

2. The region before settlement (Before the calling of our ancestors)

It is unthinkable that a place as protected as the Grosskopischer valley wouldn't be inhabited by humans since the earliest of time. Even in the absence of historical sources and without excavations that were made one can conclude with certainty that people lived there, based on a discovery made at a later time. This finding decidedly placed the settlement within the context of the general historical events in the larger Siebenbürgen. Around the time of Christ's birth the Dakers lived there, who became so strong that they represented a danger for the neighboring Roman Empire. Consequently, the Roman emperor Trajan organized several campaigns against them. He conquered Siebenbürgen, occupied it with his legions, and brought Roman settlers into the country, which remained under Roman rule from the year 106 until 274. Already in the year 257/8, Roman troops and civil servants retreated over the Danube River under the pressure of the People's Migration (Völkerwanderung). Remaining in the country were not only buildings and streets constructed by the Romans, but, with certainty, also a portion of the population who withdrew into isolated, protected valleys. Such a hideaway was also the valley of **Grosskopisch**. The upper portion of the **Marhelt** and the **Fettendorfer** High Plateau above it offered not only good grazing pasture for cattle breeding but was also far away from the migrating populations.

What about the finding?

The mayor Michael Von Heydendorf d. A wrote about it in the year 1779 to the governor of Siebenbürgen, Samuel von Bruckenthal, the following:

"I venture to send to you, subserviently, your Excellency, the remnant of a little piece from ancient times which was found four years ago on the BIRTHALMER Hatert, approximately one hour's distance from the market in a deep, wild valley adjacent to the Fettendorfer Praedlum under the trunk of a toppled down oak tree in the vicinity of a water source. There were also residual pieces of a jug and a bowl of the same ore, but so damaged that they were not felt worth preserving. Perhaps, Your Excellency will value this little piece for your collection. Although there is no chronological information, this piece shows the following: From the Greek appearance of the monogram, which used to be carried by the Greek emperors on their banners you can see that **Zenovius**, who took the vows, most likely was a Greek Christian who nevertheless used the Roman language and letters. From this single case one could derive the exquisite antiquity of the presence of the Greek Church in Siebenbürgen. You can also see that the Christian teaching already was accepted at a time when the Roman colony used only pure Latin in speech and writing, and not yet utilized the Slavic language. This leads to the assumption that at the time of our fatherland this area had already been settled by Roman colonies."

The location of the finding, the so-called Bärengraben, belongs according to property laws to the community of BIRTHALM. For this reason it is called the BIRTHALER DONARIUM. Geographically, however, this place belongs to the Grosskopischer Valley and lies around seventeen kilometers south of Gross Kokel. The two items were kept in the Hermannstädter Bruckenthal Museum before they were transferred to the History Museum in Bukares. There are two objects:

- A Christus Monogram in a circular frame of 19.5 cm, the two Greek letters "X" and "P" meaning the same as the Latin "CHR", or the initial letters of the name of Christ, and
- A Votive Tablet. The panel measures 32.5 cm including the two triangular side panels. The width is measured as 12, 6 - 13, 2 cm. From the long sides of the panel 3 cm high Ösen stick out, with the "O" having been broken off. In the process the frame was also damaged as well as the letter "Z". Both objects are made of bronze and are 4 mm thick. The inscription on the tablet sounds:

EGO ZENO

VIUS VOT

UM POSUIT

This means translated freely: I, Zenovius, have donated this offering (gift).

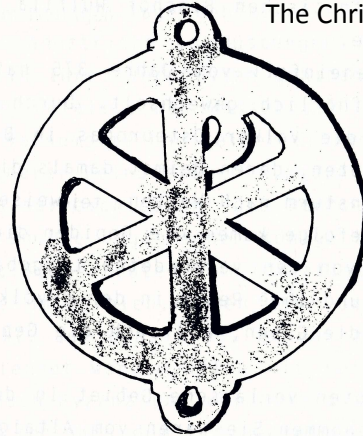
They look as follows:

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EGO ZENO
VIUS VOT
UM POSUI

Das bedeutet frei übersetzt: Ich Zenovius habe dies gelobte Opfer (Geschenk) gestiftet. Sie sehen folgendermaßen aus.

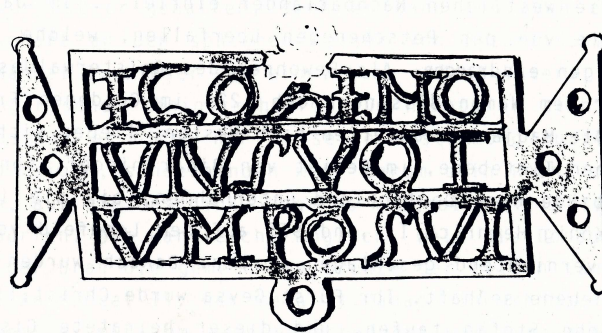
a) Das Christusmonogramm



The Christ Monogram

b) Die Votivtafel

The Votive Tablet



Diese beiden Gegenstände weisen in die Zeit nach der Regierung des oströmischen Kaisers Konstantin d. Gr. hin, also nach 337 n. Chr. Wichtig ist für unsere Betrachtung die Tatsache

Both objects point to the time after the Rule of East-Roman Emperor Constantin, the Great, that is, after 337 BCE. Important for our contemplation is the fact that our valley was settled already in the fourth century. The fund testifies that there was a little church in the Bärengraben, or that a hermit had his dwelling there and, as a priest, preached the gospel in Latin, although the name Zenovius is of oriental provenance. This one has not to take as a great miracle. It is known that the West-Gothic bishop Wulfila preached in Latin.

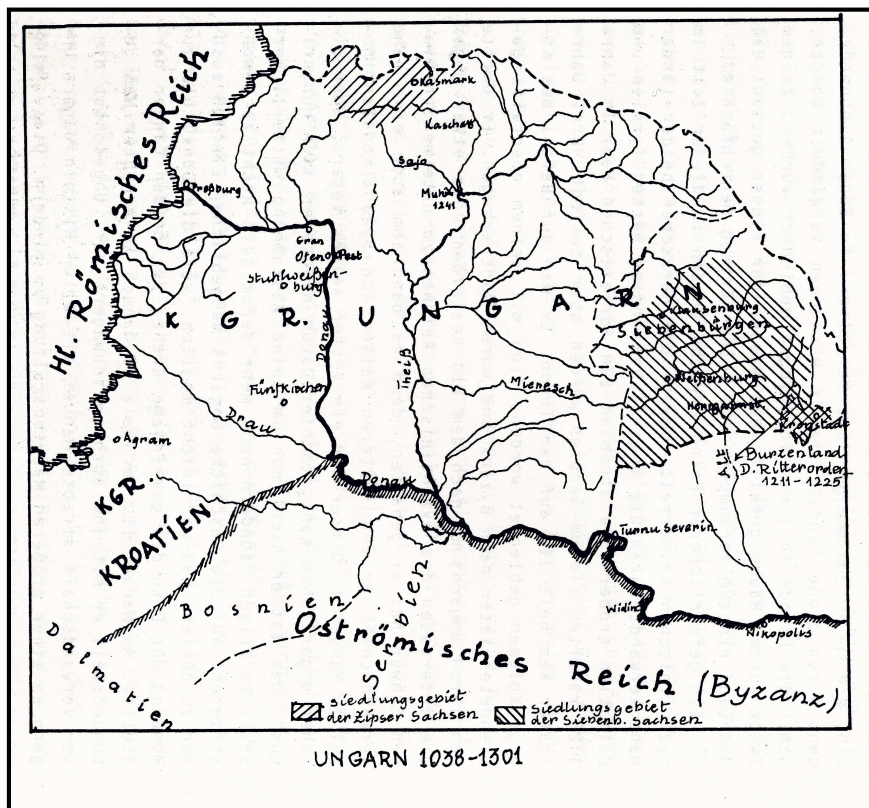
After the invasion of the Huns in the year 375 Siebenbürgen changed his rulers incessantly. These Asian nomads mobilized the communities of East Europe. Even the Goths whose home was in South Ukraine escaped to the west in response to their onslaught, some came to Siebenbürgen. In their wake the Gepiden came. They stayed in the country until they were conquered in 566 by the combined forces of the Langobarden and Awaren. The rest of them fused with the population of the country. The Goths and the Gepiden already were Christians.

The area in the Ukraine that had been abandoned by the Goths was occupied by the Madjaren. They had migrated from the Altai Mountains westward. They were not a belligerent people riding horses on looting sprees into the lands of their neighbors to the west. In the year 895 they were raided by the Petschenegen, who also invaded Siebenbürgen. As inhabitants of the Ghost Wood (Geisterwald) they were mentioned under the name of Bissener in 1224 in the Golden Charter (Goldener Freibrief). The Madjars migrated west and settled in the Hungarian lowlands near the area of Bihar. From there they organized raids into Germany until they were conquered in the year 933 by King Heinrich I and in 955 fatally beaten by King Otto I in the field of the Lech. Afterwards they settled in the plain of Theiss. Their Prince Geysa became a Christian and had his son Stefan be baptized. Stefan married Gisela of Bavaria, the sister of Emperor Heinrich II. With entourage came the first German settlers into the country, many Nobles and Sathmarer. In the year 1000 The Pope conferred the King's Crown to Stefan. He gave the country a well-ordered administration for which he relied on the German Nobles who had been called into the country.

Because of the many invasions by the now combined Petschenegen and Kumanen the border patrols in the East were enlarged and secured by the step-wise advancement by the Szekler, who were the border patrols. Finally they reached the wall of the East Karpaten where they established a firm residence which they maintained until the present day. In the south of Siebenbürgen large areas were changed into waste lands to inhibit the enemies' progress. For this purpose trees were cut down, the flow of water in the rivers blocked so that the earth turned into swamp land not suitable for food production.

A more dangerous enemy of Hungary grew up in the shape of the Byzantine Empire, despite the rulers of both countries being close relatives. The Hungarian kings had captured Symien and Dalmatia. They strove for the Adriatic Sea. In the year 1128 they fought to get Serbien but were defeated. Three years later Bela II came to the Throne. He had been blinded by order of King Koloman and fled with his father, who also had been blinded, to Byzantium where he was educated. He could ascend the throne only if he swore never to undertake any activity against the interests of the Byzantine Empire. He kept the oath because of his close kinship to the later Emperor of Byzantine (Konstantinopel) Manuel I. He was a cousin of his father, son of a Hungarian Princess. For this reason he called himself "Hungaricus". He did this not only to show his maternal ancestry but also to demonstrate his right to have a significant input into the fortunes of Hungary. This was easily possible because the Danube to the estuary of the Drau was the common boundary for both countries. Bela II was bound to Manuel II even closer because he was also related by marriage to him. Regardless of this relation Manuel strove by all means to prevent Hungary to develop into a great power. This animosity prompted Bela III to make a radical turn towards the West of Europe despite the fact that he had been held as a hostage during his studies in Constantinople.

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Hungary 1038-1301



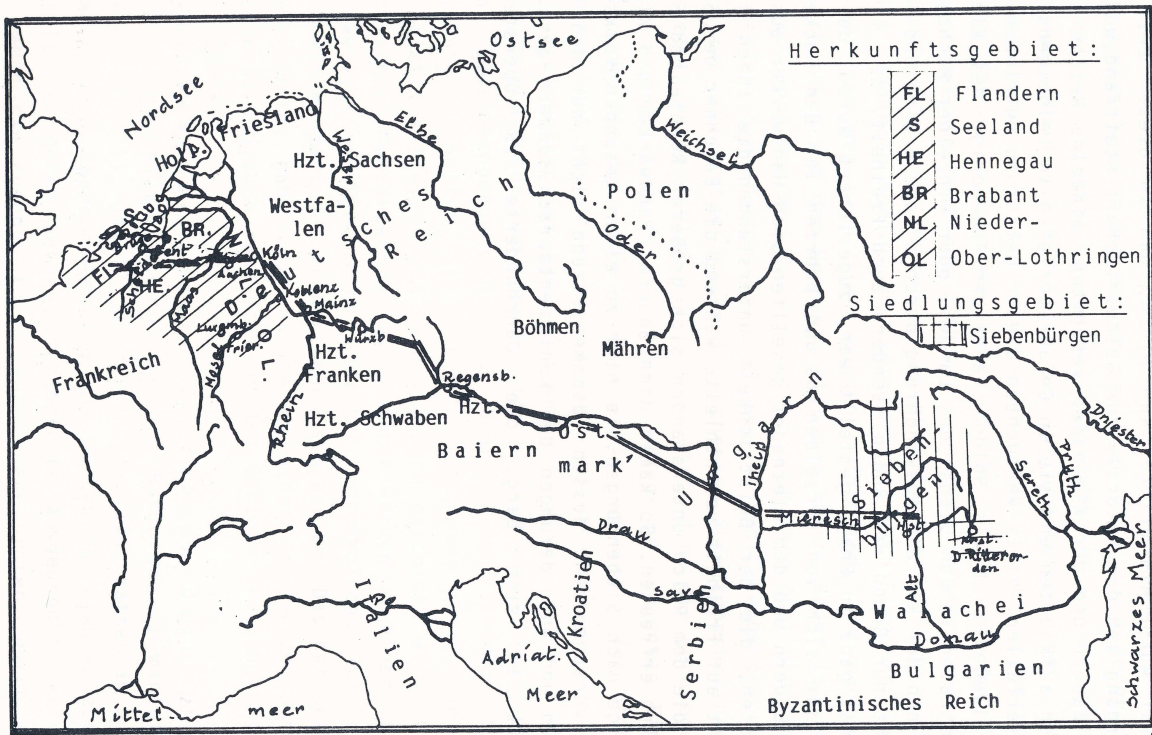
The settlement by our ancestors

We are not yet there in our story; before contemplating the history of the settlement we must talk about the son of Bela II, Geysa II. His mother was Serbian; therefore to free her home land and claim his heritage was a justified request by the son. He conducted several campaigns into Serbia without success. Every advance to the south or east was met with a campaign against Hungary by the Byzantine emperors. This empire was a much more powerful enemy compared to the wild tribes east of the Karpaten Mountains. They employed a well-equipped army of knights. To meet them one had to have similar armor and weapons. The Hungarian kings had always tried to engage roaming crusaders to serve for Hungary, but only very few let themselves be recruited.

In addition to these external threats Geysa II was burdened by concerns about the defenses of his country. There were also internal political and economic troubles. The nobility attempted to seize more and more power for them and to limit the power of the king. The German noble men, who had come to the country earlier, had mingled with leading influential Hungarians, had adopted their desire for power, and were no longer a support for the king. Oppressive was also the economic situation of the country. The Second Crusade had pulled through the country. In its wake famine ruled in the touched areas. Vast areas along the South Karpaten Mountains had been changed into wasteland for the purpose of defense and lay fallow. They produced neither fruit nor taxes which were both so very much needed to fight a war.

At this point King Geysa II decided to call German settlers into the country. As warriors they were supposed to stand up to the enemies with modern weapons and equipment and defend the country. Their craftsmen should be able to produce these weapons and build fortified cities to protect the country. At their walls the onslaught of the enemy would falter. The peasants called in should drain the swamps, clear the woods, and create fields, meadows and pastures. At the hillsides the choicest vines would be planted. Recruiters were sent to the Rhine River because there was the densest population of Europe, where war craft was in the blood, as craftsmanship in general, and where the most advanced agriculture was practiced. It was also known that many settlers had set out there looking for a new home stead. There were many from the lands along the Rhine River from Luxembourg to Flanders who set off for Siebenbürgen. Others may have joined them along the way; their numbers have not been passed down. It is certain, however, that they were settled in South Siebenbürgen in the administrative district which was later called Seven Chairs (Sieben Stühle). The "hospites vocati", i.e. the called guests, which were called in the beginning "flandrenses", Flanders immigrants, were called "saxones" or Saxons after the year 1238. Most likely this term was used and propagated by the King's Chancellery, labeling all Germans this way. In the language of the Roman population in South Siebenbürgen the term "Flanders" has been preserved until today. It is used when a Saxon, in anger, is not sent into "the land of pepper" but instead to Flanders. The different dialects of the immigrants were melted into a more or less common language. The idiom of the Nosner land differs strongly. The reason for this that this group immigrated at a different time and also lived geographically isolated from the remaining settlements.

What motivated our ancestors to abandon their old homestead? There are varied reasons. In the 11th and 12th century, for the last time in 1135, large floods alternated with years of drought in the region of the Lower Rhine. In their wake famines had marched in. Added on were the never-ending war feuds of the dukes and princes, which not only caused growing poverty in the population, but also made life unsafe. Thirdly, during this time, the transition from a natural to a money-based economy took place. Peasants and the low gentry impoverished. A few rich people bought up their land and threatened them to fall into subservience. Many tried to escape this danger. Peasants let themselves to be hired as soldiers. Members of the low gentry entered the service for the country or for a person in power. As now the call for emigrants swept the country and promised not only land but also freedom, which no longer was granted at home, they tore off from their moorings and turned their back on their old homestead. Joining the peasants and gentry were artisans from the cities ruled by the Church who withheld any right to freedom, while the cities governed by the King enjoyed more rights and greater freedoms. In this way peasants, craftsmen and members of the lower gentry came to Siebenbürgen. There they fused into a healthy community, the composition of which met the requirements and wishes of the King, and harbored the force to survive the centuries.



Die Einwanderung der Siebenbürger Sachsen
1141 - 1161

The Immigration of the Transylvanian Saxons
1141-1161