

# The Functional Territorial Units in the Transylvanian geographical space during the 13<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries

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## Introduction

**T**HE TERRITORIAL unity inhabited by Romanians and the fact that the mountains were the binder that ensured the unity of territories inside, Transylvania and the territories outside the Carpathian Mountains, were presented by renowned researchers in sociology, ethnology, history, geography etc. The unity and variety of the Transylvanian territory results from the fact that, in its whole, the Romanian territory is characterized by proportionality and harmony, the mountain area representing 27.8% of the country and Transylvania 10.6%, which means more than a third. The shape and position of the Carpathian Mountains that surround Transylvania were noted since antiquity by Jordanes who called them “corona montium,” to which Dacians were inseparable as recorded by Annaeus Florus. “Corona montium” always represented the strong walls, as Nicolae Balcescu said, Transylvania was closely related to “corona montium” that surrounds and dominates with 1000 meters. Statistically, Transylvania occupies some 40%, more exactly 42,1% of the Romanian territory and accommodates 33,8% of its population, which makes more than a third of its total number of inhabitants. Situated in the central, western and north-western part of Romania, Transylvania is characterized by a well-defined complexity of geographic elements, particularly favored by its position, its geological structure and orographic evolution. All these aspects, taken together, have been a permanent and generous source of optimal conditions for human life (Pop, 1997, 14). ‘Transylvania’ (or ‘Ardeal’) is a name commonly used to refer to the Romanian territory occupying the entire western side of the Carpathian Mountains. In its restricted sense, it refers to the most important of the three western provinces of Romania. The other two are Banat, in the south-west, and Crișana-Maramureș in the north-west of Transylvania (Lehrer, 1991, 9).

## Types of functional territorial units

**S**EATS. LIKE the districts, and preserving the same administrative positions, the *seats* appear in the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries as administrative-territorial constituencies of the Transylvanian Saxons and Szekels. The Saxon organization incorporated two more districts, Braşov and Bistriţa, and gradually grew into a territorial and political assembly which became known as “*Universitas Saxonum*.” The etymology of this word can be traced to the Latin *scammum*. Along with the division into counties, the organization of the territory inhabited by the Szekels into seats was perpetuated throughout the entire 17<sup>th</sup> century. These major seats were in turn subdivided into smaller seats that were the branch-seats or sub-seats of the first. The following Szekel seats are recorded to have functioned: Odorhei seat, a main/major seat, which branched out in the 17<sup>th</sup> century into the sub-seats Brăduş (which managed 9 centers) and Cristur, Mureş *seat*, Arieşului *seat* (which in 1642 controlled 22 villages), and Ciuc *seat* with the sub-seats Gheorgheni and Caşin. Lastly, the *great seat* Three Seats reunited three former seats (Szepsî, Kézdi and Orbai), later joined in by Micloşoara sub-seat, which in 1627 was in control of over 10 villages (Andea, 2003, 735).

**Boroughs** (oppidum). These units enjoyed, among others, the privilege of electing their own government system but remained subordinated to the counties or the seats to which they formerly belonged. Before the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Transylvanian *boroughs* and towns were noted to have existed only in incipient form and, therefore, were rather sporadic administrative structures. After this date, they acquired a fairly important economic, social and demographic status that provided them with a certain amount of authority within the Romanian territories from inside the Carpathian arc (Pascu, 2001, 492). During the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century they are recorded under the names of *civitates* or *castra*: Braşov, Sibiu, Oradea, Alba-Iulia, Cluj, Rodna, Bistriţa. As most of them were wiped out by the Tartars, their restoration and the revival of the urban life was measured in huge efforts made over a long period of time. By the close of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the towns and boroughs had once again begun to get the attention of their neighbors. Some of them were predominantly mining, occupational or trade centers, others were predominantly political-administrative or religious centers, while others fulfilled an important military role as well. The centers of outstanding merits besides economic privileges were also granted territorial, administrative, legal and even religious autonomy. (Pop, 1997, 494). Thus, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, places such as Arad, Oradea, Baia Mare or Timişoara become such prestigious centers. Rodna gains pre-eminence because of its gold and silver mines, Sibiu for being a Saxon administrative centre, Alba Iulia as an episcopal centre, and so on. By mid 14<sup>th</sup> century, historical documents mention the existence in Transylvania of some 33 *boroughs* or urban centers (Pascu, 2001, 492). Nearly all the urban settlements in Hungary and, correspondingly, those in Transylvania had a predominantly German population as a result of the incoming stream of immigrants from the west of Europe. (Pop, 1997, 496). Having grown around urban centers and being administratively subordinated to them, the administrative-territorial entities called *Foras* (*fora*) and *conciliabuli*, were also ranked among the boroughs.

**Districts.** The *district* was an administrative-territorial unit which either contained the capital together with its surrounding areas or was a territory inhabited by a nationally homogenous population. Etymologically, the term derives from the Latin *districtus*. Romanian *districts*, which evolved from the old knyazships, are attested as having existed in Țara Maramureșului (13<sup>th</sup> century), in Făgăraș (1222), in Țara Amlășului (Amlășului Country) and Țara Rodnei (Rodnei Country). They were ruled by voivodes, knyazs or counts according to the ancient way, scrupulously kept by the Hungarian Crown's legislation. The Saxon territory, commonly called *Fundus regius*, preserved its original administrative structure that was made up of seats and *districts*. In addition to the seats of Sibiu, Mediaș, Sighișoara, Sebeș, Nocrich, Cincu, Orăștie, in 1603 other two *districte* are mentioned: the district of Bârsa, subsequently frequently called Brașov district, which included Brașov and Rupea seats—later replaced by Cohalm seat—and Bistrița district. Also, at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, documentation speaks of a Miercurea seat. There were also some subdivisions of these administrative structures, but they functioned for relatively shorter periods of time only. After much effort, the Aulic Decree from 1718 finally stipulated the administrative division of the region of Banat into 13 districts—reduced to 11 by 1719–1720. These districts were Timișoara, Caransebeș, Orșova–Almăj, Lipova, Lugoj–Făget, Cenad, Ciacova, Becicherec, Panciova, Vârșeț and Palanca Nouă (New Palanca). The Danube Klisura/Gorge (Clisura Dunării) together with its straights became a separate district. Făgăraș *district* included the counties of Făgăraș, Odorhei and Trei Scaune (Three Seats) (Andea, 2002, 377).

**Principalities.** According to certain historical sources, the great *Principality of Transylvania* included 11 *counties*: Alba de Jos (Lower Alba), Alba de Sus (Upper Alba), Cluj, Crasna, Dăbâca, Hunedoara, Solnocul de Mijloc (Middle Solnoc), Solnocul Interior (Inner Solnoc), Târnava, Turda and Zarand, four *districts*: Bistrița, Brașov, Chioar and Făgăraș, five *Szekel Seats*: Arieș, Ciuc, Mureș, Odorhei, Trei Scaune (Three Seats), nine *Saxon Seats*: Cincu, Mediaș, Miercurea, Nocrich, Orăștie, Rupea, Sebeș, Sibiu, Sighișoara and 11 *independent royal towns*: Alba Iulia, Bistrița, Brașov, Cluj, Gherla, Dumbrăveni, Mediaș, Sebeș, Sibiu, Sighișoara, Târgu Mureș. As far as the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Transylvanian Principality was made up of the following administrative units: 10 *counties* (Alba, Târnava, Hunedoara, Turda, Cluj, Dăbâca, Solnocul Interior (Inner Solnoc), Solnocul de Mijloc (Middle Solnoc), Crasna and Zarand), plus the *districts* of Făgăraș and Chioar (the last three counties, together with Chioar district, formed the so-called *Partium*), a number of five Szekel Seats with their subbranches Odorhei with Cristur, and Brăduț, Three Seats with Micoșoara, Ciuc with Gheorgheni and Cașin, Mureș and Arieș, plus *nine Saxon Seats*: Sibiu, Sighișoara, Mediaș, Sebeș, Miercurea, Cincu Mare, Rupea, Nocrich and Orăștie with its *two districts* of Brașov and Bistrița, formed together the Saxon University (*Universitas Saxonum*). (Andea, 2002, 372). During the Ottoman administration (1541–1699), Transylvania, Banat plus the counties that belonged to Partium, Satu Mare, Crasna, Middle Solnoc (until 1552), Solnocul din Afară (Outer Solnoc), Bihor, Zarand, Arad, and occasionally Maramureș, were united and received the name of *Independent (Autonomous) Principality* with the capital in Alba Iulia. Similar to the Romanian Danubian states, this principality was ruled by a Prince appointed by the Turkish Legislative Assembly and confirmed by the Sublime (or High) Porte.

**Royal Commissariats.** This transitory form of organization in *royal commissariats* lasted up to the Restitution Edict (*Restitutionsedikt*) in 1790 ordained by Joseph II. After this event, the territories readopted the organization before the Reform into counties, chairs and districts. As expected, the territory allotted to the 6 military border guard divisions from Transylvania assembled between 1762–1764, enjoyed the privilege of being administratively and militarily directly subordinated to the Aulic Council of War (Andea, 2002, 376). The Military Border Troupe Ensemble included the regiments from Transylvania (regiment I and II Romanian, regiment I and II Szekel and the hussar regiment) and those from Banat (the Romanian–Illyrian, the German–Banatic and the Illyrian–Banatic regiments) (Andea, 2002, 377).

**Judgeships.** Administratively and politically, before the constitution of the Romanian Principalities, the Romanian population in Transylvania, Țara Românească and Moldova (Moldavia) was organized along rivers or inside their basins, into so-called ‘countries’. Thus, we speak of Maramureșului, Bârsei, Oltului, Hațegului or Moșilor ‘countries’. These territorial structures were called *judgeships* or *knyazships*. However, the Romanian term *judet* (meaning ‘large district’), deriving from the Latin *judicium* (used in Roman administration with the meaning of ‘bench or bar of justice’) was preferred to others and was therefore perpetuated to the detriment of the Slavic word, *knyazship*, which was eventually lost. *Comitat* (=country), was yet another Latin word that circulated in Transylvania, while in Moldavia the term *ținut* (=land) was used to denote a territory that “was in subordination” of an urban settlement or town—in Romanian, ‘ținea de’ means ‘it was subordinated to’. Later, however, the administrative-territorial units preserved only the name, that of *judet* (large district) (Popovici, 1980, 12).

**Pashaliks.** These were administrative structures specific to the Ottoman Empire, the term—from the Turkish, *pasalık* or *vilayet*—being used to denote the province or jurisdiction of a pasha, who applied a despotic type of government. Subject of the Turkish Empire during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Principality of Transylvania was therefore also organized in such *pashaliks*. There existed a pashalik in Timișoara, with the capital in Timișoara. It was divided into 6 sângeács or sancaks: Gyula, Ineu, Lipova, Cenad, Timișoara and Moldova, and after the downfall of Oradea, the *ejalet* or *pashalik* of Oradea was created, with the headquarters in the homonymous castle. During the twilight of the Romanian principality (1660–1680), several attempts were made towards the signing of a treaty between the Turkish and the Transylvanian population with respect to the precincts of the *pashalik* of Oradea, and also to the designation of the levy paying settlements (Andea, 2003, 733). The newly-created situation following the Treaty of Vasvár (1664), signed between the High Porte and the Habsburg Empire, called for territorial restructuring and reorganization. The County of Bihor was annexed to the *pashalik* of Oradea but for Săcueni castle and the city of Debrecen, which both remained under the jurisdiction of the Prince (Andea, 2003, 733).

**Centre-nettings.** Within the old administrative division, *centre-netting* designates any subdivision of a large district (*judet*). From a historical point of view, echoing the Austrian

model already in use in Oltenia, Constantin Mavrocordat introduced the *demesne*, an administrative subdivision similar to the *centre-netting* in Țara Românească (1740), respectively to the *circle* in Moldavia (1741). The *demesne* was a subdivision of the large district which bunched together mountain villages. The *centre-netting*, another subdivision of the large district, was characteristic of Țara Românească which bunched together the lowland villages. It had the same legal status with the *circle* in Moldova, where the duality *desmesne-centre-netting* from Țara Românească was not known. In Transylvania, the counties and districts were divided into *circles* ("circuli," "kerületek"), subdivided in turn in centre-nettings (= (Rom.) "plase," (Lat.) *processus*, (Hung.) *járások*), according to the number of centers in their jurisdiction. (Andea, 2002, 373).

**Regions.** During the Middle Ages, the *regions* were primarily found in Moldavia and were similar in their territorial-administrative organization and in dimension to the *counties* in Țara Românească. Each *region* was ruled by a chief magistrate or a starost(a), on condition that there existed a castle on the territory of that region. In 1938, during the totalitarian regime under Charles II, the *region* was restored as territorial-administrative structure according to the Nazi Gau model. It thus became a fascist-like territorial-administrative unit in which civil servants were also agents of the unique political party masquerading as the people's delegates. In Transylvania, the *regions* were granted legal political and administrative functioning through the Administrative Act published in the first part of the 187<sup>th</sup> Official Monitor of 14 August 1938. This act stipulated that Greater Romania was divided into 10 regions, with Someș, Mureș and Timiș as part of *Transylvania*; the regions' new emblems and flags were acknowledged in the Official Monitor of 10 February 1939.

## Conclusions

**F**OR A long-enduring people that have been part of the Carpathian–Danubian–Pontic land for thousands and thousands of years, the territory does not represent merely an element outside its intimate being but mostly the very intrinsic component of its existence. This indestructible bond between the Romanians and their land is manifest in their exceptionally adaptable nature through their particular lifestyle and activities, all ascribed to the existence of a great variety of natural resources specific to the equally varied forms of relief—mountains, hills, plateaus, estuaries. This bond is also reflected by the Romanian building and household architecture, the materials they use, their dressing styles—so subtly nuanced from one region to another, and, above all by the distinctive way in which Romanians resonate with their natural environment, interpret it, and then turn it into spiritual values. It is essential to highlight the fact that the territoriality unity of Transylvania has been determined by a complexity of favorable factors, each with its well-defined role in the process. Its unique and outstanding geography, its exceptional ethno-demographic base, its distinct economic system, its specific social and administrative structures and, above all, its individual system of spatial and temporal statuses and institutions of political, cultural, or other nature built during the process

of a long-lasting historical evolution, all these aspects have come to concur in a harmonious way to the unity of this land. The huge diversity of historical circumstances with their manifestations and mutual influencing eventually promoted complementary relations amongst its regions. These provided the inhabitants with living environments of exceptional economic conditions, well-differentiated in order to be mutual supporting, and, reunited, to create the harmonious unity of today's Transylvania.

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**Abstract****The Functional Territorial Units in the Transylvania geographical space during the 13<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries**

“Transylvania,” or “Ardeal,” are two names commonly used to refer to the Romanian territory covering the entire western side of the Carpathian Alps. Favored by its particular and, at the same time, outstanding individuality of its geography, by its unique ethno-demographic base, its distinct economic system and specific social and administrative structures, such as the royal commissariats, the districts, the judgeships, the sub-districts (centre-nettings), the pashaliks, the principalities, the seats, the boroughs, but, mostly by its own system statuses and spatial-temporal institutions of political and cultural type. All these are the result of a long process of historical evolution, for the administrative unity of Transylvania is the clear consequence of the inter-clashing of a great diversity of historical factors of joint manifestations and mutual conditioning, which generated complementary relationships amongst its regions. They created life environments of extraordinary economic potential, each area having a well-defined structure that enabled them to support one another. Their reunion laid the basis of the overall harmony of today’s Transylvania.

**Keywords**

Seats, Boroughs (oppidum), Districts, Principalities, Royal Commissariats, Judgeships, pashaliks, Centre-nettings, Regions.