

RURALIA – EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL RURAL ARCHAEOLOGY

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The first Medieval Europe Congress – held in York in 1992 and regarded as the forerunner of the Medieval Europe Research Congress (MERC) operating under the auspices of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) – offered an exceptional opportunity for scholars working in European medieval archaeology to exchange ideas and present their research results. There was considerable interest in papers focusing on rural settlements, and the related sessions sparked a professional discussion in which the need for an organisation offering a broader scholarly framework for the study of medieval rural archaeology and rural settlement was first articulated. Two years later, in Luxembourg, André Bazzana, Alan Aberg, Terry Barry, Jean-Marie Pesez, Jean-Michel Poisson, and Haio Zimmermann planned the first RURALIA conference, which was held in Prague in 1995. Sabine Felgenhauer-Schmiedt, Heiko Steuer, András Pálóczi Horváth, and Zdeněk Smetánka also contributed to the organisation of the conference and are, therefore, likewise regarded as founders of RURALIA.

The initiative was not without precedent. From 1957, the *Permanent European Conference for the Study of the Rural Landscape* had provided a forum through regular conferences and publications addressing settlement geography, history, ethnography, and archaeology across multiple chronological periods (Fig. 1).

Besides European international archaeological associations and conference series such as the *EAA* and *MERC*, which specifically addresses various fields of medieval archaeology, the closest institutional precedent for the establishment of *RURALIA* is the *Château Gaillard*, an association coordinating archaeological research on Western European castles since 1962. Similarly to the body of castle studies, the new association focusing on rural settlements – the *International Association for the Archaeology of Medieval Villages and the Rural Milieu* – was also organised through national representatives under the leadership of a president, who invited national delegates to biennial conferences based on predetermined national quotas. Over the past thirty years, however, *RURALIA* has evolved into a formally registered association in the Netherlands, operating under a constitution and a structured governing body as the *RURALIA European Association for Medieval and Post-Medieval Rural Archaeology*. The current president, Catarina Tente (Portugal), is supported by a vice-president, two secretaries, and two treasurers. National representatives continue to play a central role within the *General Board* by maintaining contact with archaeologists in their respective countries, facilitating the dissemination of information about conferences and helping to edit conference proceedings. The number of countries represented within the association has been steadily increasing; today *RURALIA* comprises researchers from over twenty European nations (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. The founding generation of RURALIA in Vyžlovka, Czech Republic, in 2002

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Fig. 2. The General Board at the 2025 conference in Klodzko (Poland)

Hungarian medieval archaeologists have been actively involved in the work of *RURALIA* from its very beginning. András Pálóczi Horváth represented Hungarian archaeology at the inaugural conference in Prague in 1995 and served as the national representative of Hungary until 2011. He was subsequently succeeded by Miklós Takács, followed by Csilla Zatykó, and since 2025 Tibor Rácz has been the national representative. Between 2005 and 2019, Miklós Takács also served as secretary of the association; in this position, he was succeeded by Csilla Zatykó, who has been vice-president of *RURALIA* since 2025.³

The main activity of the *RURALIA* Association is organising biennial conferences around themes that vary from event to event. The primary objectives of these meetings are to strengthen professional exchange, promote comparative research, and facilitate the dissemination of archaeological results across disciplinary boundaries. The thematic and chronological scope of the conferences ranges from the Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages to the Late Middle Ages and the early modern period. While the first conferences were predominantly defined by French, British, and German scholarship, participation has gradually become more balanced; today the events are characterised by a broad European representation. Since 2011, the original national quotas and the limited system of invitational participation has been replaced by an open call for papers, allowing wider participation. Although presentations were initially delivered in English, German, and French, by now English has become the primary language of communication. Through these organisational changes and the introduction of a scholarship program, the association seeks to encourage the active involvement of early-career researchers and to ensure the continuous renewal of the *RURALIA* community (Fig. 3).

It is a fundamental feature of the week-long conferences held at rural locations across Europe - and a core element of *RURALIA*'s community philosophy - that in addition to scholarly discussions, participants also engage in the cultivation of lasting professional networks through shared meals and field excursions, that in many cases lead to strong friendships. The events typically attract fifty to sixty archaeologists from a wide range of European countries; the thematic scope of the presentations is correspondingly diverse. In its sixteen conferences, *RURALIA* has addressed such varied topics as the archaeology of buildings and

³ Recurring Hungarian participants at *Ruralia* conferences: Mária Béres, László Ferenczi, Bianka Gina Kovács, Nikolett Lukács, András Pálóczi Horváth, Tibor Rácz, Tibor Sabján, Edit Sárosi, Miklós Takács, Edit Tari, Mária Vargha, and Csilla Zatykó.



Fig. 3. Participants at the RURALIA XVI conference in Fredrikstad (Norway) in 2023

castles, water management, seasonal settlements and marginal landscapes, current methodological issues in settlement archaeology, agricultural history, household archaeology, food production and consumption, rural markets and fairs, and the dynamic relationships between urban and rural environments across different regions of Europe:

2025, RURALIA XVI, **Kłodzko** (Poland) – “Countryside and towns. Rural settlements in the context of urban hinterlands in the medieval and modern periods”

2023, RURALIA XV, **Fredrikstad** (Norway) – “Farmers’ trade and markets. Social and economic interaction in the medieval and early modern European countryside”

2021, RURALIA XIV, **Viseu** (Portugal) – “Household goods in the European medieval and early modern countryside”

2019, RURALIA XIII, **Stirling** (Scotland) – “Seasonal settlement in the medieval and early modern countryside”

2017, RURALIA XII, **Kilkenny** (Ireland) – “Transitions and transformation in the medieval and early modern countryside / Wandel und Transformation im mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen ländlichen Raum / Transitions et Transformations des Campagnes Médiévales et Modernes”

2015, RURALIA XI, **Clervaux** (Luxembourg) – “Religion, cults and rituals in the medieval rural environment / Religion, Kult und Rituale in der mittelalterlichen bäuerlichen Umgebung / Religion, cultes et rituels en milieu rural médiéval”

2013, RURALIA X, **Smolenice Castle** (Slovakia) – “Agrarian technology in the medieval landscape / Agrartechnologien / Technologies agraires”

2011, RURALIA IX, **Göttz**, (Vorarlberg, Austria) – “Hierarchies in rural settlements”

2009, RURALIA VIII, **Lorca** (prov. Murcia, Spain) – “Processing, storage, and distribution of food – Food in the medieval rural environment”

2007, RURALIA VII, **Cardiff** (Wales, U.K.) – “Medieval rural settlement in marginal landscapes / Peuplement rural dans les territoires marginaux au Moyen Âge”

2005, RURALIA VI, Szentendre, **Dobogókő** (Hungary) – “Arts and crafts in medieval rural environment / L’artisanat rural dans le monde medieval”

2003, RURALIA V, **Lyon** (France) – “The use of water in the rural environment during the Middle Ages / Usages de l’eau en milieu rural au Moyen Age”

2001, RURALIA IV, **Bederkesa** (east of Bremerhaven, Germany) – “The peasant house. From the Migration Period to the oldest buildings still standing / La maison paysanne. De l’époque des migrations aux exemples les plus anciens conservés”

1999, RURALIA III, **Maynooth** (Ireland) – “Dispersed and nucleated medieval rural settlements”

1997, RURALIA II, **Spa** (Belgium) – “Social and economic aspects of medieval rural settlements”

1995, RURALIA I, **Prague** (Czech Republic) – “Overview of the position and tradition of rural archaeology”

Owing to the efforts of the Hungarian national representatives, Hungarian archaeologists have traditionally been present at *RURALIA* conferences in significant numbers. Not only do these events provide an essential forum for professional knowledge exchange, but they also offer an important opportunity to integrate Hungarian research results into the international academic discourse. In 2005, the sixth *RURALIA* conference, entitled *Arts and Crafts in the Medieval Rural Environment*, was organised in Szentendre and Dobogókő by the Hungarian community, including András Pálóczi Horváth, Tibor Sabján, Miklós Takács, and their colleagues. The conference created a platform for a broader range of Hungarian researchers to

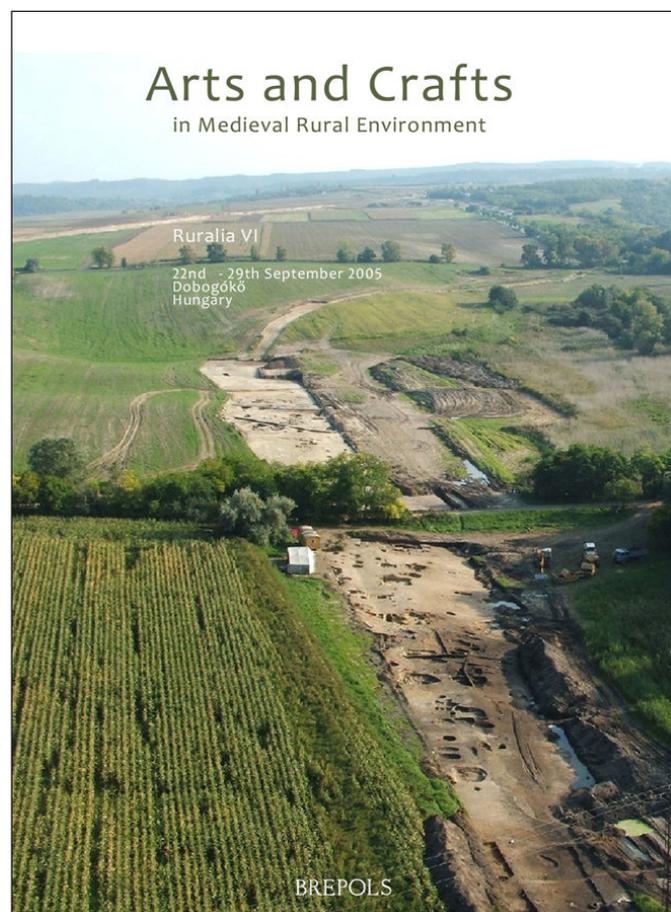


Fig. 4. Cover of the proceedings of the RURALIA VI conference in Szentendre and Dobogókő (2005)



Fig. 5. Participants at the VI RURALIA conference in Hollókő

present their work, while also enabling members of the *RURALIA* network to visit key Hungarian sites closely connected to the conference theme (Figs. 4–5).

The peer-reviewed volumes containing the papers and posters presented at the conferences are always published before the subsequent meeting. *RURALIA* has benefited greatly from the fact that the editorial work for the initial volumes was undertaken by the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague: Petr Som-

mer and Zdeněk Smetánka coordinated publication and distribution, while Jan Klápště served as editor of the first ten volumes of the Rurality series. The conference proceedings were later published by Brepols, and from 2017 onwards by Sidestone. In accordance with international standards of scholarly publishing, the volumes are available in both printed and e-book formats. The first five conference proceedings can be downloaded free of charge from the *RURALIA* website, while volumes published since 2017 are also freely accessible via the Sidestone platform.⁴

In addition to the dedicated efforts of the association's founders, the leadership of Claudia Theune, who served as president between 2011 and 2025, made a significant contribution to establishing *RURALIA* as a widely recognised and internationally respected organisation. In addition, the thematic orientation of the conferences has been significantly shaping research agendas in the archaeology of medieval and post-medieval rural settlements.

⁴ Rurality: <http://rurality2.ff.cuni.cz/index.php/publications/>; Sidestone Press: <https://www.sidestone.com/series/rurality>