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**The Saxon order in the Socio-Economic Organization of the Mediaș Seat.
Rural Neighbourhoods
Summary**

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The choice of the present research topic, "The Saxon order in the Socio-Economic Organization of the Mediaș Seat. Rural Neighbourhoods" stems from our ongoing interest in studying the evolution of Transylvanian rural society, particularly the Saxon community. Undoubtedly, the impetus for this initiative emerged from our own urban coexistence experiences with the Germanic communities in Sibiu, further bolstered by our professional background as a curator within the ASTRA National Museum Complex, focused on the Saxon minority, particularly in rural settings, and responsible for the cultural heritage preservation of this community.

Consequently, delving into an extensive body of specialized literature, conducting field research campaigns (especially in southern Transylvania, spanning from 2009 to 2020), exploring Saxon collections within museums across the country, and investigating archival documents in our capacity as curator, have all played a pivotal role in realizing this goal.

Our research, developed within the framework of the doctoral thesis across six chapters, aimed to define the Saxon order within the rural region of the Mediaș Seat. This was achieved through the investigation of civic institutions involved in the organization and governance of the Saxon community. Thus, the thesis addressed the emblematic characteristics of the organizational form of economic and artisanal interests – the guild – and examined the neighbourhood as a fundamental element of the local community, discussing its significance, functions, and impact on the daily communal life of individuals. Additionally, the work also delved into the role of youth associations for both boys and girls, focusing on the perspective of forming social groups.

Why the Mediaș Seat? As a result of professional interests dictated by the nature of our occupation and the accumulated experience, we have observed the presence of studies that only tangentially approach the topic we propose. Up to the present, we can affirm that a comprehensive synthesis work that addresses and highlights the Mediaș Seat¹ as a distinct space, where guilds and neighbourhoods in the rural area, through their imposed rules and statutes, played a significant role in its development, has not been truly accomplished. The specialized

¹ We are referring to the Mediaș Seat which was organized in a more restricted sense until 1553 when it included the localities: Alma Vii, Ațel, Bazna, Băgaciu, Biertan, Brateiu, Buzd, Copșa Mare, Curciu, Dupuș, Ighișu Nou, Mediaș, Moșna, Nemșa, Richiș, Șaroșul pe Târnavă, Valchid, and Velț. Thus in the present work, we deal only with the localities that were part of this organisation form until that year. Initially, the Mediaș Seat comprised and two other settlements belonged to the Mediaș Seat: Furkeschdorf (the settlement disappeared around 1476) and Weissdorf (the settlement was already abandoned by 1519).

literature provides individual studies and articles concerning rural communities within the Mediaș Seat, with the theme of the socio-economic organization not being rigorously elaborated in a unified manner that reflects the area's importance in Transylvania's history.

To underline this role, we have selected and analyzed the model of good coexistence and communication within certain village neighbourhoods belonging to the Mediaș Seat. An additional strength of our research lies in the tools employed by these neighbourhoods, which we were able to identify in the field.

Why the Saxon Seat? The emergence of such a work is significant due to its contribution of new information regarding the socio-economic aspects that played a role in maintaining the cohesive Saxon communities of the Mediaș Seat, giving rise to the widely used phrase "Saxon order." Today, the colloquial expression "Saxon order" reinforces, argues for, and underscores the specific order, discipline, and identity of the Saxon population, affirming the progression of socio-economic institutions over time and their organization according to well-established rules.

Why the Neighbourhoods? These constituted the foundation upon which the spirit of community, trust, and preservation of Saxon identity with Germanic roots was built. The presence of neighbourhoods in the Transylvanian space is a historical fact dating back to the 15th century, exhibiting continuity until the end of the 20th century when, following the massive emigration of the Saxons, they self-dissolved.

If the first three chapters of the thesis present the theoretical aspect of the topic – addressing specialized terminology, the historiography of the subject, the historical context of Saxon colonization, administrative organization in Transylvanian "seats," and the socio-economic order of the Mediaș Seat – the following three chapters focus on the practical component. They concentrate on the analysis of data obtained through archival research, individual interviews, and field studies in the researched villages.

The first chapter of our work, titled "**State of Scientific Research**," is dedicated to the specialized terminology used within the thesis and the historiography of the subject. This encompasses bibliographic and archival materials. We have identified documents and conducted careful analysis and interpretation of neighbourhood statutes; neighbourhood registers, accounting ledgers, notifications, and other written evidence. All of these were discovered in the archives of Evangelical parishes (less studied due to lacking inventories) and various collections within the Evangelical Augsburg Confession District Consistory in Mediaș.

The second chapter of the work, titled "**Perspectives on the Administrative Organization in Southern Transylvania,**" aims to present the history and geographical identity of the Mediaş Seat, with a focus on its constituent localities. The chapter addresses the phenomenon of German colonization in southern Transylvania and the administrative organization of the Transylvanian space into Saxon "seats." In this context, the Mediaş Seat is treated as a territorial-administrative authority. Additionally, the chapter also delves into the specific aspects of the rural space, without dwelling extensively on the evolution of 17 rural localities within the Mediaş Seat, but rather on the key historical details that differentiated them in the early centuries of Saxon colonization, as well as demographic data concerning these localities.

The presentation order of the localities is determined by their current administrative structure and organization. Thus, the settlements are presented as follows: Ighişu Nou, Curciu, Biertan, Copşa Mare, Richiş, Moşna, Nemşa, Alma Vii, Brateiu, Buzd, Aţel, Dupuş, Bazna, Velţ, Valchid, Şaroşul pe Târnave, and Băgaciu.

The third chapter, titled "**Marks of Saxon Order: Defining Characteristics,**" provides a broad theoretical framework of the Saxon socio-economic order in the Mediaş Seat. This chapter is structured into three subchapters that provide us with crucial information about the historical organizational structures of the Saxon community: guilds, neighbourhoods, and youth associations. The focus of the first subchapter lies on guilds as forms of economic organization, identifying the main craft centres in the Mediaş Seat, including Mediaş, Biertan, Moşna, and Aţel. The next two subchapters deal with the civic institutions that regulate social issues for citizens, namely neighbourhoods and youth associations – fraternities and girls' associations – are also addressed as forms of social organization.

The subsequent two chapters of this thesis, namely the fourth and fifth chapters, concentrate on analyzing the data acquired through archival research and, occasionally, interviews. They also examine the extent to which the relationship between "Order = Neighbourhood" or "Order = Youth Associations" is reflected in records and statutes.

In the fourth chapter, titled "**Saxon Neighbourhoods in the Area of the Mediaş Seat,**" the first objective was addressed: the analysis of the evolution of neighbourhoods in the Mediaş Seat, with an emphasis on the rural space. This analysis was made possible by translating and presenting the most significant neighbourhood statutes, revealing how neighbourhoods were

governed through these documents, spanning from the 16th century to the 20th century. The translation of these documents (5 statutes) and the correlation of information with neighbourhood registers and ledgers (19), compiled by neighbourhood representatives themselves, highlighted a lifestyle adapted to each respective era. The information from the neighbourhood registers and ledgers, a total of 19, was correlated, in specific case studies, with field information obtained through interviews with members of the Saxon community or through phone interviews with Saxons settled in Germany. The analysis of how neighbourhood life is reflected in the aforementioned documents is approached selectively, with six localities chosen for the case study: Richiș, Biertan, Bazna, Așel, Ighișu Nou, and Curciu.

Following the analysis conducted on neighbourhood statutes over approximately 300 years, significant changes are observed, not only in terms of drafting but particularly in relation to the shifts in the social life of community members. Through a structural perspective, it becomes evident that collective statutes from 1794, 1898, or 1921, addressed to multiple communities or neighbourhoods, were meticulously organized and detailed, breaking down functions and various activities of the neighbourhoods. This led to a complex and detailed structure, with statutes tailored to the specific needs of each society. On the other hand, individual statutes directed to a single neighbourhood, such as those from Mediaș (1595), Biertan (1774), and Richiș (late 19th century to early 20th century), present a simpler and less detailed structure, with provisions presented in successive articles, without being divided into specific themes.

The analyzed registers preserve records of community members, including information about births, deaths, and other significant events. As evidenced by the provided information, these documents highlight identity attributes of a rural society governed by principles intended to initiate, shape, and correct the education and moral development of the community. The discontinuation of these registers had a significant impact on the life of the Saxon community, marking the beginning of a period of transformation regarding the organization and way of life of the local community, which was deprived of its members due to emigration to the West.

Within Chapter Five, titled "**Youth Associations: Fraternities and Girls' Associations in the Mediaș Seat's Area**" the second objective was addressed: the analysis of the evolution of youth associations in the rural space of the Mediaș Seat. This endeavour was facilitated through the translation and analysis of two distinct statutes, one meant for boys and another for girls, as

well as the section dedicated to young individuals in the aforementioned 1898 statute. These statutes emerged in the 19th century – placing them within a specific historical context – reflecting a system of norms and rules (varying by gender), as well as the perceptions and societal expectations of that era. Similarly to the neighbourhoods, information was also cross-referenced with registers and ledgers maintained by fraternities and girls' associations, totalling 9 in number.

These associations were composed of young individuals who were being prepared for adult society, which they were to contribute to after marriage. The statutes and written records of these associations show that their activities revolved around tracking income and expenditures in the associations' treasuries, which aided the youth in learning to appreciate the value of money and their labour.

Tracing the historical evolution of social and economic institutions as well as urban and rural community life, we observe a common denominator that is omnipresent and binds them together: the church. The link between individuals, communities, and other forms of medieval organization – the church – exerted a strong influence not only in the Transylvanian context but also across Europe.

The final chapter of the thesis, the sixth one, titled "**Symbolic Testimonies of Social Organization: Neighbourhoods and Youth Associations**," focused on field research conducted to identify movable cultural heritage, specifically the ritualistic and symbolic artefacts used by neighbourhoods and youth associations. Throughout the studies that have emerged over time, we have noticed an inclination towards examining objects that belong to museum collections, rather than focusing on local village collections or objects housed either in places of worship (in our case, Evangelical churches) or parish houses. Writings about the instruments used by neighbourhoods in the studied villages, particularly regarding artefacts, are very limited. Thus, to address this gap, we considered the research, documentation, and inventorying of these heritage objects a necessary and impactful initial step.

The Evangelical churches manage and store these elements of movable cultural heritage, but we consider it imperative to compile a catalogue and publish them, given their historical, social, and cultural value. We do not deny that over time, certain such objects have found their way into museum collections; however, as demonstrated in this work, valuable objects from neighbourhoods and youth associations are awaiting recognition. Considering that the

Evangelical church was the nucleus of the community, we have particularly focused on analyzing its management of movable cultural heritage elements belonging to neighbourhoods and youth associations in the studied villages. This analysis is especially pertinent because, after the departure of the Saxons in the late 1990s, the church became the primary custodian of the tangible memorial heritage they left behind. In most cases, the last Saxons transferred a portion of the instruments used by neighbourhoods and youth associations to the Evangelical clergy, thus enhancing the significance of this analysis in this context.

The results of the research have led to the development of a database that encompasses the objects catalogued within the ecclesiastical institutions in the study area, objects that have not been scientifically listed until now. The on-site research results consist of the identification and documentation of a total of 69 items from the 19th to 20th centuries, which these civic institutions used to organize local communities and address internal issues. These objects belonged to communities in Ighişu Nou, Curciu, Biertan, Copşa Mare, Richiş, Brateiu, Buzd, Aţel, Bazna, and Valchid. Thus, three objectives have been addressed in this chapter: identifying the locations – excluding museum collections – where these items can be found and creating a means of identifying specific objects belonging to neighbourhoods and youth associations; identifying and analyzing the historical testimonies (physical artefacts) found in the field, which were associated with neighbourhoods and youth associations; developing the first database based on localities, categorized by typology, of these historical testimonies.

We have taken into consideration the fact that existing museum collections are not comprehensive enough to encompass the full diversity of artefacts and objects specific to these social organizations in the research area. This realization underscores a discrepancy between our current knowledge and the ability to have a comprehensive perspective on the cultural heritage of this region regarding such artefacts and objects.

The research findings from museum collections, combined with those from field research conducted throughout the years 2021-2023, enable the classification of the typology of objects found in the field based on their role in everyday life. From this perspective, we can observe that the common unit stems from the relatively large number of identified neighbourhood chests and signs. The majority of artefacts discovered in the Mediaş area are represented by these signs and chests. Among them, a chest considered to be the oldest among all identified chests in the field has been attributed to the village of Moşna and dated to the year 1803. Additionally, another

significant element is the oldest inscribed neighbourhood sign, discovered in Biertan and dated to the year 1822.

The discoveries obtained through this research have been surprising and have opened promising perspectives for the possibility of uncovering new objects in subsequent research. However, the final results lead us to the conclusion that not all villages have preserved these testimonies, which does not exclude the possibility that they might be housed in other spaces inaccessible to us.

Thus, the identification and documentation of these objects offer a broader perspective on the phenomenon of Saxon organization and how these communities managed their mobile heritage and used it to strengthen social cohesion. Additionally, this effort can contribute to the recovery and promotion of important cultural and historical elements that can be used to better understand the evolution and development of rural Saxon society over time. We believe that implementing a strategy of preventive conservation to safeguard these objects would be beneficial. Establishing a protection system and developing a visitation circuit for specialists and the general public would add value for researchers and would reintroduce these villages into tourism and the economy. This *de facto* situation has further motivated us in our research to scientifically and photographically document this perishable and marketable mobile heritage. Moreover, valorising these elements as witnesses of material heritage facilitates access to deepening knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of the Saxon organization, which has defined the Saxon community for centuries. A substantial and noteworthy contribution is the support received from associations and the Saxon communities settled in Germany in the course of this research endeavour.

Therefore, comprehensive scientific research was necessary, addressing historical and monographic aspects, analyzing documents, and approaching case studies with an interdisciplinary nature, capable of reflecting the complexity of the socio-economic reality of rural communities within the Mediaș Seat. It is evident that the Saxon social order in Transylvania represented a well-defined structure that ensured the proper and harmonious functioning of the Saxon community, made possible through the implementation of clear laws, rules, and sanctions, as well as the active involvement of guilds, local authorities, the church, and each individual.

The conclusions, utilized bibliography, and annexes (photocopies of the statutes discussed in the thesis and their full translations, photocopies from the neighbourly registers, and partial translations of their contents) also find their place at the end of the work.

The research started from the following working hypotheses, for which an appropriate research methodology was applied:

Hypothesis 1: The concept of order and organization originated from neighbourhoods and was shaped over time by the idea of neighbourhoods.

Through the analysis of data obtained from documentary research and exploratory investigation, we have re-evaluated and reconfigured the mentioned concept. We argue that this order was initiated before the emergence of neighbourhoods, and the neighbourhoods adopted the organizational model of guilds, to some extent, drawing inspiration from the examples provided by guild statutes. The latter offered well-defined rules that prevented injustices and ensured an orderly and disciplined framework for the artisans' activities.

We highlight that traditional guilds played a significant role in societal development, contributing to the creation of strong communities and their economic growth. In conclusion, the guild was a vital organization for craftsmen, providing them with a shared identity, a recognized legislative framework with established status and rules to adhere to, as well as an opportunity to safeguard their interests and enhance their craft. Therefore, starting from the 14th century, guilds represented an effective means of economic self-regulation and adult discipline within craft activities in Transylvanian towns, contributing to the region's economic development and prosperity. Similarly, neighbourhoods, starting from the 15th century, served as a form of adult discipline within social activities, characterized by a well-organized system.

Beginning with the first guild statutes in the 14th century that emerged in Transylvania, the concept of order and organization was initiated from an economic perspective. With the emergence of neighbourhoods in the 15th century, which spread more widely, every community, both urban and rural in southern Transylvania, became familiar with this form of social organization. As a result, the notion of neighbourhoods contributed to the development and consolidation of order over time. Although the practical implementation of order was carried out through guilds, neighbourhoods had a determining role in shaping and functioning of the Saxon communities, going beyond the economic aspect to involve social engagement and communal

unity. Following the argumentation and analysis, we can conclude that hypothesis 1 has been partially demonstrated.

Hypothesis 2: Existing museum collections only reflect a limited proportion of the total objects that belonged to neighbourhoods and youth associations in the Mediaş Seat's area. This implies that many of the significant artefacts and objects associated with these social and cultural entities are not documented and recorded in the field. By correlating the data obtained from the research of museum collections and field research, we have compiled an inventory of symbolic instruments that belonged to neighbourhoods and youth associations. The scarcity of such objects in museum collections is confirmed by the in-situ discovery of 61 objects belonging to neighbourhoods, some found even in Germany, and 8 objects belonging to youth associations. Thus, additional research and documentation efforts have allowed us to discover and document the cultural heritage of these communities more comprehensively and authentically, fully demonstrating hypothesis 2.

The Degree of Novelty of the Research

In evaluating the degree of originality of the conducted scientific research, we consider that it is ensured not only through its interdisciplinary nature but also through the ability to synthesize and reinterpret already known aspects, while also providing a novel contribution through empirical research. Concretely, the innovative character of our doctoral thesis is primarily supported by the following aspects:

- Providing researchers with our own translated versions of the neighbourhood statutes in Romanian allows for a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of social organization among the Saxons of the Mediaş Seat. By presenting these statutes in a chronological sequence, we offer a perspective on their changes and adaptations in accordance with societal evolution and historical conditions.
- Analyzing how the regulations outlined in these statutes were upheld, through the correlation of data obtained from the analysis of neighbourhood registers and notebooks.
- Identifying and documenting the symbolic testimonies of neighbourhoods and youth associations in the field. These objects represent artefacts that illustrate and reflect the practices, traditions, and values of the Saxon community.
- Offering a fresh and original synthesis and interpretation of already-known aspects: Our doctoral thesis proposes a fresh and original approach to interpreting and analyzing

aspects that were partially researched within the domain of rural social organization among the Saxons of the Mediaş Seat. By synthesizing and reinterpreting existing knowledge, we make significant contributions to understanding and explaining relevant phenomena from the perspective of neighbourhoods and the Saxon community as a whole.

Through these aspects, our doctoral thesis makes a significant contribution to the research field, with an impact on understanding and valuing the cultural and social heritage of the Saxon community in the Mediaş Seat.

Perspectives for New Research Approaches

- Extending the subject's scope to other areas of Transylvania by identifying and analyzing neighbourhood documents and translating their statutes.
- Expanding on-site inventorying to other Saxon communities.
- Creating a database of objects identified in situ.
- Establishing a database of objects identified in museum collections.
- Developing a unified concept for the preservation, conservation, and exhibition of objects with ritualistic value.

Keywords: Saxons, Saxon social order, Mediaş Seat, rural area, social organization, neighbourhoods, youth associations, guilds, neighbourhood statutes, neighbourhood registers, mobile cultural heritage.