

POSSIBLE ANALOGIES OF THE WRITTEN STONES FROM THE TÁSZOK PEAK, IN PARTICULAR THOSE IN THE MOLDAVIAN AREAS

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ABSTRACT: The analogies of the written stones from the Tászok Peak can be found along the routes passing through the border areas of Transylvania and Moldavia, including the so-called Salt Road that connected the Salt Region (Sóvidék) in the district of Udvarhelyszék with the region of Moldvabánya (Baia) and the so-called Beszterce route connecting Beszterce (Bistrița) with Karácsonkő (Piatra Neamț). The third road connected Szászrégen (Reghin) with the region of Ditró (Ditrău), from whence the road lead through Pricske to Tölgyes (Tulghes) and Moldova (Western Moldavia) and through the Tászok to Bélbor (Bilbor) and Bukovina. My observations suggest that the written stones found in the Szeklerland and the Moldavian areas are mainly connected to the Anjou-Era network of commercial roads used during the 14th-18th centuries between Transylvania and Moldova. The sites listed in this study are: Firtos (Firtușu) Peak, Szertó Peak, Bekecs (Bichiș) Peak, Kereszt (Crucii) Mountain, Salamás (Sărmaș) Creek, Tászok (Tasoc) Peak, Pricske (Prișca) Peak, Zsedán (Jedanu) Creek, Hajtó (Haita) Creek, Írottkö (Piatra Scrisă) Peak, Herla and

Radocsány (Rădăşeni). All of them can be associated with the commercial road network from the Middle Age and the Age of Principality, which partly remained in use until the 19th century.

KEYWORDS: written stones, road network, Tászok Peak, Szeklerland, Moldova

In 2018, we conducted an archaeological assessment organised by the Márton Tarisznyás Museum of Gyergyószentmiklós (Gheorgheni, Romania) at the Tászok (Tasoc) Peak in the northern part of the Gyergyó (Giurgeu) Depression. Although the site had been known for about 105 years and officially registered as an archaeological site for roughly 20 years, thorough archaeological research had not been conducted until then. The study conducted by Iaşi professor Neculai Bolohan determined that the site dated mostly to the 18th–20th century, and was related mostly to the production of various natural resources requiring temporary presence.¹

The Tászok Mountain is located in the Eastern Carpathians, in the Borszék (Borsec) Mountains that form the northern part of the Gyergyó Mountains. It is surrounded by the reservoir of the Maros (Mureş) River in the southwest and of the Szeret (Siret) River in the northeast. The Tászok Peak rises on the left side of county road J128 that leads to Borszék through the south-eastern branch of the mountains, the Halaság (Hălăşag) Valley, at a rough distance of 900–950 m from it. The archaeological site itself is at the boundary of the administrative areas of Ditró (Ditrău), Salamás (Sărmaş) and Borszék, and it lies roughly 15 km from Ditró, 30 km from Gyergyószentmiklós, and 10 km from Borszék.

The first to study the signs on the Tászok Peak stones was István Kovács (1880–1955), archaeologist of the Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum (Transylvanian National Museum), in August 1913, who also examined the two boulders that are currently in the Gyergyó Museum. Before they were brought to the museum in 1962 by

1 Bolohan & Puskás-Kolozsvári 2019.

Márton Tarisznyás, they had been lying in the courtyard of the Hodos (Hodoşa) primary school, abandoned there since WWII. The photos taken afterwards are still available in the local archives, but unfortunately no description made at that time survived. For the purposes of studying runiform script, the bigger one, numbered III by István Kovács, is worthy of our attention. The mentioned author states that its deep notches “especially can be seen as letters”.²

At the site, we determined that the so-called written stones could be found almost exclusively along what István Kovács had described as the older carriage road of Borszék, on a route that can still be followed clearly. The stones studied in 1913 were lying along the two sides of this route.³ The exceptions are the boundary stones we found in our research near the current administrative boundary of Ditró and Salamás – on one of them, we documented a property mark.⁴ Otherwise, there is a clear connection between the written stones and the old boundary marks, especially in the places where boundaries of three towns met.⁵

We recorded the exact location of 14 stones, but it is very likely that there are more stones on this peak and its surroundings. On our summary map, we also indicated the probable locations of the eleven stones documented by István Kovács (Photo 1). We noticed that most stones were on the same line along a certain road that runs through the Tászok Peak, mostly along the administrative boundary of Salamás and Ditró. In the meantime, I ascertained that this road was not the same as the one indicated on the first military survey of Transylvania, the Josephine map made between 1769–1773.⁶ Based on written data available to us, this cart road was actually made somewhat later, in 1782, because earlier than that the mineral water springs of Borszék could only be accessed by foot or on horseback.⁷ On the aforementioned map, three watch houses (*Wacht*) were indicated around the Tászok Peak. These were clearly

2 Kovács 1914, p. 241.

3 Kovács 1914, pp. 233–234.

4 Bolohan & Puskás-Kolozsvári 2019, pp. 130–131, photo VI and pp. 157–158.

5 As for these, see: Takács 1987, pp. 16–19, 196–203; and Tóth 1996.

6 <https://mapire.eu/hu/map/firstsurvey-transylvania/> (downloaded on 3 December 2019).

7 Endes 1938, p. 227.

related to the customs station in Pricske, to which they are connected via a forest road which was under military control.⁸

Antal Kémenes, who accompanied István Kovács to the Tászok Peak, mentioned two similar sites in the boundary region between Moldavia and Transylvania: on the side of the Tatár (Tătaru) Mountain, in the spring region of the Güdüc (Ghiduț) Creek, and at the boundary of Gyergyószentmiklós, at the spring of the Zsedán (Jidanul) Creek.⁹ We can also see them well on the first military survey of Moldavia (1788–1790).¹⁰ The Tászok Peak is near the Közrez Pass (Pasul Chiozrez), the spring region of the Güdüc Creek is close to the Pricske Peak, while the upper course of the Zsedán Creek is close to the Balázs (Balaj) Pass. So practically every site is connected to the border regions and roads that cross them.

According to the 1862 map of the Grand Principality of Transylvania, the most important transport route between Gyergyószék and the neighbouring regions of Moldavia ran near the Tászok Peak,¹¹ but prior to 1810 this still crossed the Pricske customs station. The Pricske customs station was first mentioned in 1607, but it was only in 1827 that it was moved permanently to Tölgyes (Tulghes, Hargita County).¹² In 1760, a border dispute arose between Szárhegy (Lázarea) and Gyergyó, following which boundary marks were placed, among others, in the spring region of the Güdüc Creek, using stones marked with the letters H and A (which signify: Határ Állás, i.e. the place of the border).¹³ The road crossing the valley of the Zsedán Creek connected Békás (Bicaz) and Marpatak (Pârâul Mărului) and Tölgyes, which is to the north. In the old days, written stones were probably placed here, too, since this is a long-disputed border region between Moldavia and Szeklerland. Are they still there?

8 Bolohan & Puskás-Kolozsvári 2019, pp. 156–157.

9 Kémenes 1914, p. 117.

10 <https://mapire.eu/hu/map/firstsurvey-moldva/> (downloaded on 3 December 2019).

11 Karte des Grossfürstentums Siebenbürgen, <http://mek.niif.hu/05000/05055/html/> (downloaded on 3 December 2019) And: <http://www.geo-spatial.org/download/karte-des-grossfuerstentums-siebenbuergen-harta-marelui-principat-al-transilvaniei> (downloaded on 4 December 2019).

12 Demjén 2016, pp. 145–150.

13 Tarisznyás 1982, pp. 59–60.

Today, we find written stones in the Gyergyó Depression on the territories of Salamás and Remete (Remetea). The latter is now located in the courtyard of the Roman Catholic church, but it used to be along the road that crosses the Kereszt (Crucii) Mountain.¹⁴ A similar written stone is located on the Szertő Peak,¹⁵ near Felsősófalva (Ocna de Sus, Hargita County) and on the Bekecs Peak,¹⁶ near Nyárádselye (Șilea Nirajului, Maros County). From what I observed, practically every such stone is located along roads that cross the passes. I will not present them in detail here, but for parallels with more accurate dates I must mention the stove tile found by archaeological excavation in the fill of the cellar of a 16th-century mansion in Székelykeresztúr (Cristuru Secuiesc, Hargita County) (Székelykeresztúr, Kriza János u. 23).¹⁷ On the fragmented rectangular stove tile measuring 21.6 x 15.6 cm there are also a triangle, a pentagram, and a half-moon next to an “illegible” runiform script.¹⁸ I should also mention the runes from the Firtos (Firtușu) Peak, found on a large boulder mostly covered by the ground, that have long been associated with the stones from the Tászok Peak.¹⁹ On the same peak, there is a chapel made of stones on which there were stonemason marks cut evidently before the construction.²⁰ The chapel, which has a round-arched apse, was probably built in the 13th–14th century.²¹ It seems it was only in the mid-15th century when a fort was built on the Firtos Mountain. Excavations made there returned ceramics and stove tiles suggesting a mansion, mostly from the 16th–17th century, that were added to the museum in Székelyudvarhely (Odorheiu Secuiesc).²²

Northwest from our area, in the southernmost part of Dornavátra (Vatra Dornei), in the reservoir of the Hajtó (Haita) Creek, a “megalith” marked

14 Lazarovici et al. 2011, pp. 59–60, photo 13.

15 Berta & Károly 2007.

16 Erdélyi & Ráduly 2010, p. 97.

17 Benkő & Székely 2008, p. 257.

18 An attempt at deciphering by János Ráduly: Ráduly 2011, pp. 32–34.

19 Ferenczi 1990, p. 18; Ferenczi 1997, p. 17, Figure 10.

20 Ferenczi 1997, pp. 16–17, Figure 8–9.

21 Sófalvi 2017a, p. 131.

22 Sófalvi 2017a, pp. 132–133, photos 62–63.

with runes was discovered in 1987.²³ Its discovery site is called Gura Haitii – Valea Paltinu (Suceava County), where several written stones were found later. Although they were not published, based on photos available on the Internet²⁴ the marks on them are similar to those observed on the boulders from the Bekecs Peak and Tászok Peak. The discovery site of the boulders is close to the so-called Maria Theresa Road,²⁵ which was built between 1762–1786 to connect Transylvania and Bukovina.

To the south, in the Esztena-hegység (Munții Stânișoarei) there is the so-called Piatra Scrisă (Hungarian: Írott kő, English: Written Stone) Peak at 1150 m above sea level, northwest from the village of Cotârğași (Suceava County), close to the administrative boundary of Suceava and Neamț Counties. The marks on the large rock of 2.10 x 1.40 x 2.80 m²⁶ located here are also similar to those observed on the boulders on Tászok Peak. Its publisher, Dan Gh. Teodor, differentiated three types that consist of parallel lines (A), resemble runiform script (B), and use various (Cyrillic, Greek, and Latin) letters and Christian symbols (C).²⁷ Most of the signs he recorded probably date from the 14th–16th centuries, but he dated them, among others, by citing the parallels on the Tászok Peak, to the 9th–14th centuries.²⁸

But one that is indeed probably earlier, from the 12th–13th century, is the runiform inscription consisting of seven signs found near Herla (Suceava County), on a stone of 0.60 x 0.28 m picked up from the bed of a periodic river.²⁹ In addition to the inscription of Turkic-looking letters, graphics of three weapons can be observed, too: bow and arrow, spear, and a slightly arched

23 Naum & Butnaru 1989, pp. 28–31.

24 http://heritage-ua-ro.org/ro/objects_view.php?id=SV184 (downloaded on 4 December 2019)
And: <https://rares19.wordpress.com/2010/07/05/mesaje-pesto-milenii-i/> (downloaded on 5 December 2019).

25 Naum & Butnaru 1989, pp. 102–105.

26 Teodor 2003, pp. 789–793, photo 3–4. See also: <https://sites.google.com/site/romanianatura66/home/carpatii-rasariteni/stanisoara/probabil-cea-mai-veche-scriere-din-lume-aflata-in-muntii-stanisoara-la-piatra-scrisa-a-fost-fragmentata-prin-dinamitare> (downloaded on 21 November 2019).

27 Teodor 2003, p. 790, photo 5.

28 Teodor 2003, pp. 791–794.

29 Ursulescu 1991–92, pp. 81–83, photo 2–3.

sabre. Unfortunately, none of these can help us in the dating: only deciphering the inscription could give us some input for more accurate dating.

Much better known is the limestone axe of Radocsány (Rădășeni, Suceava County), a stray finding discovered at an ancient discovery site. The runiform script on it probably dates from the late 15th century, but Géza Ferenczi has doubts about its authenticity and believes it could be a forgery.³⁰

Runes, in particular stonemason marks (*Steinmetzzeichen*) are also familiar from various Moldavian churches. Some of these were published as early as the late 19th century, for example the one on the church of Gura Humorului (Suceava County) built in the 15th century at the spring of the Hamar (Humor) Creek,³¹ or those on the walls of the Suceavan churches of Saint George and Saint Demetrius (16th century).³² The most recent inscription published is on the wall of a Franciscan monastery in Moldvabánya (Baia, Suceava County), and was dated to the first half of the 15th century.³³

Displaying the aforementioned sites on a map, we can see that most of the written stones found in the Gyergyó Depression and around the Oriental Carpathians are on an imaginary axis pointing roughly in a SE-NW direction (Photo 2). Overlaying these points on the 1862 map of the Principality of Transylvania, it is rather obvious that they were probably closely related to the trade routes of the time (Photo 3). This reinforces our hypothesis that the so-called Salt Road was used as early as the late Árpád period,³⁴ connecting the Salt Region of Udvarhelyszék with the town of Moldvabánya (Stadt Mulda in German),³⁵ which was established by German settlers in the 13th century. A barbed arrowhead found at the boundary of Gyergyóalfalu (Joseni, Romania) provides archaeological evidence of the use of the route in the 13th–14th century.³⁶ Another object dating from the same period is a broadsword, a stray

30 Csallány 1960, pp. 109–110, photo 56; Ferenczi 1997, p. 23, footnote 93.

31 Romstorfer 1893, p. 68.

32 Romstorfer 1895, p. 143.

33 Ráduly 2006, pp. 146–147, Figure 1; Tánzos 2006, pp. 150–151, photo 1; Ráduly 2007.

34 Sófálvi 2016, pp. 296–267.

35 Iorga 1925, p. 78.

36 Sófálvi 2017a, pp. 57–58.

find near the road that leads from the Pricske customs station to the Tatárhavas (Tătaru) Pass.³⁷

Another remarkable route of that time in the area I studied is the so-called Beszterce Road, the trade route that connected Karácsonkő (Piatra lui Crăciun, today: Piatra Neamț, Neamț County) through Tölgyes (Tulgheș) with Beszterce (Bistrița, Bistrița-Năsăud County), known by that name as early as the 14th century.³⁸ This road led south from Tölgyes along the Balázs Creek, which falls into the Putna Creek, through the Balázs Pass and the Zsedán Creek valley, to Békás, from where one could easily reach Karácsonkő. Its northern part led along the Kis-Beszterce to Bélbor (Bilbor), then followed the valley of Hajtó Creek, to reach the Beszterce region, but it is rather difficult to identify the exact route today.

The significance of these two medieval roads is explained by the trade relations established in the Anjou period. In 1335, the Congress of Kings in Visegrád agreed on setting up new trade routes to Bohemia and Poland. So in my opinion the written stones mentioned and other runiform mementos are probably related to the trade route network that connected Transylvania and Moldavia and was used in the 14th–18th centuries. In the territory I studied, in the north-eastern part of Transylvania, starting from 1368 it was controlled by Beszterce. Its main element was the Lemberg–Cetatea Albă (lit. “White Citadel”, today: Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy, Ukraine)–Kaffa. In fact, the Transylvanian and Moldavian trade routes led to this. During the reign of King Louis I (the Great) (1342–1382), the port cities on the northern side of the Black Sea, such as Chilia at the influx of the northern arm of the Danube Delta, or Cetatea Albă on the right side of the Dniester delta, were actively connected to trade in Central Europe. This allowed “overseas” goods to reach Hungary and Poland by land.³⁹

In the south-eastern part of Transylvania, the royal city of Brassó (Brașov, Romania) acquired a monopoly for trade in the direction of the Black Sea in 1358. This monopoly covered the region between the valleys of the rivers Bodza

37 Tarisznyás 1982, p. 187; Demjén 2016, p. 135.

38 Poncea 1999, pp. 162–163; Manolescu 1966, pp. 67–70.

39 Iorga 1925, pp. 43–48; Gorovei & Székely 2005, p. 38, footnote 28.

(Buzău) and Prahova.⁴⁰ This explains the rock art and runes noted in the region of Bodzaforduló (Întorsura Buzăului, Romania),⁴¹ including the signs of the so-called Cave with Inscriptions found nearby Nuciu (Buzău County). This area pertained to Szekler County of Wallachia which existed until 1845 and was also established during the Anjou period. The trade corridor emerging at that time was controlled by the city of Brassó.⁴² Similar cave churches are found in Moldavian territories. However, due to multiple conversions and extensions, only the one in Örhely (Orheiul Vechi, Moldova) can be dated; one of its inscriptions notes the year 1665.⁴³

In 1469, in the north-western part of Moldova, the construction of the Putna monastery started during the reign of Ștefan cel Mare (1457–1504). Thanks to imperial support, it soon became an economic and cultural centre of the area. In this context, it might be relevant that in 1473 this emperor signed an agreement with King Mátyás which provided for mutual exemption from duty for Moldavian and Transylvanian traders.⁴⁴ In my opinion this explains the name “Putnaloka” mentioned in written sources in connection with the road that crossed Pricske in Gyergyószék, which is the same as Hágótölja pertaining to Gyergyószentmiklós, based on Frigyes Pesty’s compilation of toponyms.⁴⁵ According to Pál Binder, the Slavic word “put” in the name Putna means path.⁴⁶ Without doubt this route only permitted travel by foot or horse. But another argument to support this could be the fact that the road section crossing the Görgényi (Gurghiu) Plateau reaches the Gyergyó Depression via a ridge known as the Putna Pass.

There is no doubt today that in the Szeklerland, most of the earliest Szekler written records starting the 13th–14th century are from Udvarhelyszék.⁴⁷

40 Sófálvi 2017, p. 61.

41 Lazarovici et al. 2011, pp. 71–72, 75.

42 Sófálvi 2017, p. 62.

43 Ghimpu 2000, pp. 133, 192.

44 Gorovei & Székely 2005, pp. 75–76, 84.

45 Csáki & Pál-Antal 2013, pp. 107–108.

46 Binder 1992, p. 106.

47 Benkő 2016, pp. 480–485.

Curiously, most of them are also related to churches, as in the case of the Moldavian regions. Otherwise, the early Moldavian churches are closely related to Transylvania, such as the one in Orheiu castle, or the fort chapel Soroca (Moldova) on the right side of the Dniester. The latter was built by masters from Beszterce.⁴⁸

I should add that, to my current knowledge, Ditró (Ditrău, Harghita County) emerged in the early 15th century. Its German name *Dittrichderf*, “Dittrich’s village” is probably a tribute to the first settler.⁴⁹ In any case, it is certain that starting from the first third of the 15th century Szászrégen (Reghin, Mureș County) was connected to trade with Moldavia and Poland. The Szászrégen road to the Moldavian border and Polish regions led through the Ditró region. Its significance was probably attributed to the fact that from there, through the Tatár Pass, one could reach Tölgyes, and via the Tászok Peak and Bélbor (Bilbor, Harghita County), Drăgoiasa in Suceava County,⁵⁰ but even the Borgó Pass (Pasul Tihuța), which connected Beszterce and Suceava. For a long time this Bélbor footpath was the shortest way to Moldavia and Bukovina.⁵¹ Somewhere in the second half of the 16th century, the Remete settlement was established, opposite Ditró, on the other side of the Maros river. The older road was the one through Kereszthegy, which ran through Laposnya (Lăpușna) and the valley of the Görgény Creek, to Szászrégen.⁵² This road appears on the first military survey of Transylvania,⁵³ which means it was still significant at the end of the 18th century.

From the early 17th century, Szentmiklós, one of the earliest settlements in the Gyergyószék region, became increasingly significant. Its geographical location made it easier for Szentmiklós to acquire market-town status, since it lies at the intersection of the main road connecting Gyergyószék to Csíkszék and the Salt Road crossing the Görgényi Mountains, which also included

48 Ghimpu 2000, pp. 95–96, 191–192.

49 Vámszer 2000, p. 143.

50 Orbán 1869 II, p. 141.

51 Benkő 1853 III, p. 156.

52 Vámszer 2000, p. 148.

53 <https://mapire.eu/hu/map/firstsurvey-transylvania/> (downloaded on 6 December 2019).

the Pricske customs station.⁵⁴ As we can see on the first military survey of Transylvania, the road forked in three directions at the Pricske customs station, on Tatármező: to the south-east, it ran through the Lapos Mountain to reach Békás and Karácsonkő. To the north-east, it led through Tölgyes to Németvásár (Târgu Neamț) and Baia. The third branch to the north-west led to the Közrez Peak, from where one could easily access Borszék, Bélbor, Dornavátra and Beszterce.

The written stones presented in this paper are rather obviously connected to the Transylvanian trade route network in the Middle Ages and during the Principality, which was probably established in the Anjou period and was used more or less until the 19th century. At the same time, I must emphasise that we should not disregard a connection with the boundary marks of the time, since the two are complementary and not exclusive. In my opinion, a similar phenomenon can be observed today at the boundaries of towns, in the case of town name signs placed along the roads crossing them.

54 Demjén 2016, pp. 15–16.

PHOTOS



Photo 1: Written stones identified in 2018 on the Tászok Peak (K1–14, in red, source: Google Earth) and those found in 1913 (I–XI, in blue, source: Kovács 1914, Figure 2).

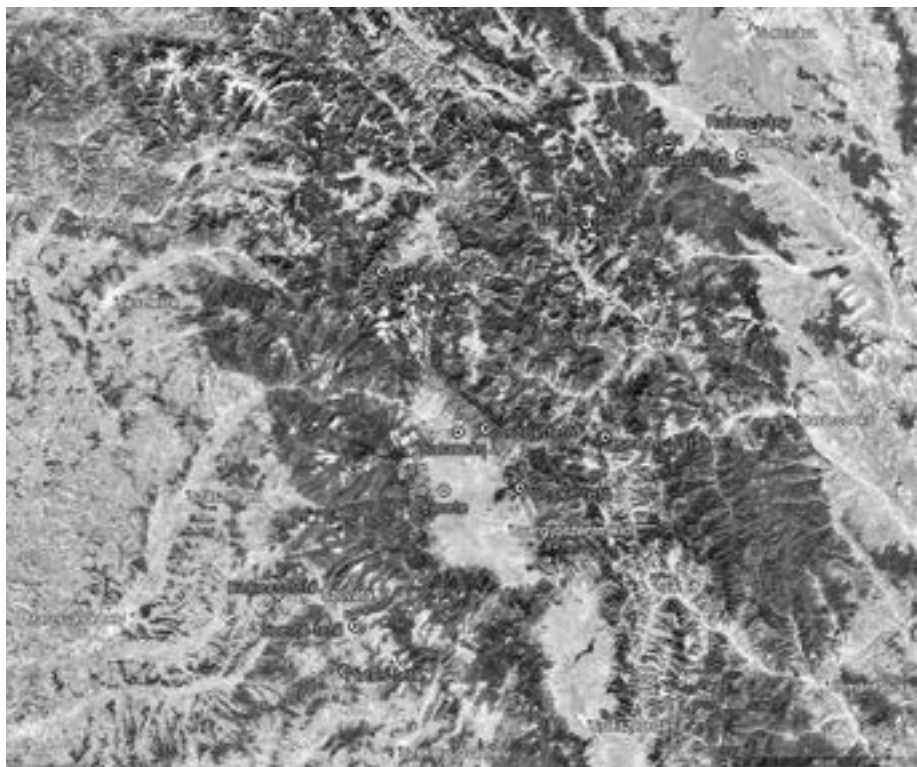


Photo 2: Locations with known written stones mentioned in this paper (source: Google Earth).



Photo 3: Discovery sites of the written stones overlaid on the 1862 map of the Principality of Transylvania (source: <http://www.geo-spatial.org>)

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