Field Architecture

**PhD THESIS**

**– ABSTRACT –**

**The ”Restoration” of Medieval Churches during the**

**Baroque Period in the Szekler Land**

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## Objective

Ecclesiastical architecture represents a significant landmark in the study of the evolution of religious attitudes within society. Creating a work of art as a testament to the Divinity entails the implementation of the most advanced resources and technology in accordance with the prevailing aesthetic model of the era. It is not coincidental that secular architecture has drawn inspiration from ecclesiastical architecture, incorporating volumetric concepts, architectural forms, and decorations.

The objective of this study is to define characteristic typologies regarding the transformation of churches during the Baroque period and to comprehend the motives and methodology employed. The aim is to identify any differences in approach among historical ecclesiastical institutions present within the studied territory, namely the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformed Church, and the Unitarian Church. The study seeks to address the question of whether Protestant churches employ defensive strategies while the phenomenon of the Counter-Reformation unfolds within the Roman Catholic Church as a response to the ideas of the Protestant Reformation.

## Relevance of the research topic

Furthermore, it is desired to present a selection of recent research regarding the phenomenon of Central European Baroque. The subject of the transformations of medieval churches has been addressed in the collective volume titled "*Alla Moderna.* *Old Churches and Baroque Renovations: a European Perspective*", which emerged from a conference held in 2012 and coordinated by Augusto Roca de Amicis and Claudio Varagnoli.[[[1]](#footnote-1)]
The thesis of Meinrad von Engelberg, titled "*Renovatio ecclesiae: die ”Barockisierung” mittelalterlicher Kirchen*", addresses the transformation of medieval churches in the German territory.[[[2]](#footnote-2)]
In 2015, Gergely Domonkos Nagy defended his doctoral thesis at the Department of Architectural History and Monuments within the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. The thesis focused on the subject of central compositions in Baroque ecclesiastical architecture within the territory of Hungary, titled "*Centrális téralakítás a magyar barokk szakrális építészetben*."[[[3]](#footnote-3)]

In the Transylvanian context, Mircea Țoca published a synthesis of Baroque architecture in Cluj in 1983, titled "Clujul baroc"*.*[[[4]](#footnote-4)]

In 2015, Virgil Pop defended his habilitation thesis at the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, titled "Restaurarea bisericilor medievale în epoca barocă" at the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca.[[[5]](#footnote-5)]
In 2023, Marius Păsculescu defended his doctoral thesis at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca. The thesis focused on the subject of baroque-influenced monasteries, addressing possible urbanistic concepts, titled "Mănăstiri urbane baroce din Transilvania. Tipologii și morfologii". [[[6]](#footnote-6)]

As for the geographical context, Szeklerland, whose delineation will be clarified in the following chapters, owes its first historical publication to Balázs Orbán. His multidisciplinary work titled "A Székelyföld leírása" was published in six volumes between the years 1868-1873 and encompassed the most detailed description of the territory of the Szekler Land from ethnographic, architectural, historical, and geographical perspectives.[[[7]](#footnote-7)]
Given that Balázs Orbán was a romantic historian, his work adopts a subjective narrative expressing his aesthetic preferences clearly. Nevertheless, his historical sources and references are credible with some exceptions, and the majority of conclusions resulting from architectural-historical analyses are currently supported by contemporary research.

In 1981, the book titled "A középkori Udvarhelyszék művészeti emlékei" authored by László Dávid was published, which presents medieval monuments, predominantly churches, and their architectural analysis..[[[8]](#footnote-8)]

In 1995, Kinga Tüdős provided an analysis of the fortification systems of churches in the historical area of the "Scaunul Trei Scaune".[[[9]](#footnote-9)]

Another historical region within the Szekler Land, the Ciuc Chair, was studied by archaeologist István Botár in his work titled "Havasok keblében rejtező szép Csík: A Csíki-medence középkori településtörténete", published in 2019. [[[10]](#footnote-10)] Lucrarea prezintă rezultatele cercetărilor arheologice și oferă o analiză a evoluției localităților din zonă.
In 2023, Dóra Danielisz defended her doctoral thesis at the Department of Architectural History and Monuments within the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. The thesis focused on the architecture of Reformed churches in the Three Chairs region, titled "Háromszék református templomépítészete".[[[11]](#footnote-11)] The appendix of the doctoral thesis presents 82 churches from the studied area, accompanied by photographic documentation and architectural surveys for each building. The author analyzes the spatial configuration of the Reformed churches, identifying topologies used between the 17th and 19th centuries.

The most comprehensive collection of Szekler fortified churches belongs to the French author Hubert Rossel, published in 2015, describing a total of 80 buildings.[[[12]](#footnote-12)]
The information gathered by him represents a cumulative compilation of studies on the respective theme aimed at familiarizing French readers with the heritage of the area.

The relevance of the present work is illustrated by the lack of in-depth research across the entire territory of the Szekler Land. Previous studies have mainly focused on the analysis of fortified medieval churches in the peripheral regions of the Szekler Land, which were located along the southeastern border of the Kingdom of Hungary.

The present work explores the phenomenon of baroque influence on medieval churches within the Szekler Land, providing a comprehensive study by analyzing a total of 107 churches from all five regions, namely the Arieș Chair, Ciuc Chair, Odorhei Chair, Mureș Chair, and Three Chairs region. The research aims to understand the fundamental ideas behind the phenomenon and identify the main recurring patterns. Therefore, this study is aimed at a limited, specialized audience.

## Title of the doctoral thesis

The term "restoration" appears in quotation marks in the thesis title. This representation has been deliberately chosen. By definition, restoration implies the return to the original state; it is a renovation, a repair of the architectural monument. However, this definition has been understood and implemented differently throughout the evolution of civilization.

Prior to the twentieth century, restoration interventions were completed according to the tastes of the era. During those periods, what was considered aesthetically pleasing was what was modern, and what was modern was always the period preceding it. A Renaissance intellectual would demolish interventions made in the Middle Ages on an ancient temple. Conversely, a nineteenth-century intellectual would demolish Baroque interventions on a medieval church.

The term "restoration" within the quotation marks in the title of this thesis refers to the transformations of the Baroque period that were carried out according to the tastes of the time, which altered the appearance of buildings but were not completed in the sense of the word as understood today. In the Baroque period, the concept of restoration was understood from an etymological perspective and was associated with the revitalization of the Church institution. Baroque restorations did not respect the medieval building, and the desire to beautify the church reflects a subjective attitude. Chapter 9 will explore in detail the terminological definitions and historical solutions identified throughout the investigation.

## Methodology

The research began by identifying medieval churches in settlements within the Szekler Land. For this purpose, the inventory of papal tithes from the 14th century was consulted, which constitutes the first source regarding the ecclesiastical administration of the Kingdom of Hungary. In Szeklerland, the list of tithes was recorded between the years 1332 and 1334.[[[13]](#footnote-13)]

The inventory was analyzed by Géza Hegyi, drawing attention to settlements misidentified by previous researchers and clarifying previous discrepancies. Thus, within Szeklerland, Hegyi identified 149 settlements that paid tithes.[[[14]](#footnote-14)]

The next step involved reviewing existing literature, starting with the monograph by Balázs Orbán, followed by the minutes of episcopal visitations. Historical maps of settlements, illustrations, and period photographs were consulted, as well as studies on art history and architectural history. Due to the lack of technical documentation from the period, and considering the significant number of buildings and the absence of coherent ecclesiastical administrative organization, archival research was limited.

The fundamental method implemented in the thesis was the on-site investigation of buildings, visual analysis, photographic documentation, as well as the compilation of architectural surveys, a method known in the specialized literature as *Bauforschung*. [[[15]](#footnote-15)]

Where made available by the beneficiaries, restoration projects were consulted. The results of research from related fields, such as archaeological, dendrochronological, stratigraphic studies, art history studies, studies of masonry, geotechnical studies such as ground-penetrating radar surveys, as well as technical or biological expertise, were analyzed.

The data obtained from the specialized literature were analyzed in parallel with observations made during the visits. The central element of this research consists of synthesizing the information contained in the data sheets of the churches, presented in the appendix of the doctoral thesis. Through this collection, the elaboration of conclusions regarding ecclesiastical architecture from the Baroque period in Szeklerland is facilitated.

The novelty of the research lies in the compilation of architectural surveys comprising plans and sections in various historical stages of the churches - one plan illustrating the current state of the building, one plan depicting the medieval and Baroque configurations, and one longitudinal section with the medieval and Baroque elevations.

## Structure of the doctoral thesis

The doctoral thesis is structured into two segments, comprising a total of 11 chapters. The first part, which includes chapters 1-4, is dedicated to detailing the historical context of the researched period, focusing particularly on socio-cultural changes and the historical framework. The first chapter establishes clear temporal and spatial boundaries for the research. The second chapter provides a succinct overview of events in the Middle Ages, covering the 14th and 15th centuries. The third chapter emphasizes events in the 16th and 17th centuries, with special attention to the Religious Reformation. The fourth chapter focuses on events during the Baroque period and the impact of the Counter-Reformation on socio-cultural and ecclesiastical contexts.

The second part comprises chapters 5-10 and focuses on the analysis of the studied churches in different periods, as presented in the previous chapters. Chapter 5 establishes the specific objectives of the research, identifying specific churches. Chapter six details the transformations of the church buildings from the Middle Ages. Chapter seven continues the presentation of changes in the 17th century. Chapter eight constitutes the core of this doctoral thesis, focusing on the transformation of churches during the Baroque period. This chapter is subdivided into two sections, each containing two additional sub-chapters. These subdivisions were necessary to highlight the various categories of interventions. Thus, the first sub-chapter describes Protestant churches, detailing both baroque-influenced and reconstructed churches within it. The second sub-chapter presents the transformation of Roman Catholic churches, identifying the two categories of baroque-influenced and reconstructed churches. Chapter nine addresses aspects related to the title of the doctoral thesis in the context of the analyses performed, while chapter ten details the religious conflicts that characterized the analyzed period and resulted in changes to the fate of churches depending on the religious affiliation of the community.

Chapter 11 comprises the final conclusions, elaborated through the synthesis of the results obtained from the perspective of statistics, periodization, interventions in planimetry, and interior and exterior architectural aspects. This chapter also highlights the identification of original contributions, while indicating possible directions for future investigations.

In addition to the thesis, data sheets were prepared for the 107 studied churches, accompanied by a brief historical study, additional photographic documentation, surveys, plans, and hypothetical sections. Special attention was given to restoration interventions carried out in the modern period, as these have the potential to influence the Baroque appearance of the churches. Due to constraints related to the document format, the data sheets could not be directly included in this thesis; however, it was suggested to incorporate as many photographs, surveys, and possible hypothetical reconstructions as possible.

## Final conclusions

## Statistics

Within the scope of this research, a total of 107 medieval churches erected by Szekler communities were analyzed. Among these, 48 buildings belong to the Reformed Church, 33 belong to the Roman Catholic Church, and 26 belong to the Unitarian Church. From a percentage perspective, this implies a distribution of 45% Reformed churches, 31% Roman Catholic churches, and 24% Unitarian churches.

As the liturgical differences between Reformed and Unitarian ecclesiae were not highlighted in the architecture of the churches, a joint analysis of Protestant churches compared to Roman Catholic ones was proposed. In summary, of the total investigated churches, 74 are of Protestant denomination, while 33 are Roman Catholic. From a centralized percentage perspective, 69% represent Protestant churches, while 31% are Roman Catholic churches.

In the process of analysis, two distinct categories were delineated based on the extent of interventions performed, namely, the group of baroque-influenced churches and the group of reconstructed churches. These classifications were applied to both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches.

Out of the total of 74 Protestant churches, only 10 underwent reconstruction, representing a percentage of only 14%. In contrast, out of the 33 Roman Catholic churches, 7 were reconstructed, constituting 21%. It is important to mention that, in the case of the 7 reconstructed Roman Catholic churches, the bell towers were preserved in four of them. Regarding the reconstructed Protestant churches, it is relevant to mention that only in the case of the church in Bădeni (Cluj County) was the medieval bell tower preserved.

In the context of Protestant churches, a significant aspect to consider is the increase in the number of new church buildings in various localities. In the 18th century, the attempt at recatholicization, supported by the Habsburg Empire, led to a functional reorganization of Protestant church communities and the establishment of new parishes, previously existing as parish branches. Thus, it is important to note that statistical analyses focused solely on existing churches transferred into the possession of Protestants do not provide a comprehensive perspective on all processes that occurred during this period.

In the analysis of reconstructed Protestant churches, no specific phenomenon was identified to characterize a particular area by a higher frequency of reconstructions. It is known that the reconstruction of churches in Avrămești and Merești was determined by the instability of the foundation soil. The temporal difference between the reconstruction of churches in Ocna de Sus and Sărățeni suggests the absence of direct links between them, even though geographical proximity might imply such a connection.

The possibility of a connection between the works carried out on the churches in Medișoru Mare and Turdeni, or between those in Merești and Satu Nou, can be considered; however, given the lack of concrete information, these assumptions remain speculative. Nevertheless, the reconstruction of churches in Bădeni (Cluj County), Ilieni, or Sânsimion represents unique phenomena within their respective regions.

Regarding the reconstructed Roman Catholic churches, it is observed that the three churches in the subsidiary parish of Gheorgheni, namely Ditrău, Gheorgheni, and Joseni, underwent reconstruction works that included the preservation of the pre-existing bell tower and occurred within overlapping time intervals. In the case of the reconstruction of churches in the Ciuc region, such as those in Sândominic, Sânmartin, and Șumuleu Ciuc, the connection can only be established regarding the temporal interval, although the geographical differences between them are considerable.

On the other hand, the reconstruction of the church in Baraolt does not exhibit evident regional connections, as it is located in a predominantly Protestant area. The buildings were examined in a historical context, considering the period of interventions. Subsequently, they were analyzed from an urbanistic perspective, taking into account their location within the localities and orientation. Later, the planimetric characteristics, the scale of interventions, and aesthetic aspects, both interior and exterior, were analyzed.

## Periodization

The interventions were periodized separately for each group, namely the baroquized Protestant churches, the reconstructed Protestant churches, the baroquized Roman Catholic churches, and the reconstructed Roman Catholic churches. From the analysis conducted, it is evident that in the case of the baroquized Roman Catholic churches, the first transformations began upon their return to the ownership of the Roman Catholic Church.

The first example in this regard is the church in Sângeorgiu de Mureș, after the year 1720, followed by the church in Dumitreni after the year 1723. In most churches in this group, the period of interventions falls within the first half of the 18th century, until the end of the period of interest, namely the year 1825. Reconstruction works on the Roman Catholic churches took place between the mid-18th century and the beginning of the 19th century.

The baroquized Protestant churches were transformed starting from the second half of the 18th century, continuing until the end of the period of interest, i.e., the year 1825. In the case of Protestant churches, reconstruction began with a slight delay, only starting at the end of the 18th century, with the exception of the church in Sărățeni.

The Josephine Edicts of religious tolerance, issued between 1781-1786, provided a new impetus for construction within the Habsburg Empire. However, it is a subject of debate whether the reconstruction of Protestant churches was closely linked to the adoption of these edicts, as the reconstruction of churches in Sărățeni (1763-66) and Ilieni (1782-85) occurred much earlier than the mentioned period. Churches such as those in Merești (1785-96), Sânsimion (1797), and Satu Nou (1798-1801) could be included in this category.

In contrast, most churches were reconstructed at the beginning of the 19th century: Avrămești (1803-1811), Bădeni (Cluj County, 1809), Medișoru Mare (1805), Ocna de Sus (1802-06), and Turdeni (1819-23).

Regarding the modifications made to the baroquized Protestant churches, these cannot be attributed to the appearance of the aforementioned edicts, as the transformations took place over an extended period and involved various types of work carried out in different decades. Each building had its own distinct history, without a clear trend of transformations with well-defined characteristics starting from the end of the 18th century.

It should be emphasized that the earthquake of 1802 had a significant impact on the process of rehabilitating churches, especially in the case of those in the Trei Scaune region: Aita Mare, Chilieni, Ghidfalău, Lisnău, Mujna, Sâncraiu, Sfântu Gheorghe, and Turia. These churches required major interventions after the earthquake. Additionally, the reconstruction of the Reformed church in Ocna de Sus was motivated by the significant deterioration of the ensemble following the earthquake.

The Baroque ecclesiastical architecture emerged in Transylvania in the first half of the 18th century, with the construction of the Jesuit Church in Cluj between 1718-1724.[[[16]](#footnote-16)]
In Szeklerland, the Jesuit Church in Târgu Mureș was built between 1728-1757, while the Franciscan Church in Odorheiu Secuiesc was constructed between 1730-1780.[[[17]](#footnote-17)] The construction sites of these two churches were still in progress when the reconstructions of the churches in Ditrău (1746-57) and Gheorgheni (1756-73) began.

Regarding the Franciscan church in Șumuleu Ciuc, the medieval building was demolished and reconstructed only starting from 1804. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Franciscan church in Șumuleu Ciuc could not have served as a stylistic inspiration for the reconstruction of Roman Catholic churches in Szeklerland. To identify possible sources of inspiration, new or baroque-style churches from Târgu Mureș, Brașov, Turda, Sibiu, Cluj, or even neighboring countries must be examined.

As for the process of baroque transformation of Roman Catholic churches, it unfolded similarly, adapting to specific needs, including local renovations and partial extensions. All these interventions varied over time and were tailored to the particularities of each church. The ratio between the number of reconstructed churches and those transformed - 10 Protestant churches reconstructed out of a total of 74 and 7 Roman Catholic churches reconstructed out of a total of 33 - indicates that the reconstruction of buildings was approached only in exceptional situations, when the mobilization of significant financial resources was justified.

Top of Form

## Location and orientation

The Josephine topographic survey took place between 1769 and 1773 in Transylvania, largely marking the positions of medieval churches, except for those reconstructed before this period, such as the churches in Calnic, Dobolii de Sus, and Merești. However, the locations of the reconstructed churches remained unchanged during the topographic survey.

The distribution of the 107 churches is as follows: 23 churches were positioned on hilltops near the localities, 54 churches were within the localities' built-up areas, and 30 churches were situated in the centers of the localities.

These positions underwent modifications only in the case of three churches. The Unitarian church in Avrămești and the one in Merești were reconstructed in the centers of the localities. The reason for this reconstruction was identified in the presence of weak foundation soil and the reduced structural resistance of the buildings. The Reformed church in Sânsimion was rebuilt on a hilltop, accessed by a secondary street. The exact reason for the reconstruction is not known. The orientation of medieval churches followed the East-West direction, with the altar positioned towards the east.

Top of Form

In the case of baroquized churches, the original orientations were not modified. Similarly, in the case of reconstructed Roman Catholic churches, the east-west orientation was maintained according to the preexisting plan. Any minor deviations from this orientation can be identified as the result of minor construction errors.

Significant deviations from this orientation were observed in the medieval churches of Bădeni (Cluj County), Cetățuia, Crăciunel, Ditrău, Maiad, Moldovenești, Ocland, Ocna de Sus, Rugănești, Sărățeni, Sângeorgiu de Mureș, Sântana Nirajului, Șumuleu Ciuc, and Unirea. The fact that such deviations were identified in Roman Catholic churches allows us to assume that these are the results of construction errors.

The churches reconstructed during the Baroque period with different orientations are as follows: Ocna de Sus, Merești, Satu Nou, and Sânsimion.

The church in Ocna de Sus is positioned on a Southeast-Northwest direction, representing a 180° rotation from the medieval church. The reason for the change in orientation is unknown.

The orientations of the churches in Merești and Satu Nou follow a South-North direction, while the church in Sânsimion has the opposite orientation, facing North-South. It is assumed that these orientations were intentionally chosen.

The longitudinal axis of the Unitarian church in Merești is parallel to the main road in the locality, facilitating access through the main entrance on the south side for all.

In the case of Satu Nou, it is assumed that the existence of the enclosure wall influenced the positioning and size of the new construction.

## Planimetric and volumetric changes

From a planimetric perspective, the ratio between the width and length of the building in plan was analyzed. According to observations, the results indicate a ratio between 1:2.5 and 1:3, which can be interpreted as characteristic of medieval churches (Fig. 1.11). However, medieval churches were observed where this ratio changes to 1:4-4.3.

In the case of transformed churches, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, when extending in a longitudinal direction, the mentioned ratio changes to values between 1:4 and 1:5. In transformed Roman Catholic churches, where side naves or chapels were added, these ratios were even modified to values between 1:1.5 and 1:2.

By analyzing the planimetry of reconstructed Roman Catholic buildings, it is found that the ratio varies between 1:2.5 and 1:3.5 (Fig. 2.11). Except for the church in Gheorgheni, which is characterized by a ratio of 1:3.7. These variations suggest that, in the case of certain reconstructed churches, the preservation of the medieval wall footprint was considered.

Reconstructed Protestant churches recorded ratios ranging from 1:1.9 to 1:3.3. In five buildings, a ratio of 1:2.1-2.6 was observed.

From a planimetric perspective, during the research period, a medieval character was identified in 42 of the baroque Protestant churches that still retained their medieval apse, representing a percentage of 66%. In the case of baroque Roman Catholic churches, 15 of them had medieval apses, accounting for 58% of the total number. Therefore, it can be concluded that, during the research, the majority of the studied churches retained their medieval apse.

The architecture of medieval buildings was shaped according to the liturgical customs practiced within the Roman Catholic Church. Considering that Protestant liturgy excludes the veneration of relics and prayers to saints, the use of altars was abandoned, the apse was desacralized, and seating areas, as well as galleries, were introduced.

According to the opinion of Gergely Domonkos Nagy, after the issuance of the Josephine Edicts on religious tolerance, the Reformed Church saw it as a prestigious contribution to construct churches similar to those of the Roman Catholic Church, which would indicate the same level of status.[[[18]](#footnote-18)]

It is presumed that the reason for the polygonal shape of the closing opposite the entrances along the longitudinal axis of reconstructed Protestant churches is to maintain a similarity with the forms of inherited medieval buildings. By analyzing the use of interior space based on the criteria established by Dóra Danielisz, which are related to the placement of the pulpit inside the church, it can be observed that in both baroque and reconstructed Protestant churches, transversal spatial use predominated. In the case of baroque or reconstructed Roman Catholic churches, the pulpits were not endowed with special significance and therefore were not mentioned in historical documents. At present, pulpits are placed either on the north side of the triumphal arch or on the north wall of the nave. Additionally, pulpits are not present in the interiors of Bisericani, Delnița, Lunga, and Nicolești (Harghita County).

The demolition of sacristies in Protestant churches was noted as early as the 17th century. This trend continued into the Baroque period, with the demolition of the sacristy documented in three buildings, although it is presumed to have occurred in another 22 churches. In most cases, the demolition of sacristies was not documented. In the case of reconstructed Protestant churches, sacristies were evidently not rebuilt.

Medieval sacristies were demolished and rebuilt in 10 baroque Roman Catholic churches. In the case of reconstructed Roman Catholic churches, sacristies were demolished and rebuilt in all seven buildings.

In addition to baroque Protestant churches, partial demolitions or extensions were carried out in 11 churches. In the case of baroque Roman Catholic churches, partial demolitions or extensions were documented in eight buildings.

During the Baroque era, the expansion of baroque Roman Catholic churches with side aisles and side chapels can be observed, inspired by the Western model created by Borromini, who transformed side aisles into side chapels. These extensions adapt functional solutions within the context of inherited churches in Szeklerland.

Analyzing the methods of interior covering of ecclesiastical buildings, various types of solutions or even combinations between them were identified, in cases where the nave and the apse of the church had distinct coverings. During the research, ceilings made in earlier periods were found, such as Romanesque vaults, hemispherical vaults, Gothic vaults, polygonal vaults, or painted wooden coffered ceilings. In addition, new types of ceilings were introduced during the investigated period, including semi-cylindrical vaults with or without penetrations, sail vaults, coffered and painted ceilings, or flat plastered ceilings.

Within the baroque Protestant churches analyzed during the period, Gothic vaults were identified in the apse in ten of them, while the Gothic vault in the nave was maintained in four churches. The demolition of medieval vaults was carried out in 12 churches, and as a result of the earthquake in 1802, the medieval vaults in the nave or apse collapsed in another five buildings.

Out of the 74 churches during the Baroque period, 41 had a flat ceiling in the nave, in the apse, or in both, including two churches with a flat ceiling decorated with stucco; the others were equipped with coffered and painted wooden ceilings.

In total, seven churches had added Baroque vaults, two of which included semi-cylindrical vaults with penetrations, supported by interior pilasters. In two other buildings, the vault of the apse is directly discharged on the walls of the apse, and in one church, a semi-cylindrical vault on interior pilasters covered the entire interior space. Only one church, that of Bățanii Mari, fig. 3.11, adopted sail dome vaults, supported by profiled pilasters.
In particular, at the church in Aita Mare (fig. 8.8.), a semi-cylindrical vault with penetrations was constructed in its nave, painted in red to highlight the line of the ribs of the Gothic vault, which collapsed following the earthquake of 1802.

In the context of reconstructed Protestant churches, two of them adopted semi-cylindrical vaults with penetrations, supported by flattened interior pilasters. The Unitarian church in Merești stands out due to the presence of a sail dome vault, rhythmized by pairs of double arches, fig. 32.8.

In another case, at the church in Ilieni (fig. 4.11.), there is a combination of a flat ceiling in the nave and a cylindrical vault with penetrations in the apse, rhythmized by simple arches.

In three of these buildings, coffered wooden ceilings, either reused or new, were implemented. Additionally, the church in Bădeni (Cluj county - fig. 5.11) adopted a flat ceiling, painted in white and decorated with stucco.

Regarding baroque Roman Catholic churches, 15 of these buildings retained the medieval vault in the apse, and in two churches, both in the nave and in the apse, the medieval vault was preserved.

Two of these churches had coffered ceilings made in earlier periods, and for another church, the existence of such a ceiling is presumed.

Particularly, the only wooden coffered ceiling made during the Baroque period is found at the church in Sângeorgiu de Mureș (fig. 47.8.). During the study, eight churches were recorded where flat ceilings were implemented over the nave.

Semi-cylindrical Baroque vaults with penetrations were constructed in the nave at four buildings, and at six churches, a new Baroque vault was built, covering both the nave and the apse. Particularly, the church in Lunga (fig. 6.11.) features a Baroque vault exclusively in the apse. These vaults are supported by interior pilasters profiled with a plinth and classicizing capitals. An exception is the church in Sânzieni, where a sail dome vault was erected.

In the case of reconstructed Roman Catholic churches, coffered wooden ceilings were documented in the 18th century at two churches. However, during the reconstruction processes, these churches were equipped with semi-cylindrical vaults with penetrations, supported by profiled interior pilasters, provided with a plinth and classicizing capitals. The vaults are rhythmized with simple or double arches, with the exception of the church in Baraolt (fig. 82.8.), which presents an undivided surface.

The shape of the vault at Șumuleu Ciuc (fig. 78.8.) is not semi-cylindrical; it is distinguished by a broken arch. It is also important to mention that the support of the vault was carried out on pilasters equipped with four detached pseudo-columns, an unusual solution in this region. The uniqueness of the church in Șumuleu Ciuc can be attributed to its strategic position near the center of the Roman Catholic Church in the Szeklerland, recognized as the Franciscan Church of Șumuleu Ciuc.

In conclusion, within Protestant churches, coffered wooden ceilings were a preferred option for interior covering during the Baroque period, and the introduction of semi-cylindrical vaults occurred in particular situations, with the mention that the introduction of the sail dome vault constituted an exception.

Regarding Roman Catholic churches, a preference for vaulted interiors is observed. A semi-cylindrical vault with penetrations, supported by interior pilasters, was the predominant choice, and the introduction of the sail dome vault constituted a notable exception in this case as well. In Szeklerland, the most commonly used type of vault was the semi-cylindrical vault with penetrations, supported by interior pilasters. In Hungary, the type of vault widely used was the Bohemian dome.[[[19]](#footnote-19)]

The new Baroque-style vault was constructed at a lower height compared to the pre-existing Gothic vault. An evident proof of this situation can be observed in Sânzieni, as depicted in Figure 49.8, where the Baroque vault of the apse partially covers the mullions of the Gothic window. As detailed in Chapter 8.2.1, pointed arches cannot be associated with classical composition.

Another notable example is represented by the church in Ciucsângeorgiu (Figure 7.11), where the footprint of the Gothic vault and the existing mural paintings on the interior wall of the apse have been preserved within the structure of the roof truss.

To illustrate this phenomenon, it is necessary to understand that the aesthetics of medieval space elicited a dual reaction of aversion and fascination among Enlightenment intellectuals in Western Europe until the end of the 18th century. French architects began to explore the ecclesiastical architecture of Gothic style, valuing their height, lightness, and simplicity. This process revitalized French architecture in the 18th century. Of course, the Gothic interiors of Szekler churches did not reflect the typical ecclesiastical architectural composition found in the West; however, the spatiality of buildings with classical composition was appealed to, as it was understood to provide the desired aspect.

Considering that these churches had only one main nave, they were extended either on the southern or northern side. The distinction between side aisles and side chapels is reflected in the layout of the space. In cases where the extended wing is equipped with benches oriented towards the secondary altar located on the eastern side, we can refer to them as side aisles. Conversely, when the secondary altar is placed against the northern or southern wall, it is more appropriate to identify the space as a side chapel.

During the examined period, these extensions were exclusively carried out at three churches in the Ciuc County. At Racu (Figure 45.8), the nave was extended in the second half of the 18th century, while at Ciucsângeorgiu and Mihăileni (Figure 8.11), the extensions were built only at the beginning of the 19th century.

Side chapels placed on the northern side of the nave were constructed at seven baroquized Roman Catholic churches. A southern side chapel was only built at the church in Bisericani. Four of the aforementioned side chapels have polygonal plans, while the rest have rectangular plans.

In the case of reconstructed Roman Catholic churches, extensions with side chapels were implemented in five buildings. At three churches, the chapels were built on a polygonal plan, while the rest had rectangular plans.

We observe that out of the total of 33 Roman Catholic churches, side chapels were added to 13 of these buildings, indicating that this intervention was not universally applied. It is presumed that the realization of these side chapels was conditioned by the available financial resources, being implemented in those buildings that had the necessary means for this architectural extension.

Regarding the triumphal arches, which separate the space of the nave from the space of the apse, in the case of Protestant churches, this distancing became unnecessary. Thus, the demolition of triumphal arches can be observed in baroquized Protestant churches in seven instances. It is presumed that the demolition of the triumphal arch occurred during the same period in six additional buildings. In contrast, in 42 of the churches, the medieval apse was retained, and the medieval triumphal arch was preserved in 30 of these buildings. Therefore, it can be concluded that this intervention was not common, indicating an appreciation for preserving medieval elements in a significant number of churches.

The demolition of triumphal arches was carried out in reconstructed Protestant churches.

In Roman Catholic churches, during the Baroque period, the triumphal arches provided the necessary space for the placement of secondary altars.

In five buildings, the triumphal arches retained their medieval form. It can be assumed that during the Baroque period, the same configuration of triumphal arches persisted in two more churches.

In six churches, the closure in a pointed arch suggests the maintenance of the medieval form of the arches, subsequently enriched with a Baroque-style profile. Additionally, it is presumed that in one church, the semicircular form of the arch indicates a subsequent intervention, during which it was decorated with stucco ornaments featuring vegetal motifs. In four buildings, the medieval triumphal arches were demolished and reconstructed.

The demolition and reconstruction of triumphal arches were carried out in reconstructed Roman Catholic churches.

A common intervention observed in the studied churches was the construction of galleries. The construction of galleries became necessary with the increase in population, to provide seating for a larger number of people. In the case of baroquized Protestant churches, galleries were also introduced in the eastern part of the building, meaning in the desacralized apse. In Roman Catholic churches, galleries were only located near the western side of the nave, while the apse continued to be used for the placement of the main altar.

In many ecclesiastical records, existing galleries are referred to with the term "chorus," a word borrowed from Catholic vocabulary. This term indicates the location of the pulpit or the cantor's stand and the young members of the choir. Subsequently, in the 19th century, galleries were constructed to accommodate organs. [[[20]](#footnote-20)]

In baroquized Protestant churches, existing galleries were mentioned in official documents for 11 churches, while their construction was noted in 25 churches. Additionally, it is presumed that new galleries were built in 11 churches.

For reconstructed Protestant churches, wooden galleries, stone galleries, or brick galleries, as well as combinations of these materials, were found in nine churches.

In baroquized Roman Catholic churches, existing galleries were mentioned in four churches, and the construction of new galleries was noted in seven churches. Furthermore, it is assumed that galleries were constructed in six additional buildings.

In reconstructed Roman Catholic churches, during the studied period, the construction of new stone or brick galleries was observed in four churches, and it is presumed that a gallery was built in one more.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the construction of galleries was more widespread in Protestant churches compared to Roman Catholic ones. A relevant factor would be the use of wood for constructing galleries, a much easier solution than galleries made of stone or brick, as observed in Roman Catholic churches with cross-vaults resting on semicircular arches.

Entrance porches were built at almost all studied buildings, regardless of religious affiliation. These interventions were characteristic of the researched period and aimed to ensure the protection of building entrances, initially made of wooden structures and covered with shingles, later reconstructed from stone or brick.

The existence of entrance porches in baroquized Protestant churches was recorded in 13 buildings, while new porches were constructed in 16 churches. Additionally, it is assumed that porches were made in 8 more buildings. It is worth mentioning that the architecture of the southern porch at Ghidfalău, as depicted in figure 24.8, with its open arcades, represents a unique solution in the region.

Reconstructed Protestant churches also featured porches. The wooden porch at Sânsimion, as shown in figure 40.8, presents the simplest solution among the detailed examples.

In the case of baroquized Roman Catholic churches, the existence of porches was noted in two buildings. During the Baroque period, new stone porches were added to eight churches. Additionally, it is presumed that new porches were built in five additional buildings.

During the Baroque period, new stone porches were added to three reconstructed Roman Catholic churches. In Gheorgheni, two porches were constructed, as shown in figure 86.8, one located on the southern side of the nave, and the other on the southern side of the apse. The architecture of the porches in reconstructed Roman Catholic churches features generous dimensions, with rectangular plans, a single entrance on the southern side accompanied by side windows, and gable roofs.

In conclusion, the construction of entrance porches predominated in the case of Protestant churches.

In nine baroquized or reconstructed Roman Catholic buildings, there is a tendency to create a cross-shaped plan: at Cârța, Cozmeni, Gheorgheni, Lăzarea, Racu, Sândominic, Sânmartin, Sântimbru, and Șumuleu Ciuc. This cross is formed by the nave and the apse, creating the longitudinal axis, and by the northern lateral chapel and the southern entrance porch, creating the transversal axis of the cross.

In his work, Nagy noted that parish churches in Hungary adopt a central plan only in exceptional situations.[[[21]](#footnote-21)] Even in the case of cathedrals, instead of adopting a central plan, there is a tendency to expand the space by adding a transverse axis parallel to the existing longitudinal axis. As a result, a configuration resembling a Latin cross develops. The monumentality of the central space has been altered in favor of larger surfaces to allow access to a greater number of people and to provide more opportunities for representation.[[[22]](#footnote-22)]

In the case of the church in Racu, the transverse axis is formed by the northern lateral chapel with the sacristy, as well as by the southern lateral nave. Another distinctive intervention in this church is represented by the corridor with open arches, which covers the southern entrance door and extends along the western facade of the lateral nave.

During the analyzed period, another commonly encountered intervention consisted of building new bell towers or raising the existing ones. In Protestant churches with Baroque influences, a new bell tower was added to 14 of these buildings. Additionally, works to raise the bell towers were documented at 8 churches. At two buildings, the bell tower was partially rebuilt. After the earthquake of 1802, the reconstruction of bell towers was necessary at 3 churches in the Trei Scaune region.

In the case of reconstructed Protestant churches, the bell towers were built simultaneously with the reconstruction works. In the churches of Ocna de Sus and Bădeni (Cluj County), the bell towers built before the reconstruction were preserved. In Ilieni, the bell tower collapsed following the earthquake of 1802 and was reconstructed between 1812-1819.

Analyzing the Baroque-influenced Roman Catholic churches, it is observed that new bell towers were built at nine of these churches. Additionally, at nine other churches, the existing bell towers were raised. It is worth mentioning that at three of these buildings, wooden bell towers dating from the 18th century were documented.

At the church in Mihăileni, dendrochronological research has revealed that the bell tower was built in 1716 and later supplemented with an additional floor in 1731. According to specialized literature, the construction of the tower is associated with the master builder named Sándor Bíró homoródszentmártoni, who was active in the area during that period. It is remarkable that, in the 18th century, the master aimed to build a tower that would imitate the style of medieval towers.

It is important to note that in the 18th century, until 1796, the church in Cârța had two bell towers, one added to the west facade of the nave, and the other part of the fortification system. In 1769, the bell tower located near the west facade of the nave was demolished.

In two other instances, bell towers were demolished and rebuilt in different locations from their previous position.

In the case of reconstructed Roman Catholic churches, the preservation of pre-existing bell towers is notable, with the exception of the churches in Sândominic and Sânmartin. Bell towers were heightened at four of these buildings. In Baraolt, the medieval bell tower collapsed in the earthquake of 1802, thus necessitating a complete reconstruction.

By examining the positions of the bell towers, it is observed that in the baroque Protestant churches, in 23 out of the studied churches, these are arranged as towers adjacent to the west wall of the nave. In another 20 churches, the tower was integrated into the fortification system. In four other cases, the bell tower was built adjacent to the south wall, the east wall of the nave, or even near the north wall of the medieval sacristy.

In the reconstructed Protestant churches, in eight of the mentioned churches, there are bell towers attached to the west wall of the nave. In Ilieni, the bell tower was initially part of an old oval-shaped fortification wall, which is now partially collapsed.

Among the baroque Roman Catholic churches, out of the 23 churches with bell towers, in 18 of them, the towers are added to the west wall of the nave. In four of these churches, the tower was incorporated into the fortification system.

In the case of reconstructed Roman Catholic churches, out of the seven analyzed churches, in six of them, the bell towers are added to the western wall of the nave. In the church of Baraolt, the bell tower is integrated into the enclosure wall.

It is necessary to investigate the phenomenon of the central tower placed in the axis of the western facade. The stone towers built before the Baroque period primarily served defensive purposes. Before the 18th century, there were defensive towers at 59 churches, either on the western facade or integrated into the fortification walls. Thus, it can be deduced that although a tower shared with the church did not fit into the classicist aesthetic, the presence of defense towers influenced decisions. Instead of building two western towers, following the Austrian model, the reuse and elevation of existing towers were preferred.

In the case of baroque Protestant churches, the presence of wooden bell towers, dating from the 18th century, is observed near 7 of them. Regarding reconstructed Protestant churches, the existence of a single wooden bell tower is notable, identified at the church in Sânsimion. In the case of three of the baroque Roman Catholic buildings, in the 18th century, new wooden bell towers were added. In contrast, in the reconstructed Roman Catholic churches, wooden bell towers were not constructed, with the majority being equipped with medieval stone bell towers.

It can be observed that the presence of wooden bell towers is predominant in the context of Protestant churches. This phenomenon can be attributed to the constraints imposed on the Protestant Church in general under Habsburg domination, which limited construction works, accompanied by a lack of funds and financial supporters.

The architecture of wooden bell towers and wooden spires has been investigated by Ilona Balogh. According to her research, our knowledge regarding this subject is primarily concentrated on the period of the 17th and 18th centuries.[[[23]](#footnote-23)] According to the findings of Balogh's research, it can be argued that architectural styles have had a significant impact on the evolution of wooden bell tower architecture. However, bell towers have been identified whose sources of inspiration remain unclear, which do not correspond to any specific architectural style, suggesting that these could be the result of a simplified wooden construction technique.[[[24]](#footnote-24)]

Thus, it can be concluded that the reconstruction and elevation works of the bell towers are evident in both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. With the cessation of military conflicts in the 18th century, the towers, which initially were part of the fortification system, underwent a significant transformation, changing their role to a predominantly symbolic one. The placement of the bells and their sound became signs of the timing of ecclesiastical rituals. The heightened towers were equipped with floors featuring open windows, and in some cases, functional clocks were installed to signal the time. The spires were rebuilt in various forms, their tops adorned with ecclesiastical symbols.

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