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Contributions to the knowledge of the medieval fortress from Pojejena (Caraș-Severin County)

Pojejena, a toponym of Slavic origin, means: a “burned place” and it is directly related to the fact that throughout history in this strategic area, therefore a good crossing place over the Danube, many battles and dramatic military events took place.

Although a lot of material traces since the Prehistoric times have been found, people who fortified for the first time here were the Romans. Because of their desire to control the Danube River since Emperor Domitianus’s time, a castrum was built here, which apparently played an important role in the annihilation of the Dacian power center from Divici, a fortress situated on a hill 7 km upstream from Pojejena. The plateau on which the Roman fortification was built is named by the villagers “Șițarnița” (= place of livelihood, place of sight) and actually reflects the strategic position of the place. From this point an observer has a good field of view both westwards and beyond Veliko Gradiste as well as to the east until the entrance to the Danube Delta at Golubac.¹

During the Middle Ages, when the Danube Iron Gate area was a border region between the regional powers, first between the Hungarian Kingdom and the Byzantine Empire and later the Ottoman Empire, the old fortified sites on the northern bank of the river were reactivated and strengthened. In case of the Medieval Pojejena, it must have happened the same, but its fortress is almost unrecognizable; not even a brief study has ever been published about its date. Dumitru Țeicu, who has dedicated himself to researching medieval fortresses in Banat, “forgets” to localize the medieval ruins in this region and is pleased to briefly list the few documentary attestations.² In this situation, we believe that the information in the text below comes as a complement to the well-known ones about the medieval fortress chain in the Danube Gorge.

Documentary data

Although it is not clear, whether there was a fortification in Pojejena soon after the 14th century, it is certain that the locality appears in documents in various forms, phonetically

¹ Gudea, Nicolae–Uzum, Ilie: Castrul roman de la Pojejena. In: *Banatica* II. (1973) 85–96.

² Țeicu, Dumitru: *Cetăți medievale din Banat*. In: *Medieval Fortifications in Banat*. Cosmopolitan – Art Printhouse, Timișoara, 2009. 106–107.

similar: *Pozsasyn* or *Possesin*.³ Beginning with the reign of Sigismund of Luxembourg (1387–1437), the locality is of major importance, being the crossing of the Danube preferred by the Christian armies in their southern-Danubian campaigns against the Turks. We know from the chronicles of the time that in 1427 the Hungarian king met in the city of Pojejenei with Emeric Himfy of Iersig and from here with a few cavalry squadrons he raided the bank of the Danube occupied by the Turks trying in vain to conquer the city of Golubatz (Galambóc).⁴ Next year (1428) King Sigismund of Luxembourg was in Banat and took up steps to fortify the northern bank of the Danube in order to prevent possible Turkish attacks. In despair, the king gave up the fortresses of the Danube Gorge to the Knights of the Teutonic Order. They were grateful for the properties received in exchange for their military service and were going to improve the defense system of the area. From the documentary sources of the Teutonic Order we find that between 1429 and 1435, the captain of Pojejena was Peter Hebllicher, and that he had 200 pedestrians and 30 riflemen, a good ferry, and was subordinated to the commander of St. Ladislau.⁵ We also find out from the Teutonic Knights' reports that the fortress was built from stones and bricks and a little further upstream of it was another deserted castle. This can be only the Roman camp on the neighbouring plateau. The information is useful because it proves that the place of the Roman camp was not used in later times.

On June 18, 1437 Ioannes Huniady (János Hunyadi) crossed the Danube while attacking the Ottoman fleet. After his death in 1456 winning a great victory at Belgrade over Sultan Mehmed II., the Turks occupied Pojejena and raided more and more often in Banat and Transylvania. An important year in the history of the village is 1460, when in summer until autumn Mihail Szilágyi (uncle of King Matthias) fought with the Turks under the walls of Coronini, but after gaining some victories, he failed to defend himself effectively in the "Battle of Pojejena" where he was wounded and captured. A year later he was executed in Istanbul, in the capital of the Ottoman Empire.⁶

The total control of the northern bank by the Turks allowed them to carry out large-scale raids in Christian territories. At the year 1474 at Pojejena the Turks built a bridge of vessels and thus Mihailoglu Ali Bei undertook with 7,000 horsemen a massive attack against Oradea (Várad) city. Also during this period it seems that the Turks did not repair the fort, it remained a ruin until the 18th century.⁷

Archaeological and cartographic data

If we want to understand the importance of the place in the Middle Ages, we can not ignore the archaeological traces of the Middle Ages found here, which are all the way be-

³ Feneșan, Costin: Cavalerii teutoni în Banatul Severinului și la Dunărea de Jos în prima jumătate a secolului al XV-lea (Documente și extrase). In: *Der Deutsche Orden im Severiner Banat und an der niederen Donau in der ersten Hälfte des xv. Jahrhunderts (Urkunden und Auszüge)*. Mega Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2016. 282.

⁴ Ibid. 21.

⁵ Ibid. 31.

⁶ Hațegan, Ioan-Boldea, Ligia-Teicu, Dumitru: *Chronologia Banatului*. II/1. Banatul și Artpress Publishing House, Timisoara, 2006. 258.

⁷ Ibid. 267–268.

tween the first upper terrace and the banks of the Danube. From our archaeological excavations we identified in the upper levels characterized by medieval ceramics developed over the Roman ones. Chronologically, the situation fits in with the historical realities, the medieval ceramics belongs to the greatest extent to the 14th–15th centuries.

In the cartography of the late Middle Ages and the modern age, the fortress does not often appear to be mentioned. However, on some Habsburg itineraries the name of the fortification is called *Boischina Schloß*, and the vignette with which it appears has two corner towers, which suggests a more complex construction. After the later cadastral maps, the fortress was at the Danube bank in the place called “Zidina”. In the memory of the locals there were beautiful stone walls with horizontal rows of bricks and it was the best fishing area in the area.

On the maps of the first military survey during Emperor Joseph II the place of the fortress is marked with a wide and deep ditch, which it is related to the Danube and the neighbouring stream. The shape of this ditch is almost circular and closes a much larger area than the strict construction of the medieval fortification. This image allows us to imagine that the fortification was much larger than the central edifice of stones and bricks and that on its edges it had possibly a wooden palisade.

Unfortunately, the medieval castle was never excavated archaeologically, and today, from a negligence of local authorities, the area was concreted to make room for the new naval port of Pojejena, according to the European model of the 21st century. The only material testimonies came from scholars, passionate about history and archeology, such as Károly Torma or Leonhard Bohm, from the so-called Belle Epoque Period (end of the 19th century), who also gave us a drawing of the walls that were still visible on the surface.⁸ Their testimony was later confirmed by Constantin Daicoviciu and Ioachim Miloia, in the period between the two world wars.⁹ The walls look like a medieval recess held at a height of 8 meters and 16 meters in length and appear to derive from reused materials from the nearby Roman castrum.¹⁰

There is no photo of the city, but we hope in the future to highlight it by non-invasive prospecting. From the archaeological surveys on the present state of the village the presence of a rich medieval ceramic material can be observed, belonging to the 13th–16th centuries, a sign that the medieval civilian settlement developed on the Danube bank upstream of the fortification on the ruins of the former Roman settlement.

Instead of conclusions

Corroborating existing historical sources and data about medieval Pojejena, we can see that until the Ottoman period there was a continuous dwelling during the Middle Ages here. Since the period of Sigismund of Luxembourg, the importance of the Danube crossing has increased in Pojejena in connection with the battles with the Turks. There is a small royal fortress here, which is an extension of the Coronini fortress. Pojejena was strengthened with

⁸ Țeicu, Dumitru: Cetăți op. cit. 32B

⁹ Daicoviciu, Constantin–Miloia, Ioachim: Cercetări arheologice în Banatul de sud. In: *Analele Banatului*, III (oct.-dec. 1930), Timișoara, 10–25. especially 20–21.

¹⁰ Bódog, Milleker: Délmagyarország régiségleletei a honfoglalás előtti időkből. III. rész. Kiadta Délmagyarországi Történelmi és Régészeti Museum Társulat, Temesvár, 1906. 247.

a strong garrison during the rule of the area by the Teutonic Knights. After the middle of the 15th century during the expansion of Ottoman Empire power, Pojejena was conquered by the Turks and for decades the place became a just river-crossing place of the Danube. With the liberation of Banat from the Turks by the Habsburg imperial armies at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Pojejena became a border between the two great regional powers (Ottoman and Habsburg Empires), but the further development of the firearms rendered unnecessary the refortification of the Danube crossing point.



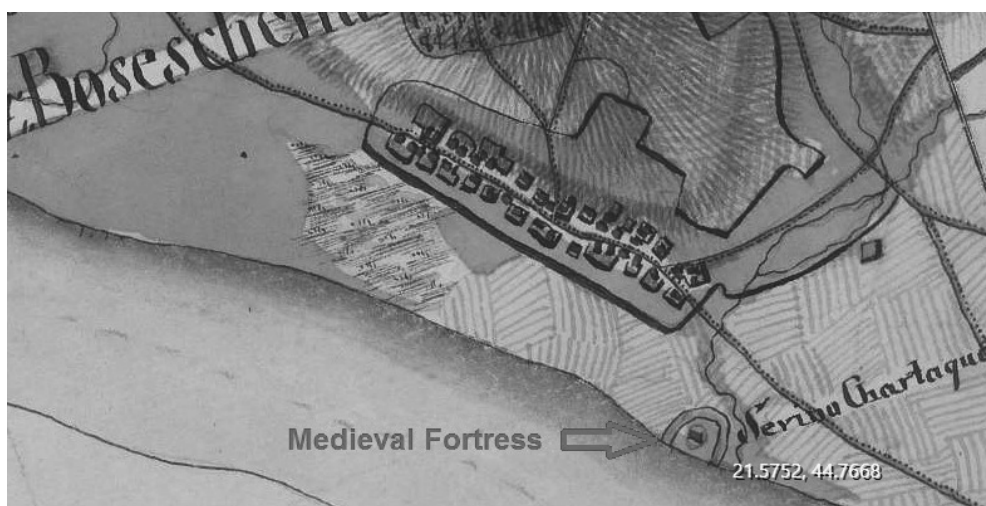
Fig. 1 – The Boischina Schloß on the maps of Leutnand Geyer, after Moll’s map Collection (<https://mapy.mzk.cz/en/>)



Fig. 2 – The position of the Roman ruins and the remains of the medieval fortress from Pojejena, in the year 2006, before the construction of the new European harbour of Pojejena.

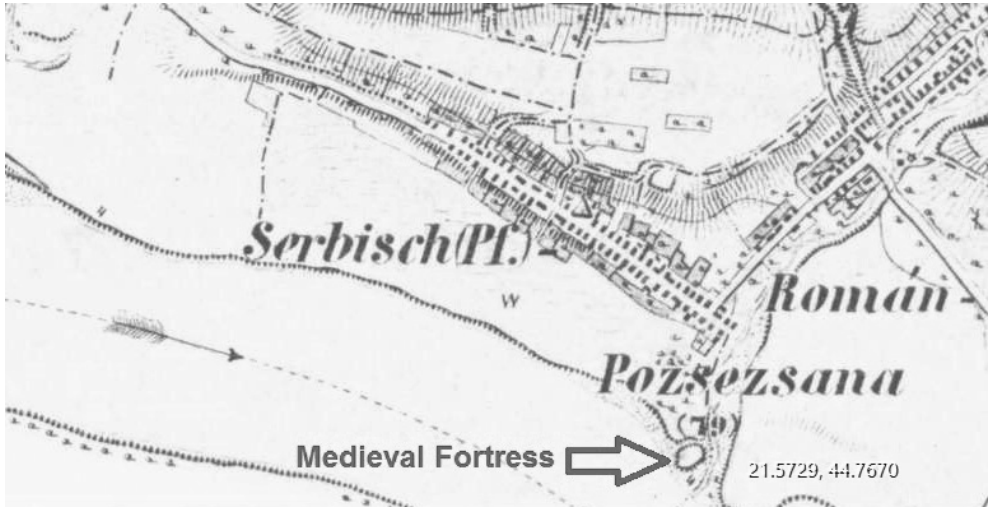


Fig. 3 – The toponim Zidina for the ruins of the medieval fortress from Pojejena on the Habsburgs maps.



Temeschwarer Banat (1769–1772) - First Military Survey

Fig. 4



Europe in the XIX. century (with the Third Military Survey)

Fig. 5

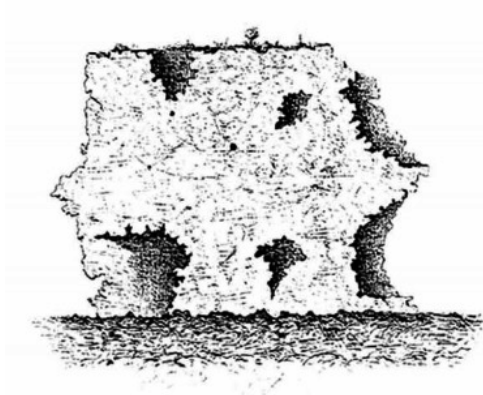


Fig. 6 – Drawing of the Pojezana medieval fort walls, made by L. Bohm, year 1880