

Settlement Patterns of the German Colonisation in Transylvania/Romania

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The German colonisation in Transylvania goes back to the mid-12th century: In the framework of territorial expansion to the East, i.e. to Transylvania, Hungarian King Geza II (1141–1161) invited settlers from German territories to stabilise this Eastern border region permanently, for both economic and defense reasons. Based on the offering of land and freedom, the first groups of colonists may have arrived around 1150 and settled in the area of Sibiu (German: Hermannstadt). Early documents mention the groups of "prieores Flandrenses", later also "Teutonicii", "Latini", "Saxones", and finally the royal Hungarian chancellery used "Saxones" as a collective designation for the Transylvanian Germans (of all tribes).¹ The first independent provostship of the new settlers was founded in 1189–90 and confirmed in 1191 by Pope Celestine III. The "Andreanum" given by King Andrew II in 1224 represents the basic document of territorial and personal statute jurisdiction for the Transylvanian Saxons up to the end of the 19th century.² In 1211, King Andrew II invited the Order of Teutonic Knights to settle in the eastern part, called Burzenland (Romanian: Țara Bârsei), but in 1225 the order had to leave.³ After the severe devastations produced by the Mongolian invasion of 1241–42 in Transylvania,⁴ again groups of settlers were invited and at the end of the 13th century the colonisation of Transylvania is considered to have been accomplished. In the central region of Transylvania 247 settlements of the "Saxons" have been preserved to this day – mostly villages,

a few market towns and 7 towns. The settlement patterns are almost the same: rows of narrow and deep plots with houses whose gables face the street, attached to each other and aligned along one or both sides of the public spaces – the streets and/or the settlement square (Fig. 1). The plots are closed on the rear side by barns and followed by orchards (fig. 2). Differences from village to village are related only to the specific topography of the surrounding landscape, and similar patterns are preserved also in the market towns and in the suburbs of towns (like Schäßburg/Sighișoara, Fig. 3). If one tries to find out about the origins of these patterns, one will discover that no scientific research on Transylvania is available. However, in recent publications on the church fortifications of the Saxons the territorial organisation of the villages is mentioned "with Flemish plots".⁵ Again we have to go back to the 12th century and find the village of Flemmingen near Naumburg, which bears witness to the peaceful merging of the former Slavic – circular – village of Tribun and the medieval new settlers invited from Flanders by the bishop of Naumburg.⁶ As in Transylvania the new settlers had to secure the border region by clearing woodland and stabilising the region permanently – and the settlement patterns are the same, preserved until today. Considering that the "prieores Flandrenses" were among the first groups of colonists, they may have brought with them the settlement pattern system – usually under the leadership of locators from the lower nobility, but with experience in clearing



Fig. 1 Călnic (Kelling), World Heritage site, aerial view of the settlement [G. Gerster]



Fig. 2 Călnic (Kelling), rows of plots with farmsteads [G. Gerster]



Fig. 3 Sighișoara (Schäßburg), World Heritage site, aerial view from southwest [G. Gerster]



Fig. 4 Holašovice, Czech Republic, World Heritage site, aerial view of the settlement [mapy.cz]



Fig. 5 Rimetea (Eisenburg), main street [C. Machat]

woodland and territorial organisation. At a certain moment, this type of settlement pattern may have become common for the settlements of German colonisation. We find similar patterns preserved e.g. in Southern Bohemia/Czech Republic in the village of Holašovice (German: Holschowitz) near Ceske Budezovice (Fig. 4), or in settlements outside the Saxon colonisation of Transylvania, like the iron mining village of Rimetea (German: Eisenburg) in the Western Carpathian Mountains in Romania (Fig. 5), founded by German miners.⁷ Unfortunately, we have no documents concerning the first groups of settlers in Transylvania, but many location docu-

ments⁸ from the Naumburg or Meißen area in Germany mention the free choice of the church location: In Transylvania all the settlements of the Saxons have the church in the centre of the village (or settlement; even in towns); for defence reasons it is located on a hill or in marshland, in the event of enemy attacks offering short refuge distances for all families (Figs. 6 and 7). Presumably, the locators also brought with them the knowledge of church fortifications from their homelands, where due to repeated medieval territorial conflicts the numerous "vernacular" church fortifications followed the model of the feudal knights' castles. In Transylvania, the first church



Fig. 6 Saschiz (Keisd), World Heritage site, aerial view of the settlement [G. Gerster]



Fig. 7 Prejmer (Tartlau), World Heritage site, aerial view of the settlement [G. Gerster]

fortification works may have started immediately after the Mongolian invasion (1242), and perhaps the fortified seats of the locators' families – like that in Călnic (German: Kelling) (Fig. 1), documented in 1269⁹ – had served as models. The fortification works continued especially after the first Ottoman invasion of Transylvania in 1395 and were completed around 1500 (including the large fortification works of the cities). Today about 150 church fortifications have been preserved, because after the loss of any strategic or defence function in 1711, when the last armed conflict in Transylvania – the rebellion of the "Kuruz" fighters¹⁰ – had ended, they were in-



Fig. 8 Toarcla (Tarteln), aerial view of the settlement [G. Gerster]



Fig. 9 Toarcla (Tarteln), view of the village structure from the church tower [C. Machat]

cluded in the yearly course of events in the public life of the community, i.e. for storage (food, goods of the families) and education (classrooms).

Since 1990 especially the villages have been threatened by the emigration of the Saxon population to Germany, and many of them have already been abandoned (Figs. 8 and 9). For this reason, between 1991 and 1998 the exhaustive recording and scientific inventory of all the 247 Saxon settlements became a very urgent duty: Based on a scientific method proved in Germany since 1980 and financed by the German Federal Government, the inventory was implemented with Romanian specialists within the framework of a cooperation agreement between ICOMOS Germany, ICOMOS Romania and the Romanian National Commission for Historical Monuments.¹¹ On the maps at a scale of 1:5000, all the buildings of heritage value have been marked (Fig. 10), and the geomorphological characteristics of the surrounding cultural landscape and of the settlement patterns are indicated, documented also by aerial photographs and followed by index-cards with detailed descriptions of all the buildings.¹² The results have been published in the bilingual (German-Romanian) series *Topography of Monuments in Transylvania*; a first volume including 10 villages in the Braşov County was already introduced during the ongoing project work in 1994, and until 2016 four more volumes followed.¹ Based on the project results, in 1999 Romania succeeded in convincing the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO to add to the World Heritage site of Biertan (German Birthhalm)

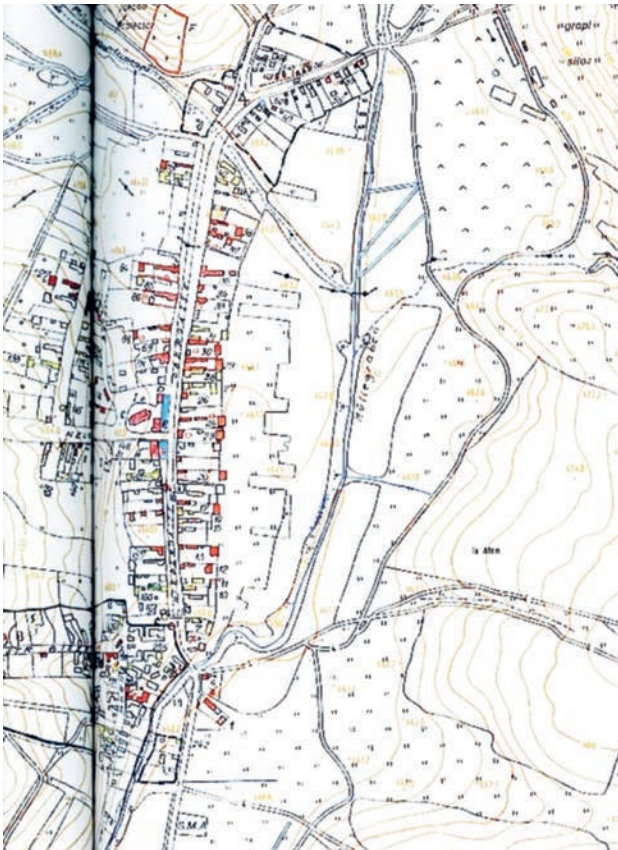


Fig. 10 Toarcla (Tarteln), topography of monuments, map with documentation [C. Machat]



Fig. 11 Biertan (Birihalm), World Heritage site, aerial view of the church fortification [G. Gerster]

(Fig. 11), inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1993, five more Saxon villages with fortified churches, thus representing the different historical regions of German settlements in Transylvania: the village of Călnic (Kelling) in the Western settlement area; the village of Valea Viilor (Wurmloch) (Fig. 12) in the central part; the entire village of Biertan (Birihalm) (Fig. 13); the village of Saschiz (Keisd) with the church fortification in the centre (Fig. 6); but also a peasants' refuge fortification on a hill; the village of Viscri (Deutschweiskirch) (Fig. 14) and the village of Prejmer (Tartlau) (Fig. 7) in the Burzenland (Țara Bârsei), i.e. in the south-eastern region.



Fig. 12 Valea Viilor (Wurmloch), World Heritage site, aerial view of the settlement [G. Gerster]



Fig. 13 Biertan (Birihalm), World Heritage site, aerial view of the entire settlement [G. Gerster]



Fig. 14 Viscri (Deutschweiskirch), aerial view of the settlement [G. Gerster]

The fortified church in Dârjiu (Hungarian name Ders) (Fig. 15) as a representative of the small group of Transylvanian church fortifications of the Székely (Hungarian) population was also included in the position "Villages with church fortifications of Transylvania" on the World Heritage List.¹⁴

Instead of a conclusion, a few words about the "vernacular architecture" of the Transylvanian Saxons: In early times, most of the houses of the farmsteads had been built in half-timber or in log-house construction, but due to repeated damages caused by fire especially in the 17th and early 18th centuries



Fig. 15 Dârjiu (Ders), World Heritage site, the fortified church of the Szekely population [C. Machat]



Fig. 16 Richiş (Reichsdorf), main street, row of houses of the Romanian peasants [C. Machat]



Fig. 17 Codlea (Zeiden), former Saxon houses [G. Lambescu]

(both in the inner cities and the villages), the administration of the Austrian Empire (especially after 1780, when Joseph II became emperor) forced the communities to rebuild their farmsteads in masonry.¹⁵ This is reflected in the type of late 18th century "vernacular" architecture with the typical houses with gables facing the street and with hip-roofs. This type of house became very common and was built all over Transylvania during the entire 19th century (also by Romanian peasants) (Fig. 16) and up to World War I. Today many of these houses are empty, abandoned or have been sold as weekend houses to Romanians from the big cities (Braşov/Kronstadt, Sibiu/Hermannstadt) (Fig. 17) – have a look at the results.

Notes

- ¹ Christoph Machat, Wehrkirchen und Kirchenburgen in Siebenbürgen. In: Denkmäler in Rumänien/Monuments en Roumanie, ICOMOS Journals of the German National Committee XIV, München 1995, p. 61.
- ² Quellen zur Geschichte der Siebenbürger Sachsen 1191–1975, gesammelt und bearbeitet von Ernst Wagner, Köln / Wien 1976, the provostship p. 9, the Andreanum pp. 15–20.
- ³ Quellen 1976 (see note 2), pp. 13–15.
- ⁴ Quellen (see note 2), pp. 20–23.
- ⁵ Hermann und Alida Fabini, Kirchenburgen in Siebenbürgen, Wien / Köln / Graz 1986, p. 11.

- ⁶ Hans-Dietrich Kahl, Vom Wendenkreuzzug nach Siebenbürgen? In: Zur Rechts- und Siedlungsgeschichte der Siebenbürger Sachsen, Siebenbürgisches Archiv Bd. 8, Köln / Wien 1971, pp. 164, 166 and note 19. See also Matthias Hardt, The Beginning of Colonisation in Eastern Central Europe in the High Middle Ages in this publication, p. 6f and note 16.
- ⁷ Quellen 1976 (see note 2), pp. 32–34.
- ⁸ Hardt (see note 6), p. 6 and note 4.
- ⁹ Quellen 1976 (note 2), p. 27f. Regarding the locators and their position in Transylvania see also Fabini 1986 (note 5), p. 13f.
- ¹⁰ Harald Roth, Kleine Geschichte Siebenbürgens, Köln / Weimar / Wien 1996, p. 66f.
- ¹¹ The project was also included in the working plan of ICOMOS-CIAV. See Christoph Machat, Conservation Management of the Vernacular Heritage. In: Conservation and Revitalization of Vernacular Architecture and ICOMOS-CIAV Annual Meeting 1997, Bangkok 1997, pp. 98–104.
- ¹² Christoph Machat, Die Dokumentation des siebenbürgisch-sächsischen Kulturgutes (1991–1998) und ihre Ergebnisse. Weltkulturdenkmäler und Denkmaltopographie. Marius Porumb zum 70. Geburtstag. In: Ars Transilvaniae, Bucuresti 2013, pp. 17–30.
- ¹³ Christoph Machat (ed.), Denkmaltopographie Siebenbürgen / Topografia Monumentelor din Transilvania:, vol. 3.3. Braşov County, Innsbruck 1994, followed by 5.1.1. Sibiu (Hermannstadt), Inner City, Köln 1999, 4.1. City of Sighişoara (Schäßburg), Köln 2002, 3.4. Braşov County, Heidelberg 2002, 5.7.1. City of Mediaş (Mediasch), Gundelsheim/Neckar 2011 (CD-ROM), Sibiu-Bonn 2015 (printed version).
- ¹⁴ Christoph Machat (ed.), Denkmäler in Rumänien / Monuments en Roumanie, ICOMOS Journals of the German National Committee XIV, München 1995, pp. 61–73. See also Christoph Machat, Attempts to Safeguard the Transylvanian Saxons' Architectural Heritage – The Project "Fortresses, Rediscovered Treasures", in: Heritage at Risk, ICOMOS World Report 2008–2010 on Monuments and Sites in Danger, Berlin 2010, pp. 145–147.
- ¹⁵ Roswith Capesius, Das siebenbürgisch-sächsische Bauernhaus. Wohnkultur. Bukarest 1977, pp. 24–28.