

## THE AGE AND EVOLUTION OF THE SETTLEMENTS NETWORK IN ALMĂJ LAND (15<sup>TH</sup> – 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)

**Ana-Neli IANĂȘ\*, Daniela DRĂGAN\*\***

\* *PhD Teach. Assist., West University of Timișoara, Department of Geography, Blv. V. Pârvan, No.4, 300223, Timișoara, Romania, e-mail: [anaianas@yahoo.com](mailto:anaianas@yahoo.com)*

\*\**PhD student, “Babeș-Bolyai” University, Faculty of Geography, Clinicilor, No.5-7, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, e-mail: [daniela.dragan@yahoo.com](mailto:daniela.dragan@yahoo.com)*

**Abstract.** *The age and evolution of the settlements network in Almăj Land (15<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries). Since Almăj Land (depression) is considered part of the territorial entities category “terra” in the Carpathian Mountains, the analysis of the age and evolution of the human settlements that define the habitat of this type of territorial system is very important, especially in order to identify its functionality and evolution. Human life in this territory has been attested by the documents and archaeological discoveries as dating from the Bronze Age and having the greatest development in the Roman period. Configuration of the Almăj settlement network started only from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, influenced the relief, the availability of drinking water and fertile soil, also transport infrastructure which has the role to ensure the connections between the system’s settlements or the connections of matter, energy and information between these and the neighboring regions. If, in the past, the human settlements from Almăj Land were represented by some hamlets in the mountain area (with the relief as a shield against foreign attacks), starting with the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and Austro-Hungarian Empire’s domination in Banat, the hamlets from the mountain area disappeared, with the population drawn to adjacent settlements. The Habsburg domination influenced also Czech colonization with some settlements at a high altitude in the mountains (for example Ravensca village) for economic needs and flood risk in the Nera Valley, contributed to a „swarming” process and the creation of new settlements as Șopotu Nou and Borlovenii Noi. The completion of the current structure for this regional system (which comprises 31 human settlements, all villages) was realized at the 1956 census when the last existing hamlets were declared villages.*



**Rezumat.** *Vechimea și evoluția rețelei de așezări din Țara Almăjului (secolele XV-XX).* Întrucât Țara Almăjului face parte din categoria entităților teritoriale de tip “terra” din Munții Carpați, analiza vechimii și evoluției așezărilor omenești ce definesc componenta de habitat a acestui tip de sisteme teritoriale este foarte importantă, mai ales în vederea identificării funcționalității și a evoluției acestuia. Locuirea acestui teritoriu a fost atestată documentar și în urma descoperirilor arheologice ca datând din epoca bronzului și având cea mai mare dezvoltare în perioada romană. Configurația actuală a rețelei de așezări din sistemul regional Țara Almăjului a început să se contureze abia din secolul al XV –lea, un rol deosebit în această privință având-o: relieful, apropierea de resursele de apă și de solurile cu grad ridicat de fertilitate, proximitatea față de infrastructura de transport care să asigure legăturile dintre așezările sistemului, sau schimburile de materie, energie și informație între acesta și regiunile învecinate. Dacă în trecut, așezările din Țara Almăjului erau reprezentate de cătunele din zona montană (relieful având rolul de adăpost și apărare împotriva năvălirilor străine), începând cu secolul al XVIII – lea și intrarea Banatului sub stăpânirea Imperiului Austro-Ungar, cătunele din zona montană au dispărut, populația fiind înglobată în localitățile aflate la cea mai mare apropiere. Aceeași dominație habsburgică a determinat și procesul de colonizare a cehilor, respectiv apariția unor așezări pe cele mai înalte culmi ale munților (de exemplu Ravensca), iar necesitatea realizării diferitelor activități economice sau gradul ridicat al riscurilor hidrologice (inundațiile pe râul Nera), au influențat procesul *roirii* populației și crearea altor așezări, după cum o demonstrează și numele acestora (Borlovenii Noi, Șopotu Nou). Definitivarea structurii actuale a componentei de habitat a sistemului regional analizat (care cuprinde 31 de așezări omenești, toate sate) s-a realizat la recensământul din 1956 când ultimele cătune existente au fost declarate sate.

**Key-words:** *settlements network, hamlet, regional system, Almăj Land*  
**Cuvinte cheie:** *rețea de așezări, cătun, sistem regional, Țara Almăjului*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Almăj Land is considered part of the territorial entities category “terra” in the Carpathian Mountains and they have been mentioned from the beginning of the millennium BC II d, when these were very well organized.

Almăj Land provided good conditions for humanization process since ancient times, because of its rich and varied resources and because of the role of shield that the surrounding mountains had, promoting the realization of a settlements network, documentary attested from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The proof of this claim, were the numerous archaeological discoveries, material remains, some written documents and especially, the traditional forms of the rural life which are maintained until today. Taking into consideration these aspects, we’ll try to highlight some of the proofs which are revealing the early humanization of the analysed space, focussing on the discovery of settlements traces, without mentioning other archaeological discoveries (implements, ceramics, coins etc.) that will be made in other detailed study.

## 2. PROOFS OF THE HUMANIZATION PROCESS BEFORE 15<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

Among the oldest evidences of the humanization process of this space are the archaeological discoveries from the **Bronze Age** (2500 – 1700 BC) on the current communes territory Bănia and Eftimie Murgu, which also brought to light the traces of a Coțofeni settlement on Socolăț Hill, at the place called Piatra Oborului (Moga, Gudea, 1975). Other traces of a Dacian fortified settlement from Middle Bronze Age, Hallstatt, were found on the Leu or Balta Neagră Plateau from Borlovenii Vechi settlement (Sitariu, 2005). Living this space was due to the existence and discovery of some local resources, particularly gold and copper resources used for manufacturing jewelry. Their existence is sustained by some noting that the river's beds Caraș, Lăpuș, Timiș and Nera contained gold sands and their exploitation does not involve complicated technical processes (Mărghitan, 1979).

The **Iron Age**, which began in the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC, was characterized by an intensification of the humanization process, traces of some settlements walls from the first period of this era being discovered at Bănia, on the Pârâului Valley and Big Valley, at the places Arie and Comorâșnița. Other discoveries from this period were: the traces of a Dacian fortresse in Pătaș village and the ruins of Grădiște fortress (declared archaeological reserve) discovered in the southern of Dalboșeț village (in the vernacular language *Grădiște* meaning *Fortress*). In this era, the features of the Daco-Getic civilization began to outline. Regarding the humanization process of this area by Dacians, in the western part of the Almăj Land, the fortress Mudava is notable, found on a map in the library of Vatican by professor Marius Bizerea. "*The name of this fortress is kept unimpaired in the vernacular language: Mudava, name registered on the Buceava Valley which flows in Nera river, before gorges*" (Dolângă, 2000, p. 72). Even today, when the people from Almăj are passing through the forest from Șopotu Nou to Boșneag, they say that they are going to Mudava. The name *dava* prove the habitation of this area by Dacians.

Then, at the beginning of II century AD, Almăj Land was included in the boundaries of the **Roman Empire** which will be part of, until the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The traces of a roman fortress have been discovered also near the Catholic cemetery from Bozovici, and some tombstones at Ogei, near Dragomireana, in Gârbovăț village. *Villa rustica* from Dragomireana (Șopotu Vechi) was the center of a large agricultural Roman farm, its discovery being relevant to prove the economic polyvalence of the rural settlements from that period (Gaga, 1984), the place being considered also a Roman camp (Borza, 1943). The discoveries from the Roman period were the most numerous in Almăj Land: the traces of a settlement dating from 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD at Morii Vechi place from Borlovenii Vechi village and the traces of a Roman camp at the place Comoară (Prilipeț village), on a brick being discovered a set of initials of the Cohort III Dalmatarom (Sitariu, 2003, p. 36).

In the **early feudal period (7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> centuries)**, the archaeological discoveries attested Romanians from Banat as farmers, livestock breeders, blacksmiths and potters.

Then, in **10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries**, the population from Banat was part of Glad Principality, later was part of Ahtum Principality and it opposed with vehemence to the Hungarian expansion. During this period, Almăj Land had 15 – 20 villages. „*The coins*

discovered at the two extremities of Almăj: Șopotu Nou and Pătaș prove that the settlements have been under Glad and Achtum Voivodship administration in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, Voivodes which had contacts with the South-Danubian Czardom” (Smeu, 1977, p. 19-20).

**12<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries** were characterized by the establishment of some new settlements of Romanians in Banat and many rural settlements in Almăj depression. Almăj was a privileged district among the eight districts from Banat, because it was formed of Romanian population, the foreigners reaching with difficulty in the hill and mountain region from south-western Banat. “The first documentary attestations of the villages from Almăj Land have been made in 1241, when Gârliște (Rudăria) and Bozovici settlements have been mentioned for the first time(...)” (Gaga, 1984, p. 13). The Cnezs from Almăj had an important role in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in the campaigns against Turks, contributing to strengthening the relations between Romanians from Almăj and others privileged districts from Banat.

### 3. THE EVOLUTION OF THE SETTLEMENTS NETWORK AFTER 15<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

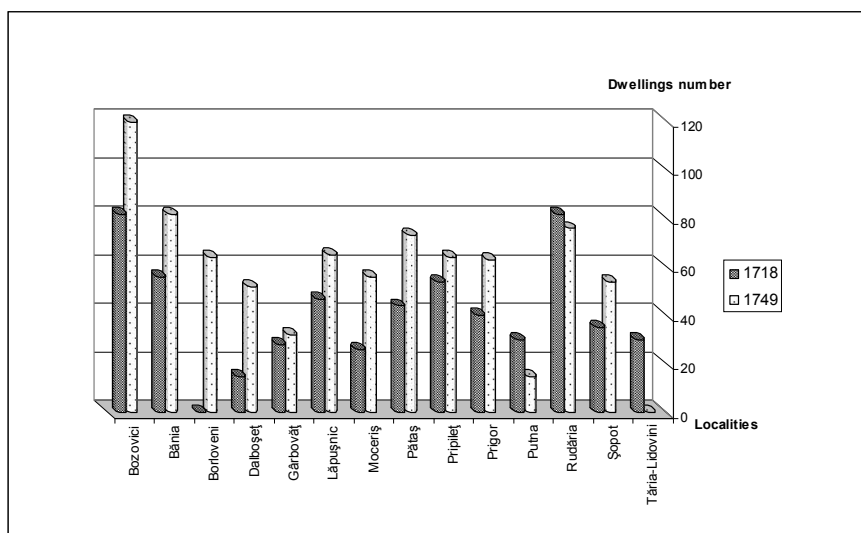
In the **15<sup>th</sup> Century** a document of Hungary King Sigismund was showing that in Almăj there were stabile settlements or principalities with 504 peasants, 32 border guards and 26 couriers (Motogna 1944).

Then, from the **16<sup>th</sup> century** until the **18<sup>th</sup> century** Banat was owned by Otoman Empire, in 1541 forming the Pashalik from Buda and the Almăj Land has become a border area of Transylvania Principality and passing through a great agitated period determined by the Turks proximity. The Turk Administration Period (1658 - 1690) has been one of the most difficult for all villages from Almăj Land. The fact that Habsburgs intending to own the Banat Region included here also Almăj Land determine the Turks to make many incursions and to destroy the villages from Almăj (Andrei, 2007).

Beginning with the **18<sup>th</sup> century** the Banat Region passed under the Habsburgs Empire suzerainty and Almăj Land has been integrated on the border area of the empire. The population were obliged to pay considerable giving and taxes to the empire, fact realized during the first census in 1718. The consequence of this action were the living process of the villages by the peasants, these ones becoming brigands (*lotri*), fact that, finally, leads to the snock from 1737 - 1739 (Dolângă, 2000). This will be the end by the defeating of the insurgents from Almăj while many of them were sheltered themselves on Romanian and Serbian lands. After the Peace of Belgrad in 1739 it was made a new census realizing the fact that some parishes have disappeared, their inhabitants being removed to the closest locality. The inhabitants come down from pastoral settlements to the foot of the mountains. Thus, „the grazing as a permanently economic activity form stop and appear the familial grazing” (Smeu, 1977, pag. 35).

Making a comparison between the dwellings number from the census of 1718 with the one realized in 1749 we can remark an increase of the inhabitants' number from majority villages of the depression (figure 1); one of the causes is the coming down process of the population from the mountain area to the lower one and another one is represented by the disappearance of the anterior mentioned parishes, its population being incorporated on the localities situated in the proximity of them. The only settlement were the reducing

process of the inhabitants is obvious is Putna. The population number is in decrease in 1749 compared to 1718 as an outcome of the moving process of the population to a distance about few kilometers, where in 1749 is formed a new settlement Borloveni.



**Figure 1:** The evolution of the dwellings number in Almăj Land in 1718 and 1749.

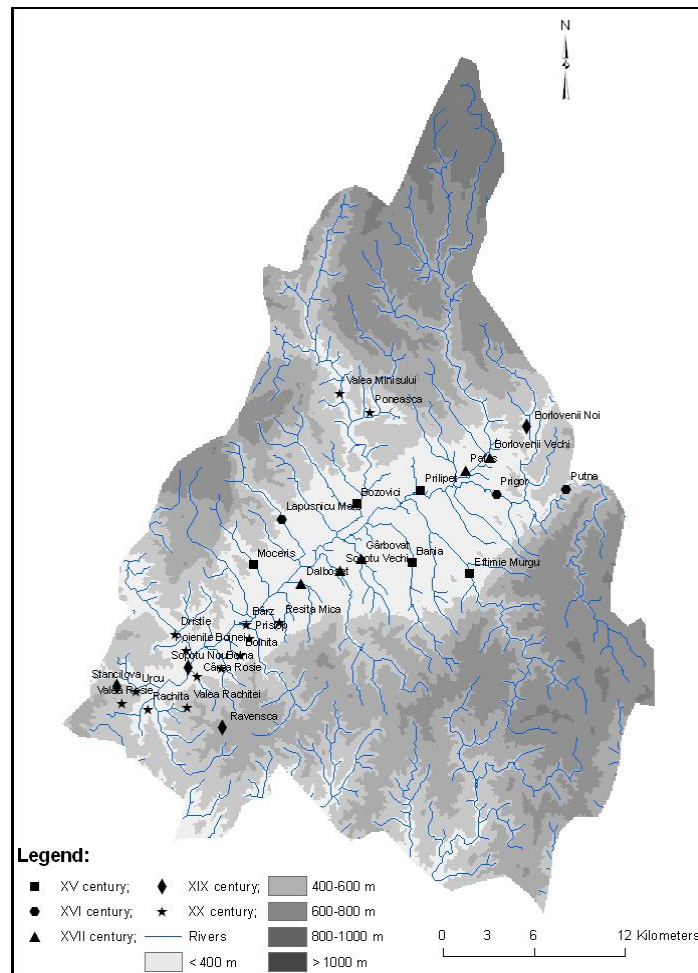
At the same historical period the King Joseph The 2<sup>nd</sup> made a trip in Banat and he was surprised by the poor status of all 13 villages from Almăj exhausted by the fights with the Turks and also, by the revolts against the Habsburgs, the inhabitants of Almăj Land strongly opposing to the militarization process of the region in which they're living (Negru, 1943). With all those, they started the setting up of the border regiments divided in companies. The "Româno-Iliric" Regiment has been divided in 16 companies, two of those being in Almăj Land, one in Bozovici (covering five villages) and another one in Prigor, to this last one belonging six villages (Gaga, 1984). The military authorities from Almaj have opposed to the foreign colonization in this region due to the fact that the population from here should be numerously enough and for the new population it would be difficult in their adaptation to the new climatic conditions (Popiți, 1939). This fact ensured the majority of the Romanian population at that time. In 1779 when Banat has been divided in three counties (Timiș, Torontal and Caraș), the Almăj Land has continued to be a distinct area administrated by the War Council from Wien.

Finally in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it appeared the first diversification in the ethnic background from demographical point of view through the colonization process. Especially, it is represented by the coming of the Czech colonists who are forming in Almăj the village called Ravensca in 1858 „with 32 households summing 181 inhabitants” (Gaga, 1984, p. 15). Until this year the population from Almăj Land was homogenous, totally Romanian.

The struggled history of the region with many wars and fights which had affected

this territory generated consequences on the evolution of the settlements and population, evolution reflected by the change of the core area of many villages. In connection with the historical evolution of the Almăj Land settlements it is important to surprise some aspects as the following ones:

- from the first half of 15<sup>th</sup> century there have been attested the settlement called Rudăria (Eftimie Murgu) and Mocerîș and from the second part of the same century Bozovici, Bănia and Prilipeț;
- in the 16<sup>th</sup> century there were mentioned Lăpușnicu Mare, Prigor and Putna;
- in the 17<sup>th</sup> century: Dalboșeț, Gârbovăț, Pătaș, Șopotu Vechi and Borlovenii Vechi;
- from the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were attested Șopotu Nou, Borlovenii Noi and Ravensca;
- at the level of the 20<sup>th</sup> century all the others settlements appeared (figure 2, table 1).



*Figure 2: The age of the settlements network in Almăj Land.*

**Table 1: The age of the settlements network in Almăj Land**

Nr. crt.	Locality	Year
1.	EFTIMIE MURGU	1410
2.	MOCERIȘ	1439
3.	BOZOVICI	1484
4.	BĂNIA	1484
5.	PRILIPET	1484
6.	LĂPUȘNICU MARE	1540
7.	PRIGOR	1550
8.	PUTNA	1577
9.	DALBOȘEȚ	1603
10.	GÂRBOVĂȚ	1603
11.	PĂTAȘ	1603
12.	ȘOPOTU VECHI	1607
13.	BORLOVENII VECHI	1690
14.	STANCILOVA	1829*
15.	ȘOPOTU NOU	1828
16.	BORLOVENII NOI	1829
17.	RAVENSCA	1858
18.	PONEASCA	1909*
19.	DRIȘTIE	1913*
20.	POIENILE BOINEI	1954*
21.	RĂCHITA	1954*
22.	URCU	1954*
23.	VALEA RĂCHITEI	1954*
24.	VALEA ROȘIE	1956*
25.	CÂRȘA ROȘIE	1956*
26.	VALEA MINIȘULUI	1956*
27.	BÂRZ	1956*
28.	PRISLOP	1956*
29.	BOINA	?*
30.	BOINIȚA	?*
31.	REȘIȚA MICĂ	1956*

Sources: Ghinea Eliza, Ghinea D., (2000), *Localities from Romania. Dictionary*, Ed. Enciclopedică, București

\* *Anuarul Socec al României Mari 1924-1925*

The situation concerning the documentary mentioning of the Almăj land settlements is different in connection with the bibliographical sources that are used in the study framework. For instance, Lidia Gaga, (1984, p. 20), points out that in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century was mentioned the following settlements: Bănia, Bozovici, Mocerîș, Prigor, Prilipeț and Pătaș. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the oldest ones it joined Borloveni, Dalboșeț, Gârbovăț, Putna, Șopotul and Pătaș, the last one being divided in High Pătaș and

Down Pătaș. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the writing occasion of Joseph the 2<sup>nd</sup> travel journal from 1773 and also on the Grissellini's map of 1776 it have been mentioned 13 settlements as: Bozovici, Bănia, Borlovenii Vechi, Dalboșeț, Gârbovăț, Lăpușnic, Moceriș, Pătașul de Sus, Pătașul de Jos, Prigor, Putna, Șopotul Vechi and Stancilova.

However, analyzing many sources (Smeu, 1977, Iosipescu, 1977, Nemiș, 1981, Sitariu, 2003) we tried to study the ex-village hearths, some of them disappearing and other were comprised or concentrated in the contemporary localities. From Dacians and Romans period there are reminded the existence of some villages which could be formed by the property process of the dismissed on the hearth veterans. These ones completed the old Dacian settlements as Grădiștea-Dalboșeț (Sitariu, 2003). These localities represented an incipient phase that will form the village of today “*a fascinating social and confessional structure*” (Nemoianu, 2000, p. 1). In the following assertions we shall try, shortly, to present some considerations about the history of each locality.

**Bozovici** is formed by nine hearths (Cusec, Tăria, Jidovini, Pădișel, Craiște, Zăgrade, Ronește, Lighidia and Miniș (today Minișului Valley). It is documentary attested for the first time in 1484 when Matei Corvin King powered Lazăr from Bozovici (Lazarus of Bohowith), called by Iorga “*Almăjeanul*” and who take part to the ennoblement ceremony of Iacob Gârlișteanu from Rudăria (Smeu, 1977). From the oldest times this locality was the most important economic, cultural and social centre from Almăj fact for other researchers give this appellative to the whole depression. Under the dominance of Austrian and Hungarian Empire it accomplished the administrative function of trammel residency being an important borough for the cattle export (Gaga, 1984). Bozovici has been described as a “*compact amassed village*” with a borough structure (Vuia, 1975, p. 193).

At the same year (1484) it is mentioned **Prilipeț** village which today belongs to Bozovici Parish. During the military border period it was named Prilipetz and on the period of the Hungarian Administration it was called Perebeo (*cf. P. U. G. Bozovici*, 2000, p. 6). The village had three cores: on the Fir Tree Hill, on the Tăria Hill, and “*La Comoară*”, in present being located on the right bank of near river, approximately to 260m highest (Albert, 2003) along the way that follow the valley, the relief features being favorable for its spatial extend.

The village with a parish residency role, Rudăria, (after 1970 **Eftimie Murgu**), is formed by the core connection of Rustnic, Ielocu and Margianova. The parish comprises the cores of two villages Gârliște (on the left bank of Rudăria beck) and Rudăria (on the right bank of it called today “*Pre Țărmuri*”), (Gaga, 1984), being known among the time as Gârlești, after Iacob de Gârliște family, “*ban*” of Severin Region on whose lordship were been situated the settlement (Iosipescu, 1977, p. 12). It is a concentrate and elongated village along the Rudaria Valley on two parallel streets.

**Bănia** locality is formed by three former cores: Ogașul Corbului, Cioaca lui Bodrilă and Valea Mică, being present in documents as Margina, Bandia and Pania. The village territory comprises a meadow area with a width about 3 km, a hill area about 4-6 km and a mountain area with a width of 22 km on the Big Valley. In length the territory extends on 40 km (Andrei, 2007, p. 12) and the highness is between 280 and 325 m. Bănia is documentary attested in 1484 when Matei Corvin King gives the Iacob Gârlișteanu, lord of Rudăria, many manors with villages from these ones Marginea and Săliște belonging to Bănia, Marginea being the biggest one. However, “*Vasile de Bănia*”, “*cneaz*” at that times, mentioned the fact that the village already exists in the actual hearth/core and it was named with this appellative anterior by 1484 (Andrei, 2007, p. 60).



The Communist Party tried the abolition of some communes, such as Bănia and Eftimie Murgu, while Bozovici became a mammoth commune constituted from the villages: Bozovici, Prilipeț, Eftimie Murgu, Bănia, Gârbovăț, Lăpușnicu Mare and Mocerîș.

**Gârbovăț** village was attested for the first time with this name in 1603, when it had 28 wood houses (Sitariu, 2005). The village had a hearth lower than the current one, in the place Săliște. Even the village was called Săliște until in 1756, when because of the flood, the village moved its hearth above, having a gathered form along the road. Throughout history, it has been also known as Gerboz and Garbovezi (*cf. PUG comuna Bănia*, 2000, p. 4).

**Lăpușnicu Mare** settlement was documentary attested in 1540 in the document that Varvara Simionovski donated to her son-in-law Matei Dorca, the estate with the name Lăpușnic (Sitariu, 2005, p. 217). Because of the relief, the village has an elongate disposing, being considered the longest locality from Almăj Land, approximately 2 km. As local tradition mentions, the village was constituted from one core area (Săliște or Lăpușnicu de sub Codru), located at 4 km from the place where the current hearth of the village is.

**Mocerîș** village, which today belongs to Lăpușnicu Mare commune, was mentioned in 1439, as having an irregular form, almost rectangular, and being formed of Țârcovița and Ducin core areas (in our days, Ducin Valley shelters belong to Mocerîș village).

**Dalboșeț** parish has been documentary attested in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (1603), its olden being more amplest because it is very possible that, during the Middle Age, the settlement could be formed by many “*crânguri*” (hamlets), consideration started by the preserved toponymy (Seliște, Morminți, Ogașul Morarului). This locality had two hearths/cores, one on the Satului Valley (on the place of ex Dacian settlement Grădiște) and other one on Seliște (Gaga, 1984). The commune’s settlements evolved during the time, in connection with the social and economic conditions, as permanently settlements (for example Dalboșeț village), or as semi-permanent settlements (as the type of dwellings which, once in time, formed villages). Thus, nowadays, we can certainly point out that “*on the Dalboșeț state predominate the small villages, constituted by a few dwellings (7 – 26 houses) with a population about 20 – 70 inhabitants, named colibinți. These villages are : Reșița Mică, Prislop, Bârz, Boinița and Boina, which until January 1956 were hamlets of the Dalboșeț settlement*” (Budescu, 2007, p. 177). Before the cooperativization (collective farms) process of the agriculture, the dwellings were built on the biggest plot, with the most fertile soil, existing a continuously moving of the inhabitants between villages and cabins. In present, only the oldest people and those that don’t have a house in Dalboșeț village hearth, are permanently living in the hamlets. The villages of Reșița Mică, Bârz and Boina, developed on the river meadows, having the same name, in time extending on the slopes or on the interflues. On the other hand, the villages Boinița and Prislop, developed on the hills, only a few houses being situated on the valleys.

**Șopotu Vechi** locality belongs to Dalboșeț commune, being documentary attested in 1607. It had initially two core areas : Stupina and Seliște. Today, it is included in the type of valley villages, with rather a gathered structure than an elongated one.

The commune residency, **Șopotu Nou (New Șopot)**, as its name shows, is a new settlement, from 19<sup>th</sup> century, formed by the “*swarming*” process of the inhabitants from the “*matrix*” village, Șopotu Vechi. The catastrophic flows from 1910, which destroyed almost

the whole village, determined the inhabitants migration from the village's hearth to the agricole terrains located on the hill area, fact that has driven to the appearance of new hamlets (five of them situated on a distance of about 3 – 5 km ones to each other), the village being partially reconstituted on the initial occupied place. From this parish it belongs also **Stancilova** village, which has a scattered structure and real trends in its evolution to a village with a concentrated structure (clustered village).

**Ravensca** is a settlement appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as consequence of the colonization process with Czech population (the inhabitants being named *pemi*), during the Austro-Hungarian domination. It is located at 800 m altitude in Almăj Mountains, the colonization of this area being made by several reasons: political (for defending the military border of the Habsburg Empire) and economical (for forestry exploitation and mining activity). The village is located "*alongside the road, with a rood form*" (Vuia, 1975, p.214) the two main streets being Mala Strana (Little Street) and Velica Strana (Strada Mare). Each one of it corresponds with the mountain road to Liubcova, Sichevița, Șopotul Vechi. On the beginning, the houses were built by wood and stone, then by brick, preserving the specific of the country from where the ancestors came out. There are also well conserved the customs, the tools and the Christians traditions. In this case, an important relevance has the interference of the two cultures: Czech and Roumanian one reflected in language, in popular customs and trades (Băcilă Coșa S., 2001). The connections between "*pemi*" and the inhabitants from Almăj Land have developed only at the end of XX century, on its beginnings the village being ruted.

The **Prigor** village, as a commune residency has been documentary attested at the level of 16<sup>th</sup> century, has been formed by the core connections of Rueni, Sălin, Scoc, Ramnița, Vârtoape and Iloț. At the same century is also attested **Putna** village, which belongs to Prigor commune. Its name was mentioned in the documents from 1577, 1603, 1690 and 1700. Another village is **Pătaș**, which figured until the Almăj Land militarization as two separated settlements: Pătașul de Sus and Pătașul de Jos. It is formed on the cores of : Săliște, Gaura Ursului, Gura Gurgului, Râpa Stupinioara and Morminți villages, being attested for the first time in 1603.

**Borlovenii Vechi** was attested as settlement (in its present central area) in the period 1690 – 1700 by the document of Luigi Fernandino Marsigli (Sitariu, 2005), being a gathered – rectangular village. It was formed on the Bujor place, the name Borloveni appearing earlier in another document from 1603, when the village was constituted by Leu (Scorțari), Vlașca, Răcușini and Breazu hamlets, formed from 2 – 10 families.

**Borlovenii Noi** represents another new village which belongs to Prigor commune, documentary attested for the first time in 1829, as a consequence of the "*swarming*" process of 48 families came from Borlovenii Vechi, interested to build a road through the Prigor Gorges. This road follows to link the Almăj Land and Craina (Sitariu, 2005). It was known with the name Breazova, being a clustered-polygonal village as Borlovenii Vechi.

#### 4. THE FUNCTIONALITY OF THE SETTLEMENTS NETWORK

The functionality of the settlements network in Almăj Land was caused by the association of many important components which are making evident the features of this analysed territory as "*the orientation, intensity, rhythm and specific of the flows, relations and material , energy and information exchanges which individualize and promote informations about the territorial functionality groups specific who created them and used*

them” (Dezsi, 2004, p. 106).

One of the elements that ensured the functionality of the settlements network was the spatial localization of the regional system. Almăj Land is an intra-mountain depression which favored the humanization process of this space since ancient times. The economic valorization of all morphological elements of the system (the depression, the Nera’s terraces, piedmont and mountain area) favored the development of a rural regional system, without too many connections with other regions and with a subsistence economy.

Nera Valley represents the main axis of the system, along which are unfolding the matter, energy and information changes between the region’s settlements and the biggest village, Bozovici (which has the role of polarizing centre in Almăj regional system) and also between the settlements from Almăj Land and other regions. Not only because of its functions, Bozovici village became polarizing centre of the region, but also because of its geographical position in the central part of the system, in the area of rivers and transport infrastructure convergence that ensures the system’s cohesion, the human communication, the goods and services circulation between all the region’s settlements and also with other external centers or regions (by Pârvova mountain pass to Domaşnea, Caransebeş, Băile Herculane, by Miniş Valley to Anina, Reşiţa, Oraviţa and from Şopotu Nou to Moldova Nouă and Danube Valley).

A last element with a major role in the formation of this rural settlements network, especially after 15<sup>th</sup> century, was the Romanian population which contributed to the preservation of the national character and to the delimitation of this regional system as a Romanian space.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the old and evolution of Almăj Land settlements network is the clearest proof of the humanization process of this territory since ancient times. This aspect was conditioned by the elements of the natural component which had a lucky role in the system’s creation process and in the establishment of the human settlements agricultural functionality. Only a few villages have an industrial function in connection with wood exploitation in our days, and mining in the past.

The subsistence economy, reduced the spectacular development of the region and its connections with the external areas, comprising 31 settlements in this intra-mountain depression. The majority have been documentary attested since 15<sup>th</sup> century, at the creation of some new settlements contributing also two processes: colonization process under the Habsburg Empire domination and the “*swarming*” process of the inhabitants from the mountain area to the depression area. Excepting Bozovici village (which is the biggest locality from the region), the other villages have usually less than 1,000 inhabitants. There is no town in Almăj depression, so we can name Almăj Land as an entirely rural regional system.

## REFERENCES

- Albert, Carmen**, (2003), *Campaniile monografice din Valea Almăjului și Naidăș*, în Documentele Institutului Social Banat-Crișana, Editura Mirton, Timișoara, 25-307 pp.
- Andrei, N.**, (2007), *Monografia localității Bănia*, Editura Timpul, Reșița.
- Băcilă-Coșa, Semenica**, (2001), *Țara Almăjului. Monografie*, Editura Marineasa, Timișoara.
- Borza, Al.**, (1943), *Banatul în timpul romanilor*, Editura Fundațiunii Oliviero Varzi, Timișoara.
- Budescu, Icoana**, (2007), *Dalboșeț. Studiu monografic*, Editura Timpul, Reșița
- Dezsi, Șt.**, (2004), *Evoluția rețelei de așezări din Țara Lăpușului în secolele XIII – XVI*, în Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Geographia, XLIX, nr. 1, Cluj-Napoca, 99 – 114 pp.
- Dolângă, N.**, (2000), *Țara Almăjului. Studiu monografic*, Editura Mirton, Timișoara.
- Gaga, Lidia**, (1984), *Zona etnografică Almăj*, Editura Sport-Turism, București.
- Ghinea, Eliza, Ghinea, D.**, (2000), *Localitățile din România. Dicționar*, Editura Enciclopedică, București.
- Iosipescu, Silvia**, (1977), *Așezările omenești din Depresiunea Almăj-considerații etnogeografice*, în Studii și Comunicări de Etnografie-Istorie, II, Caransebeș, 9 – 25 pp.
- Mărghitan, L.**, (1979), *Banatul în lumina arheologiei*, vol. I, Editura Facla, Timișoara.
- Moga, M., Gudea, N.**, (1975), *Contribuții la repertoriul arheologic al Banatului*, în Tibiscus, IV, Timișoara, 129-143 pp.
- Motogna, V.**, (1944), *Banatul românesc în prima jumătate a secolului al XV – lea. Epoca lui Sigismund de Luxemburg (1395-1439)*, în Revista Institutului Social Banat-Crișana, an XIII, mai-august, Timișoara, 458-459 pp.
- Negru, I.**, (1943), *Contribuții la cunoașterea Banatului (Jurnalul de călătorie din 1773 al împăratului Iosif al II – lea)*, în Revista Institutului Social Banat-Crișana, an XI, iulie-august, Timișoara, 69-110 pp.
- Nemiș, V.**, (1981), *Despre satul lui Eftimie Murgu*, Editura Litera, București.
- Nemoianu, Al.**, (2000), *Satul almăjan*, în Revista Almăjana, nr. 3, Bozovici, 1 pp.
- Popiți, Gr.**, (1939), *Date și documente bănățene 1728-1887*, Timișoara.
- Sitariu, D.**, (2003), *Valea Almăjului – file de istorie și credință*, Editura Timpul, Reșița.
- Sitariu, D.**, (2005), *Satul almăjan – statornicie și continuitate*, Editura Gordian, Timișoara.
- Smeu, L.**, (1977), *Contribuții la istoria Almăjului*, Editura Litera, București.
- Vuia, R.**, (1975), *Satul românesc din Transilvania și Banat*, în Studii de etnografie și folclor, vol. I, Editura Minerva, București, 155-360 pp.
- \*\*\* (2000), *PUG Planul Urbanistic General al comunelor Bozovici, Bănia*
- \*\*\* *Anuarul Socec al României Mari, 1924-1925.*