

# MEDIEVAL ROOFS OF THE CSÍK SEAT (HARGHITA COUNTY, ROMANIA)

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**Key words:** dendrochronological research, medieval church, roof truss, Ciuc (hu. Csík) Seat, Transylvania

**Abstract:** The paper “Medieval roofs of the Csík Seat” presents the results of a dendrochronological research focused on the medieval churches of the Ciuc Basin (East Carpathians, Harghita County). More of these churches preserved the medieval chancels although the exact building dates were unknown and only indirect data, such as altar and bell inscriptions, give a more precise dating. Earlier dendrochronological sampling remained unsuccessful because of the timber species used: Norway spruce for which we had no valid local chronology. After a campaign dedicated to a new chronology, sampling was repeated and more roof structures were successfully dated.

The dendrochronological data (Mihăileni 1491 chancel, 1492 nave, Cârța 1505, Cozmeni 1506, Armășeni 1532 chancel and 1533 nave, Ciucsângeorgiu 1533) assures narrow limits for the chronology of the Late Gothic constructions, and also provides important knowledge regarding environment reconstruction, historical carpentry etc.

**Rezumat:** Articolul „Șarpante medievale în Ciuc” prezintă rezultatul unei cercetări dendrocronologice mai ample concentrate pe bisericile medievale din Bazinul Ciucului, situate în Carpații Răsăriteni (județul Harghita). Majoritatea bisericilor din zonă a păstrat mai multe părți medievale, însă datarea sanctoarelor gotice, în lipsa izvoarelor scrise sau epigrafice, s-a bazat pe datări indirecte (altare, clopote datate). Cercetarea dendrocronologică a șarpantelor din zonă a fost inițiată mai demult, însă lipsa unei cronologii pentru molid, specia folosită la aceste structuri, a îngreunat datarea acestora. În urma unei cercetări dedicate molidului, pe baza cronologiei formate, mai multe probe colectate demult și cele prelevate mai recent au putut fi datate și astfel s-a reușit datarea absolută a mai multor șarpante din zonă.

Datarea șarpantelor din Mihăileni (sanctuar 1491, navă 1492), Cârța (1505), Cozmeni (1506), Armășeni (sanctuar 1532, navă 1533) și Ciucsângeorgiu (1533) asigură repere noi exacte privind cronologia valului de construcție din goticul târziu, dar și cunoștințe importante privind dulgheria medievală, cadrul natural din zonă etc.

## Introduction

The Ciuc Basin is situated in an intermountain depression of the East Carpathians located in the upper Olt Valley. In the Middle Ages this region was known as the Csík Seat (*ro.*: Ciuc) belonging to the historic Székely Land, at the Eastern border of the Hungarian Kingdom. Ecclesiastically it belonged to the Transylvanian Catholic Bishop, most precisely to the Telegdi archdiocese. The churches of the seat were firstly mentioned in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century in the papal tithe lists and this network of the parishes lived almost unchanged continuously until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when some *filia* settlements built their own churches and successfully formed new parishes (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup>

It is remarkable that a great majority of the medieval churches survived the last half millennium preserving their medieval aspects, a “classic” Ciuc church is formed even today by a late Gothic sanctuary, a contemporary or even earlier nave and a west bell tower.<sup>2</sup>

The late Gothic building activities especially affected the existing sanctuaries: all of the 13-14<sup>th</sup> century sanctuaries were replaced by wider, longer and higher polygonal shaped sanctuaries, with brick or stone vaults. The exact building dates however remain unknown: there are no written sources, epigraphic elements which would document the interventions. Therefore, the scholars used indirect data to determine the chronology of the Late-Gothic building phases, mostly the dated inscriptions of the altars and bells,<sup>3</sup> presuming that these were ordered after the finalizations of the new sanctuaries. Such *ante quem* dates were obtained for the churches

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<sup>1</sup> Botár 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Entz 1996.

<sup>3</sup> For the bells of the region see Benkő 2002, for the altars Sarkadi 2011.