

Brief considerations concerning the beginnings of the town of Râmnic

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Abstract: The fact that Râmnic is mentioned since 1389 proves its special importance, as it represents, from a chronological viewpoint, the third certification of an urban settlement in Muntenia (Walachia), following after the first capitals of the state situated south of the Carpathians: Câmpulung and Argeș.

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In an article appeared some time ago in the pages of the same review (D. Căprăroiu, 2007), we have brought to light the particular circumstances of the appearance of the medieval town of Brăila, indissolubly related to the activation of the commercial road that will actually bear its name.

On the other road of the Walachian commerce, more exactly on the road of Olt, which went across Walachia – connecting Sibiu and *the Bulgarian areas* – the town of **Râmnic** will develop, during the same period, but with the contribution of the merchants from Sibiu¹.

Attested in documents since 1389², the **town** situated by the water of *Râmnic*³ certainly evolved from a village that had functioned, for decennia on end, as “a market town in the valley”. Its position was ideal, both from the perspective of the local commerce – to which can be added the proximity of the salt mines from Ocna⁴ –, and from the perspective of the

international transit commerce, which will stimulate during a few decennia, its urban structuring.

Though we lack the extremely necessary archaeological evidence, our opinion is that here was present a local center of power ever since the pre-statal period, which must have existed despite all these determining economic factors, active on the background of a favorable geographic position, apparently independent from the **direct** involvement of the political factor. What gives a certain credibility to this appreciation is the location itself – which could be the location of the supposed residence of the prince (cneaz) named *Farcaș* (>Slav *Vâlku*, “wolf”), from which the denomination of Vâlcea⁵ County may derive, probably lying in the boundaries of the former principedom of Oltenia –, and the existence of a walled town, suggested by the documents⁶. Moreover, the document of May 20, 1388 attests the existence of a court at the place called Hinătești (“curte la

locul Hinăteștilor”), previously given to Cozia, by the boyar Tatul (in *DRH*, 1966, p. 27): “The piece of information concerning the *court* is very precious because it implies the idea that it belonged to an important boyar, who could not have got to this position in just a single generation. Moreover, the family of the boyar who had this court was on the verge of disappearance, which makes it possible for this court to become part of the property of Cozia. So, in point of ancientness, this court may date back from the times of the previous two or three generations.” (A. Sacerdoțeanu, 1972, p. 41).

Later on, when the **Reign** came into existence and developed, in a natural relation with its itinerant character – fully motivated by the need to organize the country, a **local court** must have been installed in the most important settlements – to which Râmnic certainly belonged! –, from which the voivodes emitted important certifications of privileges. From this viewpoint we must highlight, once again, the early attestation of the locality of Râmnic by the river Olt – the third in chronological order, after Argeș and Câmpulung –, as princely town, where the voivode had the possibility to dwell, even for longer periods of time (A. Sacerdoțeanu, 1972, p. 43).

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1“As far as the commerce with Sibiu is concerned, no privilege certificates have been preserved from Mircea or from the following reigning princes, as some of the archives of Sibiu have been lost; it is possible that such privilege certificates existed. Only a century after Mircea’s reign, on June 29, 1505, we have a confirmation given by Radu cel Mare, concerning the customs house for the merchandise from “genuine” (= “the precipice”), at the ford of Olt (*la vadul Oltului*), given by Mircea to the monastery of Cozia. A custom tax was exacted for *all the Turkish and Hungarian merchandises and wax, cattle, fish, wheat, flour, of all that is bought* (so for the export, not for the import), *since 103... because this customs was given to the above-mentioned monastery by the holy late great-grand father of ours, Io Mircea voivode*. The customs tax will be paid by anyone, *even by the burgomaster of Sibiu, even if he were to have a document sealed with my big or little seal or with the ring on my hand... You, custom-house officer, shall not spare anyone when it comes to the payment of the customs tax according to the register of the customs house near the Danube*. The merchandise mentioned here is the transit merchandise going to Transylvania, brought from the other side of the Danube river and put down in the register of the customs house when the merchandise crossed the river, namely *Turkish merchandises* (mentioned in the beginning of the charter) and *Hungarian merchandises*, that crossed the country to arrive on the other side of the Danube.” (P. P. Panaitescu, 2000, p. 120).

2The charter by which Mircea cel Bătrân voivode enlarged the boundaries of Cozia Monastery, giving to it the place that used to belong to Jiblea village, was emitted on September 4, 1389, “in the town of my reign called Râmnic” (“**în orașul domniei mele numit Râmnic**”) (in *DRH*, 1966, p. 29). A year before, on May 20, 1388, also in a donation act meant for the same monastery, was mentioned the existence of a “mill in **Râmnic**” (in *DRH*, 1966, p. 27).

³ The locality **Râmnicul de pe Olt** (in *DRH*, 1966, p. 260) or **Râmnicul Vâlcei** – as it was called beginning with the modern times, in order to

distinguish it from Râmnicul Sărat – will take over the name of the homonymous river, on whose banks it developed, being etymologically related to the existence of "**râbnice**" or "**râmnice**", namely ponds arranged as fisheries, at the confluence with the river Olt. An important argument confirming this interpretation is provided by the use of this hydronym *only* in the area of the settlement from Râmnic, while, upstream, the river is known as "râul Olăneștilor" or "râul Cheienilor" (A. Sacerdoțeanu, 1972, p. 38-39).

⁴ We are thinking about Ocna Mare („the big salt mine”), called so since the 16th century, in order to

differentiate it from the smaller salt mine nearby, and also from Ocna Mică („the little salt mine”) from Târgoviște (*cf.* L. Rădvan, 2004, p. 450).

⁵It is attested since the times of Mircea voivode, when he gave the beehives of **Vâlcea County** (" **județul Vâlcea**") to the monastery of Cozia, on January 8, 1392 (in *DRH*, 1966, p. 44).

⁶We are thinking about the so-called *Cetate* („walled town”), whose existence is suggested by the toponym *valea Cetății* (the „Valley of the walled town”), from within the town (in *DIR*, 1951, p. 181).