

APPROACHES CONCERNING THE FORMATION OF THE MIEVEAL COUNTY OF KRASZNA / CRASNA (11th-13th c.)

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Abstract: *The research concerning the formation and development of the medieval county of Crasna/Kraszna, received very slight attention to reach concluding results. During the present incursion we try to draw up approaches on the formation and development of early counties. The chosen chronologic stages were set on two very important moments in micro-regional level and the context of the Hungarian kingdom: the first written record of the county and the fall of the Arpad - dynasty at the end of the 13th - beginning of the 14th century. After analyzing the context of early county organization, questions appear: why the valley of Barcău has the majority of the early middle age fortification? Would it be possible that this issue denotes the marchia character of the county? When we take note of the record of 1164 with all the components of the integral organization of a county, why are we not able to identify on the field the castrum of the administration unit? Could it be possible that this hidden center is at Șimleu Silvaniei? Could it be an argument the 1257 record on the domain description of Șimleu, where we can see a well developed, rich possession? The present incursion represents only one stage of the research, the clear results are to be concluded from the future researches.*

Key word: *Crasna County, castrum, Barcău, Crasna, marchia*

Rezumat: *Cercetarea formării și dezvoltării comitatului medieval al Crasnei a avut parte de prea puțină atenție, încât să cunoaștem pe deplin contextul nașterii unității administrative medievale. Pe parcursul prezentei incursiuni se încearcă o trecere în revistă a diferitelor abordări tematice a-propos de formarea comitatelor medievale timpurii. Palierul cronologic propus s-a stabilit între două momente importante atât micro-regional cât și la nivelul Ungariei medievale, anume, prima menționare documentară a comitatului, respectiv stingerea dinastiei Arpadiene. După analiza contextului organizării comitatelor timpurii, la nivel de regat, se nasc întrebări: de ce valea Barcăului este împânzită de mai multe fortificații, decât Valea Crasnei? Oare acest șir de fortificații oferă comitatului caracterul de marchia? Dacă în 1164 asistăm la menționarea documentară a tuturor elementelor care compun organizarea integrală a unui comitat medieval, de ce nu s-a identificat până acum, pe teren centrul comitatului Crasna? Oare acest centru ascuns se află la Șimleu Silvaniei? Ar putea fi considerat un argument descrierea de hotar a Șimelului din 1257, unde asistăm la un domeniu foarte bogat? Prezenta incursiune reprezintă doar un punct în stadiul cercetărilor până în prezent, rezultatele clare așteptându-se de la cercetările viitoare.*

Cuvinte cheie: *Comitatul Crasna, castrum, Barcău, Crasna, marchia*

Introduction

Kristó Gyula affirms that "The historian must write reality. He is not allowed to exclude an ethnic from a land, if it is there and he can not imagine its presence there if it is not true. He is not allowed to decide based only on national feelings, political views, subjective feelings or personal beliefs, but must rely on sources." (Kristó 2004, 9-10). The past and our situation today cannot be clearly revealed without analyzing widely the surrounding area we live in. Hungarian and Romanian historiography during the 19th and 20th century aimed to process histories of Eastern and Central

Europe through the optics of national relationships, ethnic interests and the foundation of a strong, undeniable past. Lately the view towards the wider context meant not only gaining knowledge, but the change of optics as well, providing denial to provincial mentality narrowness that abundantly fed nationalistic manifestations. The scientific need of perception on wide scale concerning every topic and problem of the historical past, but mostly the eager wish to form and educate the public conscience made historians of the last decade to accept certain facts and set them on paper, in both Romanian and Hungarian historiography, proving that indeed, the history of Transylvania, although had shown lots of its secrets, still remains a full

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basket of unknown issues, hopefully not for a very long time though.

The everlasting Romanian- Hungarian ideological and historical conflict got so into the marrow of everyday life, that lost its entire stake by nowadays. Of course, this so-called competition is the result of frustrations from both sides. The time has arrived to accept every fact, whether it is – relatively - good or wrong, and to try and concentrate on building an honest, clear historiography. Moreover, the sudden high-scaled development of history's auxiliary sciences can offer the open gate to the mentioned development.

A few words on the chronologic staircase that we have chosen: regardless the "classical" theories on Transylvania's conquest by the Magyars, very particular situations are recorded around the north-western part of the province, meaning the inconclusive present stage of research. The first record of the medieval county is dated to 1090 (considered as being a fake, although re-edited in 1177), but most of the settlements begin to appear in written sources only from the beginning of the 13th century. Between these two moments, in 1164 we assist on the description of the social ambient of the county. These issues raise questions that can be answered only after a very detailed field and documentary study.

At the end of this introduction we have to emphasize certain issues on the topics that will form the subject of the present paper. First of all, the lack of written source facility can lead us into dangerous quagmires of erroneous theories and beliefs (Benkő 2001, 135). Second, as much as we try to clear up the mist of early medieval Transylvania, we can notice the rather deficient level, where archeology stands, due to the enormous amount of unpublished information, or data communicated under forms that draw doubt.

These two issues together just lengthen the path to the knowledge that could really help solving important matters concerning the history of the province we are talking about.

Hereby, we must admit, that the results and conclusions of the present paper are only a slight stage of research. Yet again, based on these results, one can try and trace the clear and main research directions.

Motivation

Kraszna/Crasna County, as one of the smallest counties in medieval Hungary received proper attention starting only from the beginning of the 20th century, by Petri Mór, who dedicated a monumental work to the county to be today,

known under the name of Szilágy/Sălaj County (Petri 1901). Further on, just a few studies appeared on objectives that are set on its territory, but yet only Györffy György tried to synthesize relevant facts on the formation of the county (Györffy 1987), with more or less valuable data, gathering most of the documents that mention social and administrative elements of the medieval administration unit. It is necessary to mention also one of the latest publications (Bálint 2009), that after a tremendous archive study has gathered every medieval and modern document relevant for our topic, a work that has seen sunlight under the title of *Örök Szilágy/Aeterna Sylvania*.

Since the appearance of the above mentioned main studies, regional -historical and archeological-researches revealed new facts on the topic. So, the motivation to set on paper a few new data lays on the usefulness of such information, concerning county formation in medieval Transylvania, in general, but mostly throwing a short glimpse of an eye on the formation contexts and processes of Kraszna/Crasna County. Another relevant observation is made, concerning the western outskirts of the province where during the 11th century important laic and ecclesiastic establishments are set up -at the contact point between the western planes and Transylvania's mountains-, but the research results are extremely poor, particularly concerning the medieval counties of Crasna/Kraszna and Satu Mare/Szatmár (Bóna 2001, 79).

Approaches

There are still disputes concerning the origins of the counties in medieval Hungary and Transylvania, not only due to the lack of written sources dated to these periods, but also because of historians who omit taking under detailed analysis archeological data as well. To be more precise, there would be an urgent need to set the bases of a new kind of research, *sine ira et studio*.

In spite of all the disputes, Hungarian and Romanian historiography succeeded yet in aiming a few common directions, during the 20th century and even further on. In the same time, historians started accepting that the development of a medieval county has a castle as core (being one of the main common directions of research), although, the general tendencies have shown, that the starting point in this core analysis is set on the castles/fortifications mentioned by *Anonymus*, without paying attention to these military and social objective's chronological preliminaries (Bóna 1998, 18).

Within the three volumes of History of Transylvania, also appears the same idea, of the castle as county formation core, with a few added details. The author(s) assume, that around the core, donations have been given to the Slavic milieu that lived on the territories unoccupied by the newly arrived Magyars. These donations have formed private property blocks (on the outskirts of Transylvania, around valley ends, at the feet of the mountains) that were ruled by royal grangers. Ergo, the incipient administrative organization of the province was set on the Slavic layers as well (Köpeczi et al. 1986, 289).

On the issue of castle/fortification preliminaries Györffy György has made a very broad approach. There are opinions that set the origins of the institution in Frankish-Bavarian, Slavic or Bulgarian fundamentals. Others affirm, that king Saint Stephen I organized the counties without any local prerogatives. Taking in consideration the above facts, it is not certain which is the foundation layer of the administrative organization. There is only one certain fact: besides the "Avar plains", during the 9th century there are three major forces around the Hungarian Kingdom, such as the eastern Frankish Reign, Great Moravia and the outskirts of the Bulgarian dominium, but yet, we don't have the right to refer to the system used in the motherland of these three "powers" (Györffy 1977, 191). By the beginning of the 11th century, documents reveal the most important character of the county: the clear separation of the royal court property from the castle domain, the castle administration does not encompass either the properties of the king, queen or the prince's. In the same time, a document emitted by Saint Stephen in 1009, proves, that the county was a unitary territory (*quator civitates...cum...terminis et finibus* - concerning the grant of authority for the bishop of Veszprém over four castles/counties) and it's granger's (*comes*) administrative power over the inhabitants (Györffy 1977, 203). So, as we have already mentioned, the county is the king's power apparatus built around the castle. To understand the county's human resources management, we have to mention the fact, that the granger did not spend very much time on his domain, so he had several *locum tenens* figures, as follows: the military leader (*maior exercitus*), the administrator of the castle (*maior castri*), the castle judge (*curialis comes*) and the royal judge (*billogos*). Of course there were several lower ranked officials as well: *missus*, *praeco*, *custos*, *portae*, *miles*, *centurio*, *decurio*, etc. (Györffy 1977, 204)

There is also a very interesting approach drawn up by the same Györffy György, when speaking of the frontier counties (*marchia*). When speaking of the medieval county of Crasna/Kraszna, there are certain issues linked to this administrative unit type that will represent a matter of discussion in the followings. *Marchia*, as frontier-county makes its appearance during the 11th century, having a very clear role. Its leader was the frontier granger (*marchio* or *comes confinii*). Specialized military units (*sagittarius* and *speculator*) were detached to these fortifications / lines of defense. (Györffy 1977, 208)

Reviewing the Hungarian county system, it is quite visible that the majority of the administration units and castles, were domain districts of the 10th century so-called "nobility", districts where they have imposed their power through military accompaniment. The same author, after amassing the available information draws the conclusion, that the roots of the medieval county organization can be set on two major lines: first, administration organized through local preliminaries, second, Saint Stephen's improvements by western influence. (Györffy 1977, 209-210)

Crasson civitate *

Set in the north-western part of Transylvania (Fig. 1a), the medieval county of Crasna/Kraszna is one of the smallest counties (territorially speaking) in medieval Hungary. It is actually set on the western quarter of today's Sălaj County (Fig. 1b).

Geography of the medieval county

There are certain, very important geographical elements in the county and its vicinity, that eased the process of habitation development, strategic organization and economic growth during the middle ages as well. First of all, we have to mention the Meseş-gate phenomenon (*Porta Mezesina*), as the easiest passing point between the Transylvanian Plateau and Pannonia. Three hydrographic basins (the valleys of Crasna/Kraszna, Barcău/Berettyó and Zalău-Zilah) helped also the formation of road infrastructure, three major relief elements, that actually constitute the transition point between the above-mentioned large geographic units. In fact, the core of the county seems to reveal itself as being set in the Valley of Barcău/Berettyó River.

* *Colomanvs (episcopus) princeps fuit in Crasson civitate* (Györffy 1987, 515)

Short historical review

We shall crayon a few important data revealed by written sources. Most of the data is revealed through domain descriptions, but also privilege donations for local men of the king. Such a privilege request is traced in the first written record dated somewhere around 1090-1093 (Bálint 2009, 29). We are witnesses of the moment, when *Mesta*, receives legal status on *Crasson civitate* from king Könyves Kálmán, but he refuses this privilege and asks the king to spare him from paying as tax the tenth of his income. In this same record we find out, that *Mesta* was the owner of the "bison field"[†] and the plains around *Boyza*. The request was drawn, towards the king, by *Nepcor* as well, who have asked not to pay taxes on his fields in *Gemelchen* and not enrolling in the army nor by himself, neither by his nephews. Actually the first domain description of the county has been revealed, but also we get familiarized by the *Nepcor-Mesta* kindred. (Fig. 2a)

After not even a century, during 1164 there is another document emitted, that mentions the followings: *Janus c. de Crazna; Tupa cur. c. de Karasna; iud-bus Gábrielé biloto et Sebecuriali c-e de Carasna; pri-o Cuca; iudice Agya; castrenses de Carasna de v. Ban; Tumpa centurione, ... iud-e Tupa curiali c-e de Carasna; iud-e Compolto adiac-o de Carazna; iud-e Tupa curiali c-e et Ruben biloto de Crazna; ioub-es castri Karaznay, scil. Ruben maior exercitus, Echilleus varnog, Euzud et Pinna centuriones et Paradan et cives eiusdem castri, scil. Byuncy, Vcyk, Micus* (Györffy 1987, 516). The above mentioned notabilities clearly describe a mature county structure, so we can affirm, that before the Tartar Invasion, the organizational structure of the county is almost complete. So far, the *castrum* or *civitas* of *Crazna*, has not been yet identified on the field. The majority of the preoccupied researchers have linked the existence of the fortification remains to the homonymous village. Actually we have in front of us two major lines in starting to find this mysterious county center. One of them is on the shoulders of top-names, the other one can be observed by our opinion in the masses of fortifications in the county that can be dated in the late 11th century. Let us return to this issue, further on in the present paper.

There are two major moments in the history of the county. 1213 and 1251/57 represent moments when we are able to view the complete image of the county and its belonging domains. Let us have

a short review of the records concerning the county, giving their original, Latin form:

1090 - *terra Bozia, terra Gemelchen, Crasson;*
1164 - *Crazna;*
1208 - *terra Deudas, villa Yppu;*
1213 - *villa Botocun, villa Ban, villa Dirsig, possessio Hydveg, terra Coznis, villa Kechel, terra Kyrys, villa Kouachi, terra Nesmer, terra Nogfalw;*
1214 - *villa Bogus, villa Pechey, villa Saicu;*
1217 - *Iloswa, possessio Lomperth;*
1219 - *terra Cesar, terra Matha, terra Polyaspotok;*
1249 - *terra Wolko, terra Zwan;*
1251 - *possessio Wathasomlyowa;*
1257 - *terra Bylgoz, terra Chechy, terra Ghywrktheleke, villa Huruat, villa Kourogh, villa Lagud, villa Maiadeigen/Maiade, terra Mynoraw, terra Perechen, terra Rathon, terra Sczeck, terra Szeek, terra Wylak, terra Wyduna, terra Worsolch;*

Of course this situation is overthrown by the middle of the 13th century due to the event mentioned above, but if we take a closer look at the end of the above list we have to notice that all the settlements mentioned in 1251/57 are part of the domain of *Wathasomlyowa* (Szilágysomlyó/Şimleu Silvaniei). (Fig. 2b)

In 1249, due to unknown reasons, the center of the county is set to *Wolko* (Subcetate/Váralja). It is certain, that king Béla IV donates the domain of *Wolko* to Paul of Geregye kindred, as a gift, for his services during the Tartar Invasion (Györffy 1987, 522)

Fortifications

There is another aspect that we have to mention. Given the supposed territory of the county we have to take a look at the fortifications that are dated or can be dated in the 11th-12th centuries. In fact we can observe a very strange situation. There are about five fortifications on the territory of the county. Strange, that it may seem, four of these, are set on the valley of Barcău/Berettyó River: (Marca/Márkaszék (Dumitraşcu, Lucăcel 1974), Subcetate/Váralja, Tusa/Tuszatelke (Băcuţ-Crişan 2003), Halmăşd/Halmasd - uncertain dating (Cosma 2000)) and one above the valley of Crasna/Kraszna at Szilágysomlyó/Şimleu Silvaniei (Pop 1991; Pop, Csók 2003). The common feature in all five cases is their position on dominant hill-tops, over the exit of the river from its gorge (except Halmăşd/Halmasd, that could be interpreted as surveying the saddle-road that passes

[†] *planities Bubalorum*

towards the hydrologic basin of the Criș River), but also, they are set on the southern border of the medieval county. This assumption raises the question: would it be possible that these fortifications are actually part of the incipient character of the medieval county as *marchia*? If we analyze also the geographical names of this region we also observe an interesting fact: all along the southern and western borders of the county we can find top-names that denote the frontier of the newly built administration unit (Sălăgean 2005). (Fig. 3)

The fortification at Szilágysomlyó/Șimleu Silvaniei, on the hill-top above the Crasna/Kraszna valley has all the strategic features to survey the passing-point below it. The early phases of the fortification are very difficult to trace, due to the 14th century interventions, when the first stone fortress is built. The information given by the excavations that have been made here will give us concluding answers and will form the subject of a future study. It is very obvious, that the main role of this objective was the supervision of the salt road that passed in the valley

Questions

Given the short incursion in the micro-regional history of the medieval county, instead of conclusions there are a few questions that have been raised. At the present stage of research these questions are very difficult to answer, mostly those concerning the beginnings of the administrative unit. The main interrogation comes from the direction of medieval status evolution, domains,

properties. As we have already mentioned, the first record made during the end of the 11th century is talking about a kindred that had properties around the middle course of Barcău/Berettyó River. What if the *Nepcor-Mesta* kindred is set here by the king, as administrators of the new frontier set during the process of administrative organization of north-western Transylvania? What if the fortifications on the river, are military headquarters of the chieftains of these two kindreds? One argument could lay in the tumultuous presence of fortifications on the southern outskirts of the county to be.

It is a strange fact, indeed, that at the beginning of the 12th century, we have a very clear social structure, but not an identified county centre. If we lay upon the theory, that the county centre received its name by the river that passes through the county, moreover that it had the clear aim to protect the salt route, the county center shouldn't be elsewhere than at Szilágysomlyó/Șimleu Silvaniei. An argument that could sustain this theory would be the large property that *Wathasomlyowa* had at the middle of the 13th century. One small detail that overturns the situation is the setting of the county centre to *Wolko* in 1249.

All these questions will receive an answer that will be given by the archeological field and systematic researches of the future.

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Fig. 1a - Geographical position of the interest zone on the territory of Romania/ Poziția geografică a zonei de interes pe teritoriul României

Fig. 1b - The contour of the medieval county on the territory of today's Sălaj County/ Conturul comitatului medieval pe teritoriul Județului Sălaj de azi

Fig. 2a - Crasna/Kraszna County at the end of the 11th century: *Boyza* and *Gemelchen*/Comitatul Crasna la sfârșitul secolului al XI-lea: *Boyza* și *Gemelchen*

Fig. 2b - Illustration of the domain of *Wathasomyowa*, 1257/57 / Ilustrarea domeniului *Wathasomyowa*, 1251/57

Fig. 3 - Position of the fortifications mentioned in the text/Poziția fortificațiilor menționate în text

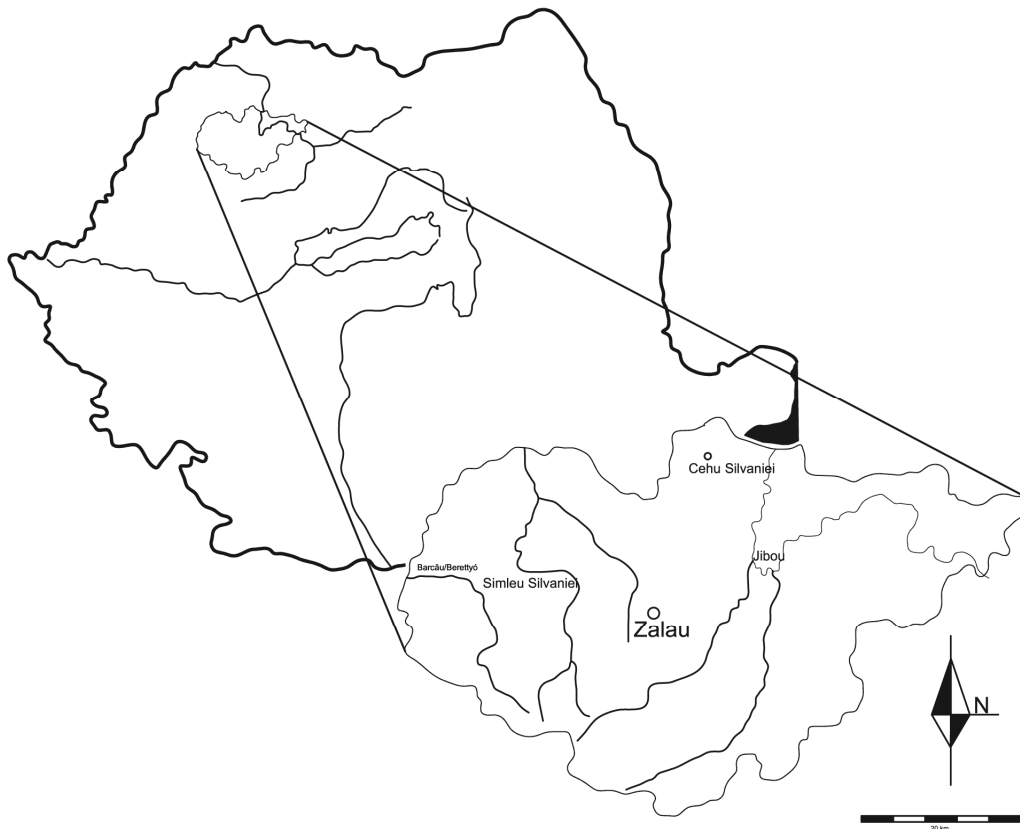


Fig. 1a

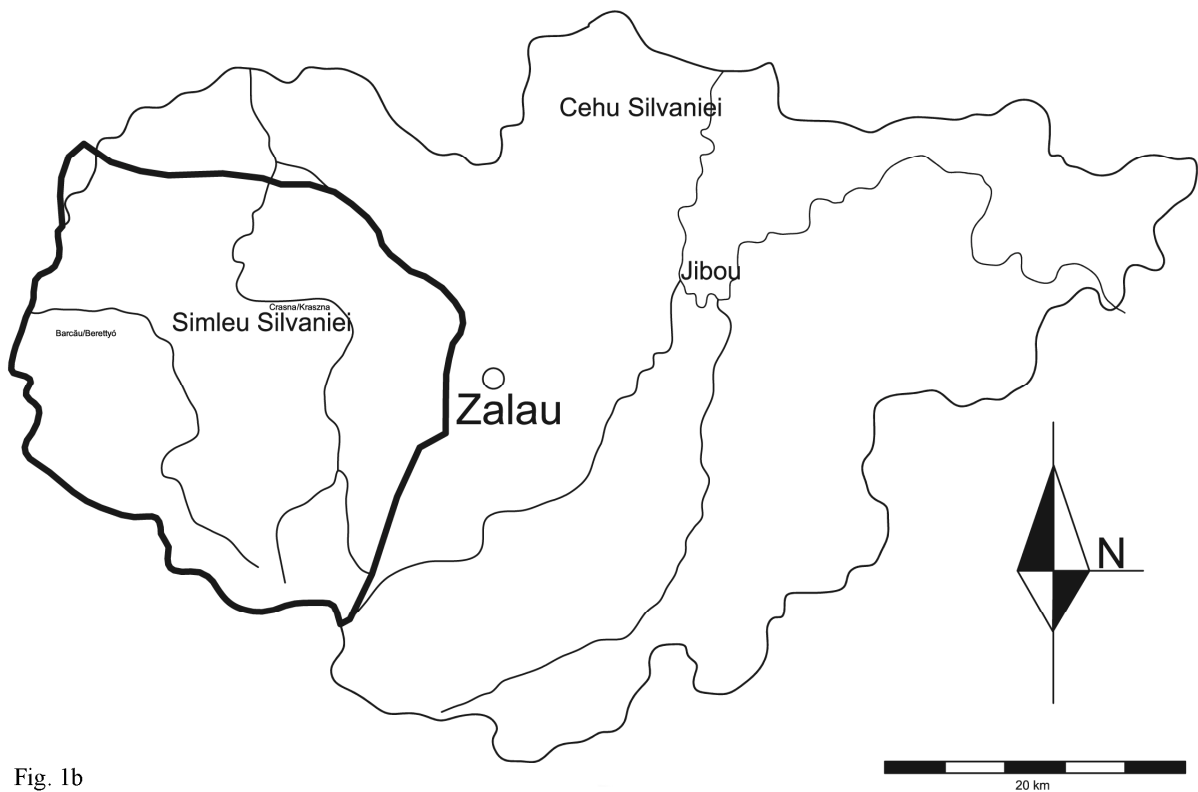


Fig. 1b

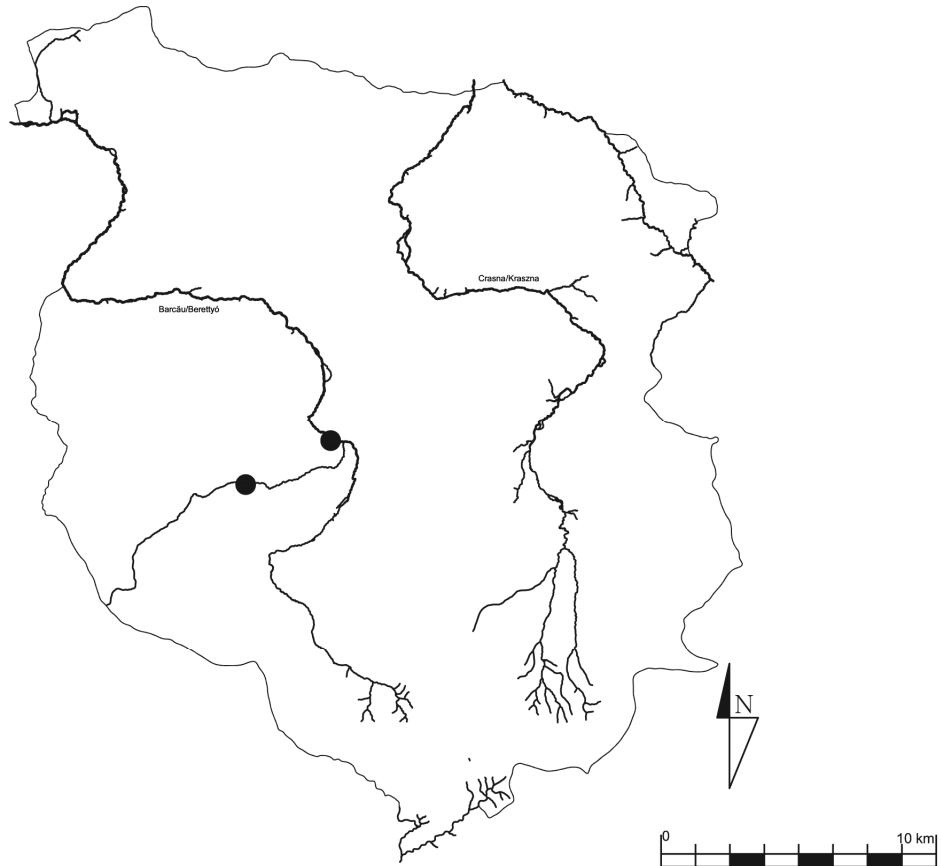


Fig. 2a

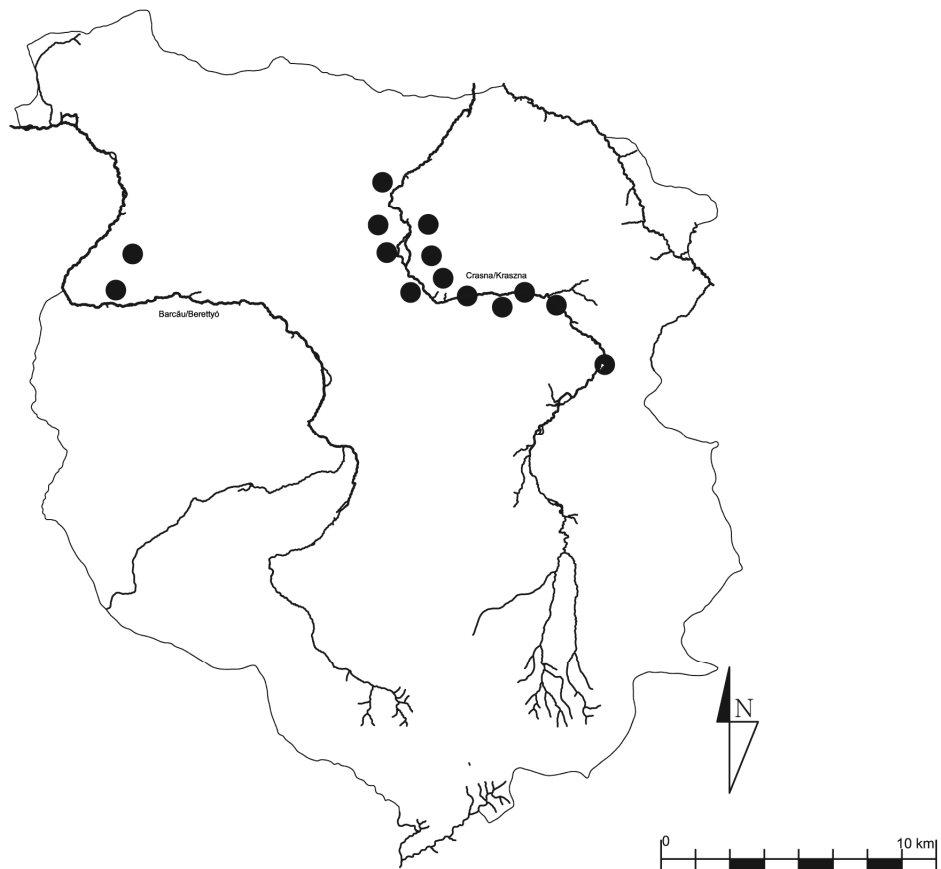


Fig. 2b

