THE FORTIFIED CHURCHES FROM SOUTH TRANSYLVANIA

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Transylvania (Erdély in Hungarian, Siebenbürgen in German) is the historical region located in central Romania. Bounded on the east and south by the Carpathian mountain range, historical Transylvania extended in the west to the Apuseni Mountains; however, the term sometimes encompasses not only Transylvania proper, but also the historical regions of Crişana, Maramureş, and (Romanian) Banat.

The period which we will spoke about begins in mid 12th century and ends in the 16th century, although there is more information about the Saxon fortified churches after this century. In 12th-13th we can speak about emigration like as a specifically German phenomenon. German emigration took place in the final stage of the Hungarian feudalism entering in the country. Hungarian penetration encountered, as is known, many obstacles in Transylvania. The conquest of Transylvania by the Hungarian kings has been done in stages because of the military Romanian opposition. On the other hand, there were many incursions in north of Pechenegs and Cumans who lived at the Lower Danube and started arriving in Transylvania. Together with Romanians they oppose the entry of Hungarians, and the danger is extended through the Tartar invasion until the end of the 13th century. While the Hungarian Crown have conquered the whole territory of Transylvania, it was interested to defend the kingdom against enemy invasion from the East.

I. SAXON COLONIZATION IN TRANSYLVANIA

The Saxons left their native places in Germany (Flanders, Saxony, Bavaria, and the Rhine and Mosel rivers) and were settled in Transylvania since the mid 12th century together with a small part of Hungarian population called “Secui”. Latest researches speak about a first group of German settlers who came from Flanders - as evidence, in the oldest documents are mentioned as "Flandrenses". Another group, known in the documents as Theutonici were peasants and craftsmen from the villages and towns of the Rhine and Mosel region, arrived in Transylvania in the second stage. The largest group, arrived here at the end of the 12th century. It is known as the Saxons (Saxonese) originating from the right of the Rhine (province of Saxony). From this group, which imposed its traditional lifestyle, habits, institutions, legal forms of social organization among all the settlers, drawn, we mention the generic name of Saxons. After the year 1206, nominal expression "saxones" is generalized in almost all documents relating initial privileges.
confirmation and reconfirmation of the first kings (Geza II, Bela III and Andrew II, the latter being the author of the 1224 diploma privileges - Andreanum or "Golden Bull" of the Saxons).

From the first step of colonization also come the groups sitting in the Sibiu area, probably in the middle of the 12th century under the reign of King Geza II (1141-1161). In addition, Crown has chosen a territory extended between Orăștie and Baraolt, which shows the original purpose - military guarding of the southern border of Carpathians line. Later in the 13th century there were settlements on the north side of the province, in parts of Sighisoara and Medias, here were areas of Hungarian nobles. Colonization in the Province of Sibiu starts in the time of King Geza II (1141-1162), and it is based on the reference of King’s Andrew II diploma in 1224. This document was issued to ensure the protection and safety of the recently conquered royal lands. The original document from Geza II which called German settlers is not known, so that it can not fit chronologically early Saxon settlement than approximately: around the year 1150. It is assumed that in the first phase of settlement, settlers were preoccupied with ensuring their daily time needed. We think that it needs one or two generations to build the first ecclesiastical stone church, knowing that building such of church is a lengthy and costly undertaking. It seems that they were satisfied with the temporary churches of wood, or raising the necessary cult chapel, built rudimentary in stone.

At the end of the 12th century it is organized The Church of Sibiu by Pope Celestine III - it was first mentioned on 20 December 1191 as “Ecclesia Theutonicorum Ultrasilvanorum" - this implies the existence, at that time, of a number of ecclesiastical buildings, probably of wood, although archaeological excavations have not revealed a simpler example of wooden church built in this area earlier. If there were wooden churches, until the 12th century most of them were replaced by stone churches.

Storage buildings and archaeological research led to the conclusion that the oldest stone church in the Saxon royal land - especially in the surroundings of Sibiu were built only during the first decades of the 13th century and probably only a few communities recently managed to finish the building. In Sibiu region Saxon settlers have build so called short basilica, with three naves separated by columns linked with strong rectangular masonry arches. On the east entered, the basilica is usually preceded with a semicircular apse with a square choir main nave, and the other two naves are provided with smaller apse. This feature of the basilicas with chorus square and semicircular apse located in the east side of the ship, is common in the lower Rhine valley, rarest in the upper Rhine valley and widespread in central Germany, but examples are quite numerous in south-east of Germany, where we can find Baumburg church, dated 1156 (the oldest dated monuments of this kind), church Tegernsee (undated) and Benedictine monastery church, from Faurndau (after 1220). The specific plan of this group does not appear in Hungary until after the Mongol invasion, the oldest example being Benedictine church from Ják. It can be inferred that the Saxons called masters of Bavaria and Austria that came directly in Transylvania.
The oldest basilicas are today in the surroundings of Sibiu, the center of the first area settled on royal land. In any city where was Saxon inhabitants, except Cisnădie and Sebes were not maintained Romanesque basilica, since these buildings, erected in the first century after colonization, have never matched the growing population, being replaced by spacious Gothic buildings.

II. ROMANESQUE CHURCH

1. Cisnădie (germ. Heltau)

Lutheran Church, formerly dedicated to St. Walpurga, was built at the turn of 12th-13th centuries, as a Romanesque basilica, with the bell tower located in front of the west side and containing a central semicircular choir apse, flanked by collateral agreements with small apse (the small apse from north side of the church was later incorporated in the chapel of the 14th century).

Massive Romanesque tower, 59 meters high, has the first two floors cross vaulted and the access is through stairs build in the walls that measure three meters on the ground floor; on the fifth floor was set out a bell, and in the walls, eight twin windows are fitted, two on each side. From 1795 he was protected by the first lightning rod in Transylvania; and tower clock dates from 1868. The four corner towers are signs of judicial authority. The thieves had to pass through three lines of defense walls fitted with corridors to reach the heart of the fortress-church. The devastating Turkish attack from 1493 had mobilized the community to fortify even better the church. Many towers and bastions were built to enhance the safety of people, but over time many of them were destroyed. Romanesque church with three ships went through various changes, only the main portal wear the footprint of the Romanesque style.

Choir plan has a square and keeps the Romanesque cross vault. The south wall of the choir has an old Romanesque door built for priests, and on the north wall are kept store mural paintings from the Romanesque period: representations of St. Peter and St. Walpurga. The choir is separated from the nave by a semicircular opening Romanesque triumphal arch. Ships side communicates with the central nave by five semicircular arched openings supported on massive pillars of rectangular plan without capitals. In the SW of the church is a chapel with a circular plan embedded in a defense tower from 15th century, under which it was discovered in 1911, during restoration works, a ossuary. It can be, in this case, the rotunda church of the second half of the 12th century, later transformed into the chapel of the cemetery.

2. Cisnădioara (germ. Michelsberg)

It has been written a lot about the dating of Cisnădioara church, but the situation is even today shrouded in mystery. It is believed that the church existed in 1241 when the Tartar invasion took place in Transylvania, but the construction was far from being completed, existing
now only ships foundations. Church of the Citadel, once dedicated to St. Michael's is a short basilica with three naves, with two towers planned for the west facade, executed only in part. On the east, the church has a square choir and a semicircular apse, and in the right lateral, a small apse. In the south wall of the choir is built a door for the priests. Also in the choir are visible traces of wall paintings and consecration crosses are kept in several places in the church. The bottom tower rooms have cross vaults and floor access is made by stairs built into the walls. The lateral naves have cylindrical vaults and central nave has open roof structure. More than likely that the church receives a vaulted ceiling; the access was accomplished through the ladders previously remembered.

The church is made exclusively of stone, except the western front, where the profile is relatively rich portal framed by blind arcades. The wall around the church is equipped with a tower on the south part and was built in 13th century with battle aisle and battlements. The area could be well surveilled from above thanks to the Battle Passage. Gate Tower looks now more like nowadays as it is in ruins. In the courtyard there is a fountain that provides demand water for the community in the event of a prolonged siege. The northern part of the tower there was placed a few feet outside the precint wall and joined to it by a mobile bridge. The site can be found in several places round boulders, which are still mentioned around 1850 as the battle to keep the gallery to store the besiegers. According to oral tradition, each son had to bring, before the wedding, such a rock in the citadel.

But the piece de resistance of this church is the western portal, a rare beauty in this south area of Transylvania; standing out a unique Romanesque element: four columns with cubic capitals supporting cylindrical pins, embroidery consists of carefully carved spirals, ribbons dotted with pearls, palmettes. Only in certain places between elegant decorations you can still identify one chip carved. It seems that the portal dating from the second half of the 13th century has some Cistercian influence, since they noticed the presence of capital with proteomes.

III. CISTERCIAN ARCHITECTURE INFLUENCE

When we speak about Cistercian architecture in Transylvania, our references are confused with the description of the abbey from Cârța, but also with those few churches that it has influenced. Based on research conducted in 1982 in the northeastern corner of the monument from Cârța, the following conclusions can be drawn yet on the basis of archaeological materials and observations: in the first decade of the century XIII (1202), there has been started the building of a Romanesque basilica whose construction was stopped at one time. After this period of uncertain duration, construction was restarted with other craftsmen who have included in their plan a transept, and probably long-ships. Relatively precise dating of the foundation of this Cistercian monastery is facilitated by a document issued by the Hungarian royal chancery in 1223. From the text of the royal diplomas results that this territory, where was founded and built the abbey Cârța, is bounded by Olt River on the north, Arpaş River to the east, Cârţișoara river to the west, and Southern Carpathians (Fagaras Mountains) to the south - has been donated by
King Andrew II of Hungary (1205-1235), for the salvation of his soul, through Benedict, when he was prince of Transylvania.

The first monastery buildings were constructed, according to customs of the Cistercian order of perishable material, probably wood. They can be dated with relative safety from 1205-1206. Several years later, between ca. 1210-1215, near the wooden temporary buildings a stone chapel was built, so-called oratorio.

Stone construction of the monastery begins a little later, in the '20s of the 13th century around the year 1230. Monastery building was done in two main phases of implementation, interspersed chronologically great Tatar invasion in 1241. In the first phase of construction, which features exhibits stylistic tribute to later Romanesque style, it outlined the general plan of the monastery, its inner walls that delimited the court is raised to a height of 3-4 m above the modern field. In 1260, after censoring caused by the Mongol invasion in spring 1241, construction will resume under a new architect, formed in mature Gothic atmosphere. At this stage there is the dismantling of the old oratory of stone, whose foundations were built in the north wing of the transept with its pair of chapels and, in part, the choir with polygonal apse. By 1300 the eastern wing of the monastery and church books were already completed, finishing works and construction of the southern wing of the abbey continued for about two decades. Architect and masons workshop, active at Cârța after the Mongol invasion in 1241 had a major contribution in disseminating the spirit and form of Gothic art in the 13th century in Transylvania.

IV. GOTHIC CHURCHES

Biertan

Biertan is the most impressive fortified Saxon church from Transylvania. Moreover, between 1572 and 1867, in Biertan was the Evangelical Lutheran bishopric of Transylvania. Here we can find one of the most important architectural religious and military complex from Transylvania. The citadel, together with the imposing fortress-church hall dominates the entire settlement. The first church here was mentioned documentary in 1402 with the patronage of St. Mary. Also in this direction advocated frescoes inside the so-called Catholic tower iconography with a theme dominated by the Last Judgment. According to recent research, this bill would have a provincial style, with a mannerist infusion and late Renaissance style and can be dated to the first quarter of the 16th century. So it seems that the village had not had a Romanesque church, like many villages from this area.

The church was built until the late 15th century and the first quarter of the 16th century, various documents indicating payment for work by the year 1523. It is a vast Gothic edifice, a hall church with three aisles and polygonal altar in the choir, with a sacristy in the north. Unlike other similar churches, this church had not need some more fortification added in next period.
Thus, only one floor above the choir has made defense trays provided with fire. Instead, the church is impressive because it contains some interesting artistic elements. Among the star-shaped vaults we can note details of the choir arch and the gothic windows. Special doors and frames are in the north and south of the ship, containing a number of the new features style, Renaissance. The sacristy door leaf, decorated with parquetry, is dated since 1515 and has a special lock that one key works while a number of 15 bars that protrude in four directions in the frame of stone - perhaps the most interesting detail of the church Biertan. Citadel is presented as a fortress with three chambers, six towers and two bastions. The strongest is the interior enclosure, approximately oval in shape and has four towers. On the west side was built a road that ascends to the inside of the citadel, between two walls connected by balancing arches; the exterior wall is supported by numerous buttresses. In this section, the citadel is defended by four rounds of walls.

Amid the terrible anguish caused by the Ottoman invasions, self-defense measures have been extended and generalized in the village’s world, in the Saxon settlements. With the beginning aspect of isolated initiatives, strengthening rural phenomenon will gain impressive proportions in the late 15th century and especially in the next century. Transylvania had the largest number of peasant fortifications and fortified churches from European.

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