

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ROMANIAN  
FORTIFICATIONS IN OLTENIA,  
IN THE 13<sup>TH</sup>-14<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES, IN THE  
BLOCKING OF THE HUNGARIAN ROYALTY'S  
ADVANCE TOWARDS THE DANUBE

Radu Ștefan VERGATTI\*

**Keywords:** fortifications, citadels, monasteries, 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, Wallachia, Banat, Oltenia.

**Abstract:** The appearance of the first state formations on the territory of future Wallachia dates back to as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century. They distinguished themselves from the 13<sup>th</sup> century on in the battle against the Royal Hungary expansion, the invasion of the Mongol armies and finally, in the blocking of the attempt of the Bulgarians to cross North of the Danube. The reach of Wallachia, from Banat to the Black Sea, is attested on the one hand by written documents and on the other hand by archaeological finds. We are referring here especially to the traces of fortifications, discovered by the archaeologists. They are generally to be found beside the mountain passes that had stave off both the advances of the Hungarian royalty's army and those of the Catholic priests. They delimit the boundary of Romanian rule, both politically and religiously. The discussion on known fortifications and, especially, on others that are less known, gives the possibility to shed new light on the influence and power of the Romanian voivodes of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Rezumat:** Apariția primelor formațiuni statale e semnalată pe teritoriul viitoarei Țări Românești încă din secolul al XIII-lea. Ele s-au afirmat din secolul al XIII-lea în lupta împotriva expansiunii regalității maghiare, a invaziei armatelor mongole și, în fine, în oprirea încercării bulgarilor de a veni în nordul Dunării. Întinderea Țării Românești din Banat până la Marea cea Mare este arătată pe de o parte de documente scrise, pe de alta de vestigii arheologice. Mă refer aici, în special, la urmele fortificațiilor descoperite de arheologi. Ele sunt, în general, în dreptul trecătorilor montane, care opreau atât pătrunderea armatei regalității maghiare, cât și aceea a călugărilor catolici. Ele desemnează hotarul stăpânirii românești, atât în sens politic, cât și religios. Discutarea unor fortificații cunoscute și, mai ales, puțin cunoscute, dau posibilitatea să se arunce o lumină nouă asupra întinderii și puterii voievozilor români în secolele XIII-XIV.

A particular problem for the Hungarian royalty, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was the expansion of their kingdom towards the Danube. The representative of Catholicism, they were expected to conquer new lands, as requested by the Papacy. This had been a failure of the organisers of the crusades, the first attempt to colonise the Levant.<sup>1</sup>

There was an attempt, through the Hungarian Catholic royalty, to reach the Danube. The goal was for this great river to be used as a commercial axis between the West of Europe and the Black Sea – a turning point of commerce between the Mongol and the Hanseatic worlds.<sup>2</sup>

The King of Hungary, Andrew II (1205-1235) attempted an expansion. He eventually managed to conquer, after bloody battles, the south-eastern countries of Serbia, Herzegovina, Croatia, and Bosnia. Everywhere in these regions he created feudal units named “Banat”. They had the purpose of defending the border and collecting income for the King. At the same time, he conquered Galicia—in the North, where he defeated the Ruthenians. He gave this region to his second son, Coloman. King Andrew II's eldest son Bela, the future King Bela IV (1235-1270), wanted to further extend his rule into Transylvania, a region he had received as fief from his father, called “the old king”. Bela only succeeded in imposing his royal authority in Western Transylvania. He did not manage to overturn the Romanians and Szekely who were occupying the South and the East of Transylvania. Bela also faced the Saxon colonists, who had started a series of new towns for their community. It was impossible for the Hungarians to go through the Saxon citadels, because they did not know how to fight their urban fortifications.<sup>3</sup> In the South area of the Banat, in the plains, the Hungarian king did not succeed in overcoming the ranks of the Romanians and the Cumans.

The archaeological digs, initially started for rescue purposes by Ștefan Pascu and Dumitru Țeicu, and the systematic investigations conducted by Ștefan Matei and Dumitru Țeicu,<sup>4</sup> in the Southern Banat area, up to Turnu Severin, with the adjacent settlements, have conclusively shown that the stratigraphy may largely not be taken into consideration because it had been disturbed by modern works. The pieces discovered there – rings, earrings with S-shaped terminations, rings with “fleur-de-lis” seals, analogous to similar pieces discovered in the necropoleis of Romanian boyars in Țerova, Reșița, but also in Serbia, as well as Hungarian ones, but also other elements – a ring with a double-headed eagle, a bull's head with a Byzantine cross between its horns – point to the existence of a blend between the works of jewellers across the entire Balkan Peninsula. Sometimes, these artefacts are found together with those of jewellers from the Danubian corridor, starting from the centre of Europe and going down to the Lower Danube, in the Delta area.

\* Historian, PhD, senior member of the Academy of Scientists of Romania; email: rstvergatti@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> Le Goff, 1970, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> Brătianu, 1988, passim.

<sup>3</sup> Musset, 1965, p. 270.

<sup>4</sup> Țeicu, 1993, p. 238; Țeicu, 2003, pp. 64-69.