

**SHIFTING MATERIALITIES UNDER HABSBURG EXPANSION:  
THE EVOLUTION OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN MANOR HOUSE  
IN EARLY MODERNITY**

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## **Abstract**

In the following study, I will be exploring, on the one hand, the formative period and mental landscape in and through which Transylvanian aristocratic residences of the early modern period were designed and understood as both homes and symbols of power in the rural landscape. On the other hand, I will also be looking at these manor houses from a present-day perspective, aiming to understand how, historically, state-level monuments' preservation policies have been unable to treat such sites in their coherent contexts, resulting in their current situation as a critically endangered heritage field.

In reconstructing the early contexts of these sites, I will confront two sets of data: ego documents written by late seventeenth century Transylvanian aristocrats, followed by a combination of evaluations of their own residences and slightly later (early eighteenth century) noble houses.

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## Introduction

The following study is concerned in parallel with the early modern, respectively present day development of aristocratic residences and their surrounding cultural landscape in rural areas of Transylvania, Romania. Throughout its pages, I intend to work on balancing these two different approaches in such a way that both areas of understanding may benefit.

The existing body of works written on aristocratic residences in Romania is, while not at all negligible, generally directed at a different category of residences, respectively based on a different set of approaches. That is, the buildings that have generally made the subject of research tend to be older, or grander than the ones in the present sample. The Transylvanian aristocratic residences that have undergone any form of research, however, tend to fall either in the box of traditional archaeology, or into that of art history, with a significant gap in research remaining between these study directions. Significant and coherent efforts towards the establishment of *Bauforschung* as a standalone discipline in the Romanian academic landscape have barely emerged in the past decade, with one such example being the recently published report on the princely palace in Alba Iulia<sup>1</sup> – itself part of the second volume of a publication concentrating on aristocratic residences of medieval and early modern origin.<sup>2</sup>

The generally newer and more modest historical houses that pepper much of the Transylvanian landscape, however, make it into such works less often; besides from primarily individual projects focusing on specific areas of high density in manor house numbers,<sup>3</sup> the tendency in

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<sup>1</sup> Ileana Burnichioiu, “Incintele estice ale Palatului Principilor din Alba Iulia. Cercetări de parament din anii 2014-2017” [The eastern courts of the Princes’ Palace in Alba Iulia. Parietal investigations from the years 2014-2017], in *Palaces, castles and manor houses of Medieval and Early Modern times* (Cluj Napoca: Editura Mega, 2017), 97-138.

<sup>2</sup> Ileana Burnichioiu & Letiția Cosnean Nistor, *Palaces, castles and manor houses of Medieval and Early Modern times*, (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Anca-Raluca Majaru, “Reședințele nobiliare extraurbane din Banat în secolul al XIX-lea” [The extra-urban noble residences of the Banat in the nineteenth century]. Phd thesis, Universitatea de Arhitectură și Urbanism „Ion Mincu”, 2016.



research for such sites is for them to be development led – i.e., contracted research, often art historical in nature, as part of the process of state approval for restoration works.

Endeavours closer related to the manor houses concerned in this study are projects such as *Monumente Uitate*,<sup>4</sup> a large, NGO-based effort towards cataloguing noble ensembles in the rural areas of Romania.

In this context, the main direction of this thesis is putting together primary sources, written and physical – i.e. the houses themselves – in order to understand the early modern context in which they were designed and created. Further on, archaeological observations and field notes together with previously published archaeological, art historical and historical studies will be employed in charting the evolution of this material culture genre into modernity. In particular, I aim at understanding how the Baroque, as the stylistic flagship of the Habsburg administration which took hold of Transylvania and its environs starting with the late seventeenth century, was slowly adopted into the noble residential architecture, in the detriment of Renaissance Transylvanian traditions in the field. In order to do this, the approach of the study has shifted the main area of concentration from a purely material culture and built environment analysis of the Transylvanian nobility, towards a study of the said group's small perspective (e.g. individual or immediate familial contexts) social history and the impact of these relations on their mobile and immobile materialities. Aside from this, the historic and geographic space in which it all comes together tends to be fragmented and marginalised by historical narratives, thus marking the need for filling at least some of the gaps in understanding.

A final note of particular importance is that for the purpose of this study, the portion of *Partium*<sup>5</sup> most looked at is that currently found within the Romanian borders, with particular attention

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<sup>4</sup> Forgotten Monuments – [monumenteuitate.org](http://monumenteuitate.org)

<sup>5</sup> While this will be expanded upon in the following pages, *Partium*, short for *Partium Regni Hungariae*, constituted the border counties between Transylvania proper and the rest of the Hungarian Kingdom – in the decades following the fall of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, these were attached to the Transylvanian principality, yet as a border region, had much contact with the Ottoman empire, and at times fell under its administration.

falling onto the Mureş river valley, a coherent cultural, geographic and ethnographic space on the western, intra-mountainous borders of Transylvania

The reason for this rather ahistorical sourcing is my long-term work in extra-urban aristocratic residences, which makes for the object of my parallel activity in the Cultural Heritage program. The reality of this built heritage genre in western Transylvania<sup>6</sup> is dire. This is anything but helped by the complexity and inherent lethargy of the legislative sets of historical monuments' protection that are active in each country. Being directly involved in the conservation, management and conversion of one such site in particular (the Konopi manor house, extensively written about in chapter IV), I perceive this study not only as a purely academic endeavour, but as a step in furthering my own understanding of aristocratic residences, with the aim of safeguarding the surviving ones for future generations. As a consequence of this – i.e., in order to ensure a specialised, real-world applicable end-result of this study, I am sadly in a situation where I must take in account the existence of current state borders, due to the different attitudes and legislations regarding historic houses present in each state.

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<sup>6</sup> And indeed, significantly worse than the noble residential heritage in Transylvania “proper”, where interest in conservation and/or revival has existed well in advance.

## Chapter I: the place, the people

The following chapter, or at least its contents, is a contextualising section, and I will be gathering the essential information on the main region studied in this dissertation, conventionally named *Partium*,<sup>7</sup> with the Mureş river valley in particular, for the purpose of this work. Respectively, it will provide, as far as currently available primary sources allow, with of the nobility as a whole in the region.

In terms of periodisation, it will roughly concern the time frame between the fall of the Hungarian Kingdom and the integration of the former eastern Hungarian provinces into the Habsburg Monarchy.

While far from being an exhaustive piece on the particularities of *Partium*, this chapter is meant to bring together various sources that touch upon the area but are rarely too deeply concerned with it. Whether viewed as a highly ambiguous province between the Transylvanian Principality and Ottoman Hungary,<sup>8</sup> or later on as a set of buffer counties between Transylvania and the bulk of the Hungarian Kingdom, *Partium* tends to stray to peripheral stations in most works concerning its more clearly defined neighbours. This historically centrifugal tendency of *Partium* is in itself noteworthy and is echoed in multiple areas, part of which will be discussed in a later section looking at noble residential heritage.

### I.1 *Partium*: a fascinating neither, nor

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<sup>7</sup> Teréz Oborni, “Le Royaume Des Szapolyai, du Royaume de Hongrie Orientale à La Principauté de Transylvanie (1541-1571).”, *Histoire, Économie et Société* 34, no. 3 (2015): 65–77, stemming from the title of the Transylvanian Prince as established at Speyer in 1570.

<sup>8</sup> Gábor Barta, “The Emergence of the principality and its First Crises (1526-1606),” in *History of Transylvania*, (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado 1994), 247-300.

Prior to gathering the remarks of Gábor Barta<sup>9</sup> and others who have touched upon the late medieval evolution of the region, an integration into the larger European context is required, an attempt at bringing together a conflicting and generally unequally represented territory.

The path towards something akin to statehood and far greater autonomy of Transylvania is one that begins with the decline of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary.<sup>10</sup> With the heavy blow delivered by the armies of Suleyman I at Mohács in 1526, the situation of the realm was close to critical, and not due to the Ottoman armies alone. Although victorious, these had proceeded to temporarily leave Hungary not long after the battles had ended; it was however the internal fighting for the empty throne of the heavily damaged country that eased the breaking up of the kingdom into three portions.<sup>11</sup>

Following this, the North-Western counties together with Upper Hungary were essentially constituted into a rump state governed by the Habsburgs as “Royal Hungary”; the central areas were fully integrated as provinces of the Ottoman Empire, with Buda being finally occupied in 1541, remaining so for the next century and a half; and finally, Eastern Hungary, with the province of Transylvania as its core, which continued to exist as an independent principality, though under the Sultan's sphere of influence. While this perception about the beginning of self-contained Transylvanian statehood appears common, it should be noted that the principality would function with significant fluctuations in its degree of autonomy, as well as within a continual process of negotiation with both the Ottomans, as well as with the Habsburgs,<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Gábor Barta, “The Emergence of the principality and its First Crises (1526-1606),” In *History of Transylvania*, (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó 1994, 247-300.

<sup>10</sup> Jan de Maere, “The Military History of the Pashalik Transylvania in the XVI & XVIIth Century.” Paper presented at Short Military History of the Pashalik-Principality Transylvania in the XVIth & XVIIth centuries, Flanderhof Manor, Romania, December 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Barta, “The Emergence,” 250.

<sup>12</sup> Following the results of the disastrous quarrelling for the Hungarian thrown after Mohács, some of the high aristocracy and clerics had stopped taking independent statehood as a given; much of this activity of pleasing either the Porte or the Hofburg was inaugurated by György Fráter, whose duplicitous external policies, whether as Bishop of Nagyvárád or later as Voivode of Transylvania, were perpetuated through much of the duration of the semi-independent principality.

especially given the period of the two Hungarian kings – one in Royal, and one in Eastern Hungary.

Much of these inconsistencies were put to rest with the signing of the 1570 Treaty of Speyer, where the dual kingship issue was solved through the official establishment of the Transylvanian Principality, the ruler of which received the title *Princeps Transylvaniae et Partium Regni Hungariae Anexarum*.<sup>13</sup> While certainly tenuous, the resulting principality tended to appear stable, and rather an area of refuge for much of the cultural currents less than welcome in the neighbouring Ottoman and Habsburg lands.<sup>14</sup>

Yet the essential development that follows the trisection of the Hungarian Kingdom and the establishment of the autonomous principality is the appearance of the *Partium*. Bela Köpeczi gives the territory and population of Transylvania towards the end of the sixteenth century as 100.000 square km and about 955.000 souls.<sup>15</sup> Of this total, however, the stable core of the principality would in fact comprise a mere 60.000 square km and 650.000 inhabitants.<sup>16</sup> The rest of these numbers would be found in the western and north-western border counties generally known as *Partium Regni Hungariae*, as lastly designated at the Treaty of Speyer; while populous and fertile, *Partium* remained somewhat of a distant satellite province to the principality, due to the frequency of external attacks – such as the 1594 pillaging by the Crimean Tatars<sup>17</sup> and parts of these counties changing hands relatively often. This uncertainty only deteriorated in time, with a significant proportion of *Partium* coming under direct Ottoman administration throughout the seventeenth century.

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<sup>13</sup>Oborni, “Le Royaume,” Latin for “Prince of Transylvania and of the annexed parts of the Kingdom of Hungary.”

<sup>14</sup>As an example, it is the religious-confessional fragmentation that particularly contrasts with the situation in the Habsburg lands – the counter-reform is essentially a political taboo in the principality.

<sup>15</sup>Bela Köpeczi, *Kurze Geschichte Siebenbürgens*, (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1990), 270.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> de Maere, “The Military History,” 3.

## I.2 Noble society in and around the Principality

The break-up of the Hungarian Kingdom involved deep changes in the functional patterns of its successor or inheriting polities, as the feudal model of the old kingdom had to be adapted to varying local realities.<sup>18</sup> Of course, these structural changes in functioning principles and behaviour of the state – in fact, an entire renewal – would be necessarily mirrored at least by the politically active segment of the population. The period of accommodation to newly found autonomy, spanning the few decades following the partition, brought about a set of relevant changes to the power balance in the province – effectively ending the roughly equal share of power in the old system of feudal estates.<sup>19</sup> The leading feudal estates so far had been the nobility, the Saxon burghs and districts represented in the *Universitas*, and the Szeklers, who preserved a more or less harmonious balance together with the voivode, as the figure of central authority.<sup>20</sup>

However, the in-fighting of the Szekler counties significantly weakened their influence, and the general tendency of the Saxons towards supporting the currently distant Habsburg cause led to a form of political passivism, and finally, the voivode disappearing as an office.<sup>21</sup> The previously complex power-sharing operation thus transformed into a much-simplified feudal system, in which the nobility was initially left with rather little opposition – though the nobility was far from unified, with the Principality tending to act at this point of intense activity by the Reformation as a legally tolerant polity<sup>22</sup> for most Christian traditional confessions and newly forming groups.

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<sup>18</sup> Gábor Barta, and Béla Köpeczi, “The ruling class”, in *History of Transylvania*, (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó 1994), 716.

<sup>19</sup> Barta & Köpeczi, “The ruling class,” 722.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Gábor Kármán, *Confession and Politics in the Principality of Transylvania, 1644-1657*, (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020).

In a way, this simplification of the feudal system in a historically complex province brought the local aristocracy closer to the status their counterparts from larger Hungary had enjoyed, or indeed as in much of the continent. *Grosso modo*, the functional pattern in Transylvanian noble estates was not different from the one in Hungary: namely, that an estate had to be self-sufficient, ensuring whatever supplies necessary to satisfy both the landowner's household, and the households of the villeins.<sup>23</sup> The grand difference between the Transylvanian nobility and the main aristocracy of the old Hungarian Kingdom, as well as of Royal Hungary, was in fact the much smaller scale that everything fitted in:<sup>24</sup> the few properties that could conventionally be considered grand domains, such as that of Alba Iulia<sup>25</sup> belonged in fact to the princely exchequer, rather than to any of the grand (on local scale) landowners.<sup>26</sup> This in itself entails an unusually small scale of production per total, as well as, to some extent, a shortage of money – with payment within and without the individual manorial estates often being in kind, and particularly in wheat,<sup>27</sup> of which the principality never produced exceeding amounts, leading to its virtual transformation in the later sixteenth century into a form of currency.

The unusual fragmentation of noble manorial holdings – all the more so given that Hungarian nobility traditionally applied the principle of primogeniture<sup>28</sup> in its inheritance laws – at the beginning of the 1600's, and so on the brink of what could be called the Transylvanian century, is clearly laid out in Köpeczi's volumes.<sup>29</sup> In the entire principality, most of the land was owned by 350-400 families, where 15% held no more than three bound villages, and only two families held conventionally large landed estates – the Losoncz branch of the Bánffy family.

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<sup>23</sup> In the Transylvanian case, it is most commonly applied with the strict definition of tenant farmers bonded to the landowner.

<sup>24</sup> Barta & Köpeczi, "The ruling class," 723.

<sup>25</sup> In Hungarian, Gyulafehérvár

<sup>26</sup> Barta & Köpeczi, "The ruling class," 723.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *I.e.*, the first-born son essentially inherits all, so as to avoid fragmentation of the family landed wealth.

<sup>29</sup> Barta & Köpeczi, "The ruling class," 721.

Although far from rivalling with the levels of other European nobles, Transylvanian aristocrats were in no way below engaging in conspicuous consumption. Their attitudes towards and patterns of representation, however, set them apart – and it is not improbable to state that these representation behaviours were to a great degree shaped by the extended period of reduced contact with the nobility outside of the Ottoman sphere of influence. As will be later on examined in ego documents by such individuals as Miklós Bethlen or Péter Apor, the Transylvanian aristocrat of the 1600's appears attached to late images of the Renaissance, and simultaneously quite dismissive of the Baroque and the materiality that it proposes.<sup>30</sup>

With the situation in the stable core of the Principality being as such, it is not bold to assume that the nobles of *Partium* would inherit a similar baseline situation, albeit with the added complexities of the province's inherent instability.

The first decades after the partition are particularly illustrative of how the chief consistency in the area lay with change – and that is due to the territorial issues that remained mostly unsolved until the treaty of Speyer. The development of this chaotic interim particular to the historical county of Bihar, centrally disposed within the *Partium*, is covered in Ede Reiszig's monograph on the Bihar county,<sup>31</sup> or in Jenő Szentkláray's similar work on Temes county<sup>32</sup> – towards the south of the “buffer zone.” As such, it is explained that with the partition, the two resulting Hungarian monarchs both began to seek support, including against each other, by granting lands – it was often the case with landed grants from the *Partium* that the land subject to the grant was either already part of specific domains, or outright under the rule of the opposition – in the

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<sup>30</sup> Péter Apor, *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae*. Translated by Bernard Adams. London: Kegan Paul. 2003. Apor summarises the more radical opinion of Hungarian noblemen of the early days of Transylvanian Habsburg dominion in his book *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae*: it is not the imperial taxes that are bankrupting Transylvania, but the useless ornamentation of your wives and daughters.

<sup>31</sup> Ede Reiszig, "Bihar vármegye nemes családai" [Noble families of the Bihar county], in *Magyarország vármegyéi és városai: Bihar vármegye és Nagyvárad*, ed. Samu Borovszky (Budapest, 1904), 599-651.

<sup>32</sup> Jenő Szentkláray, "Temes Vármegye Története" [History of Temes county], in *Magyarország vármegyéi és városai: Temes vármegye és Temesvár*, ed. Samu Borovszky (Budapest, 1910), 225-395.



case of Bihar, though, it was more common than not for the advantaged position to be that of the Transylvanian monarch.<sup>33</sup> Grants of estates from Bihar, for example, offered in 1527-1532 by the Habsburg King Ferdinand to his supporters ended up as void, with the grantees being unable to occupy these at all.<sup>34</sup> More notable among these unfortunate receivers of the king's favour were Miklós Izdenczy, who had distinguished himself in defending the fortress of Eger in 1527, as well as the prelate and intellectual, future Primate of Hungary, Miklós Oláh<sup>35</sup> together with his brother.<sup>36</sup>

By the 1570 treaty, the county was mostly secured as a possession of the Principality, and in the hands of nobles or ecclesiastic institutions favourable to the prince.

Towards the south, however, the situation differed radically. The Mureş<sup>37</sup> river valley, with the Şoimoş fortress and free royal town of Lipova,<sup>38</sup> was a focal point for strategic and military developments early on. While initially Queen Isabella, the widow of the Hungarian king, moved into the fortress with her young son, future prince of Transylvania János Szapolyai between the fall of Buda (21<sup>st</sup> of August 1541), and until May the following year,<sup>39</sup> from then on Lipova would cease to be a stronghold for the principality. Throughout the ensuing decade, the fortress and district around it would change hands several times, ultimately becoming an Ottoman provincial seat with only brief episodes of Transylvanian rule.<sup>40</sup>

The uneasy state of equilibrium that Szapolyai had managed to reach fell apart with the Ottoman's demanding (and taking) of the fortresses of Becse and Becskerek.<sup>41</sup> This move was initially planned in order to provide direct communication routes between Belgrade and Szeged, but ended up affecting the neighbouring county to the south of the Mureş, Temes. With Lipa

<sup>33</sup> Reiszg, "Bihar vármegye története," 608.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Also often mentioned in historiography by his Latin name, Nicolaus Olahus.

<sup>36</sup> Reiszg, "Bihar vármegye története," 608.

<sup>37</sup> Maros in Hungarian.

<sup>38</sup> Solymosvár and Lipa in Hungarian.

<sup>39</sup> Szentkláray. "Temes Vármegye Története" 266.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>41</sup> Currently Novi Becej and Zrenjanin, Serbia – Barta, "The Emergence," 255.

itself being at times incorporated in said county, the question of the Temes area was simplified by the Ottomans quite significantly, given that they conquered much of it along the natural demarcation line of the river Mureş by mid-1552.<sup>42</sup> As such, the conflict of the two monarchs in the post-partition decades, while not extinguished per se, would dictate the affairs of the region to a lesser degree.

With areas of *Partium* falling variably under the rule of either the newly established Principality or that of the Porte, the situation once more stabilised – mostly to the satisfaction of the Ottomans. About the same time, the election of István Báthory as *Voivode*<sup>43</sup> of Transylvania in 1571 comes with one interesting detail: his family's estates, as well as his birthplace, were in the areas that became the *Partium*. Consequently, his attitude and actions were defined through a primarily precautionary stance towards the Ottoman neighbours as well as the looming Habsburg monarchy, even more so during his ulterior reign of Poland and Lithuania.<sup>44</sup>

This policy would continue throughout Báthory's reign and beyond, with this respite allowing for the successive administrative transformations which resulted, by the very early seventeenth century, in the political organization of the region from which the golden age of the Principality of Transylvania rose. This is the shape under which it was remembered well after its integration within the Habsburg realm, a good century later.

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<sup>42</sup> Szentkláray, "Temes Vármegye," 331.

<sup>43</sup> At least initially – throughout the next decade he would become Prince of Transylvania, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania.

<sup>44</sup> Barta, "The Emergence," 263.

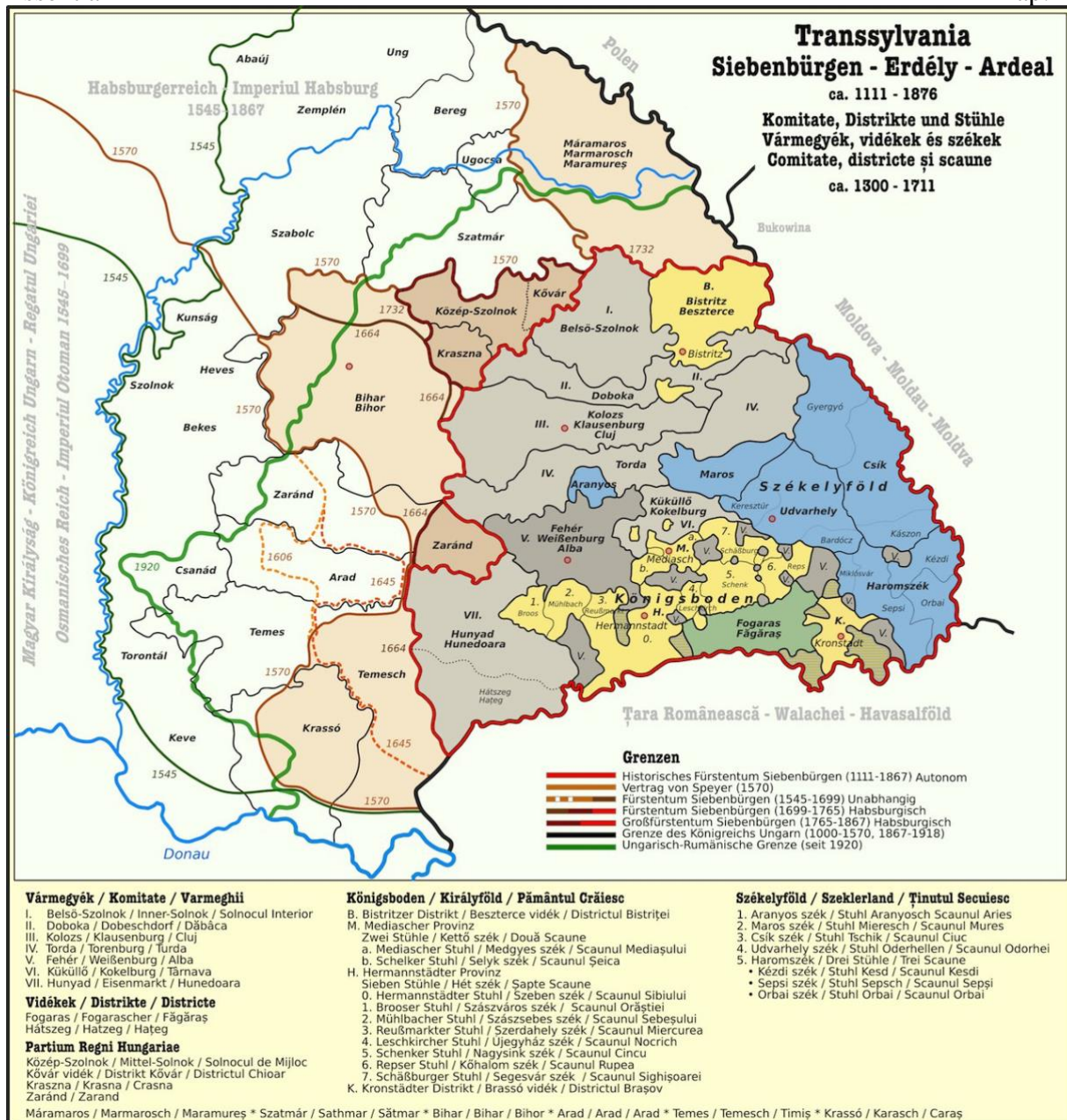


Figure 1: Map of Transylvania; Partium was variably constituted by the counties to the west of the borders of the principality, with the subdivision most discussed in this study, the area surrounding the Mureș valley, being mostly contained within the Arad county.

<sup>45</sup> Siebenbürgen 1300-1867, from Bela Köpeczi, *Kurze Geschichte Siebenbürgens*, (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1990).

## **Chapter II: The reception of the Austrian administration and culture by the Transylvanian nobility**

### **II.1 Introduction and focused contextualisation**

The meeting point of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the Transylvanian principality go through a massive process of political realigning. Namely, roughly the last two decades of the seventeenth century were marked by a decrease in the influence of its suzerain power, the Ottoman empire. Onwards, the last years of the same century and the first decade of the eighteenth involved the gradual integration of the province, as well as its western neighbouring counties, into the eastern crownlands of the Holy Roman Empire – that is, the hereditary possessions of the Habsburg monarchy.

It is no surprise that the shift of borders that brought Transylvania from the laissez-faire suzerainty<sup>46</sup> of the Ottomans under the arguably more centralised – or centralising, at the time – administration of the Habsburgs monarchs meant more than a decrease in the level of autonomy, but a sweeping wave of changes, ranging from areas such as economic, cultural, and not much later, demographic.<sup>47</sup>

For the time being<sup>48</sup>, let us concentrate on the political spectrum of this grand shift. With the first Imperial troops stationed in Transylvania – as they wintered there in 1687-1688<sup>49</sup> – the erosion of the principality's autonomy, and the power of the nobility implicitly, was quite swift. Although with the privilege of hindsight, Miklós Bethlen describes the atmosphere of the period

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<sup>46</sup> This, in the context where the situation of Transylvania under the Ottomans, while with some degree of variation, is often described as semi-autonomous.

<sup>47</sup> By this I refer, of course, to the waves of German-speaking colonists that would, from the 1730's onward, form the Roman-Catholic Donauschwaben communities concentrated in the Banat and Partium, as well as the Protestant Landler communities in Central Transylvania.

<sup>48</sup> And for the sake of clarity – after all, the primary sources of this chapter may be seen as a consequence of the sidelining of the old political and social elite of the land by the new administration.

<sup>49</sup> Agnes R. Várkonyi, "The End of Turkish Rule in Transylvania and the Reunification of Hungary (1660-1711)," in *History of Transylvania* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1994), 370.

as somewhat polarised: that is, an oscillation between those thankful for the imperials' presence, as an Ottoman push for the recovery of lost power was in check, respectively those – amongst whom he counts himself – who knew that the imperial troops were there to stay.<sup>50</sup>

Assurances were sought by the principality and confirmed by imperial representatives on repeated occasions<sup>51</sup> regarding the retention of the former's independence. However, the actions of the imperial troops, particularly during General Antonio Caraffa's leadership, showed that the emperor's intentions were quite the opposite. Out of the 1686 agreement,<sup>52</sup> where emperor Leopold I essentially assured prince Mihály Apafi of the preservation of autonomy on most plans, soon only the freedom of religion would be, at least on paper, kept.<sup>53</sup> By the death of the prince, in 1690, and subsequent<sup>54</sup> confusion as to succession, the commander in chief of the imperial troops had essentially become a military governor, with the representatives of the Estates reduced to a "shadow government."<sup>55</sup>

This, in as few words as possible whilst retaining the essential, is the factual narrative of the period in which the writings we will be looking at in this chapter were produced.

## II.2 The ego-documents.

The literary phenomenon that took off following the Habsburg annexation of Transylvania is remarkable, and constituted of a rather conspicuous and roughly contemporary genre of aristocratic memoirs – most of them being written from the last decade of the seventeenth

<sup>50</sup> Nicolae Bethlen, *Descrierea vieții sale de către el însuși* [The description of his life according to himself], translated by Francisc Pap (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință. 2004), 204.

<sup>51</sup> Várkonyi, "The End," 369-371.

<sup>52</sup> Partly negotiated and drafted by Miklós Bethlen, chancellor of the principality at the time.

<sup>53</sup> Várkonyi, "The End," 370.

<sup>54</sup> And to great extent, Ottoman fueled, with the Porte's quick move to proclaim their former prisoner, Imre Thököly, as the new prince – Várkonyi, "The End," 371.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

century, and in the first decades of the eighteenth.<sup>56</sup> While these writings are a fascinating collection, they cannot exactly be considered a school of writing: with one likely exception, all were published posthumously, sometimes more than a century after the author's passing. As such, these writings are obviously well beyond the scope of diary writing, but into that of autobiography, memoir and in one distinct case social history.<sup>57</sup> They were likely produced without the authors being aware of each other's undertaking, although they often occur in each other's writings. The corpus is therefore quite lacking in uniformity, with great differences in terms of writing style and approach – yet as an element of unity, they all touch upon the issue of Transylvania's recent (at their time) changes, with varying degrees of negativity and nostalgia.

In reconstructing the image that Transylvanian aristocrats had of what essentially constituted a return to mainstream (Central-) European political and cultural life,<sup>58</sup> and how this influenced and came to be mirrored in the residential architecture of the nobility,<sup>59</sup> these ego-documents are of irreplaceable value.

The ones chiefly concerned here are Count Miklós Bethlen's *Description of his life told by himself*, and Baron Péter Apor's *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae*, which will each constitute a section. Parts of Kelemen Mikes's *Letters from Turkey* and Countess Kata Bethlen's *Short description of Countess Kata Bethlen's life by herself*, while dated later than the previous two, will be used in the discussion section, aiding as material for comparison and contrast where possible.

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<sup>56</sup> Bernard Adams, "Introduction," in *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae*, translated by Bernard Adams (London: Paul Kegan. 2003).

<sup>57</sup> This would be Péter Apor's writing, which is introduced by the author and structured closer in spirit to a salvage-ethnography, rather than a plain memoir.

<sup>58</sup> At least, as described by Sándor Tonk (in Bernard Adams' introduction to Péter Apor) – this of course relates to the European culture of a more Western stock, which Sándor Tonk uses to somewhat ground the pessimism of Apor's lament.

<sup>59</sup> The physical manifestation of these political shifts, and their reception or rejection by aristocrats make the object of the following chapter, which is an analysis of the materiality of noble country houses dated to before and after the annexation.

## II.2.A. Count Miklós Bethlen

Count Miklós Bethlen was born at Kisbún<sup>60</sup> in 1642 as the only son of Chancellor of Transylvania, Count János Bethlen. Heir to one of the great aristocratic families of Transylvania, he received good education – initially in Cluj and Alba Iulia, including from the Calvinist pedagogue and thinker János Csere Apáczai, whom he describes affectionately in his book. Later on, he would study in Vienna, Nuremberg, Heidelberg, Utrecht, Leiden, London and Paris – travels which he describes sparsely. At age 25, having returned home, he enters politics under the guidance of the powerful Mihály Teleki, under the reign of Mihály Apafi. With the 1690 death of the former, Bethlen's ascent to the position of Chancellor of the Principality was assured. Little over a decade later, after having been directly active in the process of Transylvania's transformation into a Habsburg possession, Bethlen is arrested by the imperial authorities, eventually spending the remainder of his years in Viennese exile, passing away in 1716.

Bethlen's book, as made evident from its title,<sup>61</sup> is closer among these ego-writings to what can be safely called an autobiographic work. Finished in 1708-1710,<sup>62</sup> the book was written during Bethlen's later years, during the home arrest in which he spent his last decade of life.

From the writings, Bethlen appears as deeply religious<sup>63</sup> and classically educated – the text is of incredible descriptive richness, and interspersed quite heavily with fragments of biblical wisdom that Bethlen punctuates his opinions with, respectively with portions of greatly varying length in Latin. The latter are, more often than not, quotes from his conversations, regardless

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<sup>60</sup> Țopa, Mureș county; Alsóbún in current Hungarian.

<sup>61</sup> Bethlen, *Descrierea*.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> It is noteworthy that Miklós Bethlen was a Protestant – something that did not quite come to his aid in his opposition to the Habsburg expansion.

whether they belong to him or the interlocutor, but certainly being employed to underline his education.

The book runs through the previous sixty years of his life, prior to the moment of writing; the historical period of interest to the current work, however, are to be found quarter way through the second half.

Bethlen concentrates on narrating the historical events he had witnessed, mostly through the medium of a highly detailed narrative flow. While this does not produce the surprising social history which we can observe in the following section, it does fill an information gap in terms of inter-confessional relations during his lifetime – and how in the comparatively peaceful times of the Principality, inter-confessional competition mostly took the form of the old families funding the constructions of churches and schools pertaining to their own confession.

While the issue of confessional freedom comes up often and turns darker when the Catholic Habsburg Monarchy becomes involved – and Count Bethlen does make increasingly frequent mentions of frictions – his most poignant complaint concerning the new confessional attitudes in Transylvania is one of his more cautious ones. Of course, this is something we can easily attribute to his Protestant background.

In the same vein, it should be noted that Bethlen makes fairly often appeals to history – though not necessarily in a fallacious manner – with regard to the waning confessional freedom that had, in the eyes of the aristocracy, defined the golden age<sup>64</sup> of the Transylvanian principality. In the last pages of his autobiography, Bethlen describes, in his richly detailed style, the conditions of his initial imprisonment in Transylvania, and later home arrest in Vienna. While many aspects distress him, what appears to bear the most frustration in his tone is the ban on looking outside the window, and that on being visited by his predicator.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Chronologically, the whole of the seventeenth century.

<sup>65</sup> Bethlen, *Descrierea*, 304.



## II.2.B Baron Péter Apor

Baron Péter Apor de Altorja was born in 1676 to one of the oldest aristocratic families in Transylvania. His education he received initially in Cluj (from 1686), and then at the Catholic University of Nagyszombat,<sup>66</sup> where he read law and the arts. His professional biography is profoundly at odds with his personal political stance, as will be understandable from going through *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae*.

Having returned to Transylvania, Apor was named in 1699 by Emperor Leopold I as *főispán*<sup>67</sup> of Küküllő county – in 1713 he would be raised Count of the Empire. In his later years, Apor was named court advisor to Charles III, though he remained, somewhat isolated, on his Transylvanian estate until his death in 1752.

In a lot of early-eighteenth-century writings by Transylvanian aristocrats, Apor's *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae* departs quite interestingly from the inward, primarily individual perspective present in other books of the genre (e.g., Miklós Bethlen, Kelemen Mikó<sup>68</sup>). Instead of basing the writing on biographical details and politics, Apor's work shows an overarching perspective over his time and homeland, going into detailed descriptions of social practices of the nobility of the later Transylvanian Principality. As such, while political and historical – that is, more factual – details do transpire from his work, the primary aspects it deals with is the social habits and materiality of the “aristocracy of old.”

With a tone most easily describable as nostalgic, Apor appears to find the moment of writing to be fully inferior, morally and materially, to the times of his youth and even more so before

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<sup>66</sup> Now Trnava, Slovakia.

<sup>67</sup> The highest position of a county – *supremus comes*.

<sup>68</sup> Martyn Rady, “Review: Letters from Turkey by Mikes Kelemen, Bernard Adams,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 80, no. 1 (2002): 146–48.

While not examined in the present study, Mikó writes a pseudo-correspondence – addressed to a fictitious aunt – from his exile in the Ottoman capital.

his birth. The undertaking of writing appears almost tragic, with the first chapter declaring the purpose of the writing to be that the “precious customs [of the older times] shall not simply fall into oblivion among posterity”<sup>69</sup> – and with Hungarian being chosen to address posterity rather than Latin, so that future readers may better understand.<sup>70</sup>

The cultural elements brought by the Habsburg administration and which Apor discusses are primarily material – after all, much of his writing is based on the inferiority and costliness of the new everyday materiality of aristocrats; the totality of that which came with the new power structure is grouped together under the phrase *Neue Mode* or, in Hungarian phonetic transcription, *Náj Mód*.<sup>71</sup>

Of course, it does not take particular courage to equate Apor’s infamous *Neue Mode* with the many manifestations of the Baroque. While Apor touches surprisingly little on architecture directly, he expends sufficient pages on (mostly) sartorial aspects for the reader to infer an opposition to Baroque extravagances in dress, carriages and architecture. The fault he primarily places with women’s clothing: the fabulous expense of the new fashionable dress, so much so as to lead the land’s economy to ruin,<sup>72</sup> combined with the tendency of men and women alike to dress above their status.<sup>73</sup>

The latter aspect would in itself deserve more attention – Apor is essentially decrying the relaxation of sumptuary legislation. This is made particularly clear due to his examples of people who dress properly (i.e. according to their status) being the Saxons – the sole Transylvanian community that still passed new sumptuary laws *via* their *Burg* councils, well

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<sup>69</sup> Apor, *Metamorphosis*, 4.

<sup>70</sup> This vocalised choice in itself appears as a description of the falling out of favour of Latin as *lingua franca* – in a similar note, though in his characteristically anecdotic style, Miklós Bethlen describes as many of the Austrian high officials sent to Transylvania, representatives of the *Neue Mode*, were lesser Latin conversationalists than himself.

<sup>71</sup> *I.e.* the New Fashion; this phrase is peppered throughout *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae*, in exclusively disparaging contexts.

<sup>72</sup> Apor, *Metamorphosis*, 25.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

into the eighteenth century.<sup>74</sup>

Essential to envisioning Apor's concept of clashing words, and brave old world besieged is his account of a great wedding at Gilău<sup>75</sup> castle, in 1702.

The archaic and highly ritualised – but not, in his conception, stiff – customs of the Transylvanians are epitomised by his relative, Count István Apor. As master of ceremonies throughout the grand feast, István Apor is described in his red velvet dolman, with jewelled buttons and marten lined *mente*,<sup>76</sup> - and compared flatteringly with the “dry” court manners represented by the *Neue Mode*: Emperor Leopold I, who had been invited, had sent in his stead the general in command of the province, Count Rabutin.<sup>77</sup> The former being treated as the emperor himself, ceremony was observed all in Latin, with great reverence – until the noble guests became too intoxicated to care, abandoning the count to eat and drink alone at his high table.<sup>78</sup> Apor notes with obvious pride that the second day, the count returned as his mere self and partook in the feast with much joy.<sup>79</sup>

The conclusion to the wedding's tale is particularly clear with Apor's stance: “At that wedding there was not a single Hungarian in braided clothes or with powdered hair or with a pig-tail in a bag on his back, only the Austrian officers.”<sup>80</sup>

It would be misleading to try to explain, without more information, why Apor so eagerly rejects all-things-Austrian – what is clear, instead, is how this all-out rejection comes from a highly

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<sup>74</sup> Mária Pákucs, “Transylvanian civic sumptuary laws in the early modern period: preliminary observations,” *Revista istorica* XXIX, no. 1-2 (2019): 55-73.

<sup>75</sup> In Hungarian, Gyalu.

<sup>76</sup> A type of overcoat, not fully dissimilar from the *Attila* of the following century. Apor describes it quite extensively, both in its noble form and the more common ones – the length of text he dedicates to it may indicate that it was rather out of fashion at the time of writing.

<sup>77</sup> Apor, *Metamorphosis*, 71.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>79</sup> The following day, Rabutin rejoined as a private individual, and “(...) shouted frequently “I am not emperor today! I bore it well enough all night yesterday, which was time wasted, and now I shall make amends.” This being all in his native French, and in an advanced state of merriment, a state shared with many of those present – so much so, that the time for the dances saw rather few men up to task.” Apor, *Metamorphosis*, 73.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

conservative standpoint, and in relation very much complementary with his mostly disguised regret for having been side-lined as social group with a previous monopoly on power. This “longing” becomes obvious when Apor explains how the Transylvanian aristocrat serves his lord, whether prince or emperor, out of nobles oblige, rather than for the chance of gains of prestige or wealth...

### II.3 A concluding discussion

The question after going through this remarkable material is, on the one hand, how should such information be filtered or interpreted in order to obtain even an idea of how the annexation of Transylvania by the Empire affected the stylistic choices of its aristocracy in the short term; respectively, how can gaining deeper understanding of the artistic standpoint of the Transylvanian aristocrat in the year, say, 1700, can help us in understanding the development of aristocratic housebuilding practices well-throughout the following century?

First of all, it is obvious that not only are these writings not partial, but they set out with the concept of *nostras* and *vestras* [*sic*] – a duality otherwise much criticised by Péter Apor himself<sup>81</sup> – and with the conviction of the former’s righteousness and latter’s wrongfulness, if not outright shamefulness. After all, to be assured that the wearing of gloves in summer by gentlemen was a prime symptom of society-wide moral decay<sup>82</sup> would be nothing short of foolish – yet such lists of complaints by disgruntled, relatively marginalised aristocrats of the period reveal indeed changes as they saw them, and quite often as confirmed through visual arts,<sup>83</sup> regardless of the exaggerations they may contain.

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<sup>81</sup> Apor, *Metamorphosis*, 95.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>83</sup> Bartha, János. “Recepționarea modului de viață occidental în cercurile marii aristocrații ungare din veacul XVIII,” [The reception of the occidental lifestyle in the circles of the upper Hungarian aristocracy of the eighteenth century]. *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Cluj Napoca* 32, Cluj Napoca 1993, 49-54.

The direct references are numerous and valuable, yet there are more vantage points that may help in evaluating such shockwaves within mobile and immobile materiality. On the one hand, both Apor and Bethlen are, at the time of writing, essentially outcasts, and so are most of these early modern memoirists. Of course, we cannot equate the conditions of Bethlen's home arrest in Vienna with Apor's self-imposed isolation in his manor house at Turia,<sup>84</sup> or with the lifelong exile in the Ottoman empire of Kelemen Mikes<sup>85</sup> – yet they no longer hold the power they did, and their writings toward posterity may imply that few were disposed towards hearing them: there were enough old families in Transylvania, particularly the Catholic ones, that were happy to embrace the “Baroque lifestyle,”<sup>86</sup> inextricably tied to the Viennese absolutism as it was, but also the social positions that some measure of open adoption of the *Neue Mode* could bestow. We understand that the shift was gradual, and was greatly dependent on the opportunity seeking of the many families<sup>87</sup> – as Bartha notes, the Transylvanian nobility at the time of the year 1700 was composed of a large and highly conservative middle nobility, from which the high aristocracy was yet to be emancipated.<sup>88</sup> The slow and unequal spread of new styles through Transylvania is inferred to be caused – or hindered – to great extent by political opportunity, rather than a fundamental appreciation of the occidental lifestyle.<sup>89</sup>

This area of interpretation, within the social and historical context of these massive political shifts is what constitutes the argument of the relevance of such ego documents as used in this project. It is, of course, unfortunate that no Transylvanian aristocrat found it appropriate to write a straight up biography of one's manor house; this does not mean, however, that other writings

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<sup>84</sup> In Hungarian, Altorja.

<sup>85</sup> Mikó, *Letters*. Having been part of Ferencz Rákóczi's retinue, he would leave his homeland at the age of 17, living some years in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and France, but mostly in the Ottoman Empire, where he would pass away after 54 years in exile.

<sup>86</sup> Bartha, “Receptionarea,” 50.

<sup>87</sup> As with the fall of the old Hungarian Kingdom, the numbers of the nobility expanded massively, and the lower nobility would keep growing – something that Apor appears horrified with.

<sup>88</sup> Bartha, “Receptionarea,” 50.

<sup>89</sup> Which was at the time, of course, defined through the Baroque.

are not helpful in understanding the phenomenon.

Such ego documents are the products of profoundly politically engaged persons, of individuals involved directly in the construction of these houses, and presumably the makers of the variety of stylistic choices that, whether along conservative lines or making statements of their closeness to the new centres of power.

While from analysing these ego documents we are not left with blueprints in prose for early modern manor houses, we do manage to directly observe a fragment, small as it may be, of the mentalities held by those building the houses in question; and that is invaluable regardless whether we are looking at the social, political and, why not, artistic standpoint of Péter Apor, or those whom he criticises for their opposing perspective and choices.

Consequentially, with the loss of autonomy by the Principality of Transylvania, the relation between a noble family and Viennese power may have primarily dictated the material form of manorial seats – of such situations, relevant examples will be analysed in the following chapter.

## Chapter III

### Noble houses on the brink

In this more technical chapter, we will be looking at a set of aristocratic residences from the area of Transylvania, at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Both in the principality proper and in the Mureş valley, modern and early or pre-modern aristocratic residences are a common element in the rural landscape; as such, the sampling pool is of significant size, and only a few such sites were chosen for the present study.

While real life proportions are somewhat foregone in Péter Apor's *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae*, and implications are somewhat apocalyptic, the region's transition from *laissez faire* Ottoman suzerainty to direct imperial Habsburg governorship was indeed a historical horizon beyond which few stones remained unturned.

Though waning, the nobility, as traditional wardens of power, and their homes as symbolic embodiments of their ranks were not forgotten by the tide of change. In this chapter, essentially, I will be looking at a sample of representative houses on both sides of this horizon, and observe how the mainstream in terms of noble residence building changed, presumably radically, as a consequence of the change of regime. An important note here is that the sampling pool is far larger than what is presented, with at least eight such residences, minor and average in size, existing on the Mureş valley between Arad and Petriş.

Consequently, the houses are separated in two distinct categories. In the first one are residences from Transylvania-proper, which include representative aspects typical of noble architecture during the Principality – in particular architectural and artistic elements of late Renaissance. The distinction here is also chronological, with the first category's houses being the result of the 'Transylvanian golden age.' These buildings were owned, built, or modified by the likes of

Péter Apor and Miklós Bethlen, and as such are to be considered in comparison and contrast with their own attitudes explored in the previous chapter.

The second category of residences consists of somewhat more modest ones, and pertaining to the very early Habsburg period of the *Partium* counties, in particular the set of manor houses dotting the line of the Mureş valley through and beyond the western limits of Transylvania. More precisely, these appear to have been built in the few decades after the Habsburg integration of the region. As such, in the buildings of the latter category – and in most of the observed examples not noted here – baroque elements, both structural and ornamental, begin to take hold.

### III.1.A The Apor manor house in Turia<sup>90</sup>

While Péter Apor was not the initial builder of this *kúria*<sup>91</sup> and nor the owner to mostly develop it towards its current shape, the house in Turia was the main residence throughout his adult life and old age, with much of his writings having been written there in his self-imposed seclusion. The origins of the house go back well beyond Apor's lifetime, into the sixteenth century, when it was initially built with three chambers – although the excavations conducted in the park in 2002 noted an earlier palisaded phase dating to the fourteenth century.<sup>92</sup>

Aside from an episode of devastation during the campaign<sup>93</sup> of Michael the Brave into Transylvania, the house was successively expanded,<sup>94</sup> becoming a six-chambered house in the seventeenth century – at the end of which, following attacks by Imre Thököly's anti-Habsburg

<sup>90</sup> Altorja in Hungarian. Covasna county – owned by Péter Apor, who wrote *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae* in seclusion on his estate in the 1730's.

<sup>91</sup> Hungarian term commonly designating the somewhat archaic noble residences in the Szekler region of Transylvania.

<sup>92</sup> Cronica CIMEC – cod RAN: 64880.05

<sup>93</sup> Which took place in 1599-1600.

<sup>94</sup> Balázs Nagy, *Ținutul conacelor Trei Scaune, Sfântu Gheorghe* [The land of manor houses, Trei Scaune, Sfântu Gheorghe], (Sfântu Gheorghe: Háromszék Vármegye Kiadó, 2011).



troops, it sustained significant damage. Count István Apor – often mentioned in *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae* – would consequentially begin rebuilding efforts from 1693. István Apor was, by that point, a significant figure in the higher echelons of the Transylvanian principality, leading several counties and acting as representative of the local nobility. His political and cultural activity reflected his fervent Catholicism, with his support of the incoming Habsburgs and of the counter-reform being reflected in him being favourably treated – and positioned – by the Viennese authority.

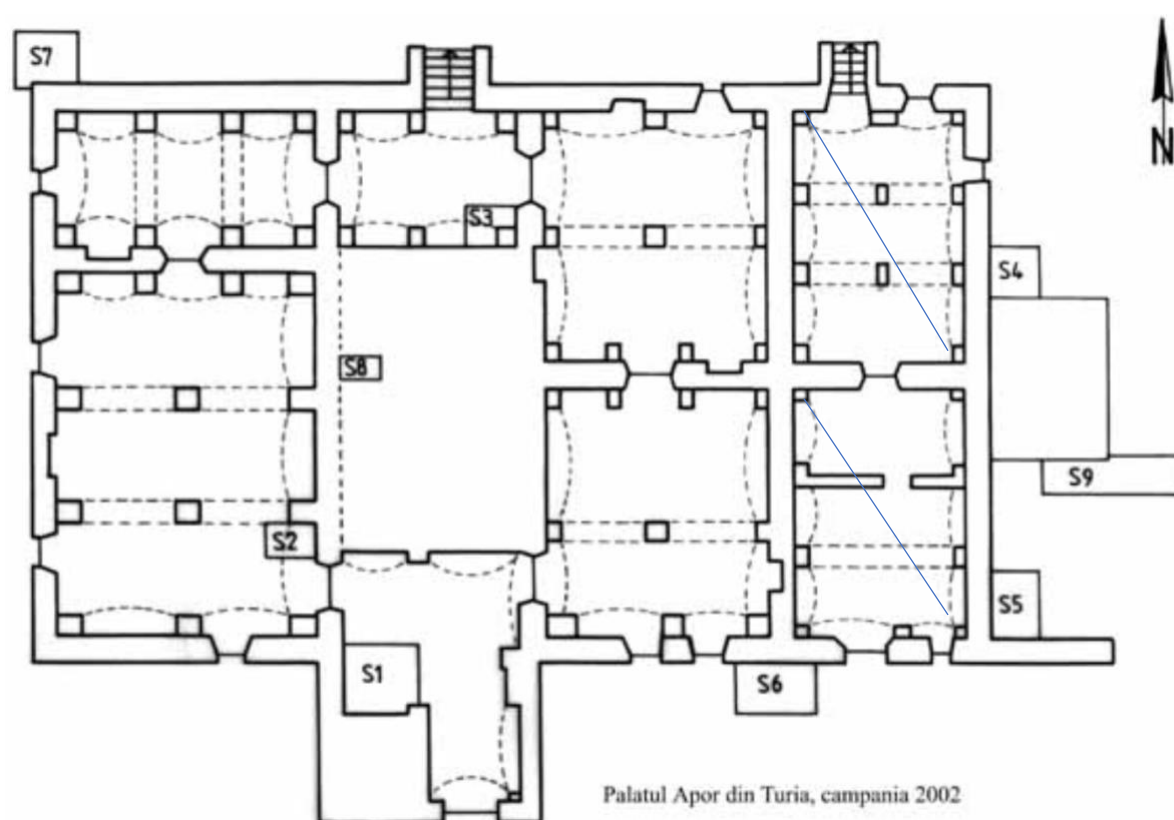


Figure 2 Floorplan of the Apor manor house in Turia, extracted from the report of the 2002 archaeological excavation.<sup>95</sup>

His approach to the reconstruction of the house in Turia is noted by Márgit Nagy as conservative, adding two rooms to the six main existing ones (see main floor plan in figure 2),

<sup>95</sup> The two added chambers (slashed in blue) constitute the rightmost section, which visibly alters the symmetry of the building as initially dictated by the positioning of its main entrance (protruding in the lower end of the floorplan).

but preserving the Transylvanian Renaissance style already present in the construction.<sup>96</sup> This conservative approach is particularly relevant through the typical renaissance balcony added (visible in figure 3, on the right side of the main façade).

Inside, compartmentalisation was based on centring living chambers, great hall and technical rooms around an entry hall,<sup>97</sup> into which the main entrance to the house also opened. To these final decades of the seventeenth century, sets of wall paintings have been dated, in a characteristic renaissance form, and depicting human, vegetal, as well as non-figurative imagery (figure 4).

Their preservation has been near ideal, with these paintings being covered for three centuries by later modern plaster work, only resurfacing during restoration work done in the post-war era.



Figure 3: Apor manorhouse, main façade.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Margit Nagy, *Reneszánsz és barokk Erdélyben* [Renaissance and Baroque in Transylvania], (Bucharest: Editura Kriterion, 1970).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Image obtained via [monumenteuitate.org](http://monumenteuitate.org)



Figure 4: Renaissance paintings discovered during restoration work.<sup>99</sup>

The exterior of the building presents fewer elements of the earlier periods, given that the outside was greatly modified at the start of the nineteenth century – a stage in which the two-floored closed veranda in neoclassical style was added unto the main entrance to the house (figure 3), as well as an austere baroque decoration all-round.

Of course, the *kúria* was the main and most representative element of a residential complex doubling as administrative centre for extensive manorial holdings. Besides portions of the enclosure wall, the only annex datable to around Péter Apor's period is the baroque-roofed stables (figure 5), which also presents decorative elements in outer plasterwork and masonry, such as four half-buried columns and the cornice surrounding the top of the walls.

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*





Figure 5: The old stables of the manor house, with the house visible in the background.<sup>100</sup>

### III.1.B The Bethlen castles of Boiu<sup>101</sup> and Sânmiclăuș<sup>102</sup>



Figure 6: Bethlen castle of Boiu, mid-twentieth century image.<sup>103</sup> Presently, little more than half of the walls stand.

<sup>100</sup> Image obtained via Wikimedia Commons.

<sup>101</sup> Kisbún in Hungarian.

<sup>102</sup> Bethlenszentmiklós in Hungarian. Alba County.

<sup>103</sup> Radu Oltean, "Cazul castelului Bethlen din Boiu - Țopa," Art Historia (blog), January 16, 2009.

In the case of Miklós Bethlen, there are two residences that are most relevant to the present topic. The first would be the castle in Boiu (figure 6), where Count Bethlen was born in 1642, and which was built at the beginning of the seventeenth century and modified mid-century by Miklós Bethlen's father, János. Discussing it, however, is problematic – with its confiscation by the state in the post-war period, the castle ended being irreparably damaged, well before significant architectural and art historical documentation had been created. As such, little is available about its interior spaces, with most available information being derived from pre-destruction photographs<sup>104</sup> of its exterior. Even so, it makes for a good example of a typical larger<sup>105</sup> residence of Transylvanian aristocrats during the late Renaissance; it is composed of a central, square body, with a number of four towers in the corners and – just as the residence later built by Count Bethlen – lacking an inner courtyard, with the entire main body of the building being instead crowned by an abrupt hip roof.



*Figure 7: Sânmiclăuș castle in the interwar period<sup>106</sup> – the building is still standing in a similar condition, but details are less visible due to dense vegetation.*

<sup>104</sup> Themselves a scant appearance.

<sup>105</sup> That is, larger than the more modest (and widespread) Apor manor house.

<sup>106</sup> Radu Oltean, "Castelul din Sânmiclăuș," Art Historia (blog), May 14, 2008.

The situation of the Sânmiclăuș castle (figure 7) is, thankfully, far clearer. The main stage of the construction extended between the years 1668-1683, one of the older holdings of the family. Miklós Bethlen, having gained some familiarity with architecture in his studies at Utrecht and Leiden, designed the building himself, which appears reflected in the resulting residence. While mostly adept of occidental tastes himself, Bethlen's design is heavily influenced by the very late Renaissance common to the Transylvanian aristocratic materiality of his youth.

In its case, there is a main body, square in plan and without an inner courtyard. Instead, the surfaces contain nine equally proportioned chambers/spaces (including the stairwell). The chambers are vaulted, and traces of coloured stucco decorations were discovered; typical renaissance window frames and doorways carved in stone are, however, better preserved.

The main body is completed with four corner towers; however, two of them are greatly reduced in proportion, and are completely included under the roof structure. Their visual impact is further reduced given that they are connected together – and so unified into the façade – by a grand loggia overlooking the Mureș river valley.

While a fortification system was also constructed following the main building stage, none of this has been preserved to the present day.

### **III.2.A The Forray manor house in Săvârșin**





Figure 8: Satellite image of the Mureș valley, with the Zărand foothills being the compact green mass in the upper half of the image.

The seat of the former<sup>107</sup> primary Forray manor and their main manor house is the village Săvârșin, in county Arad, Western Romania. The village is situated some 87km east of the current county seat (Arad), and 57km east of the medieval market town Lipova<sup>108</sup> and its fortress, Șoimoș, which would have constituted the most accessible urban settlement at the time. In this well-tied together geographic and cultural wider context, Săvârșin is one of the smaller late medieval settlements dotting the East-West line of the Mureș river and its valley – with Lippa, its fortress and most of the settlements north of the river's course laying right at the meeting point between the river's floodplain and the rocky foothills<sup>109</sup> of the Zărand mountain range.

These settlements along the valley can be understood as a *longue-durée* phenomenon in which two factors of major impact are constant. Once, the natural defences constituted by the river and by the fairly abrupt, forested hills<sup>110</sup> provide a relative safety to inhabitants. Secondly, the geography and geology present inhabitants with valuable resources in terms of food and

<sup>107</sup> With the mid-nineteenth century extinction of the Forray name, the manor successively changed owners until becoming the property of the Romanian royal family, just before the Second World War.

<sup>108</sup> In old documents, the name most frequently met is Lippa.

<sup>109</sup> A source of building material and income for the manor mentioned in Gaal Jenő's county monograph.

<sup>110</sup> With heights ranging from 400m to 700m.

building materials. Besides such directly exploitable resources (game, fish, quarries, wood), the river would have itself been exploitable as a trade route (given that it has been used for navigation, in particular as a route for salt commerce) and an energy source for milling.

It is in this context then that the more or less inter-connected historical layers of the manorial sites in villages like Neudorf, Frumușeni, Odvoș, Săvârșin or Petriș developed over the past few centuries.

In short, this would be the surroundings of the royal castle of Săvârșin.<sup>111</sup> As with the case of the early Forray manor house in Odvoș – though presumably to a greater extent<sup>112</sup> - the present building partially preserves its early modern iteration, which was lit during the same uprising of 1748. And in the same similarity with the earliest stages of the manorial complex at Odvoș, the beginnings of the manorial grounds in Săvârșin can be described most politely as confusing; in both cases, available studies proposed by art historians and architects give construction dates in the second half of the seventeenth century. For Săvârșin, Narcis Dorin Ion gives the construction period of the first iteration of this manor house in the 1650-1680 interval,<sup>113</sup> respectively that Baron András Forray sr. may have been born there in 1718. One of the current owners of the site explains the possibility that the manor had been donated to a Forray ancestor by Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand III around 1650.<sup>114</sup>

Up to this point, little can be called problematic; there is, however, the major detail that for the first half of the century, the area was under princely Transylvanian authority, falling under the Ottoman *eyalet* of Timișoara after 1645. This makes for an unlikely imperial donation with

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<sup>111</sup> A former Forray, then Hunyadi possession, it was bought by the Romanian royal family towards the end of the interwar period, confiscated at the 1948 regime change and recovered by the rightful owners in the post-communist period.

<sup>112</sup> A.S.R. Principele Radu, *Povestea castelului Săvârșin* [The story of Săvârșin castle], (Bucharest: Curtea veche, 2021), 13.

<sup>113</sup> Narcis Dorin Ion, “Castelul regal de la Săvârșin” [The royal castle of Săvârșin], *Cotidianul*, December 9, 2017.

<sup>114</sup> Principele Radu, *Povestea*, 12-13.



direct, immediate effects – and in the absence of archaeological input, I will for now avoid pushing the grounding of the manorial complexes of this area prior to 1699.



Figure 9: Fragment of the First Military Survey of the Habsburg Monarchy showing the village Săvârșin (Soborsin), with the three main buildings of the manorial complex at the centre of the image.

What does bear certainty is that the manor in Săvârșin was not only the primary residence of the Forrays throughout the entire eighteenth century, but also likely one of the earliest noble residences in the region. The first military topographic exercise of the Empire – which charted the area in the 1769-1774 interval – shows extensive buildings in Săvârșin, particularly a large, three winged (U shaped) complex precisely in the spot of the mansion standing today,<sup>115</sup> a stone or brick walled church immediately to the east of this cluster, as well as a couple of significant, still standing buildings on the borders of the park grounds, identified as the administrator's house on one hand and the servants' living quarters on the other<sup>116</sup> (see figure 9 above).

<sup>115</sup> I will refrain from saying they are the *same* building, given massive upgrades it received through the nineteenth century – however, the central portion of the current building is very likely the early modern stage of the house.

<sup>116</sup> Principele Radu, *Povestea*,

Still, with the archives of the house having burnt in the uprising, clearly retracing the extent of the park at the point of the mid-eighteenth century is difficult.



*Figure 10: North facing painting of the Forray house in Săvârșin, 1816.<sup>117</sup>*

While the house in Odvoș remained in ruins for over six decades following the uprising, there was no generational leap or abandonment at Săvârșin – with the existence of a painting (fig. 10) of the post-uprising reconstructed house dated to 1816, it can easily be inferred the manor in Săvârșin remained the primary centre of the Forrays. Besides showing the briefness of the period of disuse, the painting is also remarkable in that it shows the central building flanked by two symmetrical wings, placed further back than the main façade; this shows not only the extent of the house itself, but a direct continuation of the building pattern observable in the first military survey (fig. 9). Also visible in the painting is the tower of the church on the eastern

<sup>117</sup> Principele Radu, *Povestea*, 16.

limit of the park immediately surrounding the house, which appears clearly on the first military survey, but has no visible remains in the present day.<sup>118</sup>

### III.2.B The Forray manor house in Odvoș

Still in the Mureș river valley, though farther west towards Lipova (14km eastwards that is) lies the village Odvoș. The former was the seat of a royal estate of which Odvoș was part of. The fortress was up until 1440 a possession of the Hungarian Crown, when it was donated by King Ulászló to the future Palatine of Hungary, Mihály Gúti Ország – and it is in this donation act that Odvoș is first mentioned, as *Oldwas*, amongst the holdings of the Șoimoș fortress estate.<sup>119</sup> The first establishment of a stand-alone (if minor) manorial seat at Odvoș is a moment yet to be precisely identified by archival or archaeological means. A relative date is provided in the listing of the site in the National Register of Historic Monuments<sup>120</sup> of Romania. There, the currently standing manor house, the park, and the ensemble appear each under their own listing. The park, however, is listed as a nineteenth century monument, while the manor house is listed as built around 1650-1700, with transformations after 1800.

The results obtained over the past couple of years have clarified significantly the circumstances of the transformation and of the general aspects of the currently standing manor house. Still, not much has surfaced regarding the particularities of the first manorial complex on the site. An origin date placed towards the end of the seventeenth century seems plausible, as I will attempt to clarify in this section.

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<sup>118</sup> Presently, the Roman-Catholic manorial chapel in Săvârșin is on the almost symmetrical point on the western side of the park. Whether these are two different buildings or the military survey mapped its position wrongly and the artist perpetuated the mistake is unclear, as both options have significant inconsistencies.

<sup>119</sup> Gábor Kiss. *Erdélyi várak, várkastélyok* [Transylvanian fortresses and castles], (Budapest: Panoráma 1990). 34–37.

<sup>120</sup> In the register, the ensemble figures under the code AR-II-a-B-00637, while the mansion has the identification code AR-II-a-B-00637.01 and the park AR-II-a-B-00637.02. See listing at: <https://patrimoniu.gov.ro/images/lmi-2015/LMI-AR.pdf>

In spite of the chronological generosity of the National Register's assessment, the first sources that are indeed affirmative with regard to a manorial core of buildings at Odvoș date from the second half of the eighteenth century. In these, though, the site appears as active or close to its destruction, the moment of construction remaining elusive.

Of these documents, the richest in direct information are those that touch upon the destruction of the first complex. Essentially, they describe an archaeological horizon of a clearly defined moment, namely the devastations of noble residences and properties that took place during the peasant uprising of Horea, Cloșca and Crișan in autumn 1784.

Some writings of the period, as well as David Prodan's extensive history of the uprising<sup>121</sup> draw on a source as unique and as "live"<sup>122</sup> as could be – that is, the *Magyar Hírmondó*. This first Hungarian language newspaper, in its late 1784 edition, recounts extensively the events of the uprising, though from a standpoint that is anything but impartial.

From the description of the pillaging by the peasants in Odvoș, it is revealed that the mob burned the house of "Mr. Forray,"<sup>123</sup> the pub, the stables with a holding capacity for 44 horses, the coach house, haystacks and a barn full of wheat.<sup>124</sup> This, it was explained by those caught, was due to a rumoured order of the Emperor<sup>125</sup> to chase away the nobles and ransack their possessions.

One of the other targets of the mob was the Roman-Catholic manorial chapel, built in 1769. The chapel, however, was spared following the repeated pleadings of the Augustan friar who cared for it. Though now devastated by decades of abandonment, the chapel remains the sole standing survivor of the uprising (see fig. 11&12).

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<sup>121</sup> David Prodan, *Răscoala Lui Horea* [Horea's uprising], vol. 1-2. (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică 1979).

<sup>122</sup> In a very much current understanding of the term.

<sup>123</sup> The noble Forray family, which would later be raised to the rank of counts, had several manorial holdings (with Săvârșin/Soborsin as the primary one) and high positions in the county administration at this point.

<sup>124</sup> *Magyar Hírmondó*, in Prodan, *Răscoala* vol. 2, 320.

<sup>125</sup> Josef II was ruling the hereditary Habsburg possessions and the Holy Roman Empire at the time.





*Figure 11& Figure 12: the manorial chapel, of Roman-Catholic rite, photographed 2010 and 2014.*

One element still surviving in the partially ruined baroque chapel, though, is the coat of arms of marriage between a male member of the Forray family, unusually preceded by that of a female of quite possibly the Brunszwick family,<sup>126</sup> placed at the top of the chapel's apse, where the roof still stands (see figures 13& 14).

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<sup>126</sup> The preservation of the female crest, however, has made precise identification difficult.



Figure 13: the Brunsvik and Forray arms in the chapel apse.



Figure 14: the Forray arms as appearing on the grave of Baron András Forray, in the Roman-Catholic church in Sávârşin, built by the Forrays in the late 1700's; it is notable that it differs significantly from the officially granted coat of arms as appearing in the Siebmacher Wappenbuch.

While this “Forray” chapel<sup>127</sup> is the most visible feature of the initial complex, it is neither the only and quite likely not the oldest one. The distinguishing aspect between the chapel and the other early features of the site is that the latter are closer to being archaeological substance.

<sup>127</sup> As we may as well call it to distinguish it as an earlier site phase.



Looking at part (see figure 15) of the first Military Survey of the Empire, dating from the early years of the chapel<sup>128</sup> (and likely from just the very few years before the uprising), a number of buildings surrounding it are visible. As such, the chapel appears as a red cross in the First Survey, distinct from the black cross representing the orthodox church, some 200 meters to the East. Few decades later, in the Second Military Survey (see figure 16), the chapel appears alone, with only one of the more distant buildings towards the village potentially surviving.



*Figure 15: Odvos before or around the time of the Uprising, in the First Military Survey.*

*Figure 16: Odvos in the first half of the nineteenth century, in the Second Military Survey.*

<sup>128</sup> This is an example, however, of educated guesswork. While the Empress Maria Theresia ordered the First Military Survey soon after the Seven Years' War, in 1763, the massive scale of the project meant that different areas of the country were mapped across the next two decades. As such, the Hungarian crownlands of which Arad county was part of were only surveyed in 1782-1785, which makes it possible that the mapping of Odvos offers a glimpse of the pre-uprising (1784) built landscape. Beyond this approximation, there is one more detail in the surveys that comes in the aid of picturing the initial manorial buildings: in the maps of the early nineteenth century (figure 16), the Forray chapel appears as a lonesome building, surrounded by forested area, with a single (L-shaped) building to its S-W being a possible survivor – nowadays, however, not visible.

What complicates the situation is that the First Survey did not pay vast attention to detail, unless depicting a grand estate – and this was not the case with this secondary residence of the Forrays. However, elements of these buildings survive in the archaeology of the Konopi park today. For example, one odd feature in the park is the presence of a partly silted-in (and thus hardly accessible), half collapsed brick-vaulted basement beneath the ornamental mound in front of the main entrance. The most accessible remains of former buildings, though, are located in the basement of the Konopi house (see figure 17).

By looking at the positions of the late seventeenth-early eighteenth century wall fragments integrated into the presently standing building, their grouping in the western core of the house, around the façade closest to the surviving chapel, is evident. What makes these fragments most relevant is that it is not only their lack of interweaving with newer masonry that sets them apart; there are, in fact, distinct architectural features of the early modern constructions that are visible in these areas of the basement.

The westernmost section presents a walled-in doorway (figure 18), with its top just reaching the outside soil level. Equally well below the present-day walking surface, the northernmost, smaller wall section (figure 19) contains a large window opening, which itself contains 3 different stages<sup>129</sup> of in-filling.

The most important portion, however, is the roughly central, vaulted chamber just to the West of the central wall of the house. The walls supporting the barrel-vaulted ceiling, as well as the vaulted brickwork itself, lack almost any form of interweaving with the rest of the basement, indicating that the entire chamber is part of an earlier building.<sup>130</sup> The most impactful feature

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<sup>129</sup> These stages, however, are less easy to date by any relative means, except that they are most likely done before the post-war period, as the materials used are similar to those present in the rest of the manor house.

<sup>130</sup> This is supported in the archaeological and art-historical report on the Konopi manor house, authored by Ileana Burnichioiu, Amalia Ignuța and Bogdan Sorinca; the report is yet to be published at the date of this writing.



amongst all of these are the two clearly observable embrasures (figure 20). While these had initially been confused with air vents, there is no communicating element upwards or otherwise, except for the bricked-in openings towards the East – and as such, the former exterior of the building.

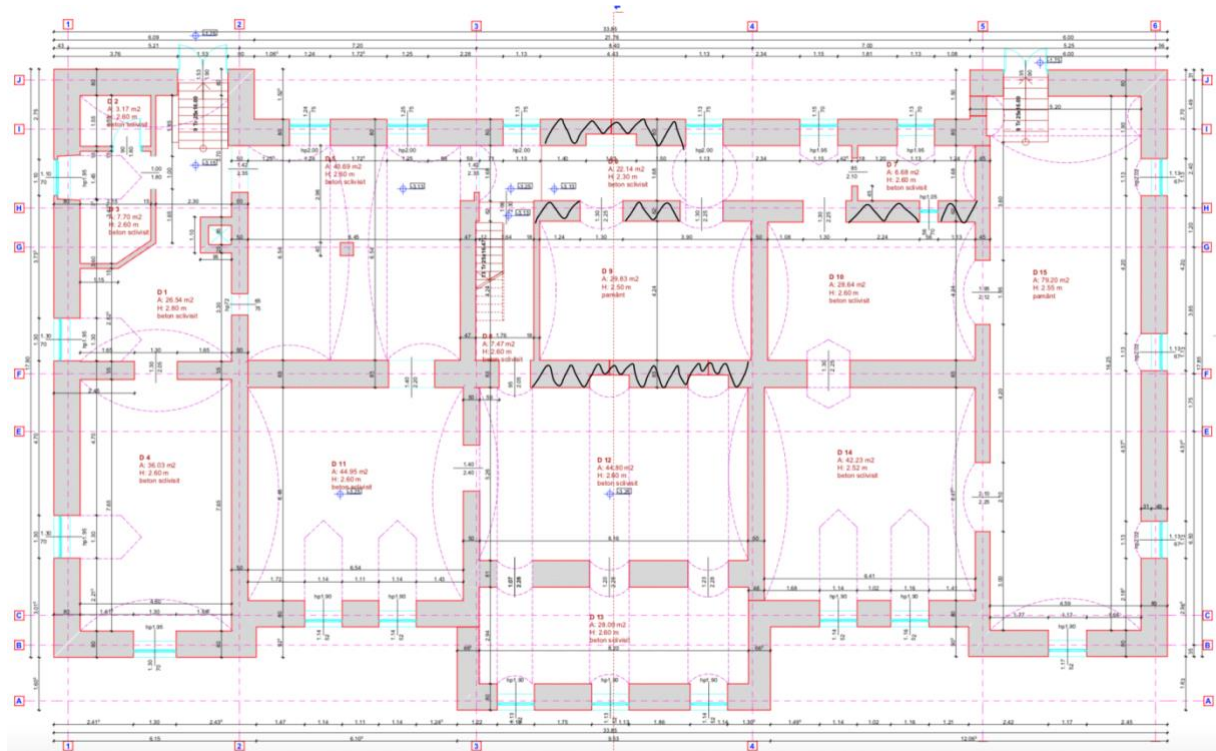


Figure 17: Basement floor-plan of Konopi manor house, North to the right-hand side, west to the top (the direction of the chapel). The zig-zags represent wall sections from older constructions.



*Figure 18: West facing picture of the sealed passage – the park and the chapel are beyond the wall.*



*Figure 19: West facing picture of the partly bricked-up window, with its 3 stages of filling visible.*

*Figure 20: East facing picture of one of the two embrasures in the central, transversal wall of the basement; the top of the opening is cca. 1.10m beneath the stepping surface outside. Inside, the brick seal blocking the view into chamber beyond is visible.*

### III.3 Chapter conclusions

It is clear from the previous pages that the aristocratic tradition in pre-Habsburg Transylvania was one consciously upheld by at least some of the leading aristocrats; it is also not scandalous to presume that the close relationship that the nobility of the principality had with the Transylvanian interpretation of renaissance visual and constructive practices was tightly woven into the noble life style. Presumably, this is where one should look in order to find the origin of the cautious and conservative stance which the aristocracy took in the early stages of the Habsburg integration and administration of the Transylvanian principality.

To observe that the baroque – as a symbol of the *náj mód* and implicitly of Habsburg domination – was not immediately welcomed by the upper layers of society is in essence correct, but not by far an exhaustive answer to the issue. Exploring the length and complexity of the process through which the upper-class Transylvanians relinquished the visual styles they associated with a recently – for them – ended golden age is a further step that leaves conclusions far more waterproof.

It is imperative to note, however, that what has so far been presented and discussed has been done so in a context where, much as a footnote of academia history, little to no attention has been paid to historic building – i.e. standing structures – recording. Such wide-framed endeavours as presently used would be less needed if, for example, the field of building archaeology or *Bauforschung* had been a general presence in Romanian studies. However, as Ileana Burnichioiu has worked on bringing into the light, the region has not only a problematic approach to heritage houses conservation, but also to efficiently recording such buildings.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ileana Burnichioiu, “Building archaeology in Romania?” in *Caietele Restaurării*. (Bucharest: Editura ACS, 2021): 162-199.

In support of the budding field of building archaeology in Romania, the following chapter presents the results of the *Bauforschung* analysis performed on the Konopi manor house in Odvoș.

## Chapter IV

### The manor house of the Czigler de Konop family

The following pages are a case study on the historical site of the Czigler de Konop or Konopi manor house of Odvoș, Romania. The chapter constitutes both a chronological continuation of the phases of use of the Odvoș site itself, as well as an element of continuation between the early modern noble residences of the region and their renewed tradition in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth centuries. Moreover, it may be a good example of a type site<sup>132</sup> for the situation of this rather particular genre of built heritage today.

While the Konopi house may seem somewhat irrelevant to this thesis, the complexity of the site recommends it both as a case study of the evolutionary typologies of the region's manorial seats, as well as in the context of a cultural heritage specialisation.

With its reconstructions and differing use-defined identities through time, the site is profoundly evocative of the material shift of aristocratic country houses – with the main difference to the object of the thesis being that the narrative of the present case study is drawn until the present day and is still developing.

At the same time, attention will be paid to the history of the site as a listed historical monument, respectively how minor bureaucratic processes in the Romanian state's post-war heritage institutions have majorly impacted such sites, quite often negatively.

With the core of the manorial site being owned by my family, the real-life applicability of this work is of direct and essential impact to the ongoing processes at the site – of recovery and conversion. As such, understanding the processes of site formation and evolution is critical.

#### IV.1 The Konopi manor house

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<sup>132</sup> While the original meaning of the term in archaeology is far narrower in scope, I find it sits well in this context of aristocratic site biographies in the postwar period on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain.

The revival of the site during the nineteenth century brings with an interesting reversal between the inhabitants' noble rank, versus social prestige, at least compared to the Forray period. Scale amongst these residences is central to their purpose, with country houses of the nobility and the landscaped gardens surrounding them being in the end a performance of status and power,<sup>133</sup> rather than simply a home. Yet scale marks differences within this category – rather than going through such an inward exploration of the ideas behind the country house, we are looking at them as central elements of rural landscapes and economies, and thus as physical expressions of the relational inequities inherent of aristocratic societies.<sup>134</sup> As such, the destruction of the Forray manor in the peasant uprising makes information scant, with some of the clearest information coming from maps. A map<sup>135</sup> of waterways and forested property limits from the Nádasdy family archive, dated 1851-1852, distinctly represents the chapel and a still extant spring as landmarks, but no built structures nearby.

In short, we see the site remaining uninhabited and traded from one family to another, eventually being bought from Count Lipót Nádasdy by the family Czigler de Konop/Konopi Czigler. While the date is unspecified,<sup>136</sup> this most occurred soon after 1852.

The Czigler de Konop family appears rather humble next to their older, out-ranking and richer neighbouring aristocrats, such as the counts Forray, Nádasdy, Teleki or Mocioni.

The nobility of the Cziglers dates to the year 1837, when Antal Czigler receives his patent of nobility and “de Konop” predicate from Emperor-King Ferdinand V,<sup>137</sup> with the letters patent and coat of arms being preserved in the 66th *Libri Regii* volume. Little information is available

<sup>133</sup> Laura Jane Smith, *Uses of heritage* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group 2006).

<sup>134</sup> Smith, *Uses*, 118.

<sup>135</sup> <https://maps.hungaricana.hu/en/MOLTerkeptar/8847/?list=eyJxdWVyeSI6ICJvZHZvcyJ9>

<sup>136</sup> Jenő Gaál, *Aradvármegye és Arad szabad királyi város. Közgazdasági, közigazgatási és közművelődési állapotának leírása* [Arad county and the Arad free royal town. Description of its economic, administrative and cultural status] (Arad: Nyomatott Réthy L. és Fiánál 1898).

<sup>137</sup> Magyar Kancelláriai Levéltár – Libri regii, vol. LXVI, 500.

about this first prominent member of the family – with one important detail being his 1827 acquisition of a plot of land at number 8 Dorottya street in Budapest. On that plot, Antal Czigler de Konop built a tenement,<sup>138</sup> insuring a long-term source of steady income.

The architecture of the Konopi manor house in Odvos, however, indicates a later date of construction, yet before 1870, when Jenő Gaál, in an 1898 county monography, mentions the house as already standing. It is likely to have been built during the preceding decade, with the portico of its representative façade (see figure 21) being tied with the construction of the local railways, in 1868-1871<sup>139</sup> – given that the structural elements of the lintel are, in fact, rail segments.<sup>140</sup> In the somewhat familiar story of one or another noble family, the presence and use of these rails is most symbolic of the obligatory adaptability innate to long lived social elements such as the aristocracy; simultaneously, it ties the house beautifully to narratives of early industrialisation and increasing connectivity throughout the Monarchy.

There is also a visible pattern of shifting approaches to the running of the estate by the family – who will, in July 1870, have their name legally changed to “Konopi.”<sup>141</sup> This shift appears to occur with each generation, in accordance to the individuality of each head of the and family. So, while Antal Konopi Czigler concentrated on consolidating the family fortune with investments in the Hungarian capital, his sons Sándor and Kálmán were the generation to finalise the country house and organise an extensive operation for quarrying stone and exploiting their substantial forests.<sup>142</sup> Their generation, as part of solidifying their position in rural Arad, dealt with the infrastructure required for such production activities, presumably

<sup>138</sup> Albert Gesztesi, “Egy Belvárosi ház - Dorottya Utca 8” [A central townhouse: Dorottya str. 8], *Műemlékvédelem. A Magyar Műemlékvédelem Folyóirata*, nr. 1-2. (2016): 195-206

<sup>139</sup> Antal Berecz, “Az Elso erdelyi vasut” [The first Transylvanian railway] in *A Magyar Foldrajzi Tarsasag*. (Budapest: Nyomatott Fanda Jozsef Konyvnyomdajaban 1882), 145-193.

<sup>140</sup> This is not to say that iron rails of the sort would have been unavailable before this date – however, the building materials used for the manor house appear to be in their totality locally sourced and of wide availability in character.

<sup>141</sup> Béla Kempelen, *Magyar Nemes Családok* [Hungarian noble families] Vol. 3 (Budapest: Grill Károly Könyvkiadóvállata 1912), 203.

<sup>142</sup> Gaál, *Aradvármegye*, 163.



being the ones to build the large and surprisingly modern<sup>143</sup> barns still standing on the house's grounds (see figure 22& 23).



*Figure 21: The portico and park-facing façade during the interwar period.*



*Figure 22: The barn as it appears in the present day.*

<sup>143</sup> “Surprising” in the context where similar buildings of the same period on similar Mureş valley estates appear significantly more archaic in design and construction techniques – it could be said that the greatest effort to produce a modern construction went into the barns, rather than into the mansion.



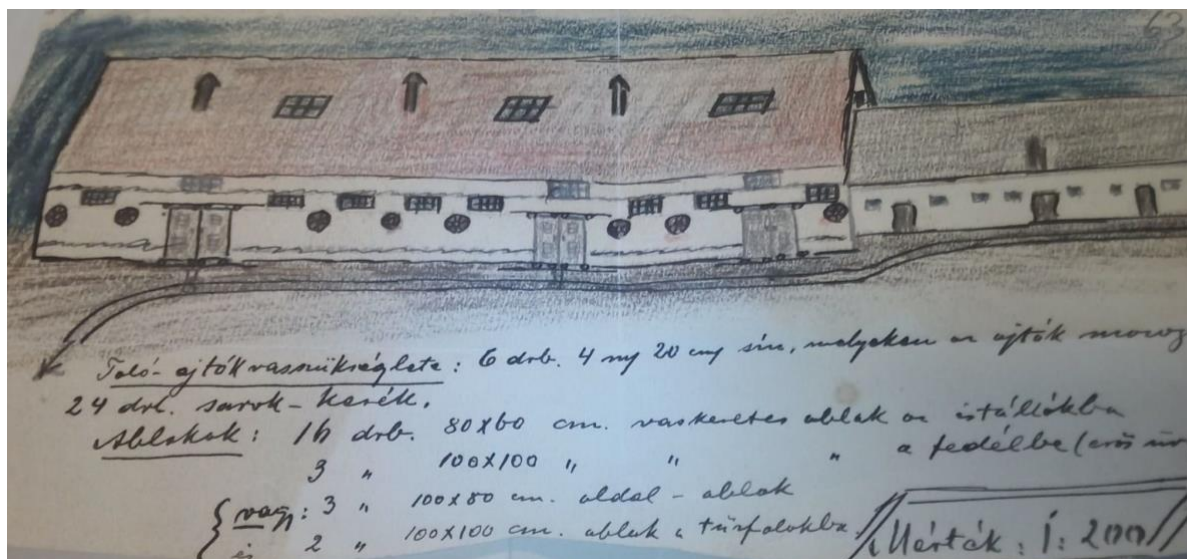


Figure 23: The barn, drawn cca. 1910, possibly by Kálmán Konopi (the second by this name). A notable element in this image, and no longer extant, is the small railroad used for the barn; it is mentioned by Antal Berecz.<sup>144</sup>

The last member of the Konopi family to have a powerful impact on the manor house and its grounds was Kálmán Konopi (1880-1947), grandson of Antal. While changes to the house are lesser, he returned to his grandfather's chief work, by rebuilding the tenement in 8 Dorottya street as a modern, substantially larger building, in 1915;<sup>145</sup> this aspect in itself marks clearly the fact that, while the house and manor may have been on the smaller side, the family was well connected to and keeping up with the centre.

At the same time, however, Kálman Konopi (figure 24) was responsible for turning the quaint country house into a strong cultural landmark. A relevant contemporary opinion<sup>146</sup> in this sense appears in 1912 in *Erdélyi Lapok*, the cultural newspaper edited by Count Miklós Bánffy. The "castle under the woods" is described there as a model farm, with the house being populated in

<sup>144</sup> Berecz, Az Elso, 1882, 146.

<sup>145</sup> Gesztesi, Egy Belvarosi, 198.

<sup>146</sup> Éva Adam. "Magyar Kastelyokrol" [About Hungarian castles] in *Erdelyi Lapok, az Erdelyi Irodalmi Tarsasag Folyoirata*. (September 14, 1912): 438-441.

summers by artists and writers, one of them being the owner himself – as the year 1907 sees him publishing a book exploring the notion of love.<sup>147</sup>

The social circles of Kálmán Konopi are complex and difficult to track, yet it is in no way difficult to conclude that they were heavily populated with artists from the Hungarian *Art Nouveau/Szecesszió* movement. Konopi's intersections with the period's art world are multiple, from friends such as Aladár Körösfői Kriesch,<sup>148</sup> with whom Kálmán would practice mountaineering in the Tatras,<sup>149</sup> or the graphic artist Sándor Nagy, who illustrated his book; to direct familial connections, as multiple of the siblings of his wife, Vilma Boér, were either artists themselves (such as Lenke Boér), or married to artists (such as his brother-in-law Rezső Mihály and his sister-in-law Máriska Undi).<sup>150</sup> Most of them members of the Gödöllő artists' colony and active in major projects of the time, such as the Palace of Culture of Târgu Mureș.<sup>151</sup> During the Great War, Kálmán Konopi supplied the colony with various pigments and materials from his estate, as supplies were scarce. With the closure of the tapestry section of the Gödöllő Artists' Colony, he would house Rezső Mihály<sup>152</sup> for a year at Odvos. However, it is difficult to say exactly where and how Mihály and his workshop spent that year.

At the same time, the Danube monarchy was dissolved, and the region became part of Romania. These massive changes, particularly the agrarian reform of the early interwar period, aimed at reducing the great estates, proved a lesser hit to Konopi's estate than to some of the others in the region. Given its relatively small holdings, the reform was less harsh – in running the medium-small estate successfully, Kalman Konopi was also helped by his own extensive

<sup>147</sup> Kálmán Konopi, *Az Ember és a Szerelme* [Man and his love], (Budapest: az Athenaeum r.-t. könyvnyomdája 1907).

<sup>148</sup> Founder of the Gödöllő artists' colony, members of which are a constant element through Kálmán's life.

<sup>149</sup> János Vigyázó, *Turistaság és Alpinizmus* [Tourism and Mountaineering], Vol. 7 (Budapest: IFJ Kellner Ernő Könyvnyomdája 1917), 264.

<sup>150</sup> Katalin Keserű, "Mihály Rezső grafikus, a gödöllői művésztelep tagja" [Graphic artist Mihály Rezső, Member of the Gödöllő artists' colony], in *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 24, nr. 1 (1979): 105-116.

<sup>151</sup> Artúr Elek, "Undi Mariska Művészete" [The artist Mariska Undi] in *Magyar Iparművészet* 25 (1912): 41-46.

<sup>152</sup> With whom Kálmán would also be involved in a business venture – together with Mihály, Vilma Boér-Konopi and others as board members, he would run a textile company in Hungary, until the 1930's.

expertise in wheat, particularly as to wheat cultivars' selecting, an activity to which he dedicated a modern and well equipped laboratory.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, as a 'celebrity' agriculturalist,<sup>154</sup> Konopi kept a lengthy advisory correspondence with the Romanian ministers for agriculture, including providing advice on the compensations provided to landowners, presumably one of the reasons for the favours he later found with the Romanian government – with king Charles II decorating him with the Agricultural Merit and figuring as agricultural representative of the Hungarian community in Romania during Charles II's royal dictatorship.<sup>155</sup>

The grounds thus remained stable and a well-known example of tranquillity, as noted in the travel writings of Patrick Leigh Fermor,<sup>156</sup> who, after spending a few nights there in 1931-32, notes its resemblance to a rural deanery, and its hardly noticeable positioning below the forested hills. Fermor appears somewhat amused by the other guests, a couple of Swedish agricultural experts, who offered him an extensive education on the typologies of wheat and their differentiation.

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<sup>153</sup> Domokos Gyallay (ed.), "A búza tudósa" [The wheat scientist], *Magyar nép, képes hetilap*, September 26, 1936.

<sup>154</sup> For reasons of mere space, this will not be fully expanded presently; however, Kálmán Konopi, at least in the press of the interwar Romanian Kingdom, most often appears as an unrivalled expert in wheat selection and cultivation, dedicated to significantly improving productivity in areas with poor soil and risk of flooding. He would continue writing in this period as well, most often articles in various agriculturalists' periodicals, mostly aiming at raising the level of agriculture practiced by the peasantry.

<sup>155</sup> L. Mikó, "A nemzeti újjászületés frontjának magyar tagjait" [Hungarian members of the National Revival Front], *Magyar Távirati Iroda*, February 6, 1939.

<sup>156</sup> Patrick Leigh Fermor, *Between the woods and the water. On foot to Constantinople from the Hook of Holland: the Middle Danube to the Iron Gates* (London: Penguin Books 1986).



*Figure 24: Vilma Boér and dr. Kálmán Konopi, 1930.*

This way of life, with the tenement known as Konopiház, in 8 Dorottya street, still in their ownership,<sup>157</sup> appears to have remained constant for the rest of Kálmán's life, with him passing away in November 1947; soon after, though, the Soviet-imposed regime change would fragment everything.

## **IV.2 The post-war years**

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<sup>157</sup> Though affected by the Soviet bombings of Budapest during the Second World War.

The Konopi house and properties, now owned by Vilma<sup>158</sup> (figure 24) alone, would be confiscated by the communist authorities in March 1948. Based on documents from the attic of the house, the initial destination given by the People's Republic was that of collective farm a by the name *Viață Noauă* [New Life].

This stage of use would probably, however, last not long after the retreat of Soviet troops from Romania, in 1956. The main use of the house during the communist regime, was, in fact, as “*Pionieri*”<sup>159</sup> camp – as confirmed by villagers, some of whom have been employees for the running of the camp (such as the site administrator, cook, gardener).

Aside from a number of poorly inspired refurbishments,<sup>160</sup> the *Pionieri* period did not leave much of a mark on the site, with the house appearing to have mostly acted as recipient for the easily removable furnishings required by the youth camp (see figure 25).

This chapter in the site's biography lies in stark contrast with the British tradition of country house visiting.<sup>161</sup> It can be argued that the house was part of an official “touristic” circuit between the 1960's and early 1990's – yet the site was a mere space in which the country's youth received its political education, without much of an actively preserved historical identity. And yet it is in the middle of this period that the house is listed in the national registry of historical monuments – as the architecture monument *Castelul Konopi*.<sup>162</sup> Then, as now, criteria for listing were not exactly awe-inspiring in their complexity and consideration of site narratives.<sup>163</sup> Rather, the criteria have constantly been a combination of age – the older, the

<sup>158</sup> According to oral history, her mental state deteriorated following this; for her few remaining years, she would be cared for and housed by one of her former house maids.

<sup>159</sup> The Pioneers being the compulsory youth organization of the Socialist Republic of Romania, vaguely based on the model of the Scout Movement, with similar examples in the rest of the Eastern Bloc.

<sup>160</sup> Such as the coating of the entire basement in concrete, including the pouring of 10cm of concrete on eighteenth century flagstone slabs.

<sup>161</sup> Smith, *Uses*, 120.

<sup>162</sup> Such buildings are often called *castel* in Romanian, though lacking the fortifications that make a castle. This is presumably a popular calque of the Hungarian *kastely*.

<sup>163</sup> Lucian Cristian Ratoiu, *Restaurarea Monumentelor Istorice. Concepte, teorii, practici* [The restoration of historical monuments. Concepts, theories, practices], (Bucharest: Editura ACS, 2021), 365.

better – and aesthetic value.<sup>164</sup> Intangible and social values, in which Konopi house is rich, are of little to no interest in the authorised heritage discourse practiced all throughout the Romanian state.



*Figure 25: One of the rooms of the house, few years after the Revolution.*

In spite of long term water damage to the lower level of the house, due to concrete usage on eighteenth and nineteenth century masonry, the period of the *Pionieri* camp has the merit of having kept the house in constant use, and thus far from dereliction.

Yet with another regime change, in 1989, the implicit dissolution of the *Pionieri* organisation and transfer of the site into the hands of the Administration of School Camps, the site would, for the second time since 1784, go through decades of abandonment.

<sup>164</sup> Sergiu Nistor, “Importanța pentru România a Convenției-cadru a Consiliului Europei privind valoarea patrimoniului cultural pentru societate” [The Importance for Romania of the Framework Convention of the Council of Europe on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society], *Transsylvania Nostra* 7/1 (2013): 8.

In 1991, the national registry of historical monuments saw its third major update in the post-war period,<sup>165</sup> and so would the site: rather than just the house, as in the 1980 iteration of the registry, the 1991 entry mentions the Konopi house “with the park.”<sup>166</sup> Besides this, one element of vast importance appears: in the identification code of the monument, the letter B appears. This announces the shift in approach evident in the 1991 monuments’ registry. Whether they are archaeological, architectural, memorial homes or public interest monuments,<sup>167</sup> entries are separated in two classes. That is class A, monuments of national importance, and class B, monuments of local importance. Of course, this classification says little about the actual relevance of the monument on either national or local scale – the classification is essentially quantitative and aesthetic. Scientific, religious, technical or social traits are not part of the evaluation methodology.<sup>168</sup> And while notions we tend to consider as profoundly linked to understanding heritage processes, such as interpreting sites as part of cultural landscapes have somewhat made an appearance, they remain superficially approached<sup>169</sup> – allowing for further degradation of the landscape’s integrity, as follows.

From 1997 onwards, a 10-year long restitution trial by distant relations of Konopi began; along this tenuous legal route, the house, park, chapel, barns and 500 hectare of forests were fragmented – something presumably allowed due to lack of clarity in legal documents. Namely, the monuments’ registry does not specify what the park is and what dimensions it had. In consequence, the house, about 500 hectares of woodland and between a quarter and a third of the landscaped garden were sold to a timber company; the Forray chapel plot, sitting between the house and the barns, went to the Roman Catholic church; the remaining park went into

<sup>165</sup> The first being in 1955, where the site is absent; in 1980 and 1991, *Castelul Konopi* does appear.

<sup>166</sup> Lista Monumentelor Istorice, 1991, 13.

<sup>167</sup> Nistor, “Importanța,” 9.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

village hall administration and was further fragmented, and the barns, being sold to yet another private owner, saw a fascinating set of uses.<sup>170</sup>

About a decade later, the house would be bought by my family, and the site of the barns soon after.<sup>171</sup>

As such, the unitarily-owned parts of the Konopi estate contain a third of its park, with the house, the barns and a body of forest. In figure 26, these are bordered with green, while the former Konopi properties within the village (including the chapel, i.e. the wedge between the barns and the house) are bordered with red.

The intentions and prospects for reconversion are in the familiar range for such houses, namely events venues in both buildings, with most accommodation spaces in the barn, and essentially a private cultural centre and library in the manor house. This is due to the necessity that the manorial grounds, reduced as they are, become a self-sustaining business – which, in the general understandings of the country house as a visiting destination, implies the rise of a narrative of place feeding off notions of heritage. This is all fine; however, this situation of positive awareness and conscious curation of heritage sites tends to be reduced to grassroots levels – that is, engagement with critical approaches to heritage processes is confined to the realm of heritage site owners and heritage NGOs.<sup>172</sup> On the state's side, the situation is compromised on multiple levels. For once, in the bureaucratic realm the Ministry of Culture, the National Agency for Public Procurement and the Ministry of Agriculture, which all have policy sets dedicated to some extent to the restoration and reuse of historical monuments, are inefficient due to the lack of trans-ministerial lack of coordination and communication.<sup>173</sup> In a similar vein, the lack of weight of expert bodies, such as the National Institute for Heritage or heritage NGOs,

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<sup>170</sup> After on-site observations, one can confidently say the barns were primarily a car repairs' workshop; part of the 350 square metre building was a body builder's club, and yet another part functioned as a bodybuilding themed village bar.

<sup>171</sup> In 2017 and 2020, respectively.

<sup>172</sup> INNOCASTLE Baseline Survey, 141.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.



does not help whatsoever.<sup>174</sup> All these cavities and walls within the institutional framework are visible in the field. From the lack of support or institutional openness towards bottom-up initiatives, to the infrastructure essential to the integration of historical estates as touristic destinations being derelict or virtually absent,<sup>175</sup> the relation between owners/local stakeholders and state is in essence dis- or non-functional.

However, we have, at least in theory, surpassed the point in which heritage is something that is, a tangible speck within the landscape which resides in a historical past of great use to various national narratives. For a while now, the exclusively monumental, “pretty” heritage has been rejected, with locale, memory and identity taking the main stage.<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, given that the authorised heritage discourse in Romania is, essentially, exactly that which Laurajane Smith describes as anachronistic and potentially damaging, the Konopi manor has yet to undergo a process of heritagisation, in a critically acceptable definition of the term.

The questions that come with this third revival relate with the owners’ conscious curation of the multiple layers of heritage – of what is to be recovered, preserved, and what may fall behind in terms of representation. Being a small family run site with a significant stratigraphy of heritage, a discussion of this sort is not just inevitable, but necessary: total inclusion and representation is ideal, but also close to utopian.

Heritagisation, however, is a complex process chiefly based around selection and curation;<sup>177</sup> not everything is preserved and integrated within a main public narrative, simply due to the fact that not all of the innumerable historical-social layers of such a site can be integrated – and that is without accounting the aspects that are simply, purely unknown to us.

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<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>176</sup> Smith, *The uses*, 3.

<sup>177</sup> Regina Bendix, “Heritage between Economy and Politics: An Assessment from the Perspective of Cultural Anthropology,” in *Intangible Heritage*, ed. Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa (London: Routledge 2008), 253-269.

For now then, the discussion of the site's heritage seems eerily simple. As opposed to the examples brought by Laurajane Smith, the authorised heritage discourse in Romania is not much of an opponent to whatever language may be used in our recovery and redefinition of the site – that is not due to benevolence towards stakeholders, but due to its own lack of language beyond aspect and age. If anything, some complementarity ensues: while the national registry's criteria of listing are primarily intrinsic, the narratives recovered and rebuilt at Odvoş are inherently intangible, creating a set of parallel understandings of the site – a downward, and an upward looking one.



*Figure 26: Odvoş and the former Konopi properties today.*

## Conclusion

Having gone through this exploration of aristocratic Transylvanian residences at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – with the brief foray up until the current times – let us draw a final line and ponder upon potential conclusions.

The evolutionary pattern itself which is observable in manor houses of the wider Transylvanian space is not intrinsically surprising; part of the authors so far consulted, such as János Bartha and Margit Nagy, have tied the entry of the region's aristocratic materiality to the adoption of the Baroque architectural and decorative styles, which entered the province *via* the Habsburg Monarchy.

As such, the shift of aristocratic residences into modernity appears as articulated by and through the increase of imperial influence in the former principality.

While essentially correct as an overview, this explanation suffers from the evident issue of generalisation and oversimplification. We have, for example, looked at the case of the Mureş river valley, a distinct geographic and cultural region with a specific “breed” of pre- and early-modern aristocratic homes. The valley, this self-contained sub-region of *Partium*, manifests the historical instability inherent to most borderlands, which it is itself by most definitions. Yet here, the constructive behaviour of the nobility appears as odd. Well into the Habsburg period, manor houses here appear to remain part of a ready-existing, pre-Baroque aristocratic tradition. The complexes then resemble more the scattered spatial distribution of a magnified farmstead than the later, Neoclassical mansion-based ideal. It is essentially a material narrative paused by the uncertainties of the Ottoman periods, yet not fully discontinued. The transition itself into the Baroque is not organic in the valley, nor is it an incremental process beginning straight at the turn of the centuries. Instead, the transition is swift and oddly uniform, being triggered by the virtual destruction of the vast majority of such sites in the uprising of 1784. Having already

adopted the occidental lifestyle as a means of finding favour with the new (Viennese) power, reconstruction of these residences into grand Neoclassical mansions was clearly the most obvious option. Simultaneously, the social conservatism expressed by some aristocrats of the region may well explain the obvious stylistic inertia – a tardiness in connecting to the visual currents prevailing in Central Europe also visible in other areas of Transylvanian arts, with the decorative elements of Transylvanian Saxon craftspeople being markedly Renaissance well towards the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>178</sup> As such, it appears that a particular Transylvanian stylistic conservatism can be discussed.

Regarding the extension of the topic of manor houses into the later modernity and contemporaneity, the research involved in producing the sections on the Konopi has brought to surface serious issues, both historical and current, in the Romanian state's protection schemes for historic monuments. Single element based monuments' selection procedures, in the past and today, led to a state-wide cherry-picking process,<sup>179</sup> in which historic buildings were often decontextualized – more clearly, disconnected from their historical, social and cultural contexts. In the case of the Konopi house, a very compact, medium-sized manorial core had survived up until the late 1980's with little change, consisting of historic gardens or park, manor house, baroque chapel and historic annexes. Instead of preserving this intact coherent landscape, the house was solely picked for protection, based on the aesthetic merits alone. Adding salt to injury, the insufficiently critical approach to monument listing is joined in the field by a generally lax or ill-designed application of the protection legislation.<sup>180</sup>

This cocktail of outdated heritage protection legislation and defective, incomplete or selective application of the law has negatively affected – or outright damaged, even destroyed – not only rural aristocratic sites, but also, for example, the fabrics of historic centres or of sites not

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<sup>178</sup> Gheorghe Mitran and Raluca Moscaliuc, *Arta Cositorului Transilvănean de la Renaștere la Baroc. Sec. al XVI-XVIII-lea* (Brașov: Direcția județeană pentru cultură și patrimoniu național Brașov, 2012).

<sup>179</sup> Ratoiu, *Restaurarea*, 365.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.

currently truly taken in consideration by heritage organisms at state level, as is the case of historic industrial heritage.

Of course, parting ways with the current approaches in heritage protection is no easy task – and while the issues are often obvious, solutions are not. The level to which outdated, and often damaging practices are ingrained in the framework of the state is hard to deny, as is the general unhurriedness towards any form of action. It is due to this that much of the recent work in the heritage field of Romania is of private and non-governmental nature; and it is this section of the civil society, combining experts and stakeholders, that may have the most positive impact in the field in the future.

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