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**THE ROLE OF SALT DEPOSITS
IN THE POLITICAL-MILITARY HISTORY OF THE
CARPATHO-DANUBIAN SPACE IN THE I-XIII CENTURIES**

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The first millennium A.D. of the Carpatho-Danubian space is characterized by the extension of the Roman domination north of the Danube for almost 200 years and by an impetuous penetration of the Germanic peoples and of the steppic elements that have gathered along elements of other kind as well and whose purpose of penetrating this place was in the hope of finding sources of income and wealth.

As a result of the wars that took place in the years 101/102-105/106, Dacia, that had become a Roman province, becomes part of the Roman world and its wealth is the key which allows a great number of possibilities to exploiting the native population, the soil and the subsoil in the Empire. It is for the "gold resources, the grains, the salt, the silver, the iron, the animals, the timber...", that Traian has conquered the Dacian state" (ZUGRAVU 1994, 60). The mine work went through a quick development period; by mine work we understand the extraction of salt, this being one of the main treasures which came to the Romans' attention, as the Italic Peninsula, the Balkans and the Adriatic area were well known for lacking salt; salt was a great wealth of Dacia's (MACREA 1969, 306).

We have knowledge of 18 big mines and 11 small ones from the Roman epoch that has been also exploited after 274 A.D. (CONSTANTINESCU 1981, 14-15). Centres for the exploitation of salt in the wealthy area of the Transylvanian plateau have been archeologically certified at Cojocna, Dej, Ocna Dejului, Turda - the ancient *Potaissa*, Sic, in the district of Cluj (CRIȘAN, BĂRBULESCU, CHIRILĂ, VASILIEV, WINKLER 1992, 155, 179, 297, 342, 389), at Ocna Mureșului, the ancient *Salinae* (DOBRA 1996, 18; GIURESCU 1983, 193; TUDOR 1968, 219), in the district of Alba, Domnești and Bistrița-Năsăud, in the district of Bistrița, Sanpaul, in the district of Harghita; salt is thought to have been also extracted at Ocna Sibiului (PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA, DAICOVICIU, TEODOR, BÂRZU, PREDA 1995, 245).

The Romans have organized an exploitation at Ocnele Mari as well, from which the salt was being transported at Buridava and was being

marketed along the Olt, towards the Danube (TUDOR 1968, 367). The Olt path from Ocnele Mari to the Danube was also called, up to the previous century, *The Salt Path* (TAMAS 1995, 61; STAMATIU 1943, 2). Ocnele Mari are part of the defence area of the Olt line, the limes and the Roman camps on this line.

Roman camps and military call-ups are to be found around all great salt exploitations, which, we presume, were meant to protect the area, as well as the natural resources, from barbarian attacks and to take part directly to the exploitation of the soil wealth.

In the salt area of Prahova, the Roman camps from Drajna de sus, Târgsor, Mălăiești and Rucăr have been raised, which were part of the supervision of North Moldavia against the Dacian - Roxolan attacks.

The Transylvanian area, which contained the greatest wealth, was enclosed within a defence belt. The east of the northern Dacia was protected by a discontinuous limes between the valleys of Someșul Mare and the defile of Oituz, formed by a series of Roman camps which spread from Ilișua up to Brețcu. The fortified line followed the course of some deep valleys situated west of the summits of Căliman, Gurghiu and Harghita mountains. The Roman camps from Orheiul Bistriței, Brâncovenești, Călugareni, Sărăteni, Odorhei, Sânpaul, Olteni, Comalău and Brețcu (CĂTĂNICIU 1987-1988, 145-159) were controlling the access to the wooded and steep valleys from Moldavia, in a region that was occupied by the free Dacian population.

Close to the camp from Sânpaul, in the district of Harghita, on the way to Mărtiniș village, in the place called "*The Salty Fountain*", a series of traces of salt exploitation dating from the times of Roman domination were found, among which an inscription to the health of C. Iul. Valentius, salt ruler by the care of his trust man C. Iulius Omucio. The document reminds of another tenant of the salt mines east of Dacia. The garrison of the Roman camp at Sânpaul was made of a *n(umerus) M(aurorum) S...*

The Roman camp from Micia-Vețel, the district of Hunedoara, played an important part in the defence of the Transylvanian gates and the Mureș stream. Ever since the first years of Roman domination Micia intermediated the change with the lazigs from Panonia. The military security was assured by soldiers from *cohors I Hispanorum Campagonum*, *cohors II Flavia Commagenorum*, *numerus Maurorum Tibiscensium* and other units that activated here shortly. These were meant to control the mining and salt areas from Mureș valley, to assure the peace of commerce with rafts on Mureș all the way to Seghedin and to supervise parts of the road that led to *Apulum*. *P. Aelius Marus*, granter of

the pasture lands and of the salt mines, had as his own agent in Micia, the libert *P. Ael. Euforus*. The camp had the key role in the defense system west of Dacia province (RAJH, 121-122), along with the camps from Bulci (Bata commune, district of Arad), Aradul Nou, Sânnicolaul Mare (district of Arad) (GLODARIU 1976, 541), Cenad (Timiș district) and Szeged, probably the ancient *Partiscum* (GLODARIU 1976, 277; POPESCU-SPINENI 1938, 42), an important trading center. This defensive belt assured the protection of the Roman Banat against the lazigs' attacks and it also protected the transport of merchandise that was realized by craft on Mureș.

The salt-wealthy area in the centre of Transylvania was given a great attention. *Ptolemy* notes the *Salinae* place in Dacia, which he situates between *Bucla* and *Potaissa*. Places with the name of *Saline* appear though, frequently as toponymic, where salt exploitations were found. (TUDOR 1968, 205; POPESCU-SPINENI 1938, 42).

The place called *Salinae* was for long identified with Turda, particularly because of its ancient exploitation, uninterrupted even in the Middle Ages. Based on the ancient itineraries and on the location of the Roman town *Potaissa* in Turda, M. I. Ackner comes with the proposition of locating it at Ocna Mureșului, where, in the middle of the XIX century, he has registered the traces of some vaulted Roman exploitation. The Roman traces stretched all the way to Șpălnaca, area in which the salt massif flourishes. (WOLLMANN 1996, 241). The camp from Războieni - Cetate was placed across Mureș, almost in the front of the salt area *Salinae*, the greatest in Transylvania. Detachments of the XIII *Gemina*, V *Macedonica* and I *Batavorum* legions made a stop here, having the mission of guarding the salt mines and the imperial road between *Saline* and *Apulum*. (TUDOR 1968, 206; FERENCZI, URSUȚ 1985-1986, 213- 221; CĂȚINAȘ 1978, 195-200)

Another extremely important salt area was situated at Ocna Sibiului and in the surrounding area. Situated close to the road that linked Valea Oltului to *Apulum*, the salt mines from Ocna Sibiului seem to have constituted a very important economic objective during the Roman domination in Dacia. I.E. Fichel registers here, in the XVIII century, approximately 15 ancient exploitations, while K. Horedt does not exclude the possibility that they had been open during the Roman period (WOLLMANN 1996, 242). Several Roman camps, which were probably assigned with the security and salt exploitation, could be found in the surroundings of this center. On the shore of Olt, the *Castellum* from *Caput Stenarum*, situated on the territory of Boița village (Tălmăciu commune,

district of Sibiu), 1 km far from the aperture of Turnu Roșu gorge, was of a great importance, not only as far as the protection of the borders of the province was concerned, but also for the supervision of the interior of the Carpathian bow and of the roads that were forking here.

The salt extracted from the Roman Dacia was further sent to the entire Roman and Barbarian world, the province being included in the economic circuit of the Empire, as Vasile Pârvan tells us: "*the commercial affairs that the country so variously endowed by the nature had to bring about drew such an important number of merchants of different nations, the merchandise travelled not only on land, but also on the greatest rivers in Dacia..., the internal activity has as a correspondent the commercial expansion outside the province, that carried the merchants, as well as the merchandise, all the way from Dacia to Saloniae, to Mytilene and even to Egypt*" (PÂRVAN 1972, 154).

The Roman retreat apparently left this territory with no political- state structure at all, but the realities, sometimes registered by the ancient writers, show that some traditionally Roman forms of political organization have been kept. The communities are organized in *romanii* (Iorga), that will become, in the middle of the first millennium, one of the forms of organization existent in Europe, except for the Roman Empire and the barbarian kingdoms. The authorities were local and were leading some crumbed territorial systems. (BĂRBULESCU, DELETANT, HITCHINS, PAPA-COSTEA, TEODOR 1998, 62-63).

One must not overlook the areas of the former Dacia, inhabited by the free Decanians, rich in salt, that kept on being exploited in the I-III centuries according to the old habit through simple methods, that perpetuated and can still be studied today in hard accessible areas, like Sări-Bisoca area (the district of Buzău), Valea Sării (Vrancea district) and the salty pasture-land area from Bistrița-Năsăud (Colibița, Bistrița Bârgăului, Prundul Bârgăului, Susenii Bârgăului, Slatinița, Livezile, Dumitra, Cepar, Florești, Santereag, Sărata, Căila, Domnești, Sărățel) (CHINTĂUAN, RUSU 1988, 238-277).

In the areas inhabited by the free Dacians, where the salt reserves are as large as they are in the Province, the exploitation was made after the old methods and, of course, with "modernizations" borrowed from the Roman world. Though there is yet no archaeological evidence concerning salt exploitation in these areas, logic tells us that such necessary richness, which could be abundantly found, was exploited not only for local needs, raising grace to the increase of the population, but also for the exchange, an important source of income.

The Aurelian retreat made the carpatho-danubio-pontic space become "*the stateless village*" (N. Iorga) (PAPACOSTEA 1993, 8), and it was the area of Europe the most wanted for its wealth as the migratory waves, be they of German origin or central-Asiatic, were all willing to get rich through robbery and, at the same time, they were also looking for areas good for pasturing for their herds, this being their main living source or for the other raw materials necessary for life and human existence- salt and metals.

The penetration of these invader waves produces several changes in the social-economical life of the inhabitants north of the Low Danube; this phenomenon marks "*the cessation of the commercial relationships based on the use of the money and their replacement through relations based on the natural economy, phenomenon which begins after the Huns' invasion, being the most representative for the economical structure of the future feudal organization now being formed*" (HOREDTE 1958, 19). The inhabitants hide their gold and silver thesauruses, using only "*bronze and brass*" coins (*Ibidem*), which had a more reduced value and did not represent a temptation for the conquerors.

The migratory' domination and control over the inhabitants had an ephemeral character, those being forced to pay *taxes in cereals and, probably, in work* (idem 1975, 118) and, of course, taxes in salt.

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The Goths descended to Scandinavia, a real *source of peoples* (ZUGRAVU 1994, 96) and intensely acted in the Low Danube in the north-pontic region, centuries III - IV A.D.

In the area of Buzău one could find the centre of the Visigoth confederation at the crossing point of the commercial roads that came from the Danube hydrants towards the interior of Dacia and, at the same time, one could not ignore the rich salt deposits in the area (OBERLÄNDER-TÂRNOVEANU 2000, 201, mss).

Ever since they came on the shores of the Baltic Sea, in the II century A.D. and settled south of the Danube, the Goths also played an important part in the acculturation reports that led to the birth of Sântana de Mureş-Cerneahov culture.¹

¹ The spread of the culture Sântana de Mureş (DIACONU 1965) in the central area of Transylvania (Sântana de Mureş: RAJA, 176-177; Palanca: CRIŞAN, BĂRBULESCU, CHIRILĂ, VASILIEV, WINKLER 1992, 301-302; Lechinţa de Mureş: CRIŞAN 1960, 285-299), was realized in stages on the north-danubian territory, first in Moldavia (MITREA, PREDA 1966, 13-57, 93): Izvoare-Neamţ (MITREA 1973-1974, 55-57), Leţcani – Iaşi

The numerous discoveries of this culture may be associated with the salt areas of the entire carpatho-danubian space.

The reinforcement of a power center in the Someș area had the role of protecting the salt space. The thesaurus from Pietroasele, attributed to the Goth commander Athanaric, was discovered in an area full of historical traces, having an excellent strategic position and is now placed on the salt diapirs, developed on the lode between Dâmbovița Valley and Moldavia Valley (ATUDOREI, BOCANTE, MICLEA 1971, 41). There are numerous aflorations on the hill Dara and Sărățeanca, Porumbița, numerous salt sources at Sărata Monteoru and the salt hills Valea Sării - Tisău and Slon - Prahova.

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The Huns passed in the II century A.D. west of the Urals. In 375 they have destroyed the Goth (Visigoth) kingdom and around the year 400, led by king Uldis (DOLINESCU-FERCHE, 1976, 599), they gain control over the region situated left of the Danube, the centre of their power being in the north of the Danube's hydrants, from where they were exercising some control over Moldavia, Muntenia and Oltenia. The power centre was

(IONIȚĂ 1996, 308), Lunca - Galați (idem 1971, 205; 2000, 334), Miorcani – Botoșani (idem 2000, 79) and Muntenia (DIACONU 1973, 13; 1977, 431-457; CONSTANTINESCU 1992, 193-208; 1994, 105-115): Târgșor (DIACONU 1965, 100-101), Mogoșani (idem 1970), Spanțov (idem 1976, 549), Oinacu (BERCIU, DOLINESCU-FERCHE, RĂDULESCU, IONESCU 1966, 375-378), Independența (MITREA 1996, 256), Oltenița (MORINTZ 2000, 231), Gherăseni (CONSTANTINESCU 1999, 38), Chilia – Militari (BICHIR 1984, 33) (no discoveries from the early phase, are to be found west of the transalutian limes and in Oltenia), then the carriers of this culture penetrate the south-east corner of Transylvania (not before 330), go further the upstream on Mureș to the centre of Transylvania, mid of the IV century. The discoveries from the inter-Carpathian space define a later phase of this culture, dating from the second mid of the IV century. The spread of this culture's vestiges is better delimited in Transylvania, as well as their differentiation from those belonging to the Romanics (BĂRBULESCU, DELETANT, HITCHINS, PAPACOSTEA, TEODOR 1995, 108-109). A region rich in Sântana de Mureș settlements is the one from the upper basin of Olt (DIACONU 1976, 542-544).

Important vestiges, settlements and cemeteries of this culture have been discovered at Pietroasele (the district of Buzău), at the feet of the hill Istrița and on the upper and mid stream of the river Călmățui. The results of this research are offering data regarding the social organization and the stratification of the society in the IV century (idem 1976, 1061-1063; 1975, 67-75). The rich royal grave from Apahida (CRIȘAN, BĂRBULESCU, CHIRILĂ, VASILIEV, WINKLER 1992, 30-34) may be the proof of a powerful Ostrogothic centre from the Hunic epoch in the area of Someș, center illustrated by the thesaurus from Șimleul Silvășiei (BABEȘ 1970, 970; HARHOIU 1976, 560), the grave of Omharus and the second grave from Apahida (CRIȘAN, BĂRBULESCU, CHIRILĂ, VASILIEV, WINKLER 1992, 34) and by the thesaurus from Someșeni.

probably situated in the region of Buzău and it offered, as it has been shown, numerous wealth.

The native Romanic population were producing things necessary for living, the Hunic tribes being incompatible with the sedentary agricultural life and, particularly because of this, the frightening barbarians had established peaceful relationships with the Romanics, from whom they used to take, as taxes, what they needed for their usual living (HARHOIU 1975, 108-109).

The Huns army, during Atilla's time, "*was formed of a million soldiers... the soldiers' weapons were made especially of leather and different metals*" (KEZA 1932, 76-77)². This population were crossing wide spaces in search of pasturelands, crossing over large rivers on leather bellows and establishing temporary dominations over the populations they found and in front of whom they were imposing themselves both through military force and by impressing through aspect and cruelty. Their way of living- cattle breeder, leads us to the thought that they unquestionably had a great interest in the wealth of the north-pontic area, where salt played an important part.

The defeat of the Hunic coalition, as well as the loss of their domination, brought in the carpatho-danubian space a new coalition led by Gepids confederated with the Ostrogoths.

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The Gepids, east- Germanic population related to the Goths, called by Iordanes "*quieta gens*" (GIURESCU, GIURESCU 1974, 174), descended from Scandynavia and settled near the hydrants of Vistula in the first centuries of the Christian era.

Several archaeological discoveries in the centre of Transylvania have been attributed to them.³ All these stand for the interest and preoccupation of the Gepids in exploiting salt reserves in Transylvania.

² It is well known that the armies of the Asiatic peoples were constituted from horsemen (one soldier possessed five battle horses), which meant the consuming of a large amount of salt both for people and for animals, being known the fact that a man needs from 5 to 7 g of salt per day, while large animals, up to 25-30g of salt per day (MINCU 1986, 922; MILOS, DRÂNCEANU 1984, 224). At the same time they used large amounts of salt in the processing of skins used for making shelters, weapons and clothes.

³ The royal graves from Apahida, containing gold decoration objects and harness pieces, among which the grave of Omharus (CRIȘAN, BĂRBULESCU, CHIRILĂ, VASILIEV, WINKLER 1992, 32-33), where elements from the Gepids' culture and the presence of the native population have been identified, the settlement from Morești on Mureș (HOREDT 1958, 51-53; LAZĂR 1995, 266-267) are situated very close to the salt

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The Avars arrive at the lower Danube around the year 558. *Avar* in Turkish has the meaning of *vagrant* (GIURESCU, GIURESCU 1974, 176). In the second half of the VII century, as a consequence of the ethno-demographic and political disorders that occurred in the steppes between the Volgue and the Caspian Sea, another group of Avars starts moving towards west. These here, as the ones before them, force, in the years 679- 680, the defiles of the North Carpathians, penetrate Slovakia and Pannonia through the valley of Tisa and overlap on those who were already there, thus forming the second *Avaric Caganat*, in the territorial limits of the first one. This one will obviously lack the force and vigour of the first one, but it will represent, for at least a century, a certain political and military power. *Around the year 700 one may notice the existence of an avar- dominative centre, around Aiud. This centre is probably the result of some infiltration from the Pannonic Fields in Transylvania, through the valley of Mureş, one of the followed objectives being that of obtaining salt from the nearby salt mines* (HORED T 1958, 98).

“Starting with the 7th century one has discovered Avarian graves spread along the middle stream of Mureş, from the point where the Aries penetrates the Western Carpathians up to the point where Târnava flows into Mureş, on an area where the most important salt mines from Turda and Ocna Mureş are laying” (idem 1975, 120).

The Avars are the only migratory people that have built defence works, called *“rings, made of wooden beams covered with grass swaths”* (*Ibidem*, 120; RUSU 1975, 149). They were exercising their political and economical domination over the Romanic population from these power synoptic tables.

The Avars took over the entire salt exploitation themselves, which they brought to the former performances with the help of the Romanic population, through population transplant and with prisoners as well.

The Avars exercised an intense domination over several Romanian territories from the extra- Carpathian space and especially inside the intra-Carpathian one, namely the Transylvanian plateau, especially during *the second caganat*, as the newcomers, cattle breeders themselves, were *directly and vitally interested in salt securing, that could be found in large*

massifs from Turda and Ocna Mureş. Other discoveries attributed to the Gepids, concentrated on the upper and middle valley of Mureş and on the stream of Târnava Mare are related to the gepid-avar-longobard conflict from 567/568, like the ones from Moreşti (LAZĂR 1995, 264-268), Noşlac (RAJ Alba, 1995, 130-131), Band (LAZĂR 1995, 57-60), Şeica Mică - settlement (HORED T 1964, 198-204; RUSU 1975, 135).

amounts in numerous places from Transylvania (HORED T 1975, 61-108). This is how one explains why the Avarian discoveries from the VII century are grouped precisely in the areas rich in salt deposits, for example those from Ocnișoara, Ocna Mureșului and Aiud (the district of Alba), Turda, Câmpia Turzii, Sic (district of Cluj), Ocna Dejului (TEODOR 1981, 44; RUSU 1975, 141; PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA, DAICOVICIU, TEODOR, BÂRZU, PREDA 1995, 320).

Salt deposits played an extremely important economical part, salt being the main element in the nourishment of both people and animals, while in the west, in the Fields of Tisa and in the Balcanic Peninsula it was an insufficient one (HORED T 1975, 119).

The Avars' great interest in the salt reserves from Transylvania can be justified not only in what the *caganat* necessities are concerned, but also by the fact that salt represented an income source, resulted from the salt commerce in the western Europe and probably in the Balcanic Peninsula (RUSU 1975, 141).

Considering the complexity of salt's exploitation procedures, the locals, who continued to live in their old homes, did the mine work. They were the only ones who knew the place of the salt deposits, as well as the extraction procedures, which meant an exhausting work in hard accessible places (TEODOR 1996, 101).

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The penetration of the Slaves disturbed for over a half century the own upward development of the north-danubian local Romanic society. Starting with the middle of the VI century, the Slave military raids against the Empire begin, affecting especially the south of Moldavia and the east of Muntenia. After the attacks the Slaves would usually return to their temporary homes in the region east of Nistru and Bug (TEODOR 1980, 75-84; 1994, 228).

Living close to the Romanians, the slaves have used and exploited solid salt, salty waters and salty pasture- lands from all over this territory. After the penetration in Transylvania through the valleys of Trotuș and Oituz they took over the income- providing salt mines at the end of the VI century (TEODOR 1994, 228). This is the only way one can explain the replacement of the term *salinae* with the term *ocna* (salt mine; *okna* is a term of Slavonic origin that means window). *The return to the Latin salinae was realized in the VII century, when it was considered a neologism* (ATUDOREI, BOCANTE, MICLEA 1971, 21).

As far as the *Sclavinian* certified by the great necropolis from Monteoru is concerned, one can neither consider its setting in an area with salty water sources nor the fact that it lays north of the salty pasture lands of Călmățui pure accidental. The salty pasture lands from Călmățui cover a wide area (the widest area with salty pasture lands from the Romanian space), where pasturing is the only form of exploitation known until today.

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The Bulgarians, Tiurkish population, native from Asia, will found a strong tribe union in the north of the Caucasians, called the Great Bulgaria by the Byzantines, after the Avars' migration in the Pannonic fields, around the centuries VI - VII.

The Avar domination starts to be replaced by the Bulgarian one from the time of tsar Krum (803), the latter having economical claims, such as getting salt from the salt mines in the Carpathians and from the south of Transylvania. The extraction and commerce of salt it was so important that it could even determine the victory in a war. This opinion has its roots in the piece of news referring to the demand made by the German king *Arnulf* to the Bulgarians in the year 892, of not allowing the sellin of the salt in Moravia, with which he was at war (SPINEI 1985, 50-51; DOBOȘI 1951, 125; DECEI 1939, 65-69; OLTEANU 1983, 122; 1977, 175). "*Boris' s older son and his successor to the throne, Vladimir (889-893) informs us that a mission of king Arnulf of the eastern side of the French empire, came all the way to the tsar of Bulgaria, asking him for a renewal of the peace and not to allow the selling of salt to the Moravians who were king Arnulf's enemy. There were no salt mines in Bulgaria south of the Danube, which meant that the salt the Moravians needed could only come from the salt mines from Transylvania, in which case the Bulgarians couldn't stop the salt transport neither in the region of Tisa (at the hydrant of Mureș, in the Szolonk spot etc.) nor in the places it was exploited. One could probably speak of a Bulgarian domination over Transylvania up to the region of the salt mines, this being proven only for Mureș Valley. The native population that were extracting salt from the salt mines in Transylvania were probably submitted to some sort of tithes that resembled the ones used for other products*" (BARNEA 1960, 762-763).

The Bulgaria across the Danube couldn't be more than just a restrained region close to the river, probably situated on one of the salt roads, which was temporarily checked by the Bulgarian riders (TEODOR 1981, 48-49).

What is remarkable is the Bulgarians' special interest in the salt deposits and the commerce with this product north of the Danube, which brought, of course, a great income as well. Arnulf's intervention highlights how damaging the lack of such a product could be, even for a short period, for the existence of the Morav state. This is a special moment in proving the importance of salt in this conflict. This product, the salt, could only come from the salt mines in the north Transylvania or Maramureş, as it is very well known that there was no salt in Bulgaria, except for some *tuzle* (DECEI 1939, 16). At that time there was a salt deposit at Salankemen (The Rock of Salt), situated at the confluence of Tisa with the Danube, on the southern shore of the river. The salt was brought here either by land or transported across Tisa (IAMBOR 1982, 16, 76). There was a financial machine formed by custom-house officers, guardians etc. whose duty was to collect a tax from the crafts transporting salt on Mureş (OLTEANU 1977, 175; 1983, 122).

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The last migratory waves that have crossed the Romanian space, the Pecenegi, the Uzi and the Cumani, who belonged to the great family of the Turkish - speaking language peoples and who came from the centre of Asia, "*fed themselves with horse milk*", as to them "*the horse is both food and weapon*"; they are permanently searching for "*water and grass*"; "*when the food for the animals was out, they would move someplace else, leaving with their chariots pulled by the cattle, horses and camels, on which they would charge the iurts, as they did not possess stable homes. As they possessed cattle, they used to go from pasture land to pasture land, searching for vegetation; they would spend the winter in the valleys, while in the summer they would go up in the mountains, living in tents*" (SPINEI 1999, 325, 326). Because of such a way of living, these migratory peoples were great salt consumers, always being in search for the precious mineral that they would obtain, of course, by using the knowledge and work of the native population.

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The Hungarians or the Magyars, a fino-ugric population, probably originated from the space between the Altai Mountains and the north of Iran. Along with the gold and the pasture lands, salt meant to them the center of attraction. *Anonimy Bele regis notaris*, in *Gesta Hungarorum* remind of the role of this wealth. Ogmond, the spy of Tuhutum, "*told his lord many things about the wanders of that country: that the land was watered by the best rivers, whose names and utility he mentioned one at*

the time, that there was gold leaking from their sand, that one can extract salt and salty raw materials from there" (POPA-LISSEANU 1934, 110-111; ***, *Documente străine despre România*, 1979, 38)

Taking into account the specific nature of the way of life of the nomad cattle breeders tribes, characterized by seasonal swinging, one may reach the conclusion that the infiltration of the Hungarian groups inside the Carpathian bow was realized along the Mureș and Someș, first in order to assure the summer pasturing and then to account for the salt and metal deposits, which meant their continuous presence in the territory (SPINEI 1990, 147; Idem 1996, 36). King Stephen the Saint, the moment he occupies the regions north of Mureș, he takes the salt mines from Turda, Cojocna and Dej under his domination. In *The Legend of Saint Gerard* one speaks about duke Ahtum, from the region of Banat, town Morisena, probably on Mureș, who "*usurped his power over the royal salt which descended down on Mureș, by putting in the harbours of this river, all along its stream to Tisa, custom-house officers and guards and making them all his birnices*" (DOBOȘI 1951, 126). The same events are confirmed by the necropols from the X century at Deva, when the Magyars were controlling the road of Mureș that gave them access to Alba Iulia and the salt deposits nearby (POPA 1988, 52). Mureș was also called "The Road of Salt" (BEJAN 1995, 91) starting with the dawn of feudalism until late in the middle Ages.

Right from the beginning of the Arpadian domination in Transylvania, the salt and ores belonged to the so-called "*regales*", the exclusive income of the monarch, of which he disposed willingly in the crown's interest, according benefits from its exploitation to some institutions and people. The king managed to attract workers to the salt mines and to the mines in Transylvania, whom he gave privileges and whom he protected from some nobles' arbitrary deeds (IAMBOR 1982, 77). They used the local population along with the *guests brought from other parts* (PASCU 1971, 275) for the exploitation of the metal and salt mines. During all the stages of its penetration, the Hungarian royalty intended to take over the wealth of both the soil and the subsoil of Transylvania, which could be found in the very heart of this rich province - The Transylvanian Plateau. Following the gradual penetration of the Hungarian feudal system, K. Horedt distinguishes five main stages: "*In the first stage, around the year 900, the line of Someșul Mic is occupied; in the second phase, around the year 1000, the Valley of Mureș and in the third, around 1100, the line of Târnava Mare. Around the year 1150, in the fourth stage, they arrive to the Olt and in the last one, the fifth, around 1200, the line of the eastern and*

southern Carpathians is occupied.” Not accidentally, one can also find here the greatest salt reserves (HOREDT 1958, 130).

The intense exploitation of the Transylvanian salt mines that brought a great income encouraged the economical development in the area of the lower stream of Mureş. One can estimate that in Transylvania functioned the salt mines from Turda, Sic, Cojocna, Ocna Sibiului, their location being made after the salt mines and the salt roads. Its quality was being valued from one salt mine to another. The salt from Turda is said to be *good and hard (solidus)*, the one from Cojocna *solid and compact, grey - colored, (caused by the mixture with the earth)*. We are being reminded that in the entire Hungary *there isn't cleaner a salt than the one in Dej*. Ocna Sibiului had better salt, but it would be seldom flooded with water (DOBOŞI 1951, 133). Ocna Sibiului should have traditionally been opened in 906. The inhabitants of this settlement, workers in the mine for a long time, celebrated in 1931, 1025 years of continuous exploitation of the mine.⁴

There are a lot of data about the exploitations from Mureş, but from later centuries. In a legend transmitted by Ian Dlugosz, the daughter of king Bella the IV is said to have received a royal salt mine in Maramureş from her father, where the princess Kinga would have thrown a ring she had re- found in Poland, in the salt mine at Bochnia, after she had become a queen there. The legend was kind of misleading, as for a long time people thought that the exploitation of the royal salt in Maramureş began in the XIII century and even earlier, a phenomenon that in fact took place later on (POPA 1970, 50).⁵

Salt is a huge source of income that gave birth to many conflicts. As the Hungarian royalty advanced in occupying Transylvania, the salt mines became its property and the king disposed of the due income according to his own decisions.

The first documents about salt exploitation in Țara Românească and Moldavia date since the XIV century, which leaves possibilities for an earlier salt commerce in this area. After the medieval states Țara Românească and Moldavia were formed, the exploitation of the salt wealth is moved under the reign's control, which thus obtains a great income. The problem that raises is the one referring to whom was dominating up to that point, as such wealth and income sources couldn't

⁴ The news was collected from Lazar Sadeanu (who lived for 80 years in Ocna Sibiului) in October 1997.

⁵ Referring to Maramureş, Anton Constantinescu enumerated 10 salt mines that were said to have functioned at Costiu enter 600 - 1006, but the author doesn't give any references.

have been left at random, which is why only the rulers had the right of opening mines (GIURESCU 1973, 79- 82; CAZACU 1957, 389-392; ILIEȘ 1956, 155-194). The documents at the beginning of the Middle Age and until the XIX century mention a continuous salt exploitation in Țara Românească and Moldavia. This activity was under the control of the reign, and in the areas where salt was extracted daily, like, for example, in the districts of Buzău (IORGULESCU 1892, 96), Slam - Râmnic (the name shows itself the presence of this deposit) and Vrancea, the inhabitants had the privilege of extracting as much salt as they needed for their daily necessities, but not for commerce, right which they obtained from before the foundation of the unitary feudal state, and later on the reign admitted a situation in reality, maintaining it (GIURESCU 1973, 80). The inhabitants from the above – mentioned districts had to pay the salt – duty, a tax on salt, for this privilege (***, *Instituții feudale din țările române. Dicționar*, 1988, 422).

The great exploitations entered under the control of the state, as it is proved by the more numerous documents from the following eras, but the hand of the law never reached the hard accessible areas, where the reserves were smaller.

The north Danubian lands had continuous connections with the south Danubian world, namely the Byzantine Empire. Exports with grains, honey, wax, salt products and fish are mentioned at the beginning of the II millennium.

Translated by *Florina Nicolescu*

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