines, sometime in the 10th-11th centuries and in the 14th century.

**MONKS, HERMITS AND MONASTERIES**

Probably the most enigmatic structure that could be found around Porolissum is the complex of the carved cells, which is believed to have been Anchorite dwellings. No written source mentions them and at this time we have no archaeological evidence related to those structures. Two different locations have carved cells (Fig. 2) both in the vicinity of modern day Jac village, at a considerable distance from each other.

The first location is at the base of Câmnin Hill in a Roman Age stone quarry (Fig. 2). The quadrilateral entrance of the cell from Câmnin is extremely small, no more 1m high and probably around 1.5m wide (Fig. 30). Preceding the empty of the small entrance, the carvers cut out from the mass of the rock a door imprint for a double frame (?). The semi-circular tympanum over the rectangular emptiness of the entrance has astonishing resemblance to Romanesque as it was highlighted before (Fig. 30). Inside, the ceiling follows a semi-cylindrical shape over a small rectangular shaped room. Opposite to the door, which is on the eastern side of the room, lays a bolted tall niche. Next to the northern wall is a small built trough in the shape of a cist (?). The whole structure and the niche on the western wall suggest that the cave served as a sacred place, and until now the rock-cut cell was believed to be a part of an anchorite monastery. The discovering of the paleo-Christian graffiti made on a Roman brick and that of the cist (?) also the small and impracticable entrance and the small chamber indicates that the whole structure could not function as hermits cell or church. Until now all the evidence suggests that it may have been a paleo-Christian funerary monument. Surely there must be other carved spaces in the old Roman sandstone quarry, nowadays covert and concealed from our eyes.

Another site is located more 1.7 km south-west from Câmnin in a place called Jac’s Vineyards (Rom. Viile Jacului) (Fig. 2). The monument called by locals Monu’s Cell (Rom. Pernița Monului) has two chambers with niches that enrich the inner walls. The entrance is located on the north steep of the ridge, is considerably larger and thicker than that of the Câmnin cell, and it has a semi-circular arch. In its thickness some perforations are remains of a massive door frame and the imprint of the door on the inside and the vertical carving of the doors pivot on the inside (Fig. 32).

Both rooms have rectangular layouts, being divided

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32 ISAC 2008, 77-84, Pl. L/1-2.
33 MARINESCU 2014, 197-212.
34 ISAC 2008, 80, Pl. LI/1-2.
35 We give our gratitude to archaeologist Dumitru Gheorghe Tamba, PhD, for the valuable information.
36 TAMBA 2008, 247.

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Both rooms have rectangular layouts, being divided
from each other by a sculpted wall. The access from the first room into the second one is being made through a large vaulted door way. The same wall separates the rooms; the hermits carved other two similar niches, one ending up as a window. The first room is the larger of the two. On the southern end lies a carved block as table and next to it two rectangular small niches arranged on top of each other. The background of the prismatic table is rough and has the appearance of a large unfinished carved niche, or maybe just a large arched niche that has been broken in time. The west wall has aligned horizontal perforations that probably sustained a wooden panelling (?). The same wall has a beam imprinting near the corner on the south extremity of the space. On the floor, along the wall lies another beam imprint. The girdler mark could have served as a support for the wall panelling as well for the board floor.

The second room, follows the same layout, but of smaller size in plan and height. The south extremity of this chamber has also a big vaulted niche and it was not carved to the ground level. The top of the eastern wall has also a small cavity serving probably as a support for a candle or maybe for an icon.

Similar manmade caves exists in Tihany Peninsula from the Balaton Lake in Hungary43, the hermit caves from Nagymaros in the vicinity of Visegrad 44 and those of Szentkút44 near today’s border of Hungary with Slovakia. The similarity between those caves is that the networks of chambers carved in rock or even natural crevasses were linked by masonry walls. The amleness of future archaeological diggings might prove that such walls existed in the case of the Monu’s Cell monastery. The quoted analogies were dated largely anywhere between the 10th and the 14th centuries as eastern rite monasteries45, but the dating of the caves from Jac could be narrowed down considerably. The existence of such places of worship in Meseș area in the vicinity of the ruins of ancient Porolissum was not random, as are not the other medieval finds.

If we give credibility to historians like Gyula Moravcsik there were circa 600 Byzantine monasteries in the Arpadian Kingdom until the Mongol invasion in 124146. Other historians like István Baán even suggested a Byzantine archbishopric created in early 11th centuries in Kalocsa (Metropolitan area) which controlled 3 bishoprics: of Transylvania in Alba Iulia, the fate of the cave monastery near the ruins of Meseș Gate would be taxed by the monastery47, later called Cenad was transformed into a Latin religious centre of the diocese of Cenad48.

The complexity of the subject and the abundance of the published studies gave us a large amount of material for a detailed future study about the monuments near today’s Jac village. Future archaeological investigations will give us new data and help unveiling more of the story behind the monument. Monu’s Cell is not the only such establishment in today Jac’s Vineyards hamlet. Other such monuments could be hidden underground near Monu’s Cell, and thus having a complex of cells.

Referring at the cases of Kalocsa, Cenad and even Alba Iulia, the fate of the cave monastery near the ruins of Porolissum seemed to follow the same pattern. From the 12th centuries we have the first written evidence: the Catholic monastery of St. Margaret of Meseș. In 1165 Hungarian king Stephen III offered privileges to the monks of the St. Margaret monastery that was built during the reign of the duke Almus in Meseș. The charter dictates that all the salt traders that will be passing through the Meses Gate would be taxed by the monastery10, all the salt exploitation in that period being under royal monopoly. From the written sources we know that the abbey functioned in the 14th century55.

In the 19th centuries and even in the early 20th century scholars disputed over the localization of the famous St. Margaret monastery of Meseș. Voices like Bunyitay Vince’s identified in the ruins of Cheud (a village situated more than 40 km north-east from the Meses Mountains) the remains of the medieval abbey of St. Margaret. Petri Mór subscribed to his antecesor having the conviction that those ruins were the remains of the St. Margaret abbey56. No long after Petri historian László Koszta who questions the theory of a proper Byzantine church administration but admits that Byzantine monasticism occurred in the first two centuries after the Christianization of Saint Stephen (Hung. Szent István)50. In any case Byzantine monastic life existed in the early days of the Hungarian Kingdom, especially in Transylvania were literary sources mentioned a Byzantine bishop, Hierotheus, since the second half of the 10th centuries51, literary sources reinforced by recent archaeological discoveries in Alba Iulia (Hung. Gyulafehervár)52.


43 In 1975 the late archaeologist Radu Heitel claimed that he found the ruins of an older church that the ones dated in the 11th century that were found earlier underneath the floors of the cathedral. The older church was named Cathedral I. a (The Cathedral I. is known in literature as the ruins of the basilica under the floors of the standing monument). The Cathedral I. a was not published properly with a plan, pictures, drawings, etc. – see: HEITEL 1973, 346. However in 2011 those ruins were rediscovered and unearthed integrally and documented properly. The plan of the old church follows a Byzantine layout and was dated in the 10th-11th centuries – see MARCU-ISTRATE 2014, 93-140.
45 DIR C, XI, XII, XIII, 8.
46 POP 2010, 50.
48 DIR C, XI, XII, XIII, 8.
Mőr wrote his monography of Sălaj county\textsuperscript{57}, the Hungarian archaeologist Buday Árpád conducted diggings on the Pomet Hill and in 1914. There, among Roman Age structures and finds he also brought to light medieval cist tombs (Fig. 38-40) and fragments of medieval decorative stone work (Fig. 41-43-45), a spur (Fig. 42) and up to 10 medieval coins found as obliteration in tombs or just scattered through the debris\textsuperscript{58}

The precise location of the 1914 digging campaign was lost until the late archaeologist Alexandru V. Matei, installing a topographical landmark in the vicinity of the place named Sub/La Bisericiță, found fragments of a human skull, in this way identifying in fact the site in which Buday conducted his research a century before\textsuperscript{59}. The toponym Sub/ La Bisericiță (Eng. Chapel’s Place) is mentioned on the First Austrian Survey, thus being dated at least in the second half of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century (Fig. 37). In the same area medieval coins were randomly found. The oldest pieces were minted in the time of Béla II (1131-1141), other ones being dated in the time of Béla III (1172-1196), Béla IV (1235-1270) and Carol Robert (1307-1342)\textsuperscript{60}

In 1999 during the systematically archaeological research in the vicinity of the porta principalis dextra of the Roman castrum on the Pomet Hill there were found some pits that contained medieval pottery as some fragments were identified in the deposit (Fig. 14). In the preliminary report a late 10th-12th century habitation level was mentioned\textsuperscript{61}. Some authors suggested that a lost medieval settlement existed somewhere near Porolissum. The assumption was made based by multiple written sources that the presumed settlement was mentioned several times, first in 1281, after that in 1363 as Monasterium Mezespatak and finally in 1385 as possesio Monasturpatak\textsuperscript{62}. Prudence is required when operating with written sources. Not always the term possesio describes a medieval village, sometimes is just a piece of estate, of land that in this case, probably belonged to the abbey. The brief information about the results of the 1999 diggings does not allow us to draw any bold conclusions regarding the existence of a medieval village near the porta principalis dextra of the Roman fort.

In 2008 the Babeș-Bolyai University debuted with the project Necropolis Porolissensis that comprised all the burial sites known at the time. Among other ones, a sector was dedicated to the medieval burial site. A small 4x4m trench uncovered a stone slab cist containing a skeleton along with other bones from previous burials arranged in on each side in the interior of the cist (Fig. 48). In the same trench other 19 skeletons were found leading authors to believe that the human remains belonged to victims of pestilence\textsuperscript{63}. In the next year in the same trench another 17 skeletons were found but only one had a 12\textsuperscript{th} century coin (Stephen III) as obliteration\textsuperscript{64}. The conductors of the diggings suggested with no real argument that the medieval burial site was a mass grave. The successively burials have left archaeological traces. New tombs disturb old ones, situation absolutely visible (Fig. 46-47).

About the localization of St. Margaret Abbey, rounding up all the data we have, the clues indicates that the abbey functioned near the Roman road west of the Roman castrum from Pomet Hill in the Chapel’s Place (Rom. La/Sub Bisericiță) as the toponym suggests it at least since the 1700's. The 1914 diggings\textsuperscript{65}, the coins founded randomly\textsuperscript{66}, the 1999 diggings\textsuperscript{67}, the two research campaigns: 2008-2009, and even the Monasterium Mezespatak term mentioned in 1363 and then as possesio Monasturpatak in 1385 complete the image of the St. Margaret Abbey functioning among the ruins of ancient Porolissum.

**THE FORTRESS**

Despite the amplitude of the archaeological campaigns undertaken on the Măgura Hill top we do not know much about its medieval past. Most of the archaeological results regarding the medieval period remained unpublished and hidden in the archaeology deposits of the County Museum of History and Art from Zalău (Rom. Muzeul Județean de Istorie și Artă Zalău).

In 1979 Mircea Rusu, one of the many archaeologists who studied Măgura Moigradului mentioned nothing about traces of its medieval past. He proposes, after some archaeological investigations, that the nearby Cămmin Hill was fortified in the Early Middle Ages\textsuperscript{68}. It is probably only later in the 1980's or 1990's that the first medieval traces were found.

We do not know anything about the size of the medieval fortress on the Măgura plateau. The primary interest was always directed towards the Dacian and Roman Age discoveries. Unfortunately after so many archaeological campaigns we could not tell which of the fortification features are medieval, or how much of the plateau was fortified. A cistern was discovered, but the debate about dating it in Middle Ages or in the Roman Age is still open.

The archaeological objects that are preserved in the deposits of the County Museum of History and Art from Zalău are dated in the 11\textsuperscript{th}-14\textsuperscript{th} centuries. For the moment only a few artefacts were accessible for this publication: a pseudo-Arabic copper coin (Fig. 8) minted by Béla III (1172-1196)\textsuperscript{69}; a bronze war flail end (?) (Fig. 9), an iron sickle (Fig. 7), an iron buckle (Fig. 7) and a fragment of a hand-made kaolin clay jug painted with red stripes (Fig. 13). Excepting the jug which can be dated in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century, all the artefacts are dated in the 11\textsuperscript{th}-13\textsuperscript{th} centuries. A dedicated research of the documentation and of the finds from Măgura Moigradului would definitely resolve the chronological issues and the layout of the medieval establishment.

\textsuperscript{57} PETRI 1901-1904.
\textsuperscript{58} BUDAY 1915, 52-111.
\textsuperscript{59} This information was given by Alexandru V. Matei himself.
\textsuperscript{60} PRIPON 2010, 687-688.
\textsuperscript{61} MATEI/BĂCUEȚ-CRIȘAN 2000.
\textsuperscript{62} SUCIU 1968, 372.
\textsuperscript{63} GUDEA 2009, 153.
\textsuperscript{64} GUDEA 2010, 104.
\textsuperscript{65} PRIPON 2010, 683-700.
\textsuperscript{66} MATEI/BĂCUEȚ-CRIȘAN 2000.
\textsuperscript{67} Mircea Rusu investigated the hilltop with two trenches in 1958, declaring that the few pieces of pottery discovered were too corroded and thus useless for precise dating, but he suspected that fortification might have been built in the Early Middle Ages (RUSU 1974, 266-267). Latter in 1994 another archaeologist, Călin Cosma continued the research. He concluded that the fortification could be dated between the 10\textsuperscript{th} and the 11\textsuperscript{th} centuries using planimetric analogies with other 10\textsuperscript{th}-11\textsuperscript{th} century fortifications as sole argument (COSMA 2000, 462, 472-475; Fig. 5; COSMA 2002, 201; PL. 152, 280).
\textsuperscript{68} UNGER 1974 I, 71, 115 (101).
The existence of the medieval abbey and the contemporary fortification on the nearby hilltop was not accidentally. Today we have an idea about the importance of the Meseș Gate since Prehistory till today. Clearly the pass had to be watched and guarded. We also know that it was crossed by royal armies chasing Cuman raiders towards Chișineu in 1068 and later by the Mongols at the half of the 13th century. Recently studies suggest the reuse of the old Roman Roads through Middle Ages until the Late Modern Age. The 1165 document give us a good perspective over the economic aspect of medieval life surrounding the Roman ruins. The discovery of a segment of paved road and of a stone-built Roman bridge south-east of Porolissum towards today’s Jac village suggests the main way towards Cluj and from there to Turda or Cojocna, two important centers of salt exploitation in the Middle Ages. The existence of another medieval road that pierced along the Ortelec Valley, the so-called Meseș Gate, is suggested by a charter from 1359. It was probably the same road that slips south parallel to the Meseș chain and was mentioned in 1359 as magnam viam, per quam solent deferre sales and probably intersected in or near Zalău with another one viam Zenthpeter. Mapping these features we realize that the fortification from Măgura Moigradului was guarding the Meseș Gate not only as pathway but more as a crossway of old reutilized Roman roads (Fig. 2).

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