

## **Formations in Maramureş during the First Half of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century (A Few Considerations concerning the Status of the Romanian Nobility)**

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**Abstract:** Formations in Maramureş during the First Half of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century (A Few Considerations concerning the Status of the Romanian Nobility). During the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Maramureş will go through the last stage of its organization under the form of a Romanian principality. The Hungarian royalty tried to bring in the territory its so-called royal hosts (noblemen of Hungarian origin) who received numerous liberties economically. Gradually, their possessions will cross over the old Romanian princely ownership, determining numerous conflicts. Even though the first measures meant to limit the Romanian freedoms in Maramureş date back since the time of King Carol-Robert de Anjou, the transformation of the principality of Maramureş into royal comitat is completed only during the reign of his son, Lewis I.

**Key words:** prince, voivode, comitat, royal document, allotment

The study of the area of Maramureş during the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century has proved to be an extremely important endeavor because of the implications it had in the Romanian Middle Ages in general. The contribution brought forth by the Romanian feudality in the area to the appearance of the second Romanian medieval state, Moldova, remains essential as long as Dragoş and Bogdan, characters who have become a legend long time ago, start from this area, delimited at present by volcanic mountains, Rodnei Massif and the Mounts of Maramureş, to lay the basis of a new Romanian political nucleus, on the other side of the Carpathians.

The analysis of the evolution and of the transformations within the society of Maramureş continues however to raise numerous questions especially because of the gaps present in the written documents, but also because of the insufficiency of the data provided, until now, by archeological diggings.

In the present study we tried to formulate

some ideas concerning the Romanian nobility in the area of Maramureş (with its two components - proposed in the specialized literature - “cnezii de sat”/ village princes and “cnezii de vale” / valley princes) meant to reflect the status of political autonomy of this territory on the background of the beginning of the process of replacement of the Romanian organizational forms with the Hungarian ones defined by the institution of the comitat.

At the boundary between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the areas that lay at the frontier of nowadays Transylvania, like Banat, Haţeg, Ţara Făgăraşului, Ţara Maramureşului, we notice the persistence of free communities (“obşti libere”). For the area of Maramureş, the above-mentioned structures appear made up of several villages, the transformations attested within them being those that gave birth to superior forms of political organization: “cnezate” (principalities).

The difficult and late participation of Maramureş as part of the Hungarian state structures

led to a coverage of the Romanian political formations and institutions in documents that dates only from the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century; the determination of stages and of a hierarchy in the society of Maramureș is offered, especially, by the archeological data or by the eventual analogies that have not always led to exact results and conclusions (I. A. Pop, 1991).

Starting from such a consideration, we can appreciate as just the idea that the principle of hereditary/family leadership functioned from an early period, the removal of the autochthonous local power in Maramureș being slower there compared to the rest of Transylvania. The fact that all the documents concerning the area of Maramureș ate only since the 14<sup>th</sup> century represents an extra clue of the fact that the 13<sup>th</sup> century symbolizes politically the last stage of the central leadership exerted by the voivodes of Maramureș (M. Gherman, 1976).

Though it was admitted that we are dealing with a process that is hard to reconstruct, the researchers determined that the appearance of the function of voivode needs to be doubtlessly connected to the delegation of the leadership attributes in the hands of a single person, chosen by the members of the cnezial (princely) assemblies.

Consequently, cnezii (the princes), at least in the case of the region of Maramureș were hereditary masters of the villages, benefiting as well of some military, fiscal of juridical attributes. Though many rights were regulated before the penetration of the royal authority in this territory (a fact highlight by the documents emitted in the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century), by means of the extension of the possession of the land can be identified, at least in part, the strata of the society in Maramureș.

The Romanian feudality would be, in this way, naturally represented, in a majority of cases, by the so-called “cnezi de sat” (village princes), who usually owned a village or even parts of an actual rural settlement. Unfortunately, the existing documents for the first decennia of the 14<sup>th</sup> century provide too little information and cannot help build a solid demonstration in this sense.

The second category of the cnezi of Maramureș was that of “cnezilor de vale”/valley princes, who owned groups of villages, formed of 4-18 settlements (R. Popa, 1997). Logically, judging from the perspective of the territories under control, the valley princes benefited of superior rights (militarily, socially and economically) compared to

the village princes.

This opinion remains, in the present state of the research, just a work hypothesis, relying rather on logical reasoning than on sure data. Moreover, this idea lay at the basis of a “unprofitable” hypothesis put forward by the Romanian research, according to which valley princes represented the real vivodes of Maramureș, during the period previous to the penetration of the royal authority. Such an evolution is not confirmed by the documents emitted during the first part of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and that is why we consider the above-mentioned vision just an attempt to implement the Transylvanian model in the territories of Maramureș as well.

For the same reason, the hypothesis of the simultaneous existence in Maramureș of several voievodate (principalities) over which the Hungarian political organization gradually came cannot be proved. The confusion between the property of the valley prince (“cnezatul de vale”) and “voievodat” (principality), frequently encountered in the historiography of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, seriously contributed to accentuating the contradictions concerning the political evolution of Maramureș.

So, starting from such imaginary considerations, for a long time, the historians tried to attribute to these “cnezate de vale” the role of some political formations that could have evolved towards state formations. The information taken from the historical sources of those times comes to prove the very opposite idea, namely that their force was a reduced one, they being easily controlled and yielding to royal power in an interval of just a few decennia.

We consider that the only clear elements concerning these structures remain their appearance after the properties of the village princes (“cnezate de sat”) and the heredity of the function of valley prince (“cneaz de vale”) (mentioned as well in historical documents).

Consequently, their birth could be seen as a result of the transformations that took place inside the free community (obște liberă), which, turned into a community subjected by the prince (“cneaz”), moved decisively in the direction of the appearance of the property of the valley prince (“cnezat de vale”).

A series of researchers of the history of Maramureș have opted as well for the hypothesis of the origin of the cnezat (principality) from among the unions of communities (obști). So, according to the opinion of a part of the Romanian historiography, the

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village principality (“cnezat de sat”) constituted just an intermediary step in-between the free community (“obște liberă”) and the valley principality (“cnezat de vale”) (D. C. Arion, 1938). Judging from the perspective of the entire 14<sup>th</sup> century, the idea proves to be right, as it is difficult to admit and to understand the simultaneous appearance and development of the two types of principalities (“cnezat”) (R. Popa, 1997). If we relate the discussion to the Romanian area from the other side of the Carpathians, we can notice that the origin of the princes (“cnezi”) lay in those members of the community delegated, following certain assemblies, to represent the interests of the community. In very many cases they managed to keep the position given to them within the family, acquiring in time an access to a higher rank, compared to the rest of the members of the community. At the same time, they remain connected to the village or the respective rural settlements that they turn into their own property.

Over the Romanian organization, Hungary will try to superpose, even since the first years of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, its own organization of comitat. The method chosen was that of bringing in the territory royal guests who received here commercial and religious freedom, being at the same time exempted from many due taxes. All these exemptions and privileges have the unique purpose of reinforcing royal power, especially as all the lands allotted to the royal guests were impossible to be taken by the inhabitants speaking a different language, a decision aimed directly at the Romanian nobility, who represented the majority in Maramureș (I. Moga, 1944).

Despite the support given to it in the area of Maramureș, by means of the royal guests, the institution of the comitat does not record from the first moment a remarkable progress. For almost half a century, in the documents emitted, we find just two mentions of people who ensured the position of “comite” (prince) of Maramureș. First of all, it is about voivode Nicolae “comite de Ugocea și Maramureș” (prince of Ugocea and Maramureș) as he is presented by a 1303\* document and by his son, mentioned on 1326 as “comite al Maramureșului”\*\* (prince of Maramureș). The information prompts us to believe that we deal rather with a period of consolidation of the voivodal institution during this first stage of the fight between these two types of organization.

Returning to our actual discussion

concerning the political formations of Maramureș, we can state that during the first decennia of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, we find attested seven “cnezate de vale” (valley principalities): “al Marei” (of Mara), “al Izei” (of Iza), “al Cosăului” (of Cosău), “al Câmpulungului” (of Câmpulung), “al Varaliei” (of Varalia), “al Talaborului” (of Talabor) and “al Bârjavei” (of Bârjava). Those of Iza, Câmpulung and Mara seem to be dominant both politically and economically, becoming the main forces capable of disputing the role of leadership of Maramureș, in the circumstances of the persistence of the local elements.

The first of them, “cnezatul Izei” (the principality of Iza), was situated in the Valley of Vișeu and in the upper course of the river that gave it its name. The center of this formation was at Cuhea, strategic, fortified settlement, situated right in the middle of this principality. Though the walled city had been identified in the territory a millennium earlier, it was only the archeological research carried out during 1964-1965 that brought to light the center of power of the family of Bogdănești.

The materials discovered within the complex (among which we can notice knife blades, riding spurs, arrow points) are a testimony concerning the military role played by the residence of Maramureș during certain periods. The fact that, in the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the “cnezat” (principality) of Maramureș included 22 villages allows us to consider it, at least in point of extension, the most powerful cnezat in the area.

The first generation attested in documents in the family of the princes of Cuhea (“cnezi de la Cuhea”) is that of the brothers Bogdan and Iuga. For this reason, this political formation is also encountered in the specialized literature as “cnezatul de vale al Bogdăneștilor” (the valley principality of the Bogdănești).

The archeological research, carried out in the fortified settlement of Cuhea, indicated the existence of several levels of habitation, an aspect situating the beginning of the center from Cuhea somewhere during the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The lack of written sources and the poverty of the archeological material prevent, for the moment, a clear reconstitution of the beginning of this family. We will keep in mind, however, the observations concerning the presence of an older cemetery in the area of the voivodal (princely) church made of stone (dating back probably from the end of the reign of Carol-Robert de Anjou) which leads us to conclude that

there must have been an older wooden church, probably dismantled on the occasion of the building of this new cult place (R. Popa, 1966). It may have belonged to the first family of this important noble family of Maramureș.

Obviously, Bogdan and his brother, Iuga, are distinguished as to great noblemen ("feudali"), holding a significant position within the society of Maramureș. Moreover, according to the 14<sup>th</sup> century documents, between the Bogdănești family and the descendents of other principalities ("cnezate") of Maramureș, there is no kinship, a piece of information confirming the attributes of power and superiority of this formation in relation to the other political structures of Maramureș.

The principality of Câmpulung ("cnezatul Câmpulungului"), for many historians the first important principality in this area comprised, in the period mentioned previously, 16-18 villages. It belonged to the Codreni family, element highlighted by a royal document ("diplomă regală") of December 28, 1345 (Ioan Mihaly de Apșa, 1900).

In this document, the Hungarian king, Lewis I, certifies his lordship over the land of voivode Erdeu-Codrea's sons. This document highlights, just as in the case of the principality (cnezat) of Cuhea, two family branches. It is about, first of all, the sons of Codrea, Oprea and Mariș, and the brother of the former voivode, Stan, along with his son Nicolae. According to the above-mentioned document, King Lewis I gives the most important privileges to Oprea and Mariș (rightful inheritors of the principality/cnezat of Câmpulung), measure that may have caused the beginning of a smoldering conflict for power in the important political formation of Maramureș.

Though the discord within the noble class, practiced by the royal power, will become something natural starting with the fifth decennium of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the facts mentioned in the historical sources do not allow for precise interpretations on the relationships within this family. In our opinion, one aspect remains sure, namely that the formation of Câmpulung will not prove to have the capacity of playing a really important role in the tense events that took place in the area of Maramureș in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, being gradually integrated in the process of assimilation to the Hungarian political and administrative structures.

Finally, the last political formation we

would like to talk about in the present study, the principality of Mara ("cnezatul Marei"), included, by mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, 9 villages. King Lewis I, by means of two acts, dated 1349 and 1355, acknowledged the lordship of the princes of Giulești ("cnezi Giuleșteni) over the possessions of Giulești and Nyres. Especially interesting, in the present case, is as well the fact that in the year 1360, the same Hungarian king confirmed the lordship of the noble Dragoș of Giulești, leader of the principality of Mara, over six more villages (Ioan Mihaly de Apșa, 1900).

Consequently, we might deal with the first case of transformation, attested in documents, based on royal gifts ("danii regale"), of a village principality ("cnezat de sat") into a valley principality ("cnezat de vale"). Even so, the lack of indubitable evidence prompts us not to reject, in totality, the hypothesis of a simple royal confirmation of certain already existing rights, which are missing from the documents of those times.

The contribution of the family of princes of Giulești (cnezi Giuleșteni), to the consolidation of the Hungarian lordship in Moldova tends to give more credibility to the first hypothesis, in the context of the fact that the Hungarian royalty has always known to reward its loyal subjects plentifully. The existence of a stone church that, stylistically, could represent the oldest stone monument in Maramureș, attributed to the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, confirms, to a certain extent, the constant evolution of this political formation under the protection of the royal privileges (R. Popa, M. Zdroba, 1969).

To conclude our brief analysis, we can appreciate that in the regions surrounding the intra-Carpathian area (as is the case of Maramureș), the princes ("cnezimea") constituted an important social layer that, during the entire reign of King Carol-Robert of Anjou (1310-1342), continued to play an important political role. Even though, generally speaking, in the area of Transylvania, the process of limitation of the local political formations' rights had already begun, its development was not characterized by uniformity (Șt. Pascu, 1971), one of the exceptions being exactly the country of Maramureș.

Maramureș appeared, in this way, by the time of the death of the last angevin king as the final fortress of the fight between the two types of

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political organization: principality (“voievodat”) and comitat. The enthronement of the Hungarian king Lewis I of Anjou will mark a new stage of ample transformations in the society of Maramureș. The supporters of the royal policy and implicitly the supporters of the transformational process in Maramureș from principality (voievodat) into comitat will increase their domains and power, while the Romanian nobles who wanted the maintaining of the old type of organization will soon have to leave the fight. Such is the case of the voivode Bogdan of Cuhea who loses this function and even a significant part of the territories he used to hold, being somehow constrained to look for the remake of these rights and freedoms in the area east of the Carpathians.

Around the primordial meanings of the words “voievod” (voivode) and “țară” (country) (with a strong basis on the level of Maramureș) can be reconstituted the historical development of the second Romanian medieval state (Gh. Brătianu, 1995). It is certain that the authority of a formerly voivode of Maramureș put its imprint on the local Moldavian structures. Yet, we must understand that it was not political force, but the implementation of certain common ideals present both on the level of the society in Maramureș and on the level of the Moldavian society that made this coalition possible.

Consequently, we can highlight, in the end, that the decline of the princely (“voivodal”) authority in Maramureș also had an immediate effect, contributing to the appearance of the second Romanian medieval country, Moldova, under the leadership of the noble of Maramureș revolted against the royal power, Bogdan of Cuhea.

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