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THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SETTLEMENTS IN HUȘI DEPRESSION (NORTH-EASTERN ROMANIA)

Elena Chirilă–Acatrinei¹, Vasile Efros¹, Radu Gabriel Pîrnău²

Abstract. The problem of the formation and evolution of prehistoric rural settlements up to the feudal period has been the subject of many papers in the fields of "settlement geography" or "settlement archeology". In recent years, significant progress has been made in this regard by analyzing complex physical-geographical and historical factors that have influenced housing, by making use of integrated archaeological, historical, ethnographic, geographic, anthropological data, thereby achieving important results on the natural and socio-economic conditions in which settlements appeared and developed. In this paper, the historical evolution of the process of populating the settlement system in the Huși Depression between the early Neolithic period and feudalism (which corresponds to the formation and development of Romanian medieval village) was analyzed by consulting historical papers, archaeological reports and the cartographic materials accompanying such works.

Keywords: Huși Depression, archeology, population, settlements

1. Introduction

Huși Depression is a distinct geographic unit, located in the south-east part of the Central Moldavian Plateau, subunit of the Bârlad Plateau. It is limited on the west by Lohan Cuesta, that is 100-200 m higher than the rest of the territory, on the north by Pietrăriei Cuesta situated on the right of the Moșna river, on the south by Drăslăvăț Cuesta and on the east by the Prut River (Figure 1).

In Romania, the issue of rural settlements was partially studied through excavations, archaeological surveys and recognitions, which allowed drawing some valuable conclusions on the extent of the settlements, their system of fortification, structure and content of their housing plan and also on the socio-economic development of the population (Zaharia et al., 1970). Important research has been conducted also within the village settlements of the pre-feudal and feudal period and also on the development of rural settlements from the Romanian ancient and medieval history. In relation to the ancient history of Moldova, excavations have brought substantial contributions to the reconstruction of the settlements network of the studied territory and have revealed evidence of living continuity in the Moldavian space in ancient times. Among the most important works in this respect should be mentioned those of Pârvan (1926), Vulpe (1950), Platon (1965) and Teodor (1968, 1969, 1969a).

Important data source are the monographic studies and collections of documents (Ghibănescu, 1887, 1926, 1927; Giurescu, 1967; Rosetti, 1907; Iorga, 1981). Also, at the end

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of the 19th century was published the *Geographical Dictionary of Romania*, under the coordination of Lahovari (1898/1902), which is a collation of geographical dictionaries from the Romanian counties published in the last decades of the century. This paper presents important information on the population size of the settlements (in the year 1889) population structure (ethnic, occupational, and so on), land situation etc.

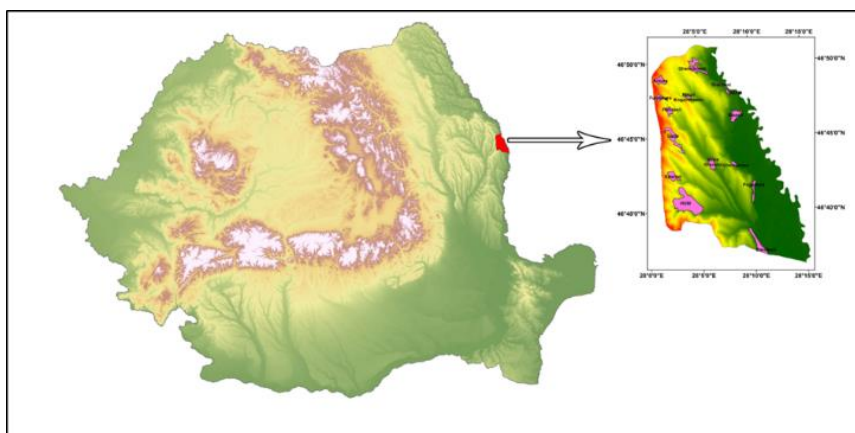


Figure 1: Geographical location of Huși Depression in Romania

Of particular importance are the old cartographic materials such as *The Atlas of Moldova and the Forest Map from 1900*, which through its details is an indispensable source for studies aiming this time span. Input from older sources (censuses, unpublished censuses, maps, etc.) are capitalized, among others, by Ungureanu (1985) and Băican (1981, 1986, 1987, 1997), who were constantly involved in the retrieval of information collected from census maps dating from the 18th century.

The 20th century is characterized by an accumulation of statistical records and maps, this being a real breakthrough in the geographical knowledge of processes such as the expansion of settlements in the study area. After 1918 there is a growing interest for problems of human geography, the main role being played by a series of personalities trained in the prewar period, such as Mehedinți, Vâlsan, Brătescu and Mihăilescu. The work on human geography focuses in particular on the study of the internal morphology of the settlement, the appearance of the households, ethno-linguistic structures and on problems of recent colonization, urbanization and industrial development. Also during this period there is a special interest in the geography of villages or rural geography, theoretically documented by Mihăilescu, who published numerous papers in this range and created the first Romanian rural morphological typology (1927). In this way the foundations of the basic geographical disciplines were laid, and occurred an update of the methods and procedures used in geographical research, somehow recovering the gaps compared to the countries where geography was more advanced. The studies of the geographers in Iasi on the development of the built urban settlements, the identification of the cities influence areas and urban hierarchies such as those of Ungureanu inserted in the book *Orașele din Moldova* (1980) or theoretical concerns regarding rural and urban settlements and the hierarchy of rural settlements (Nimigeanu, 1985; Chiriac, 1978) are also important contributions to the knowledge of the settlements and population of Moldova. Another work that deals with the area covered by our research is published in 2008 by Merlan.

2. The settlements in the Huși depression during Neolithic - early feudalism (10th - 14th cent.)

For the period from early Neolithic and the 18th century, an important source of data are the works published by Zaharia et al. (1970), Cihodaru (1931), Gugiuman (1959), Burac (2002, 2004) and others.

Archaeological information obtained through systematic research gives us an insight into the living in the analyzed area in the early Neolithic period (6500-5500 BC.), which is represented in Moldova by the *Criș culture* and by those of linear ceramics, characteristic being the association in most cases of the remnants of the two cultures living in the same settlements. In the depression of Huși the most representative archaeological sites for this period are those from Arsura (Ruginosu) and Pâhnești (Henciu Hill). These settlements are located on low-lying places, floodable or affected by moisture excess, occupying more or less extensive areas on the floodplain levees and on terraces. The low position which most of the settlements of the Cris culture occupy seems to indicate an arid climate that caused their descent in the valleys, close to watercourses or low banks of ponds (Zaharia et al., 1970).

The Upper Neolithic and the Eneolithic (5500-3700 BC) are two periods much better represented in the depression, through numerous discoveries of the *Precucuteni* and *Cucuteni cultures*. For the study area, the most important discoveries belong to Cucuteni: Arsura (La Ruptura and Ruginosu I), Pâhnești (Henciu Hill I) and Fundătura (Râpa Onosoaiiei) - all belonging to Cucuteni phase A. These settlements are located on lower terraces or even erosion levees in the floodplains, occupying a generally low position. Only some of the settlements in this period occupy higher positions, being located on medium altitude terraces or the margins of plateaus.

The *Bronze Age* in Moldova has been less studied compared to the Neolithic. In the depression of Huși few settlements have been identified belonging to the Late Bronze Age (*Noua Culture*) in Ghermanesti (Lake Recea, Barahoi II) and Mihail Kogalniceanu (Cimitirului Hill). Research conducted on the distribution of this culture in Moldova (Zaharia et al., 1970; Petrescu Dâmbovița, 1953) showed that most of the settlements of the Noua group are located on low positions: lower terraces, levees, confluence interfluvies and landslide amphitheaters, and that such settlements are encountered more rarely on higher grounds, on plateaus or terraces. The frequency of settlements of the Noua group on low-lying land, on wide floodplains with enough moisture and vegetation around must have been related to the development of cattle farming tribes of this group, which practiced to a certain extent primitive agriculture as well.

The *Iron Age* is determined by the invention and spreading of iron metallurgy, multiplication tools, weapons and other objects made of the new metal, which gradually replaced the artifacts produced by new technologies (László, 2010). The names of *Hallstatt* (1200 - 450 BC.) and *La Tène* (450-50 BC.) designate the first and the second Iron Age in Europe. In the Huși Depression Hallstatt settlements have been identified in Ghermanesti (Barahoi II), Arsura (northwest of the village and Cetățuia Mogoșești), Pâhnești (Barahoi II, Bisericii Hill) and Albița (at Podul Vechi). Regarding the forms of land which these settlements occupy, it appears that the majority are located, like the Noua group settlements, on the lower terraces of rivers, with wide floodplains around, offering early Hallstatt culture representatives favorable conditions both for raising cattle, which was apparently the core occupation at this stage, as well as for the cultivation of plants. The second Iron Age (La Tène) is identified in Moldova with the *Dacian period*. In Huși depression to the La Tène

culture can be attributed the settlements Ghermanesti (Pe Dop, Barahoi II) and M. Kogalniceanu (Cimitirului Hill). Settlements with low position occupy lower terraces, floodplains and the slopes, and those with high position plateaus, hollows and upper slopes (Figure 2).

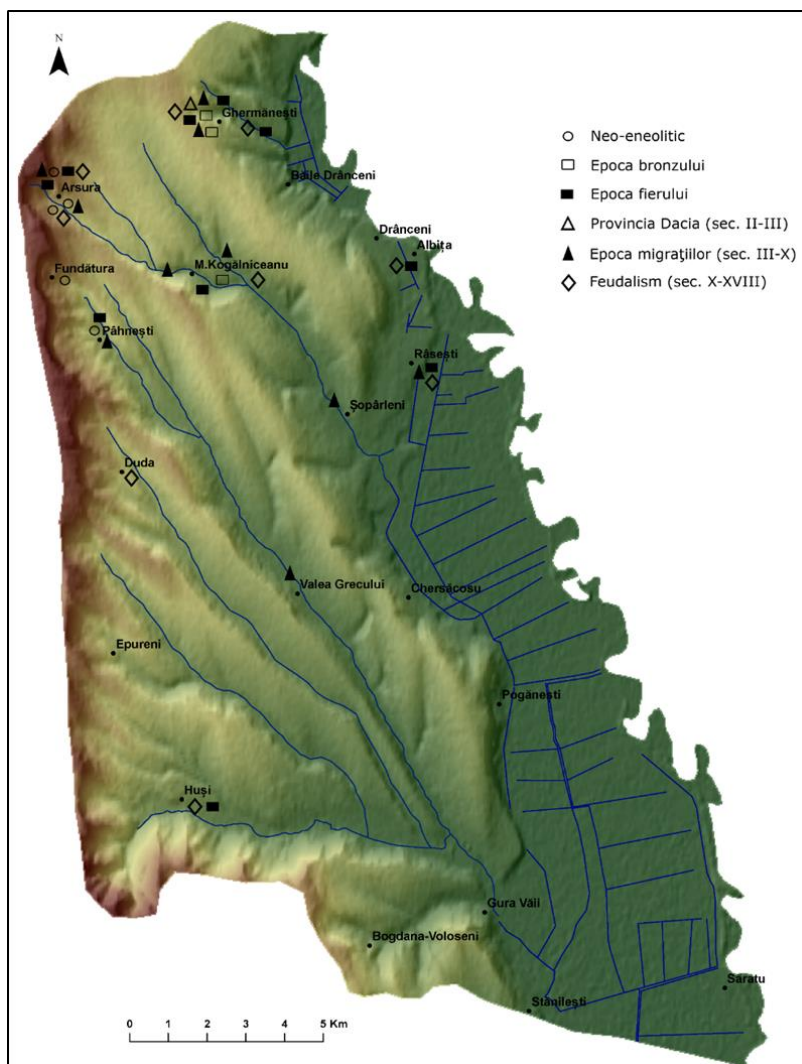


Figure 2: The distribution of archaeological sites in the Depression of Huși (after Zaharia, 1970)

Some of the features of the Geto-Dacian culture from the second Iron Age continue in Moldova in the 2nd and 3rd century AD, during the corresponding period of Dacia province. In the Huși Depression has been identified only one spot with Dacian habitation debris from this period, at Ghermanesti (Barahoi I). The type of settlement of this period in Moldova identified by archaeological excavations is that of open seating, unfortified and extended along valleys. The type of settlement with predominantly low position goes on to the next step in the time of the *Sântana de Mureș - Cerniașov* culture since the beginning of migrations period (4th century AD). Moreover, in many cases, from the same settlements with low position are derived living remnants from both the 3rd or 2nd - 3rd centuries and the 4th or even the 5th century AD (Zaharia et al., 1970).

Regarding the age of migrations (3rd -10th centuries) in Moldova, numerous excavations were conducted which aimed at clarifying the history of the local society and its relation to migratory people of those days, especially with the Sarmatians, the ancient Germans and Slavs, who contributed to the socio-economic and cultural development of this population and, therefore, to the process of forming of the Romanian people and language.

For the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, Romania's specific culture is *Sântana de Mureș*. Regarding the chronology of the findings in this culture in Romania conclusive evidence were recently brought for their classification at the end of 3rd and especially in the 4th century AD, when most of these discoveries date. In the Depression of Huși, archaeological investigations have identified traces of Santana de Mures living in Arsura (northwest of the village, Ruginosu I, La Sipotel), Ghermanesti (Pe Dop, Barahoi I, Barahoi II), M. Kogalniceanu (Drînceni-Râpi road, Râpa Șopîrleni), Pîhnești (Henciu Hill II, center of the village), Rîșești (center of the village), Șopîrleni, (Hârtop valley) and Valea Grecului (north of the village). From all these data regarding the spreading of the living traces in the 4th century AD on the Moldavian territory, the conclusion is drawn that representatives of the Santana de Mures culture preferred for their settlements the region between Siret and Prut, intensely inhabited in the previous period by various tribes of Dacians. The generally low position of these settlements depended on local geographical factors, favorable for ensuring living conditions for these communities who devoted themselves primarily to agriculture and cattle breeding. However, this low position of the settlements corresponds to some complex economic and political causes including the relations from that period between the Goths and the locals, the latter positioned in the valleys and not on high ground.

For the period between the 5th and 6th centuries there are few archaeological information regarding Moldova. Regarding Huși Depression there were identified remains of habitation from this period in Ghermanesti (Barahoi II) and Rîșești (village center).

The period between the 6th and the 10th century is of special importance, since in this interval, after the co-habitation of the Slavs with the Daco-Roman population and the gradual assimilation of the first by the locals, the formation process of Romanian people and language was now complete. In Huși Depression were identified traces of habitation at the end of this period (9th - 10th centuries - protodridu stage) in M. Kogălniceanu (between Ghermănești and M. Kogălniceanu).

Feudalism (10-18th centuries) is identified with the formation and development of the medieval village in Moldova and can be divided into early feudal period (10-14th centuries) and that of late feudalism (14-18th centuries).

From an archaeological perspective, the early feudalism in Moldova, like in all the Carpathian-Danubian region, begins with *Dridu culture*, especially well-known from excavations conducted in Dridu in Cîmpia Munteniei by Nestor and Zaharia between 1956 and 1959 (Nestor, 1960). In our study area haven't been identified sure traces of habitation of the Dridu type, yet many stations of this type were investigated further south, in the Horincea-Elan Depression. It was found that settlements belonging to Dridu culture were unfortified, of the open deforested areas type, like most settlements from the time of the *Hlincea culture*. Also, most settlements of the Dridu culture are situated on fertile lands close to waters and forests, offering residents favorable conditions for agriculture.

The next milestone in the development of early medieval material culture in Moldova (Răducăneni stage) was identified by excavations at Albița (Podu Vechi) Ghermanesti (Valea Lupului, Barahoi I) and Rîșești (village center). Most of these settlements are typical for the steppe zone in central and southern Moldova, similar to the previous periods: protodridu and Dridu. The next stage corresponding to the 12-13th centuries was identified in the basin of

Huși at Arsura (Cetățuia Mogoșești, Ruginosu I, Ruginosu II), Râșcani (La Râpă) and Duda (La Iaz). The settlements of this period are located in the same steppe region, usually occupying lower positions on the lower terraces and in the floodplains.

3. Settlements in the Depression of Huși in the 14-18th centuries

The next step in the evolution of rural settlements is that of late feudalism, dated between the mid-14th century and the second half of the 18th century. Despite the importance of archaeological research on the Romanian medieval village, so far there have been few investigations in this area, the focus being more on research of urban centers. For the town of Hushi, important information for this period has been obtained from the investigations of Andronic et al. (1965).

In the Huși depression, this period has been identified in some settlements in Ghermanesti (Barahoi II, Bisericii Hill, Pe Dop), M. Kogalniceanu (Drînceni-Râpi) and Rîșești (center of the village). In terms of landforms on which these settlements are located, it is found that most of them are on the lower terraces and on the floodplain, few of them occupying higher positions on plateaus and at the head of some tributaries.

In a study of trade between Moldavia and Transylvania, Gonța shows that at the mid-15th century, three commercial roads intersected at Huși, connecting the cities of Transylvania and Chilia on the Danube, which led not only to its prosperity, but also to the increase of its strategic importance. From here you could watch the movements of the invading Tartar hordes and could send aid to southern lands trodden by marauders.

The presence of Stephen the Great in Hushi, from where he sends a letter on 17th December 1487 to the inhabitants of Brasov, is the first documentary record of this fair, which shows the importance given to it in the country's defense system by the great ruler (Burac, 2002, 2004).

The evolution of the settlements is better documented starting with the 17th and 18th centuries, a period in which most settlements in the Huși Depression are documented as well (Figure 3).

From 1757 the administrative residence of Fălciu area moves to Huși, under the pretext of the shorter distance in comparison to the royal throne in Iași. Regarding the urban plan of the fair, in 1771 Huși included the villages Corni, Plopeni and Broșteni. Only in 1832 is the fair of Huși assigned the title of town, and from 1834 becomes residence of land with stewardship, courthouse and primary school as part of Prut net (Merlan, 2008).

The main villages around Huși, which will be further embedded in its perimeter, are Broșteni, Plopeni (where in the 18th century Bulgarians are settled being brought from the south of the Danube), Corni (today neighborhood in the northern part of Huși, with Catholic population displaced from Benței valley where they originally formed a small Hungarian market) and Dobrina (extended after 1890 along the railway to the fair Huși).

The other settlements in the depression are documented in the 16th and 17th centuries, and a good part of them are still there today (Figure 4).

Thus, Albița village is established in the 18th century on the estate of the Merești family, in the Prut valley and its lower terrace. Arsura was documented in the reign of Mihai Vodă Racoviță (1718), the name of the village coming from the burning remained after the Tatar invasion which plundered the settlement. Arsura ('Burn') Village "is located in a blind valley on the Lohan Hill, opened only in the south" (Lahovari, 1902).

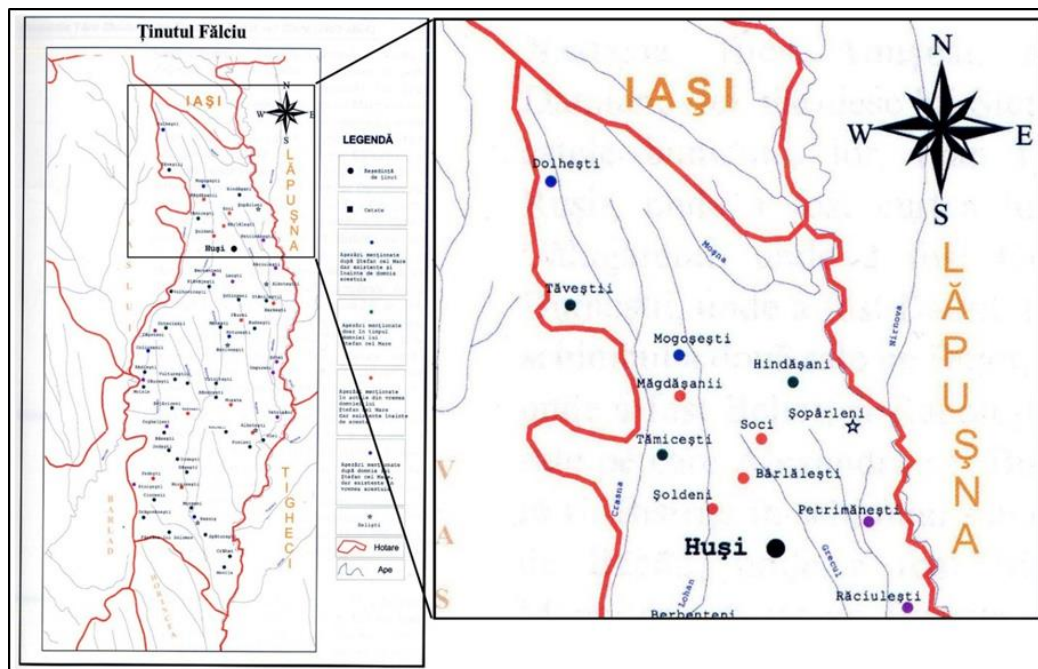


Figure 3: The settlements in the Fălciu area at the time of Ștefan cel Mare (after Burac C., 2004).

Drânceni is mentioned in 1623 during the reign of Petru Vodă Rareș, and for several centuries the name of the village was Drăceni (Ghibănescu, 1927). The change in the name from Drăceni to Drânceni takes place in 1838. In 1853 the fair of Drânceni is established, which will last until 1970. To distinguish between the village and the fair they were called Drânceni Village and Drânceni Fair. In 1968 the fair absorbs the village Valea Cânepii (Partene, 2002). In 1969 the town became the residence of the Drânceni township, encompassing also the Ghermănești commune and the villages of Șopârleni, Albița and Râsești. In the interwar period there were over 100 Hebrew families in the fair and some Greek ones. After the floods of 1969 the majority of people in the Drânceni Fair fled to Ghermănești and the surrounding villages, so that now there are only a few inhabited houses in the old borough.

The village *Duda* is documentary attested in 1635 under the name of Suleni, but then the center of the village moves on the Dudului Hill, taking the name of Dudu. At the end of the 18th century Duda was a commune made up of the villages Duda and Novaci. *Epureni* lies on Cîrța valley, on the north of Huși. In the 19th century it included the villages Bobești, Corni, Epureni and Voloșeni. To the east of Epureni "there is this place called Banța, where they say there was a Székely fair" (Lahovari, 1902).

Ghermănești village is documented around 1623, and was established by a certain Gherman Scriban near Leușeni, on the right side of Prut Valley at Cotu Ghermănești or Valea Cânepii. It is assumed that the village extended on both sides of the Prut, as evidenced by the toponym "Herman's Bridge", met on both sides of the river (Ghibănescu, 1927).

Mihail Kogălniceanu village was called in the 15th century Heghedîșani or Hindășani and then Râpile. The current name comes from the name of the illustrious scholar Kogălniceanu, who had properties from Sitoaiei Valley up to the Prut River (Drânceni Fair).

Păhnești is certified in 1638, its owner being Scarlat Rosetti. It lies on Păhnești valley at the bottom of the Ochiului Hill. In the past there was also a famous vineyard (Lahovari, 1902).

Pogănești is documented in 1648, after this being held by several landowners as Ion Racoviță (1666), Dumitrașco Racoviță (1694), Matei Conta (1785) etc.

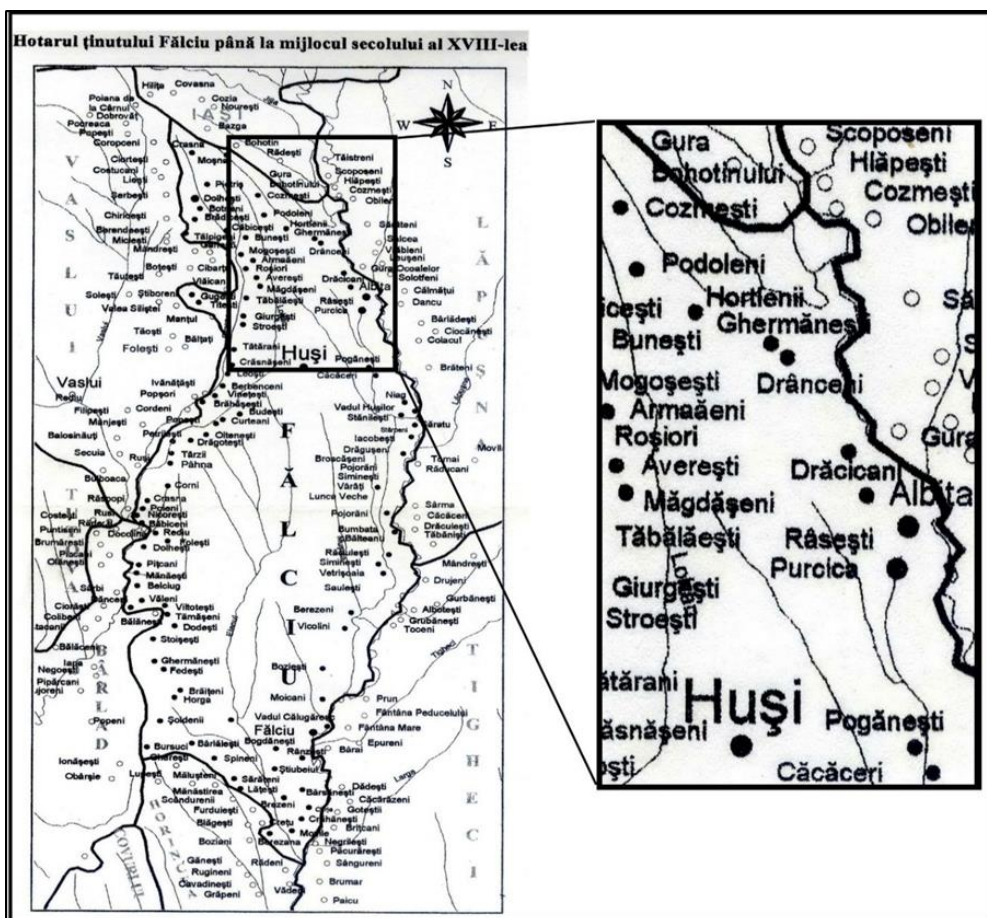


Figure 4: The settlements in the Fălcu area in the 18th century (after Burac C., 2002)

Răsești village is documentary attested in 1598 by a decree given by Ieremia Movilă, through which the ruler gives the estates Răsești and Hrubeni to Huși Diocese.

Șopârleni was originally called Troinești, name coming from an earth defense wall ("Trojan") which went across the Prut plain from Răbâia to the end of the village (Partene, 2002). Over the time the village was also called Gura Șopârlenilor, Valea Șopârlenilor, Șoporleni.

Stănilăești is documented in 1527 and was formerly Berbecești. The current name comes from a certain Stănilă (1572). The right side of the Prut was owned by the Diocese of Huși, while Stănilăești from over the Prut was a peasants' village (Merlan, 2008).

4.Conclusions

The present configuration of the settlements network in Huși Depression is the result of changes that took place over several centuries or even millennia, amid population

continuity. For this reason, the archaeological method brings an important contribution to the research of villages and towns, adding also significant topographical, structural, socio-economic, political, cultural and demographic details, substantially filling in this way the sometimes incomplete data of written sources.

The geographical and cartographic comparative method used by some researchers in the field of archeology of the primitive commune is also important in connection with the problem of rural settlements. Through the drawing of detailed micro-geographical maps in which the findings of settlements and cemeteries are mapped according to time and details of soil, altitude, vegetation and others in that area, is reached an ingenious representation of the connection between housing and the geophysical and biological frame from a micro-region in a particular historical stage.

In the depression of Husi, the rural settlements formed groups in the forest areas, and amid these settlements and those enslaved, documented in the 14th and 15th centuries, were formed other historic settlements. The expansion of the agricultural land through clearing determined the multiplying of the settlements by "swarming" or by the "releasing" system, while providing economic and social benefits to the population. Releasing was usually formed in the place of some deserted fireplaces or as a second core of already existing settlements. The extension of grain growing from the 18th century gave rise to small nuclei of seasonal workers, formed of workers coming from larger farms from other geographical areas for a season (Băcăuanu et al., 1980). These small nuclei called "odăi" were particularly prevalent in the Moldavian Plain, but later the spreading area of these chambers also covered Fălciului Depression and the Central Moldavian Plateau.

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