

## THE SETTLEMENTS FROM THE PLAIN BIRDA-MORAVIȚA. A GEOGRAPHICAL EVALUATION

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**Abstract:** The existence of early forms of settlement on the territory of the Plain Birda- Moravița dates back to prehistory. The historic record of many villages in the studied area is done starting with the papal taxes and the historic periods of intense colonization, especially those of Habsburg rule, led to the establishment of new settlements and made it possible the current detailed classification of settlements by age. However, the regressive demographic trend characteristic for the studied area, a trend reflected in the high level of mortality and the increased migration to other countries and regions, has made possible a classification of settlements by the number of inhabitants, classification whose purpose is to identify areas characterized by a steady decline in the number of inhabitants. These settlements, which were considered large and very large settlements during the migrations, suffered a drastic transformation after 1990, currently falling within the category of small settlements. The position the analyzed region in a plain area also requires a classification of settlements according to form, structure and texture, which show certain features depending on the position against major rivers but also by socio-economic or political influence reflected on the settlements from the Plain Birda-Moravița.

**Key words:** human settlements, historic record, colonization, classification, structure, texture

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### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

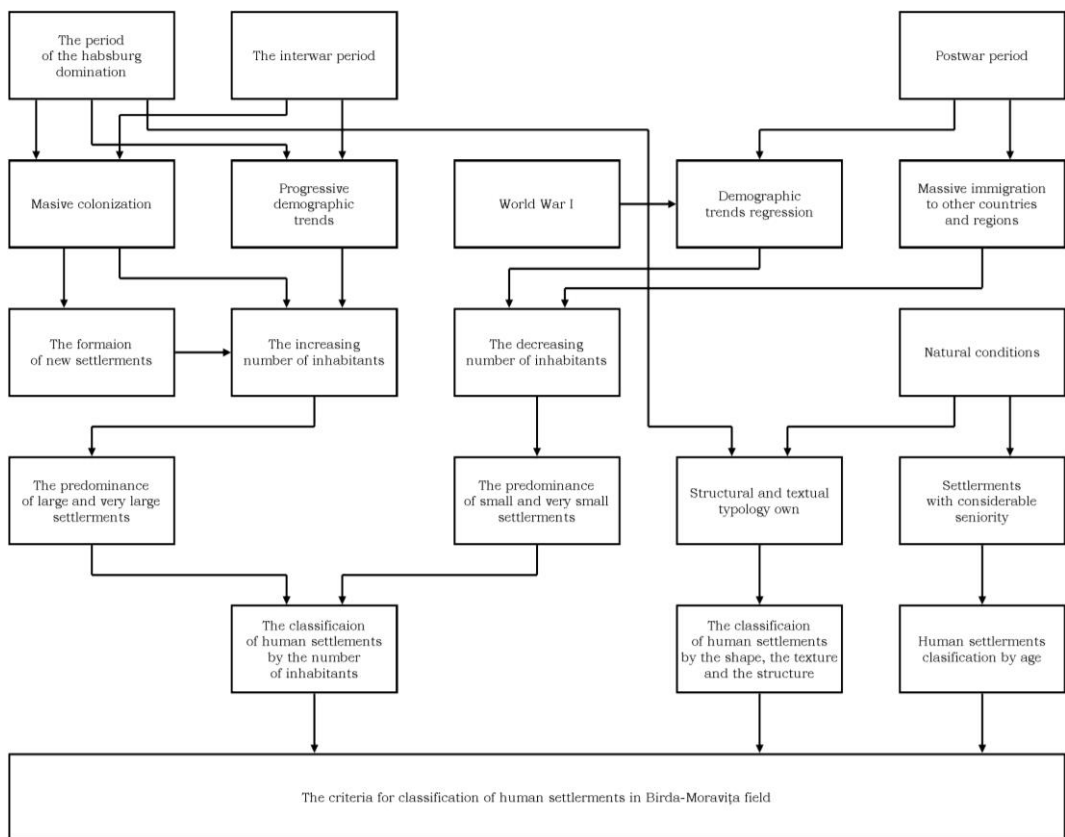
The analysis of the evaluation of the socio-economic impact on a region is a common way in international human geography. I had as a reference point the Anglo-Saxon literature (Taylor, Bryan, Goodrich, Canter, 1996; Barrow 2000; Goodman, 2004), and I have applied these theoretical elements in the complex settlements from the Plain Birda-Moravița, in order to achieve some classifications of human settlements as relevant as possible and the presentation of the type of impact that they may have at the regional level.

Equally, a particularly important role in the completion of this article belongs to the specialized Romanian literature (Vert, 2000/2001; Ana Ianas,

2011; L. Nicoara, 1999) which gave me the opportunity to classify the studied settlements in the categories proposed in the analyzed papers.

In order to identify the documentary record, we had as source of documentation the collection of Nicolae Iliesiu from the country archives.

The diversity of classification typology of settlements in the Plain Birda-Moravița can be considered as a factor in producing a strong social impact on the whole regional system. Of major importance is the detailed analysis of each element that highlights the specific features of the classification of the settlements from the Plain Birda-Moravița. Analyzing such a number of natural factors, especially social, economic, cultural or political, we can accurately determine the structural and textural typology of settlements, which is a consequence of the specific political regime of that period. Equally, if we realize an analysis of the historic situation before the war and interwar and the demographic changes that have seen a gradual growth, but also the massive emigration abroad or increased mortality, it is possible to establish a typology based on the number of inhabitants and the determination of some major differences from the censuses of 1900, 1930 and 2002. In order to achieve a typology of settlements by age, a detailed analysis of the main factors is also required (natural, historical, social) that generated a differentiation of settlements according to this criterion.



**Figure 1.** Establishing the connections between the factors that led to the existence of the classification criteria of human settlements

(Source: Raluca Covaci, 2012)

In the classification by number of inhabitants the most appropriate method was that of the comparison method by which we have tried to highlight some of the causes which led to a sharp increase in the number of small and very small settlements at the expense of large or very large settlements.

In the classification of settlements by form, structure and texture, an important role was played by the processing of aerial photographs in order to establish a structural and textural specific at the entire regional system, for this case being specific the cartographic method. This method was also used in the other classification criteria for plotting geographic realities and the changes in the human settlements over time and the number of inhabitants in a longer period of time.

The age of the settlements in the studied area present a historical and cultural impact at a regional level, certain historical or cultural elements being preserved since the Middle Ages or from the Habsburg rule (certain archaeological finds, evidence of villages, the structure and texture of settlement - consequence of Habsburg rule etc).

The deductive method has equally a major role in establishing the connections between the natural, political, economic, social and demographic factors, the relationships between them resulting in the classification criteria of human settlements (Figure 1).

#### **CLASSIFICATION OF SETTLEMENTS BY FORM, STRUCTURE AND TEXTURE**

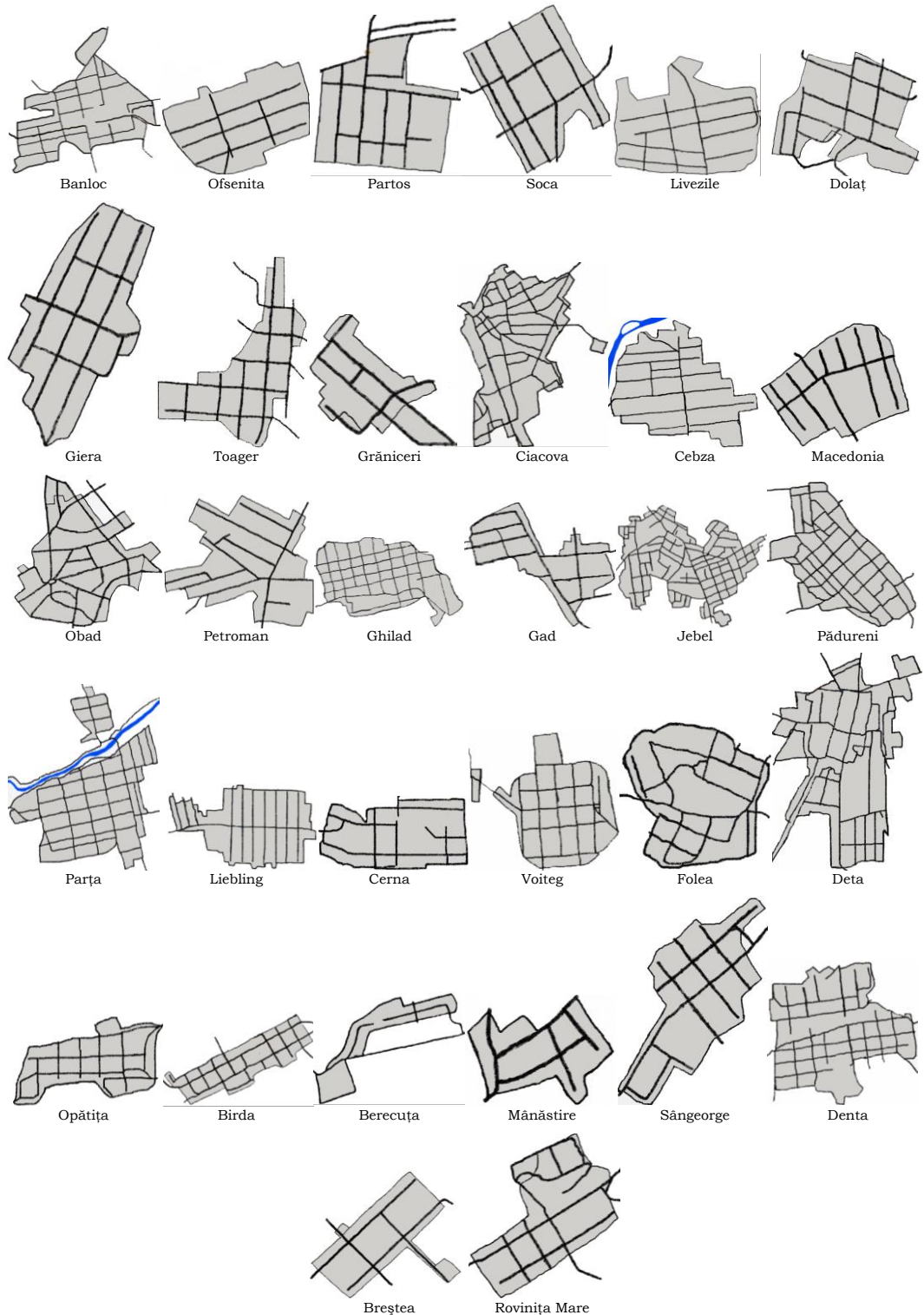
*“The relations between the morphology of the territory and the social and economic factors in a given historical period are given by setting the physiognomy and structure of the centres of the villages, the latter reflecting the development stages of settlements over time”* (Vert, 2000, 236).

Regarding the form of the settlements from the Plain Birda- Moravița, we should mention that they were influenced by factors such as the position on the main rivers of the region, the influence of Habsburg rule, certain economic, social, cultural factors, etc.

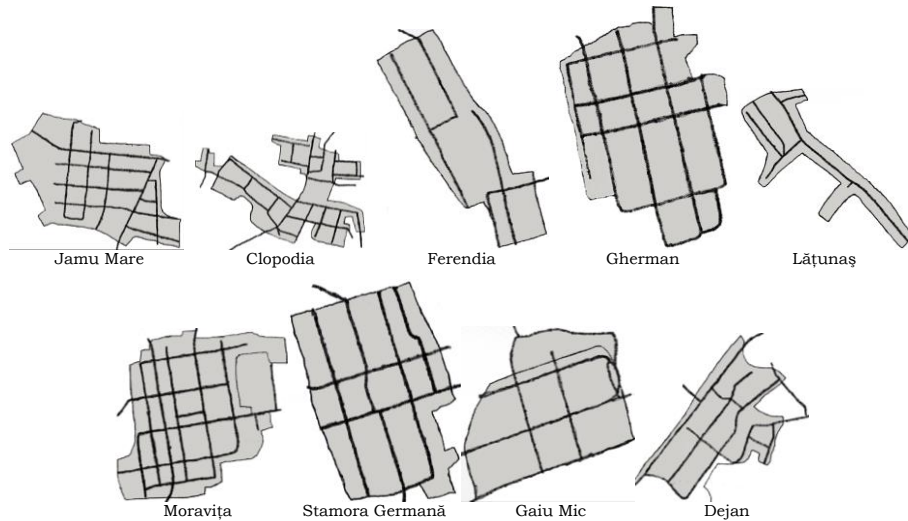
The settlements from the Plain Birda-Moravița *“fall into specific lowland villages, most of them having a linear form, with streets intersecting at 90, with semi-detached houses and with the facade oriented to the street”* (Ianăș, 2011, 292). However, there are settlements which have an elongated shape, some of which are situated along rivers (Lățunaș, Berecuța, Birda, Giera, Gad, Sângeorge, Ferendia).

However, the settlements from the Plain Birda- Moravița present the most representative types of villages in the Banat Plain. Thus, among the villages with a rectangular shape, we can mention: Cerna, Birda, Brestea, Rovinita Mare, Ferendia, Stamura Germană, Mănăstire, Dejan, Ofsenița, Macedonia, Livezile, Opațița, Gaiu Mic.

Although fewer in number in the Plain Birda- Moravița, there are several villages with square shape: Soca, Liebling, Voiteg, Partoș; however, most of the settlements have an irregular polygonal geometric shape (rectangular) such as Banloc, Giera, Toager, Graniceri, Ciacova, Cebza, Obad, Petroman, Ghilad, Gad, Jebel, Pădureni, Parta, Folea, Deta, Berecuța, Sângeorge, Denta, Jamu Mare, Clopodia, Lățunaș, Moravita. The classification of settlements by form, structure and texture is shown graphically in figure 2 and figure 3, as a result of processing aerial photographs.



**Figure 2.** The shape, structure and texture of the settlements from the Plain Birda  
 (Source: Processing after aerial photographs, 2012)



**Figure 3.** The form, structure and texture of the settlements from Plain Moravița  
(Source: Processing after aerial photographs, 2012)

The structure and texture of the settlements is largely a consequence of the regime adopted by the Habsburg authorities who ordered the systematization of old villages by merging small settlements and the organization of villages according to urban and economic criteria. Following these steps, “*many settlements have lost the traditional characteristics of a scattered village, becoming the type of village with a geometric aspect which was kept until nowadays*” (Ianăș, *ibid*).

All the settlements from the Plain Birda- Moravița fall within the type of agglomerated village with a compact structure, which have a high density of households in the centre of the village. Here we can mention some old Romanian centers such as Banloc, Partos, Soca, Livezile, Toager, Ciacova Cebza, Obad, Macedonia, Petroman, Ghilad, Gad, Pădureni, Parta, Cerna, Voiteg, Denta, Gaiu Mic, Jebel and the mixed or German villages such as Graniceri, Liebling, Jamu Mare, Moravita, Stamura Germana, Dolaț.

“*The texture of settlements refers to how the networks of streets are arranged together with the constructions along them*” (Nicoară, 1999, 38). The considerable age of the settlements from the Plain Birda-Moravita is the factor that determined the predominance of irregular or complex texture. However, we can distinguish several types of textures of the centres of the settlements:

- Village with linear simple textured centres, they having a simple structure: one street. Here we introduce the villages from the eastern part of the Plain Birda-Moravița (Berecuta, Ferendia, Dejan)
- Villages with rectangular textured centres, whose streets form right angles. This category contains a large part of the villages, both Romanian villages with old documentary attestation and the new villages which were founded with the arrival of German and Bulgarian settlers (Banloc Ofsenița, Soca, Partos, Livezile, Dolaț, Giera Toager, Ghilad, Pădureni, Parta, Liebling, Opaitat, Birda, Gherman, Moravtia, Stamura Germana, Sângeorge, Brestea, Grăniceri, Macedonia, Cerna, Jamu Mare, Denta, Deta, Gaiu Mic, Dejan, Cebza).
- Villages with irregular texture: Jebel, Folea, Clopodia, Ciacova, Obad.

Depending on rural systematization problems and how they can be solved Prof. Constantin Vert distinguishes several categories:

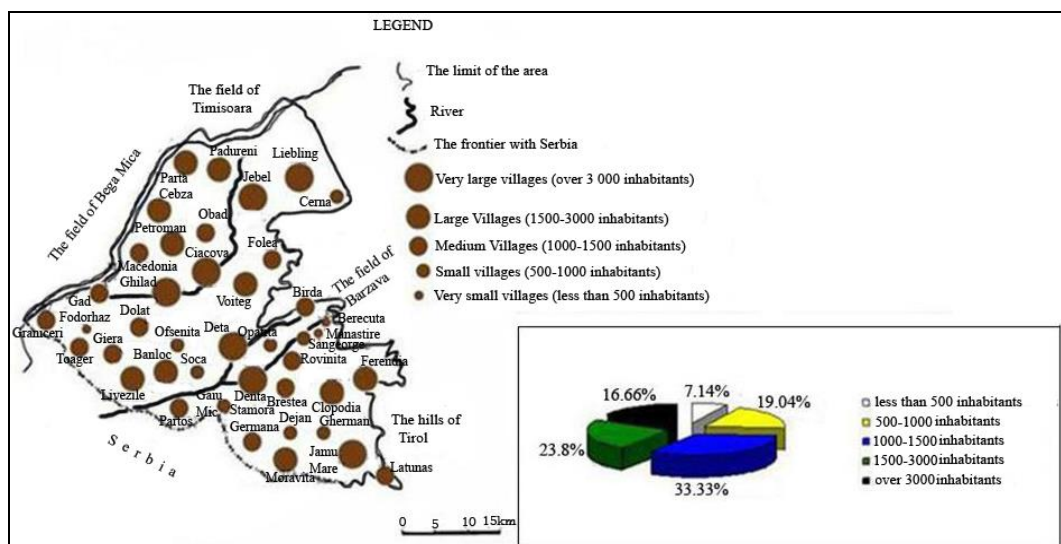
- Villages with geometric texture and high density of constructions in the centre. This includes larger settlements, centres of parishes and towns that have a relatively high degree of socio-economic development or are developing (urban facilities, technical and urban facilities, sewage). For this type, the representatives are the towns Ciacova and Deta, and the villages Banloc, Denta, Liebling, Jamu Mare, Moravița.
- Villages with irregular texture but of clustered type, the best example is the village Jebel, where, for the systematize to be possible in the future, the streets need to be redrawn.

Small villages located along a road or valley with sparsely constructions. *“Their systematization is difficult due to the remoteness of economic flows”* (Vert, 2001, 254). As examples we can take: Sângeorge, Rovinita, Berecuța, Dejan, Graniceri, Toager, Mănăstire.

### CLASSIFICATION BY NUMBER OF INHABITANTS OF SETTLEMENTS

The positioning of settlements in a plain area offered the inhabitants, since the earliest times, vast possibilities of exploitation of the natural resources (fertile soil, large expanses of land). Regionally, the prewar and interwar periods are characterized by a considerable number of people in most villages from the Plain Birda-Moravița, owing to massive waves of colonization that took place during these years, while the postwar period is marked by a wave of emigration to other regions in search of jobs and a low birth rate, which led to the presence of a large number of small and very small villages.

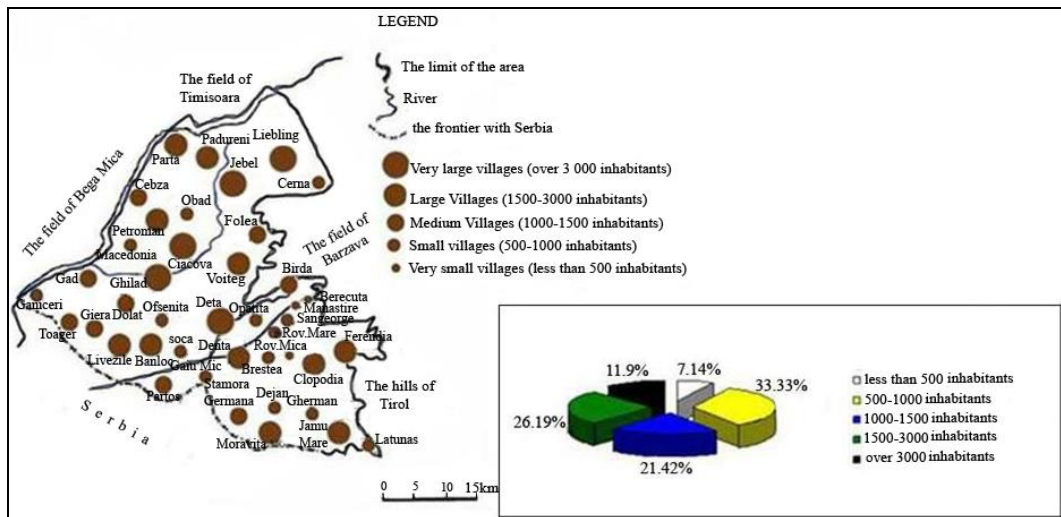
The censuses of 1900, 1930 and 20002, the villages from the Plain Birda-Moravița can be divided by the number of residents in several categories: Very small villages (less than 500 inhabitants), small villages (500-1,000 inhabitants), medium villages (1,000-1,500 inhabitants), large villages (1,500-3,000 inhabitants), very large villages (over 3,000 inhabitants)



**Figure 4.** The classification of settlements by the number of inhabitants in 1900 (Source: Census of 1900)

Thus, in 1900 (Fig. 4) there is a predominance of medium and large villages at the expense of small and very small, due to the presence of German, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Italian, Spanish settlers in the region and the high birth rate for that period. Equally, emigration recorded very low percentages. Medium-sized villages held a quite large percentage, followed by the large and very large settlements. Very small villages recorded a rate of only 7.14%. Spatially, most of the large and very large settlements were in the central-western region (Deta, Denta, Ciacova, Ghilad, Petroman, Cebza) but also in the south (Banloc, Livezile), north (Jebel, Pădureni, Parta, Liebling) or southeast (Jamu Mare, Clopodia, Ferendia).

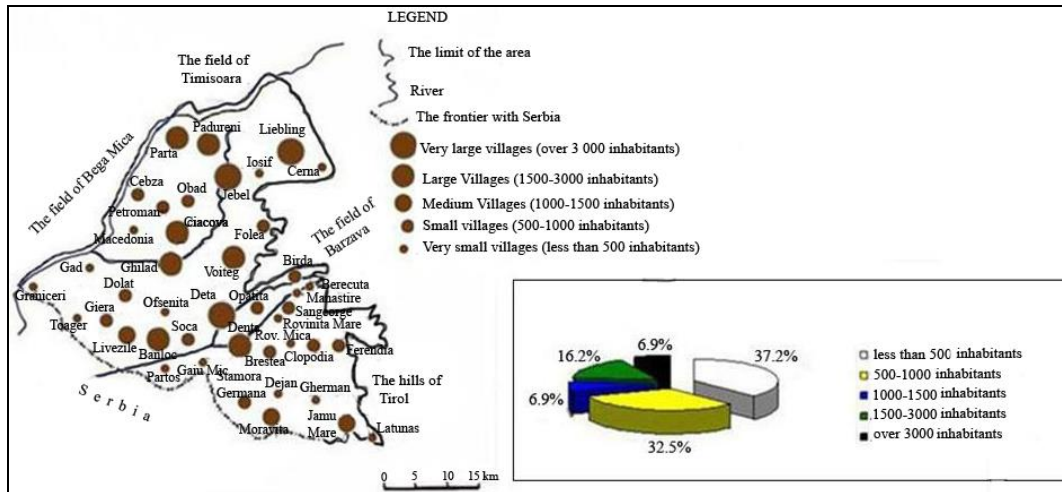
In the year 1930 there is an increase in the number of small villages (Fig.5) which come to have a share of 33.3%, followed by large villages (26.19%) and medium (21.42%). The maintenance of a high percentage of medium and large villages is due to the presence of settlers in the area which maintains a surplus of the population and the increase in small villages is due to World War I that made many victims.



**Figure 5.** The classification of settlements by the number of inhabitants in 1930 (Source: Census of 1930)

2002 (Fig. 6) brings instead a substantial change in the size of settlements. The increase of the migration phenomenon and the negative demographic balance have led to an increasing in very small villages, which hold the largest share, followed by small villages (32.5%) and large villages (16.2%). Very large villages had only a share of 6.97% in 2002.

In 2002, the small villages occupy the western and eastern or southern parts, replacing medium and large villages. We have to mention that some villages underwent a sharp decrease in the number of inhabitants, becoming in 2002 small and very small villages, compared to 1900 when they fell into the category of medium or large villages. It is about some Romanian villages such as Macedonia, Petroman, Cebza, Toager that registered a decline in population due to migration of the Romanian inhabitants and the high mortality rate, but also some mixed or German villages (Gad, Giera, Graniceri, Clopodia, Ferendia) due to the emigration of Germans or Hungarians.



**Figure 6.** The classification of settlements by the number of inhabitants in 2002 (Source: Census of 2002)

**CLASSIFICATION OF SETTLEMENTS BY AGE**

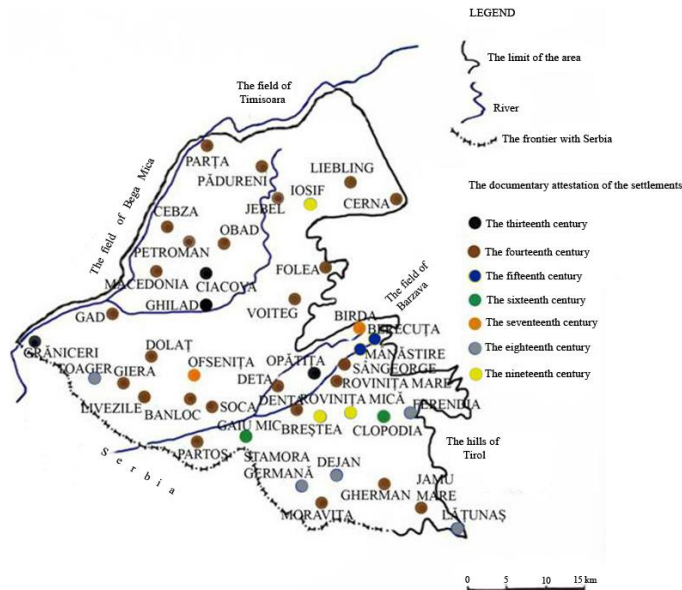
Due to the plain region with vast opportunities for exploitation of the natural environment, the settlements from the Plain Birda- Moravița were inhabited since prehistoric times (the proof consists in the variety of archaeological discoveries made since the Bronze Age and Iron Age). We may consider the Middle Ages as the period of documentary record for the settlements from the Plain Birda-Moravița, most of which are recorded for the first time during the papal taxes (1332-1337), and even before this period (Table 1).

**Table 1.** The historic record of settlements in the Plain Birda-Moravița (Source: Figures based on data from the National Archives, the collection of Nicolae Ilieșiu)

No.	Settlement	The year of first documentary record/ The year of reestablishment
1	Ghilad	1212
2	Ciacova	1220/1335
3	Grăniceri	1256
4	Opățița	1256/1333
5	Sângeorge	1319
6	Denta	1322
7	Giera	1322
8	Voiteg	1322
9	Gherman	1323
10	Banloc	1332/1717
11	Padureni	1332/1761
12	Liebling	1332/1828
13	Cebza	1333
14	Dolaț	1333
15	Gad	1333
16	Livezile	1333
17	Moravița	1333
18	Obad	1333
19	Partoș	1333
20	Petroman	1333
21	Soca	1333
22	Jamu Mare	1334/1343



23	Jebel	1334
24	Macedonia	1334
25	Parța	1334
26	Folea	1341
27	Rovinița Mare	1341
28	Deta	1360
29	Cerna	1373
30	Berecuța	1458
31	Mânăstire	1485/1909 (recorded in statistics)
32	Gaiu Mic	1517
33	Clopodia	1598/1717
34	Birda	1690/1717
35	Ofsenița	1690/1828
36	Dejan	1717
37	Ferendia	1717
38	Lățunaș	1717
39	Toager	1761
40	Stamora Germană	1789/1828
41	Breștea	1846
42	Iosif	1870/1954 (recorded in statistics)
43	Rovinița Mică	1895



**Figure 7.** The classification of settlements by age

(Source: Processing by Nicholas Collection Ilieșiu 1943 National Archives of the State)

Since the Middle Ages, most of the settlements from the Plain Birda-Moravita belonged to some well-known noble clans, which is why most settlements date back to this period. Thus, the oldest settlements have been documented in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and these are Ciacova, Ghilad (Galad-certified in the notes of the historiographer Budinski) and Graniceri (possession Chewas). In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, 58% of all settlements were documented. It is period 1332-1337, when settlements (Banloc, Soca, Partos, Livezile, Giera, Dolăț, Macedonia, Cebza, Obad, Petroman, Jebel, Pădureni, Parța, Voiteg, Folea, Liebling, Cerna, Deta, Denta, Moravița, Jamu Mare, etc) are mentioned in the lists of tithe, being also mentioned by Hungarian historians as Samu Borovszky and Bodog

Milleker. The 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries are characterized by a small number of documentary recorded settlements, found in the Turkish defterleri after 1500. (Berecuta, Manastire- 15<sup>th</sup> century; Gaiu Mic, Clopodia 16<sup>th</sup> century; Birda, Ofsenița 17<sup>th</sup> century). The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were dominated by the Habsburg rule; in this period some settlements were founded in the Plain Birda-Moravita because of the consistent waves of colonization (Brestea- founded by the pahliveni coming from Dudeștii Vechi; Rovinita Mica was founded by the 80 German families that arrived from Becicherecul Mic; Stamora-Germana- was founded due to the German colonization settlers; Iosif- founded by Hungarian settlers; Toager- founded by the Romanians brought from the Mures area from Banat). The classification of settlements by age is plotted in figure 7.

### CONCLUSIONS

Taking as starting point both the Anglo Saxon literature (Taylor, Bryan, Goodrich, Canter, 1996; Barrow 2000; Goodman, 2004) and the Romanian one (Vert, 2000/2001; Ana Ianăș, 2011; Nicoara, 1999) we can draw some conclusions that highlight the required type of regional impact of each criterion for the classification of settlements.

Thus, the structural and textural physiognomy of the settlements from the Plain Birda-Moravița, fall within the typology of the Banat plain, most of which have a rectangular, square or geometric form, a compact structure and linear texture, rectangular or irregular, therefore, the consequences of the regime ordered by the Habsburg rule.

The historical and demographic phenomena before the war and even the interwar, represented by massive waves of colonization and a positive population growth rate represented the cause of a high share of large and very large settlements, their percentage decreasing with increased migration and a sharp decline in birth rates, thus imposing a negative demographic impact at regional level by the increasing in number of small and very small settlements.

The favorable natural conditions and the landscape features were factors that favored the existing documentary records from the Middle Ages. At the entire regional system can be observed a clear predominance of settlements with a considerable age (13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries), at the expense of settlements established during the Habsburg or Austro-Hungarian periods through the intake of Bulgarian and German population.

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