

Evidence on the engineering and upkeep of roads in late medieval Transylvania

Abstract:

As part of the historical landscape of the Transylvanian voivodat, the medieval road system benefits of scattered details and general information that scholars can use when attempting at its reconstruction. While the overall situation regarding major trade routes and public roads has been looked into based on archival data alone (due to their occurrence in late medieval charters and travel accounts or reports) almost no enquiry has been conducted with the aim of retrieving accurate details about the material aspects of the presumed routes. This paper is aiming at outlining the sources available for the study of the actual road tracks, by highlighting the importance of written, archaeological and cartographic evidence when it comes to identifying and rendering these particular landscape features. Despite the general impression of neglecting the development of engineered roads, late medieval local communities, individuals and even official authorities have sometimes addressed traffic problems by developing road segments, or by commanding maintenance work for already existing ones, including some special features found along the route ways, such as bridges. Apart from general archival information on the maintenance of bridges, ferries, fords and other facilities near toll-collection points, there are also examples as concerns the construction of new road segments, the reopening of dilapidated or blocked ones, as well as dugout road lanes, engineered access roads and paved roads. However, not all of these data can be obtained from written sources, thus, compelling one to have a look at the evidence found on the field and retrieved by archaeological and cartographic research.

Keywords: *communication network, law, medieval landscape, bridges, hollow ways, paved roads, Roman roads.*